How Do We "Make Sure that Everything We Do, We Have Students at the Center"?

Reimagining Community College Board Effectiveness for Students' Success

By

Erin R. Hastey

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The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Xueli Wang (Chair), Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
Clifton F. Conrad, Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
Nicholas Hillman, Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
Michael Wagner, Professor, Journalism and Mass Communication

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Abstract

As the largest sector of higher education in the US, community colleges serve a critical role in helping many students pursue and achieve their educational goals. Most community college districts are led by a team that includes a governing board of trustees and a lead administrator (often called a superintendent, president, or chancellor) who reports to the board. While there is considerable literature on lead administrators, empirical research on community college governing boards and how they support students' success is scant. This three-phase, qual→qual→quan mixed methods study of community college governing board effectiveness explores how trustees envision, evaluate, and cultivate board effectiveness, and how trustee development efforts relate to student outcomes. Phase one, a content analysis of governing board evaluation reports, found that boards practice board skillship to fulfill internal and external institutional responsibilities through communication and delegation. Phase two, qualitative interviews with current and former trustees, indicated that effective trustees embrace their authority and practice humility, while effective boards cultivate a culture of accountability and provide support for their institutions and students. Trustee development opportunities are largely content-focused and individually conducted, while board development opportunities are process- and relationship-focused, but less widely available. In phase three, despite trustees' apparently sincere commitment to students' success, preliminary quantitative analyses showed no relationship between completing a trustee development certification program and improved student outcomes. This study has initiated a long-overdue exploration of community college governing board effectiveness, and this area of community college leadership research is ripe for further exploration of how boards can best support students' success.

How Do We "Make Sure that Everything We Do, We Have Students at the Center"? Reimagining Community College Board Effectiveness for Students' Success

Chapter I. Introduction

Community colleges serve most post-secondary students in the United States, providing critical programs and services to over 11 million students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2020). Diverse offerings include coursework for transfer to 4-year institutions, career education programs, dual-enrollment programs with K-12 systems, and developmental education, among others. Students come to community colleges from many different backgrounds, and with wide-ranging goals and needs. They may attend a community college as their first higher education experience, as they navigate a career transition, for personal cultural enrichment, and for other reasons. For many students, community colleges are the most accessible higher education option, whether geographically, financially, or both (Hillman, 2016). The access community colleges provide has long been a driving emphasis in the missions of these institutions. While these colleges should continue to emphasize access for students from all walks of life, community college researchers and practitioners have been calling in recent decades for greater attention to student outcomes (Kisker et al., 2013). There is an ever-broadening understanding within the sector that community colleges must not just provide an entry point to higher education, but also a path through which students can achieve their desired educational outcomes. However, one set of community college leaders has not yet been fully engaged in this conversation: community college governing boards.

Strategic and symbolic leadership of community colleges is often shared by a lead administrator[1] and a governing body; community colleges in 36 states are led by a leadership team comprising a college district lead administrator and a local governing or advisory board (Goldstein, 2018)[2]. Community college governing boards play an important role in leading the largest U.S. sector of higher education, but there has been very little scholarly exploration of how boards can fulfill that role most effectively.

Much of the community college leadership research that engages governing boards focuses on the relationship between a college district's board and its lead administrator (e.g., Calvert 1976; Deas, 1994; Finkel, 2017; Stevens & Piland, 1998; White, 2011). Research in this area speaks to the importance of a healthy working relationship between a lead administrator and the governing board with whom (and typically, formally for whom) they work. Other, less developed threads of community college board scholarship explore board roles and responsibilities (Piland & Butte, 1991; Smith & Miller, 2015; Vaughan & Weisman, 1997), critique bad board behavior (Moore, 1973; O'Banion, 2009a & 2009b), or identify governance approaches and practices (Donahue, 2003; Garfield, 2004; Michael et al., 2000). Work in these areas emphasizes the value of certain board practices and characteristics that may be commendable (or in some cases, not), though these practices and characteristics have not been linked to specific institutional outcomes.

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[1] This position's title varies by institution and system—commonly used titles include president, chancellor, superintendent, and chief executive officer (CEO). In this paper, I use the term "lead administrator" to refer to the community college district employee who reports directly to the board of trustees. I opt for this term because I think it best captures the nature of the job. In this context, it should not be confused with the IT position of the same name.
[2] In the remaining states, community college systems are either governed by a state-wide board or as part of a state university system (Goldstein 2018).

Content related to governance approaches and practices often introduces models of governance from other board sectors, such as non-profit organizations. These lines of scholarship may be helpful for orienting new trustees and other college leaders to important, pragmatic considerations when working with a board. Unfortunately, a systematic, empirically grounded understanding is missing in regard to what is meant by “community college board effectiveness” in the first place.

In much of the work on community college governing boards, it is assumed that what makes a community college board successful is what makes any governing board successful. “Best practices” are drawn from other sectors with no translational work or critical examination of theoretical underpinnings. For example, in the Association of Community College Trustees’ (ACCT) recently published anthology, Trusteeship in Community Colleges: A Guide for Effective Governance (King & Conner, 2020), there is no clear discussion of what is meant by the titular “effective,” nor is there an index entry for the word or its derivatives. In a section on “Trustee Effectiveness,” recommended practices are listed, but most of these would be encouraged for any college employee (e.g., “understand the college and their role” and “act with integrity and respect”) (Rutledge, 2020, p. 36). Chait et al. (1991) provide a slightly more structured definition of board effectiveness in their landmark study of college trustees, but their measures of effectiveness seem poorly aligned with the missions of today’s community colleges. They define effectiveness “based on multiple references: reputation among experts, scores on structured interviews, and institutional performance indicators” (p. 6, emphasis original). The experts are “acknowledged experts on college trusteeship” (p. 4) that the authors do not explicitly acknowledge by name or role; the institutional performance indicators are all financial in nature (p. 5). To define a board’s “effectiveness” as its reputation among anonymous

“experts” with possibly no stake in the college district being governed, and to define an institution’s performance exclusively in financial terms, leaves an obvious disconnect between governing boards and the students on whose behalf they govern.

Such a disconnect is unfortunate. Presumably, board members get involved in college governance (whether through election or appointment) because they have some personal investment in a college and its mission. Board members bring expertise and perspectives from their own careers and life experiences to their roles, and as community members, they may be a helpful localizing influence for colleges. Unfortunately, the assets board members bring to governance cannot be utilized most effectively if they are disconnected from community colleges’ main purpose: to help the students who come to these institutions achieve educational goals.

Additionally, there is a danger to boards governing without a clear and direct focus on students’ outcomes. Failing to define board effectiveness explicitly may lead to members of a board aiming at varying governance targets as distinct as balancing a district’s budget, increasing college foundation fundraising capacity, or developing a new CTE program in a local industry to which a board member is connected, among other possible goals. While such targets are not necessarily problematic, their relevance to students’ educational outcomes may be limited or unclear to the entire board. If boards and the leaders who work with them cannot clearly articulate how a board’s work supports an institution’s students, stakeholders may understandably question the utility of board leadership. More importantly, students may miss out on the possible benefits of governance practiced with those students’ progress as the top priority.

Another harm of not clearly defining board effectiveness is that it may make a board more vulnerable to the bad behaviors some scholars have noted that can lead to toxic board

environments (Moore, 1973; O'Banion, 2009a & 2009b). In governing situations where there are scattered, unspoken outcomes in mind, there is likely to be more vulnerability to toxic trustee behavior like lead administrator bullying or boundary violation (e.g., Petit, 2021). In contrast, a board with a defined purpose and practices targeted toward helping students achieve their educational goals seems a firmer foundation upon which to build a robust, healthy governing environment, to the benefit of all involved.

One final harm of the lack of understanding of community college governing board effectiveness is that, if we do not understand it, we likely cannot cultivate it well. Despite the fact that many professional development opportunities are made available to trustees through national organizations like ACCT and statewide organizations like the Community College League of California (CCLC), there is no published research on the efficacy of community college or board development efforts—professional development research in the community college sector has focused on faculty development (e.g., Sansing-Helton et al., 2021; Wang & Hurley, 2012). If current professional development offerings for trustees and boards do not empower boards to lead more effectively for students' success, they are a waste of trustee time and district resources, and at worst may promote harmful behaviors and board cultures (O'Banion 2009b).

Therefore, within community college leadership scholarship, there is a strong need to reimagine board effectiveness as rooted in the community college context, to reexamine the institutional performance indicators chosen to measure it, and to explore how it may be cultivated for the benefit of community colleges and the students they serve. To begin this reimagining and reexamination, I conducted a mixed methods study guided by the following research questions:

First, how do community college trustees envision and evaluate their effectiveness?

Second, how do community college trustees cultivate their individual effectiveness, and the effectiveness of their boards?

Third, how do current trustee development efforts relate to student outcomes?

Addressing these questions using a mixed methods research (MMR) approach has allowed me to engage diverse sources of qualitative and quantitative data, and to synthesize findings from these data meaningfully. MMR facilitates researchers' integration of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, which can be combined in meaningful and complementary ways (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). As I show in the next chapter, quantitative research on community college boards has been limited, so including quantitative data in this study's design has been of particular value to the literature in this area. Incorporating rich and yet-unexamined qualitative and quantitative data sources ensures this study follows the best of community college board research in respecting the localized, contextual nature of community college governance, while beginning needed quantitative work.

As a preview of the rest of the dissertation, in Chapter 2, I present my review and analysis of the literature that situates my dissertation study. I consider the current scholarship on community college governing boards, and the research on board effectiveness from other board governance sectors. Combining these two threads allows me to (1) understand how scholars have considered board effectiveness for community college and other sectors, (2) determine how trustee and board development have been linked to board effectiveness, and (3) explore how board effectiveness in other sectors has been measured and cultivated. Both community college board literature and board effectiveness literature from other sectors inform the study that follows.

In Chapter 3, I outline the theoretical and methodological influences undergirding this study, including the key tenets of MMR, the philosophical orientation of pragmatism and related dialectical pluralism, the approach to qualitative data analysis, and the role quantitative data serve in the context of the study. This chapter also includes a discussion of my positionality and practices I have employed to cultivate reflexivity.

In Chapter 4, I describe the study context and the methods used for each phase of the study in greater depth. This includes presenting the phases of the study; representing them in a procedural diagram; and describing the sampling and data collection, data analysis, and integration with other phases for every phase. Additionally, I include in this chapter a discussion of the limitations of this study.

In Chapter 5, I present the findings for the first phase of the study. In response to the first research question, the content analysis revealed that community college boards practice board skillship, meaning the practices and processes related to governing effectively, to fulfill their roles both internal and external to their institutions. They do this through communication and delegation with their lead administrator and other appropriate college stakeholders.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the findings for the second phase of the study. The qualitative interviews illuminated the content analysis findings further, suggesting that trustee effectiveness includes elements of both authority—trustees as political figures with connections, clout, and a willingness to use it—and humility—trustees as learners who come into their role with an understanding of the scope of community college content knowledge they need, and a willingness to put the time in to learn it. Relatedly, board effectiveness includes elements of both accountability—a board's willingness to hold their institution and lead administrator accountable, and to be accountable to those they serve—and support—a board's demonstration

of committed support for their institutional mission and those with whom they work to implement it. With respect to the second research question, the qualitative interviews revealed that trustees pursue individual development opportunities, like the Excellence in Trusteeship Program (ETP) certificate offered by CCLC, and whole-board opportunities, like having a facilitated discussion of a board evaluation to help the board build its internal relationships and work better together interpersonally.

In Chapter 7, I show how the quantitative analyses yielded important descriptive information on the underexplored dataset of trustee ETP certification in the California community college system. These analyses also explored the third research question and indicated that trustee development, measured as the proportion of a board with ETP certification, was not linked to improved student outcomes.

Chapter 8 yields the integrated findings from all three phases, which suggest that, while trustees may be committed and sincere in their support for student success, there is currently a gap between their intentions and efforts, and the outcomes for students at the institutions they govern.

In Chapter 9, I discuss the implications of the findings for this study and outline future directions for researchers and practitioners.

Chapter II. Literature Review

I begin this chapter with a discussion of the methods used to execute this review. Next, I discuss the findings that emerged from the different board governance sectors considered. I highlight key areas including the importance of board context, defining board effectiveness, board characteristics and practices that have been considered related to effectiveness, and steps taken to cultivate board effectiveness through board and board member development. I next review key theoretical and methodological approaches and limitations.

Given the slippery, contextually rooted nature of defining “board effectiveness,” I have attempted to draw from other sectors carefully and critically. Other board governance sectors have their own goals appropriate to their organizational contexts, and it may be that governance on behalf of shareholders, in the case of a corporate board at a for-profit company, ought to look very different from governance on behalf of community college students. I believe that the primary responsibility of the largest and most diverse sector of higher education should be to serve its students, and so the effectiveness of community college board governance should primarily be determined by how board governance supports students’ needs. At community colleges, students come from all walks of life, and many of them are excluded from other higher education sectors because of systemic socioeconomic and racial injustices, and related limits in geographic and financial access. In the interdisciplinary, integrative review that follows, I have made every attempt to consider board effectiveness literature with these students in mind, and to pay close attention to how scholars are currently imagining board effectiveness. In the study this review informs, I explore board effectiveness, and how it may be reimagined, on these students’ behalf.

Search Methods

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this work and the need to include diverse forms of literature, an integrative approach drives this review (Cooper, 1982). An integrative review is an especially useful approach for underdeveloped veins of literature, because it allows the reviewer to include diverse sources; for my review, these included peer-reviewed research and theoretical articles, and non-peer reviewed, trustee-facing publications. Consistent with the integrative approach (Cooper, 1982), I developed inclusion and exclusion criteria for the articles to be included.

Literature on Community College Boards

The first body of work I examined focused exclusively on community college governing boards. To ensure broad coverage, my initial literature searches were guided by the following question: What is known about the roles, challenges, and effectiveness of local community college governing boards? My inclusion criteria were: (1) Articles had to have local community college governing boards or some aspect of their governance as the primary topic or focus; (2) The research questions or hypotheses had to focus on some aspect of board governance or on trustees themselves. Based on these criteria, I excluded articles that mentioned trustees only in passing (e.g., "Based on our results, presidents and trustees should…"), and articles that were focused on non-local, state- or province-wide governing boards, and non-governing boards (e.g., college foundation boards). I also excluded research and theoretical articles that offered recommendations for managing trustees, but that did not include trustee perspectives.

To find articles, I used the following databases: Academic Search Premier, Education Research Complete, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), and the Professional Development Collection. By accessing EBSCOhost through UW-Madison's library system, I was able to search these four databases simultaneously. I limited my review to peer-reviewed

articles that could be accessed directly online or via online delivery through the university's Interlibrary Loan program.

To ensure broad coverage, I used general search terms and did not include any date parameters when searching for peer-reviewed articles. Using the database thesauruses to determine appropriate search terms[3], I built a matrix of terms and databases and used it to craft my search for literature on governing board evaluations (Torraco, 2016). Based on this matrix, I searched using the terms "community college trustees"; "community colleges" AND "trustees"; or "community colleges" AND "governing boards". I then reviewed article titles and abstracts and excluded articles focusing on non-community college boards or boards outside the US and Canada. I excluded state- and province-wide boards, focusing instead on local governing boards who work directly with a college district's lead administrator. If governing boards or trustees were mentioned in an article's keywords or identifiers but not in its abstract, I skimmed the full text and eliminated articles that mentioned these topics only briefly, or for which these topics were not central to the research questions or theoretical topics.

I evaluated ~300 articles in this manner and used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to track key citations from the 102 articles that met my inclusion criteria. All these articles were peer-reviewed; of the 102, 41 were empirical research articles—that is, they reported on the methods and findings of a study the author(s) had conducted. The remaining 68 articles were mostly informed opinion pieces, though two were historical overviews. I evaluated these two bodies of work separately, looking for areas of overlap and difference between the research findings of the empirical articles and the received wisdom of the non-empirical, peer-reviewed articles. Where these distinctions seem relevant, I have highlighted them in my findings. In addition to these

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[3] This practice accounts for the different keywords used for different databases, as shown in Tables 1 and 2.

articles, I included three books based on their relevance to the topic: Vaughan and Weisman's (1997) *Community College Trustees*, ACCT's *Trusteeship in Community Colleges: A Guide for Effective Governance* (King & Conner, 2020), and Phelan's (2021) *The Community College Board 2.0.* I conducted initial database searches for this review in August 2020,[4] and continued checking the journals identified in those searches for new, related articles through April 2023. In addition to these articles, and as a result of snowballing and mentors' recommendations, I included eleven more articles. To code the literature, I followed Foss and Waters's (2015) process for each body of work—typing quotes from the literature that seemed especially relevant to the review's research questions, sorting these quotes based on themes they had in common, assigning codes to those themes, developing a conceptual schema to order the codes, and then writing up the findings in accordance with that schema.

[4] I began cataloguing articles related to community college boards in a spreadsheet when I started my PhD program in August 2018, but had to begin this process again when that original spreadsheet file was corrupted, and the corrupted version was automatically saved over a cloud-based backup in July 2020.

Table 1

Community College Board Literature

Inclusion Criteria

- Must have local community college governing boards or an aspect of their governance as the primary topic or focus.
- Research questions or hypotheses had to focus on some aspect of board governance or on trustees themselves.

Exclusion Criteria

- Mentioned trustees or boards only in passing.
- Focused on non-local, state- or province-wide governing boards, or non-governing boards.
- Offered recommendations on managing trustees (e.g., for lead administrators) without including trustee perspectives.

Databases	Keywords used	Initial yield	Yield post-abstract review	Final sample	Journals represented in final sample
Academic Search Premier	“Community college trustees” OR “Junior college trustees”	~300 articles	0[5]	--	Academe, Community/Junior College Research Quarterly, Canadian Journal of Education, Community College Journal, Community College Journal of Research and Practice, Community College Review, Community and Junior College Journal, Community/Junior College Quarterly of Research and Practice, Community/Junior College Research Quarterly, Journal of Higher Education, New Directions for Community Colleges, Alberta Journal of Educational Research
Education Research Complete	"Community college trustees"		2	1	
ERIC	"Community colleges" AND "governing boards" OR "community colleges" AND "trustees"		90	53	
Professional Development Selection	"Community college trustees"		5	4	

[5] While there likely were articles included in this review that could have been found using Academic Search Premier only, most articles found when searching all four databases at the same time were associated with ERIC (duplicates were removed).

Board Effectiveness Literature from Other Governance Sectors

For the literature search on board assessments in other leadership fields, I followed a similar process to the one above, with differences noted here. To be included, studies had to (1) engage questions or topics related to governing board effectiveness, (2) be published in a peer-reviewed journal, (3) be an empirical study, theoretical article, or review of board literature, (4) be related to governing boards in the following areas: education, nonprofit leadership, local (no higher than city- or county-level) politics, and board-governed for-profit corporations, (5) been available for download from electronic databases in the UW library system before this work was submitted for partial completion of my PhD, and (6) articles had to be published in English.

Since I am focused on governing boards at the local level, I excluded from my analysis scholarly works focusing on governing boards at state-wide or national levels. No date parameters were used.

I browsed databases accessible through the UW Library, searching variations of "governing board effectiveness" and "trustee effectiveness" to see which databases would yield the most relevant results. Based on this, I identified the following databases for this part of the search: Education Research Complete, ERIC, Professional Development Collection, Academic Search Premier, ABI/Inform, APA Psychinfo, and Business Source Complete. I used each database's thesaurus to determine the appropriate search terms to find articles related to effectiveness in board governance. I conducted initial database searches for this review in March 2021, and reconducted the searches with the same databases and keywords to find any new, related articles through April 2023.

Initial searches yielded 407 articles[6]. I evaluated the titles and keywords of each of these articles and narrowed my sample to 150 articles that seemed relevant to the current study. Next, I reviewed the abstracts for these articles, which yielded a sample of 76 articles. In addition to these articles, and as a result of snowballing and mentors' recommendations, I included seven more articles and three books. Using these methods, board effectiveness literature was predominantly found for boards governing the following, non-community college sectors: other higher education institutions (that is, 4-year institutions), K-12 school districts, other nonprofit organizations, healthcare organizations[7], and for-profit institutions. A few articles in the sample were drawn from non-education-focused public sector boards. For this body of work, I again followed Foss and Waters's (2015) process for coding the literature, developing a conceptual scheme, and writing up the findings.

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[6] Duplicates were removed.
[7] Because of the nature of healthcare organizations' missions, I chose to categorize them separately, rather than considering nonprofit healthcare organizations and for-profit healthcare organizations as simply additional nonprofits and additional for-profits.

Table 2

Board Effectiveness Literature

Inclusion Criteria

- Must be published in a peer-reviewed journal
- Must be an empirical study, theoretical article, or review of board literature
- Must be related to governing boards in education, nonprofit leadership, local (no higher than city- or county- level) politics, or board-governed for-profit corporations
- Must be available for download from the UW library system
- Must be published in English

Database	Keywords used	Initial yield	Post-title and keyword review	Final Sample	Journals represented in final sample
ABI/Inform	"boards of trustees" AND "effectiveness"	147	43	19	Accounting Review; Administration & Society; Administrative Issues Journal; Africa Education Review; American Educational Research Journal; American Journal of Education; American Review of Public Administration; California Management Review; Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning; Cogent Business & Management; Corporate Governance; Educational Management Administration & Leadership; Educational Policy; European Journal of Training and Development, Group Decision & Negotiation; Global Strategy Journal; Health Affairs; Health Care Management Review; Hospital & Health Services
Academic Search Premier	"school boards" AND "effectiveness"	49	15	1	
	"boards of directors" AND "effectiveness"	46	28	11	

APA Psychinfo	“boards of education” and “organizational effectiveness”	1	1	1	Administration; Human Organization; Human Relations; Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance; International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning; International Journal of Business & Society; International Journal of Disclosure & Governance; International Journal of Educational Advancement; International Journal of Educational Management; International Journal of Organizational Analysis; International Journal of Technology Management; Journal of Business Ethics; Journal of Corporation Law; Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy & Practice; Journal of Financial Economics; Journal of Health & Social Behavior; Journal of Healthcare Management; Journal of Higher Education; Journal of Management Studies; Management Science; NASPA Journal; New Directions for Higher Education; Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Quarterly; Nonprofit Management & Leadership; Nursing Economics; Peabody Journal of Education; Planning & Changing; Public Administration Review; Review of Educational Research; Rural Educator; School Effectiveness & School Improvement; Strategic Enrollment Management Quarterly; Tertiary Education & Management; The CPA Journal; The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership; The Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership; Urban Affairs Review; Voluntas
Business Source Complete	“boards of directors” AND “effectiveness”	40	14	8	
Education Research Complete	“boards of directors” AND “effectiveness”	32	21	14	
	“school boards” AND “effectiveness	72	20	10	
ERIC	“governing boards” AND “organizational effectiveness	54	12	8	
Professional Development Collection	“school boards” AND “effectiveness”	17	8	6	
	“boards of directors” AND “effectiveness”	12	8	2	

After initially drafting results for each body of work, I synthesized them using the following process. First, I drafted a reverse outline for each section, indexing the topic of each paragraph. I then evaluated the reverse outline for segments that would cohere better if grouped together and reordered the reverse outline components to create a new structure. I then reordered the paragraphs in my initial draft based on the new structure in this outline, and then revised the work in that order. Findings in the next section include both community college governing board literature and board effectiveness literature from other sections. I signal when I am switching between sectors.

Literature Review Findings

In the rest of this chapter, I begin with a major thread that emerged in the literature: the importance of organizational context in determining board effectiveness. I then address key themes in the board literature related to board effectiveness: defining effectiveness, effectiveness as fulfilling roles and responsibilities, effectiveness as avoiding harmful board behaviors, effectiveness as a set of characteristics, effectiveness as linked to board practices, effectiveness as linked to organizational outcomes, and cultivating board effectiveness through board and trustee development. I then discuss the theoretical engagement and limitations I observed in the literature, followed by outlining methodological approaches and limitations. I conclude with a summative discussion of what I’ve learned from this review, and how it informs the study that follows.

Setting the Context

Because boards vary so greatly, any study of their effectiveness must begin with a clear demarcation of a board’s role, governing structure, and key stakeholder relationships. As described in the introduction, community college governing boards work closely with their lead

administrators to ensure governance of the college(s) in their district. This can include several responsibilities, but generally focuses on establishing governing policies (Zwemer, 1985, citing Griffiths, 1979) and giving direction to the institution rather than administering its functions (Caparosa, 1984). Usually, such direction is given through the lead administrator, who is hired by and directly reports to the board. A similar structure is typically used for boards in the K-12 education sector.

Community college leadership scholars have focused on two primary areas when considering the board context. The first is the in-between nature of the board role—that is, a local governing board is always bridging a gap between the institution they govern and the general public (Michael et al., 1997). In this space, boards help to legitimize the public authority of an institution (Konrad, 1977a) by deciphering political and society needs, communicating those needs to their institutions, and holding institutions accountable to fulfilling those needs in a manner aligned with the institutional mission (Smith & Miller, 2015). This diversity of needs understandably makes defining a board's purpose quite slippery—as Konrad (1977a) notes, societal expectations and institutional needs can vary widely, and ongoing "examination of an appropriate role for today's trustee" (p. 5) is an important practice for boards and the organizations and individuals who advise them. Brossman (1978) views this interstitial feature of boards as a strength in that it preserves the local control of institutions with a historically localized emphasis (p. 22).

Board effectiveness literature from other sectors also emphasizes the importance of considering board context. Kezar's (2006) landmark work on higher education governing boards highlights the complexity of studying boards because of their diversity of structures and system relationships. 4-year higher education boards may share many similarities with boards at 2-year

counterparts in terms of role, but this can vary substantially based on whether the institution is private or public (Taylor & de Lourdes Machado, 2008). A 2001 study indicated that most trustees understood their roles to be setting professional strategy, serving a supervisory role, conducting resource allocation, providing a link between the institution and the state, hearing appeals, handling individual matters, strengthening a college's external position, and serving as an advisory body for the lead administrator (Marheim Larsen, 2001).

Board work in the nonprofit sector can be even more varied. Inglis et al.'s 1999 work found that nonprofit board work broadly fell into three categories: strategic activities (external focus), resource planning (external and internal foci), and operations (internal focus). Of course, the nonprofit sector is larger and (if possible) serves more varied roles than community colleges. Adizes's 1972 study of arts nonprofit organizations in three different countries, for example, found that these organizations' board roles and functions are unique in the following ways: board composition and structure, boundaries and character of board duties and authority, methods for decision-making, and character of board responsibilities. A substantial challenge for board members in the nonprofit sector is that the amount of time they have available to devote to their board work is usually not commensurate to the volunteer nature of their role in a nonprofit (Trower, 2013). Similar challenges may exist in the K-12 education sector, where governmental policy expectations related to compliance and regulation have in at least one case proven too complex for nonprofessional educators to adequately fulfill (Slowley, 2017).

In contrast to the nonprofit sector, board members in the for-profit sector are usually financially compensated, though that does not leave the role in these contexts without complexity (Alles & Friedland, 2007). In terms of their function, these boards are typically concerned with facilitating increased profits for the companies they govern. Pargendler (2016) posits that

corporate boards are intended to offer a “midway solution” (p. 359) between market determinism and government control, but troubles the conclusion that self-governing corporations can address the challenges for which corporate governance has come under greater public scrutiny. Leblanc (2013) echoes this critique, noting that in this sector, too, board members often lack the expertise to execute their roles. They may also lack meaningful support resources (Alles & Friedland, 2007). Alexander et al. (2006) observe that the efficacy of a board in the healthcare sector will depend on its context and the needs of its organization, which is likely true for any board.

Given the diversity of board purposes and roles across governing sectors (not to mention individual organizations within those sectors), the tendency to hand-wavingly refer to “board effectiveness” or “best board practices” is misguided. Board effectiveness will depend on the mission, needs, and aims of the organization being governed. Best board practices will depend on a particular board, and the individuals who compose it at a given time. For this reason, I next explore and complicate how “board effectiveness”—the term at the heart of this review—is defined in board effectiveness literature.

Key Themes from the Board Literature

Defining Effectiveness

Several authors have offered definitions of or criteria for governing board effectiveness in the community college literature. These perspectives have tended to coalesce around the following areas: boards appropriately fulfilling their roles and responsibilities, avoiding harmful board behaviors, possessing or cultivating certain characteristics, and observing certain practices. Smith & Miller (2015) cite the 1973 Carnegie Commission on Higher Education’s definition of an effective board as one whose members are “independent, free of conflict of interest, competent, devoted and sensitive to the interests of the several groups involved in the life of the

campus," (p. 55) and then appropriately compare the search for such a board to that of Diogenes's for an honest man. Effective boards likely comprise trustees who come from diverse backgrounds (Potter & Phelan, 2008; Zwemer, 1985) and set as their chief priority the welfare of the college and the community it serves; effective boards also likely have trustees who are active, dedicated, involved, and informed (Potter, 1976). Several authors have offered lists of traits of effective boards (Newton, 1985; Phelan, 2021; Spilde & Burke, 2020),[8] but there are not yet any criteria that are largely agreed upon. In 4-year higher education, board effectiveness has been explored through the literature (Kezar, 2006), lead administrators' perspectives (Proper et al., 2009), and trustees' perspectives (Michael, 2000). In her review of board performance literature, Kezar (2006) finds that effectiveness is generally conceptualized in three ways: (1) the careful set of processes according to a set of principles, (2) meeting a specific outcome, and (3) following a set of process principles to achieve a specific outcome. Michael et al.'s (2000) study of university trustees found that they perceived trustee effectiveness to be linked to level of knowledge, influence, quality of relationships, and level of involvement in management functions.

Two studies in the K-12 space explore perspectives on board effectiveness. Pharis et al. (2005) found that most school council members related effectiveness to addressing their school's improvement plan (88.2%), addressing communication strategies (86.8%), and addressing school council business (94.3%). Council members' perspectives on effectiveness tended to align with other constituent groups of the school (Pharis et al., 2005). In contrast, Slowley's 2017 study of

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[8] Strangely, none of the definitions for board effectiveness offered in the community college research center students. Future work on board effectiveness should center those most affected by the institutions these boards govern.

two primary schools in New Zealand identified a conflict in the perceptions of the board's role between views held by the parent trustees, and those held by the government and its advisors.

In their systematic literature review of nonprofit board member development literature, Ward and Preece (2012) find that board effectiveness is predominantly linked to recruiting board members with appropriate skills and knowledge, while training and development are less prioritized. Both Williams (2010) and Herman et al. (1997) speak to the importance of critically considering the idea of board effectiveness. Williams (2010) cautions boards against adopting unproven management methods categorized as "best practices" (p. 303), while Herman et al. (1997) take the social constructionist perspective that any study of effectiveness must acknowledge that effectiveness is not a real phenomenon, but a series of judgments.

In the healthcare space, Chambers et al. (2017) highlight the challenge for health care boards in demonstrating effectiveness as a correlative of both patient safety and financial sustainability. Pointer and Ewell (1995) offer that effectiveness is generally defined as "doing the right things" (p. 315), and advocate for a paradigm of board work that incorporates board responsibilities and core roles. In the for-profit sector, Lightle et al. (2009) advocate for protection of shareholder interests as central to board effectiveness.

One thing seems clear—any definition or understanding of a board's effectiveness is closely linked to that board's governing context and its related values. A persistent challenge for researchers who seek to understand board effectiveness is that the concept necessarily presupposes criteria for effectiveness, whether those criteria are explicitly stated or not. In the community college sector, this is a conversation worth having explicitly. Are effective boards those whose colleges have the highest completion rates, balanced budgets, or vocational programs embedded in local industry? Are they those that most closely follow governance "best

practices" and employ committee structures? Or are they those made up of the best trustees—people with education expertise, a heart for the colleges, and a commitment to seeing colleges help students achieve their educational goals? Questions like these are at the heart of the sections that follow.

Effectiveness as Fulfilling Roles and Responsibilities

One way of understanding board effectiveness that emerged in the community college board literature is as effectively fulfilling roles and responsibilities. Haire (1974) defines the role as providing facilities, selecting administrators, choosing faculty, and supervising institutional standards in service to students, the community, and the college. This is a more involved understanding of the trustee role than other community college scholars have offered. Multiple scholars have been careful to prescribe a limited trustee role—one that focuses on policy establishment rather than institutional operation (Zwemer, 1985, citing Griffiths, 1979), and giving direction to the institution rather than administrating its functions (Caparosa, 1984). In addition to being linked to organizational context and values, board effectiveness is dependent on the parameters set for a board role.

Three studies have focused on perceptions of the community college board role. In Smith and Miller's 2015 study of college administrators' perspectives on trustee roles, the authors note some dissonance between what college administrators believe boards should be doing, and what these administrators perceive boards to currently be doing. In their national, randomly sampled survey of leaders from 200 community colleges, Smith and Miller (2015) found that administrators perceived greater trustee involvement in day-to-day college operations than administrators would prefer—for example, administrators perceived that the trustee role included determining financial priorities, having a voice in curricular requirements, and determining

teaching methods, even though these are roles administrators did not desire for trustees to take on . Instead, they preferred that trustees stay at a higher organizational level, engaging in strategic mission development, approving personnel matters, and fundraising for the institution (Smith & Miller, 2015). Trustees would seem to agree with this approach—in Piland and Butte's 1991 survey of 100 trustees attending the 1989 ACCT conference, they found that trustees indicated that they should not be involved in college administration, and they should not be directly involved in bargaining during negotiations with the faculty union. Interestingly, they also felt that a college president's role was more appropriately mediator rather than leader (Piland & Butte, 1991). Vaughan and Weisman (1997) found in their interviews with trustees that the trustees were conscious of the in-between nature of their role—when the researchers asked trustees whom they represent and for whom they work, the trustees noted working for both college students and the public who elected them, and spoke to the liaison role that they serve between the public and the college.

Several other non-empirical articles in the community college sector discuss the board role in relationship to the different functions trustees serve. One such function is ensuring the fiscal viability of an institution. Mathews (1974) describes trustees' role in working with their lead administrator and finance employees to develop and approve a sound budget, while Nielsen et al. (2003) and Craft and Guy (2019) speak to the responsibility they feel trustees have in "bring[ing] new resources" to the college (Craft & Guy, 2019, p. 40)—that is, fundraising. A more recent article emphasizes hiring a lead administrator as an important board role (Pierce, 2021). As to other roles trustees serve, Mathews (1974) laments trustees' limited involvement in the accreditation process, and Simmons (1985) offers recommendations for the ways in which trustees can become more actively involved in accreditation. Authors also note the important role

trustees play in collective bargaining (Moriarty, 1985) and public relations for their colleges (Hamilton & Harstein, 1985). In Konrad's 1977(b) survey of trustees in Alberta and British Columbia, he found that the activity most consistently practiced by trustees in service to their role was meeting attendance. In the K-12 education sector, Feuerstein (2009) identified six areas of board competency: decision making, the ability to function as a group, the ability to exercise authority, connecting with the community, working toward board improvement, and acting strategically (p. 12). More recently, Cutler White (2022) has argued that boards should fulfill an "expanded role in securing financial resources" (p. 66); other roles authors have posited for trustees include participation in shared governance (Kater & Burke, 2022) and partnering with colleges to help address workforce and student employment needs (D'Amico et al., 2022). Conceptions of board effectiveness should likely include bare minima related to fulfilling a role—put simply, effective boards do what they are supposed to do.

To summarize, within the community college context, the board role typically prescribed is fairly limited and focused on policymaking. While many trustees and lead administrators may agree that this is appropriate, in practice, boards may be more involved in day-to-day college operations than has been recommended. One factor that may contribute to this possible board role confusion is that many different roles have been prescribed for boards in addition to policymaking—setting the budget, raising funds, participating in collective bargaining, and serving a public relations role as public figures in college district leadership. Given these diverse recommendations in the literature, it seems possible that an implicit message trustees receive from lead administrators and scholars is "Stay high-level. Don't get involved in the details unless you're asked to." One can imagine the confusion and conflict this messaging could create, and how it could lead to the behaviors described in the next section. To determine what is effective

for a particular board, that board's role must be clearly and consistently articulated and agreed upon.

Effectiveness as Avoiding Harmful Board Behaviors

When a board's role is not clear and agreed upon, problems arise. If an effective board does, at a bare minimum, what it is supposed to, then it must also, at a bare minimum, not do things that actively harm the institution entrusted to the board. There is substantial work across governance sectors on behaviors that boards ought to avoid.

The most thorough examination of bad board behavior in the community college sector is O'Banion's (2009a, 2009b) work on the rogue trustee. O'Banion (2009a) posits that "[t]he rogue trustee may be the single most destructive force ever to plague an educational institution" (p. 548). Rogue trustees are those who commandeer a board for their own selfish ends. A college's mission, whatever it may be, is of little concern to the rogue who works not toward collaborative outcomes, but toward whatever outcomes that individual trustee desires, by whatever means will yield those outcomes. O'Banion (2009a) believes that many of the problems of dysfunctional boards are actually rooted in a single dysfunctional trustee. O'Banion's (2009a) interviews with college presidents reveal the extent to which a rogue trustee can damage an institution, and how they use intimidation and bullying to dissuade other trustees from acting against them. In one study of O'Banion's (2009b), about half of the rogue trustee cases he studied led to positive outcomes—the rogue trustee either changed their behavior or resigned, while in the other half the rogue trustees continued to stay in their role and damage the institution. Using board development resources to address issues with rogue trustees can have mixed results—it may galvanize the other board members so that they are willing to take action against a rogue trustee, but it may also make a rogue trustee more effective in their exploitation of governance culture,

terminology, and protocols (O'Banion, 2009b). O'Banion (2009b) notes that some presidents have enlisted the help of other trustees or the media, though he notes that this must be done with great care to preserve the president's credibility. While a recently published, nonempirical article (Cloud, 2022) reiterates O'Banion's (2009a; 2009b) findings, recent studies have not investigated the subject of the rogue trustee further.

Other internal challenges boards face are mistrust among the board and between the board and administration (Donahue, 2003; Phelan, 2021; Polk et al., 1976a), board micromanagement (Rubiales, 1998; Richardson, 1978), trustees who manipulate media relationships for their own personal or political reasons (Hamilton & Hartstein, 1985), trustee turnover (Phelan, 2021), and lack of governing expertise (Phelan, 2021). There is also the issue of a lack of trustee development. Konrad (1977a) found that trustees tend not to be familiar with major books and periodicals relevant to post-secondary education.

Harmful board behaviors have been observed in other education governance sectors as well. Bastedo's 2009 work on conflicts of interest at 4-year higher education institutions found that threats to trustee independence are produced through a process of "moral seduction" (p. 354) that allows trustees to engage in self-interested decision-making while maintaining an ethical self-concept. Such conflicts can be financial, political, or family-related (Bastedo, 2009). Trustee activism—that is, advocating for one's personal agenda rather than in the best interest of the institution—has been highlighted elsewhere (Levine, 2016), as has the use of the term "fiduciary responsibility" (a phrase perhaps even more slippery than "board effectiveness"!) to justify inappropriate action or inaction (Payette, 2001). Related to the harm of inaction, Slowley's 2017 work in the K-12 education sector identified boards' task avoidance, and minimal effort exerted in completing tasks, as a problem of ineffective boards. In Lay and Bauman's (2019) study of

charter schools in New Orleans, they found that these boards were unrepresentative, focused on fiduciary responsibilities rather than academics, and often failed to comply with state transparency laws.

Most of the harmful board behaviors identified relate to one or both of the following areas of concern: (1) trustees using their position on the board to further their own agendas, driving poor board decision-making, and (2) trustees being un- or under-informed regarding their role, and so failing to execute it well. The latter issue emphasizes the need for clarity on a board's role, as well as board development processes like orientation and assessment.[9] The former issue prompts a question. If O'Banion (2009a; 2009b) is correct that a single rogue trustee often drives a board toward decisions that are destructive to the college district being governed, why? Why is a single individual able in these cases to drive the votes of a majority of trustees on their board? It may be that future researchers and college leaders should consider "board resilience" to roguish trustee behavior as part of board effectiveness. If a board is to avoid harmful behavior, perhaps they must do so by being informed and learning to see where one trustee's agenda does not align with the best interests of their institutions. The next section outlines characteristics of boards that have been found to be effective across different sectors.

Effectiveness as a Set of Characteristics

In addition to being linked to certain behaviors (and the lack of other behaviors), board effectiveness has been considered as connected to certain characteristics a board may possess. These are usually linked to elements of board composition, such as trustee selection method and characteristics of individual trustees, like gender identity, racial identity, or professional background. Additionally, effective boards tend to have effective board chairs.

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[9] These topics are covered in a later section, "Cultivating Board Effectiveness".

Community College Board Composition. Community college trustees attain their roles through different means, depending on their geographic location. Boards may be elected in non-partisan or partisan elections, appointed by coordinating commissions, or appointed through executive or legislative branches (Smith & Miller, 2015). Perspectives on the methods of trustee selection vary. In Konrad's 1977(b) survey of trustees in Alberta and British Columbia, he found that trustees agreed on the factors most important when selecting new trustees, whether through election or appointment: interest in higher education, vision for the future, understanding of institutional role, and sufficient time to devote to the trustee role. Additionally, trustees in these provinces opposed the use of government departmental and provincial nominating committees in appointing board members, believing instead that if nominating committees were to be used, they should be composed by members of the college's local community (Konrad, 1977a). Another study by Konrad (1977b), this one a qualitative analysis of interviews with 35 newly appointed trustees in Alberta, focused specifically on trustees' perspectives of the trustee selection process. Some respondents felt that the appointment process resulted in trustees with a greater service motivation than electing trustees would have, while others felt the precise opposite (Konrad, 1977b). Moore (1973) has observed that whether its members are appointed or elected, a board is a highly political body. Michael et al.'s (1997) study of trustee recruitment found that a joint recruiting effort by the current board of trustees and the lead administrator was viewed as an effective way of recruiting new trustees, while using only the current board members, the governor, or the lead administrator alone were considered only moderately effective.

A few studies have sought to explore possible distinctions in the governance of community college trustees who are appointed when compared to those who are elected. In some

provinces, government appointment has led to more women trustees and more trustees with professional and teaching occupation backgrounds (Konrad, 1977a). A study that asked lead administrators to rate the effectiveness of both appointed and elected boards found that appointed board members were perceived as having more qualifications and experience, having greater representation of minoritized groups, and recalling board members when needed—all areas in which elected boards were perceived as lacking (Zwemer, 1985, citing Ladwig, 1981). In Young and Thompson's 1982 study of characteristics and beliefs of appointed and elected trustees, they found that elected trustees were more likely to concern themselves with administration, and less likely to permit faculty and students to be part of policymaking. Trustees also differed in their views related to finance. Appointed trustees were more favorable toward greater proportions of state level funding than their elected counterparts, while elected trustees believed that trustees felt more accountable to community residents when local tax revenues directly supported the college (Young & Thompson, 1982).

The limited nature of research on differences between appointed and elected community college trustees prevents us from drawing conclusions about which selection process may be better suited to board effectiveness. Despite this ambiguity, several authors have argued that appointed trustees are likely to be more qualified and effective in their role (Konrad, 1977a; O'Banion, 2009b; Zwemer, 1985, citing Nason, 1982). Polk et al. (1976b) point out that both election and appointment come with benefits and drawbacks, and that both are highly political processes. Gleazer (1985) cites the National Commission on College and University Trustee Selection (1980) in arguing that, while there are benefits to government appointment, commitment to the historically local orientation and service mission of the community college may in some communities be manifested by locally elected trustees. It would seem the

conversation on election vs. appointment follows a predictable route—education professionals believe that governance of community colleges should belong to education professionals like themselves, and trustees elected by their communities believe governance should belong to representatives of the local community.

Several researchers have conducted descriptive studies of community college trustees to better understand some of trustees' identity characteristics, like race, gender, education level, and political affiliation. Aggregate descriptions of the "typical trustee" that researchers have offered tend to be similar—historically, the typical trustee has tended to be a White man in a professional or business occupation who is in his mid-forties or older (Konrad, 1977a; Petty & Piland, 1985; Zwemer, 1985) Additionally, these trustees have tended to be involved in community groups—especially as members of Protestant religious groups. (Bers, 1980; Konrad, 1977a; Zwemer, 1985, citing Nason, 1982). Trustees tend to have completed some higher education, with Vaughan and Weisman's 2002 national survey in the U.S. indicating that over 85% have earned a baccalaureate degree or higher. Konrad's (1977a) survey of trustees in Alberta and British Columbia found that nearly half of trustees had earned master's level degrees or higher. Unsurprisingly, trustees' political affiliation appears to vary with geographical region. In Petty and Piland's 1985 survey of trustees in the state of Illinois, they found that trustees were predominantly affiliated with the Republican party, while in Konrad's (1977a) survey, 9 in 10 respondents identified as moderate or liberal politically. Vaughan and Weisman's (2002) U.S. survey indicates a more even split, with 43% of respondents identifying as Republicans and 42% as Democrats. Readers should note that these studies are a few decades old, and that much has likely changed in the makeup of trustees since.

Lacey (1985) focuses on trustees from minoritized racial and ethnic groups in his survey of 113 trustees. Most of these trustees (68.3%) had completed a baccalaureate degree or higher, and most were new to trusteeship—65.4% had served in their roles for five years or fewer (Lacey, 1985). Respondents expressed strong commitment to their roles, with 82.5% indicating they would seek reelection if they had to decide at the time they were surveyed (Lacey, 1985). Most respondents (57.9%) rated their boards poorly when compared with past boards in their districts' effectiveness in representing the views and opinions of district citizens. Lacey's (1986) survey did not focus on bias minoritized trustees may have experienced in their roles, but a survey of women trustees conducted in the same year found that a majority of the 387 respondents (59.2%) felt that women were frequently not treated as equal board members by colleagues who were men (Korhammer, 1985). While these surveys are over two decades old, two reminders remain prescient: that of having boards that reflect the populations the colleges serve, and of ensuring each member of those boards has an equal seat at the governing table (Smith, 1976).

Board Composition and Effectiveness in Other Governance Sectors. As in the community college literature, several researchers in other board governance sectors have examined the nature of board composition. In the 4-year higher education sector, De Silva Lokuwaduge and Armstrong's (2015) regression analysis did not show a significant relationship between board size and the performance of universities. In the K-12 space, Land (2002) notes the tension elected school board members experience between their roles as trustees of the district and representatives of the constituents who elected them, though also acknowledges that, since representation of diverse constituencies satisfies an important democratic principal, it may not be

realistic or desirable to consistently give preference to the trustee role. There may also be some benefit to having student representation on a board (Levine, 2016).

In the nonprofit and public sectors, diversity of board composition has been linked to differences in governance practices (Buse et al., 2016; Brown, 2002; Mitchell, 1997). Buse et al.'s (2016) study of 1,456 nonprofit executive directors found that board governance practices are directly influenced by the gender and racial diversity of a board, and that board inclusion behaviors, together with diversity policies and practices, mediate the influence of the board's gender and racial diversity on internal and external governance practices. Additionally, an interaction effect in their findings indicated that when boards have greater gender diversity, a negative impact of racial diversity on governance practices is mitigated (Buse et al., 2016). This suggests that board governance can be improved with more diverse membership, but inclusive behaviors, policies and practices are critical regardless of the diversity of a board's membership. Buse et al.'s (2016) findings are consistent with Brown's 2002 findings that, while boards that use more inclusive practices are not necessarily heterogenous in board composition, inclusive boards are more inclined to be sensitive to diversity issues and use recommend board recruitment practices. Forms of capital board members bring to their roles also contribute to board effectiveness; Azevedos's (2022) regression analysis of survey data from 13 Florida community foundations indicated that human capital, social capital, and structural capital all play a role.

In the healthcare sector, the impact of board composition has been found to be highly dependent on organizational context (Bai, 2013; Chambers et al., 2017; Pfeffer, 1973) Pfeffer's 1973 study of 57 hospitals in a large Midwestern state found that board function was partly explained by organizational ownership and source of funds, while board size as related to requirements for successful connection to a hospital's environment and board function. Board

composition was linked to the social context of the organization, and influenced a hospital's ability to obtain community support, attract resources, and achieve greater organizational effectiveness (Pfeffer, 1973). Elsewhere, including nurses on a hospital's board has been found to enhance board effectiveness through professional and gender diversity, credibility, and public trust (Prybil et al., 2019). Smaller boards have been found to encourage greater risk-taking and faster rates of decision-making and innovation, while larger boards show a stronger capacity for more robust monitoring, challenging a CEO and building demand for efficiencies (Chambers et al., 2017). There are also differences in context between nonprofit and for-profit hospital boards. Bai (2013) found that board size and presence of government officials on the board was negatively associated with social performance (as quantitatively measured by expenditures on community benefits) for for-profit hospitals, but the reverse was found for nonprofit hospitals. Context may mediate effects, however; on for-profit boards, having physicians on the board was positively associated with social performance, but this was not a significant finding for for-profit boards (Bai, 2013).

In the for-profit sector, researchers have examined several aspects of board composition with respect to board effectiveness: gender diversity (Adams & Ferreira, 2009; Cook & Glass, 2018; Kang et al., 2022), director independence from the organization (Bhagat & Black, 2002; McCahery & Vermeulen, 2014; Wagner III et al., 1998), and more recently, diversity of member qualifications and skillsets (Kang et al., 2022) and retirement status of directors (Brandes et al., 2022). Female board members have been found to have a significant impact on board inputs and organization outcomes; female directors had better attendance than male directors, male directors had fewer attendance problems the more gender -diverse their board was, and women were more likely to join monitoring committees; unfortunately, the average effect of gender diversity on

firm performance was negative, as companies with more gender diversity had fewer takeover defenses (Adams & Ferreira, 2009). In another study, it was found that women's presence on corporate boards is associated with enhanced community engagement, stronger governance, and more sustainable environmental practices (Cook & Glass, 2018), while another showed that the inclusion of female directors enhances a board's cognitive diversity (Kang et al., 2022). In terms of board member independence from the governed organization in the for-profit sector, it appears organizational context is important here as well. Wagner III et al. (1998) found a curvilinear homogeneity effect, in which organization performance is enhanced by the greater relative presence of either inside or outside directors. Bhagat and Black (2002) found that firms with more independent boards do not perform better than other firms. In contrast, McCahery and Vermeulen (2013) found that some independent board members—particularly venture capitalists—had a significant effect on value creation and innovation, which they attribute to these directors' specific expertise and experience. Recent work in the for-profit sector has found that directors who bring diverse qualifications and skillsets to their board enhance the cognitive diversity of the board as a whole, which increases firm value and monitoring effectiveness (Kang et al., 2022). Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that retired directors (those who have retired from primary employment) may have more time to devote to their board role, and thus may play an important role in contributing to board effectiveness (Brandes et al., 2022).

Board Chairs as Critical for Board Effectiveness. One study in the community college literature emphasizes the importance of a strong board chair to overall board effectiveness (Donahue, 2003). Important responsibilities of the chair include communicating with other trustees, ensuring trustees have access to the information they need for decision-making, and facilitating welcoming and collaborative environments for deliberation (Donahue, 2003). An

effective board chair can help boards navigate challenges like a rogue trustee (O'Banion, 2009b), and foster board strengths like a supportive and productive board/lead administrator relationship (Lardner, 1985).

Multiple studies in the nonprofit sector have found that the board chair's effectiveness in their role is pivotal for overall board effectiveness (Harrison et al., 2013; Ward & Preece, 2012). In one study, a board chair's effectiveness was related to their frequency of interactions with other board members, the quality of their relationships with other board members and the CEO, and higher levels of board chair emotional and spiritual intelligences (Harrison et al., 2013). Board members' social capital was found to be important for both organizations' innovation (Jaskyte, 2018) and capacity to govern effectively (Fredette & Bradshaw, 2012).

The importance of the board chair's role is also evident in the healthcare sector. Stahl et al.'s 2014 study collected data from 123 board members serving 34 Adventist Health System hospitals, and found that transformational behaviors, and to a lesser extent, transactional behaviors practiced by board chairs were central to board members' perceptions of chair leadership effectiveness. Chair laissez-faire leadership behaviors were viewed as ineffective, and chairs with more education were perceived as more effective, and a higher level of chair education was a predictor of larger organizational financial margins; younger chairs were also a predictor of financially sound hospitals (Stahl et al., 2014).

The research on board characteristics reveals several questions for community college stakeholders. First, the question of trustee selection: the research thus far indicates that the answer of whether appointment or election is preferable largely depends on who is asked. No research has yet considered this question from the perspective of students, or found an association between either selection method and indicators of students' success. Second, and

relatedly, the question of how representation matters: research from nonprofit and for-profit governing sectors reveals that gender diversity is associated with more engaged and inclusive boards, and in healthcare, trustees with higher social capital and staff experience can contribute to greater community trust. What groups have been excluded, directly or indirectly, from college trusteeship, and what important contributions and opportunities for greater community connection are colleges missing out on because of this exclusion? These questions, combined with the importance the literature reveal of having a skilled, highly engaged board chair, point to a gap in community college research thus far: board composition as strategy. That is, the literature suggests that effective boards do not just happen. They are affected by factors like who seeks (or is sought for) a board seat or leadership role, the communities and identities they represent, and how they contribute to meeting the contextual needs of the organization at that time. Rather than casting about for a "perfect board formula," community college scholars and leaders must begin approaching board composition strategically. At every college district, leaders must honestly answer the question, "For whom does our board work?" If the answer is not "students," what can be changed about how boards come to be? The study that follows this review lays important foundational work for this future line of inquiry.

Effectiveness as Linked to Board Practices

If characteristics are the "attributes" trustees contribute when they join boards, the next theme revealed in the board effectiveness literature is what boards do once in place. Much of the literature on community college governance and board effectiveness in other sectors explores practices boards may employ to foster greater effectiveness.

Most of the effective board practices recommended in the community college literature fall into one of eight areas: (1) orienting trustees to their role; (2) trustees participating in board

work; (3) trustees exhibiting integrity; (4) fostering a strong board/lead administrator relationship; (5) running productive and structured board meetings; (6) trustees exhibiting political skill; (7) conducting regular board evaluations; and (8) conducting ongoing board development. The last two areas will be discussed in the later section on cultivating board effectiveness.

Perhaps given many trustees' stances as laypeople in the world of education, several authors identify orienting new trustees to their board role as an important element in board effectiveness. Both trustees and lead administrators have perceived a need for trustee orientation (Rinnander, 1976; Zwemer, 1985). Michael et al.'s (2000) landmark study of board effectiveness highlights different sources of orientation—in the order of importance trustees perceived, they are trustees' past professional experience, trustees' educational background, and respondents' State Board of Trustees. Unfortunately, formal orientation programs were not perceived by trustees in this study as significant sources of knowledge and training for trusteeship, though new trustees found existing board members to be helpful resources (Michael et al., 2000).[10] In the 4-year higher education sector, board orientation was identified as a practice of effective boards for orienting trustees to institutional subject matter (Beeny et al., 2008) and for setting clear expectations for trustees (Levine, 2016).

Donahue (2003) found that community college trustee participation is a critical component of board effectiveness. This includes sharing perspectives on issues and attending meetings. This emphasis on participation is echoed by Rutledge (2020), who also emphasizes the

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[10] One controversial element of trustee orientation is whether lead administrators should be involved in the process; lead administrators may be able to provide valuable context rooted in the local institution, but their participation may also be viewed as an attempt to bias new trustees toward a lead administrator's agenda (Zwemer, 1985). Perhaps a model in which a board chair invites the lead administrator to share information in some portions of an orientation program would strike the right balance.

importance of committing time, effort, and courage to nurturing rules of civility in their governance.

Relatedly, trustees exhibiting integrity appears in the literature as a central component of board effectiveness. Multiple authors recommend that a board adopt a code of ethics that board members are expected to follow (Garfield, 2004; Henry & Roskens, 1989; O'Banion, 2009b). Ethical behaviors can include respecting lines of authority, complying with board meeting practices, respecting the lead administrator's role and empowering them to execute it, and avoiding untoward actions related to personnel issues and possible conflicts of interest (Henry & Roskens, 1989). O'Banion (2009b) emphasizes that a board's code of ethics should have "teeth," including a procedure for removing a trustee who violates the code.

One practice of effective boards noted by several authors is that they foster a strong relationship between a board and its lead administrator. Many authors have emphasized this as a foundation for board effectiveness in governing (Koch, 1974; Nielsen et al., 2003; Polk et al., 1976b; Tatum, 1985). Specific approaches to cultivating this relationship that have been suggested include having lead administrators share data on student success institutional outcomes so that boards can monitor progress (White, 2011), having two-way assessments (e.g., board assesses the lead administrator and the lead administrator assesses the board) (Tatum, 1985), and to regularly set aside time to explore how the board and lead administrator wish to progress in their relationship (Ingram, 1979). Benefits of a strong board/lead administrator relationship may include more effective communications in crisis situations (Fanelli, 1997) and longer lead administrator tenures, which can help effect more sustainable improvements in organizational culture (Phelan, 2021). Central to cultivating a strong board/lead administrator relationship is trust, which can include honesty, openness, integrity, and humility from all parties

(Nielsen et al., 2003). Recently, American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) CEO Emeritus George Boggs (2022) has reflected on his decades of observations of boards and lead administrators. He offers several suggestions for navigating perennial issues in college leadership, but notes that a lack of clarity persists in the board/lead administrator relationship that leads to these issues (Boggs, 2022). Some evidence in the for-profit sector suggests that boards are only as strong as their lead administrators—in a study of mergers and acquisitions, Fernandez and Sundaramurthy (2020) found that the positive effects of boards' international experience were attenuated when the CEO lacked such knowledge.

Perhaps the most obvious responsibility a community college governing board has is to conduct its meetings, and the literature suggests that productive meeting practices can go a long way toward promoting board effectiveness. Two studies have focused on observing board meetings. Gibbs (1976) identifies the following helpful meeting practices: budgeting time for student reports and other public comments at the beginning of meetings, right after roll call; giving all policy decisions a first reading and delaying a vote until they appear before the board a second time; documenting any action items related to policy decisions; providing sufficient information to trustees ahead of meetings; and devoting sufficient time (e.g., three months) to annual budget preparation and passage. Watson and Winner’s (1987) results also emphasized the frequency of board meetings (at least monthly) and a board’s regular examination of full board and subcommittee meeting processes to assess member satisfaction with them.

Another practice identified in the literature as important is trustees’ use of political skill. As Polk et al. (1976b) have argued, the political nature of a board can be used for good or ill, and trustees and lead administrators who recognize this can use politics to help colleges be responsive to community needs and prevent special interest groups from capturing institution

constituencies to the detriment of the institution. Calvert (1976) emphasizes that effective board members understand and are involved in politics at all governmental levels. O'Banion (2009b) has argued that political pressure can be an effective tool when used against rogue trustees, though care must be taken to use it only when other, less public solutions have proven ineffective.

Findings related to board practices at other higher education institutions emphasize the interstitiality of the board role—that is, effective boards are those that bring together multiple stakeholders through their leadership. In Rowland's (2013) study of three 4-year universities, she identified board strengths as symbolically and actually bringing the university together, providing representative membership and a forum for debate, and providing a forum for information transmission to members. Other strengths included efficiency in approving recommendations and enabling members to contribute to academic decision making (Rowlands, 2013). Additionally, Kezar (2006) identified agenda-setting and vision among the leadership; strong leadership on the part of the board chair, board staff, and lead administrator; a strong, nonpartisan professional culture; ongoing assessment, evaluation, and education of the board; knowledge of the educational enterprise; strong external relations; strong relationships both internally as a board and externally; and having a clear structure with roles and responsibilities defined as important board practices.

Other recommended practices include recruiting and appointing board members who have higher education experience, are committed to serving on an independent board, and possess diverse higher education experience (Legon et al., 2013). Also noted are the importance of board member orientation, clear principles of institutional governance, emphasis on the authority of the full board (rather than that of individual trustees), processes for facilitating

candor and input while discouraging single-issue advocacy, having a strong board chair, cultivating relationships with the institution, maintaining independence from external influences, and welcoming periodic assessments of board performance (Legon et al., 2013). Qualls (1983) has also identified that full board involvement in decision-making is critical to board effectiveness. Finally, no discussion of high-performing boards in higher education would be complete without including Chait et al.'s 1991 study of board effectiveness, which identified competencies of high-performing governing boards across six different dimensions: contextual, educational, interpersonal, analytical, political, and strategic.

Multiple studies in the K-12 education space highlight practices of high-performing boards. These include cultivation, identification, recruitment, orientation, and onboarding of trustees (Baker et al., 2016) and high levels of productive interactions combined with low levels of defensive interactions (Piggot-Irvine, 2008). Perhaps surprisingly, having a code of ethics in place is not itself linked to better board performance—rather, surveyed school superintendents found the quality of school board members to be more important than a board's adoption of a code of conduct (Feuerstein, 2009). A survey among all secondary schools in the Netherlands found that high cognitive conflict in a context of high social cohesion can be beneficial (Heemskerk et al., 2015).

In the nonprofit sector, Herman et al. (1997) found that stakeholder judgments of board effectiveness varied substantially—the use of board practices was not significantly related to board members' and funders' judgments of board effectiveness, but executive directors' judgments of board effectiveness were modestly related to a board's use of certain practices. Boards rated as higher than average in effectiveness were more likely to observe the following practices: use of a board development or nominating committee, ensuring all board members

have an assigned role, collective evaluation of the board's performance, and use of a process for evaluating the performance of the executive director (Herman et al., 1997).

Findings from the for-profit sector (Cheng et al., 2021) have established a strong relation between director perceptions of board performance effectiveness and internal board operations, suggesting that a board with strong internal operational practices may appear to be more effective.

The effective board practices identified across sectors tend to emphasize a central idea: effective boards are those whose members' actions suggest they take their governing work seriously. They orient new trustees and develop trustees, treating trusteeship as a formal role. Effective boards comport themselves with authentic integrity, including by governing in a transparent manner that builds trust across stakeholder groups. They are able to navigate intra-board conflicts productively. They focus on the work at hand and evaluate their effectiveness in accomplishing it. While the section on cultivating board effectiveness will outline in more detail how some boards have sought to execute in these areas, it's important to note here a complication of published literature on board practices—much of it neglects to make explicit what is meant by an "effective" board. The work in this section leaves the determination of "board effectiveness" up to different research participant groups, or to the author's perspective. While these perspectives are informative, community college leaders should take care to consider these practices through the lens of what is needed from the board at their institution, and how the board can best help to further the college district's mission.

Effectiveness as Linked to Organizational Outcomes

The question of how board effectiveness can be most closely linked to colleges' missions is an open one. No research on community college boards has yet examined if or how board

governance is linked to important indicators of students' success. Within the community college sector, it is not yet clear how boards can support desired organizational outcomes. This is an area in which board effectiveness literature from other sectors is most helpful. Several studies of boards in other governing sectors have examined how board characteristics and practices are associated with organizational outcomes.

In the higher education sector, DeSilva Lokuwaduge and Armstrong's (2015) study of governance found that board independence was linked to a reduced impact on research and teaching performances, suggesting internal board members may be better positioned to influence institutional performance in these areas. Board committees positively impacted financial and research performance, but not teaching performance, suggesting excessive monitoring can negatively influence teaching quality (De Silva Lokuwaduge & Armstrong, 2015).

In the K-12 education sector, there are several studies that examine the connection (or lack thereof) between board effectiveness and institutional performance. Trujillo's (2012) study of an urban school board's response to the high-stakes accountability measures of No Child Left Behind found that strong goal alignment between the board and the superintendent they hired could lead to higher test scores.[11] In the charter school space, use of the policy governance model has been shown to positively influence leadership and culture in a school district, although sustainability depends on such precarious factors as strict adherence to the model, unanimous board support, and strong board and administrator leadership (Curry et al., 2018). In another study of charter schools, Ford and Ihrke (2018) found that boards can improve hard measures of

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[11] To Trujillo (2012) this was not necessarily a positive outcome—she strongly criticizes the "standardization, control, alignment, and […] relentless focus on rigid, outcome-oriented accountability," acknowledging that this approach helped "protect [board members'] power to govern" (p. 351), but led to "autocratic, illegitimate policy making and a culture of fear within the central office and schools" (p. 346).

organizational performance (e.g., math and reading proficiency, operational management, strategic planning, etc.) by shifting operations to their lead administrator and taking on public advocacy duties as a board. A board's ability to think and act strategically has been linked to healthy institutional performance in the K-12 sector (Baker et al, 2016).

A board's willingness to include other stakeholders in their decision-making can have a helpful impact on school outcomes. Hofman's 1995 regression analysis of a random sample of 133 K-12 schools found that a board's involvement of school employees and parents in the board's decision-making process explained variance in students' cognitive achievement. Pharis et al. (2005) noted a link between parental involvement and council effectiveness, and Sampson (2019) found that staff input can be especially important in policymaking and resource allocation for English learners and other marginalized student groups, although board resistance can limit the outcomes obtained in these areas.

The nonprofit sector is another relatively rich source of research on the link between board effectiveness and organizational performance. Aulgur's 2016 study found that board members' perception of their role could be out of alignment with their executive director's (specifically, that board members perceived themselves less as composing a formal governing entity and more as providing hands-on help in volunteer roles) without inhibiting organizational success. Cumberland et al. (2015) found that nonprofit boards' balance across four different role-sets (monitoring, supporting, partnering, and representing) was associated with effective organizational performance. Herman and Renz (2000) found that especially effective organizations (as judged by multiple stakeholders) had more effective boards (as judged by a

different set of multiple stakeholders). Additionally, their findings indicated that more effective boards used significantly more recommended board practices.[12]

Herman and Renz's later work (2004) challenges this conclusion, though. They examined whether changes in board effectiveness and overall organizational effectiveness judged by differing constituencies were the result of changes in the use of practices regarded as best, and found that a change in use of "correct management practices" was not perceived as related to organizational effectiveness measured later, except by board members (Herman & Renz, 2004). In contrast, Ford & Ihrke (2018) found that there was a relationship between the distribution of governance responsibilities in a nonprofit and organizational performance. In the public sector, specifically management of public transit systems, Ugboro & Obeng (2009) found that board members' involvement in board educational activities may enable the board to pressure the transit systems they oversee to operate more efficiently, and board involvement in strategic activities could lead to board pressure on transit systems to be more cost-effective.

Multiple articles were identified that considered the link between board and organizational effectiveness in healthcare organization settings. Jha and Epstein (2013) conducted a national survey of governance practices of board chairs of English hospitals and compared it to an earlier survey they had conducted of board chairs of U.S. hospitals. They found that English board chairs had more expertise in quality-of-care issues and spent more time on quality of care than their U.S. counterparts. Concurrently, the association in England between hospital performance on quality metrics and board engagement in quality was not as strong as in

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[12] These included having a nominating or board development committee, using a board profile in recruiting new members, interviewing nominees, having written selection criteria for board members, following a board manual, having an orientation for new members, having and enforcing a meeting attendance policy, and others (Herman & Renz, 2000).

the U.S. survey (Jha & Epstein, 2013). Boards at high-performing hospitals were more likely than those at low-performing ones to use clinical effectiveness data to offer recognition and provide feedback to front-line staff, both on clinical quality and patient experience (Jha & Epstein, 2013). Alexander et al. (2006) found that high and average board performance reduced the probability of hospital closure relative to low performance, and there seemed to be advantages to a corporate board model rather than a philanthropic one. In McDonagh and Umbdenstock's 2006 study of 64 nonprofit hospitals, they found that higher performing boards (as measured by collaborative board functioning) were found to have better hospital performance by multiple metrics, including profitability and lower expenses. Similarly, Molinari et al. (1997) found links between positive CEO-board relations and hospital financial performance.

In the for-profit sector, Wu and Lee (2007) found that board competence in operational innovation suggests governance conditions that give rise to more corporate risk preparedness, while Falatifah and Hermawan (2021) found in their Structural Equation Modelling model analysis that the effectiveness of a board of directors did not affect for-profit firms' level of integrated reporting disclosure and cost of equity. The impact of board effectiveness appears to vary depending on the specific organizational outcome under consideration in the for-profit sector.

The research in this area suggests that boards have an impact—across governance sectors, board practices, competencies, governance models, and stakeholder relationships have been linked to organizational measures as diverse as student reading proficiency, parental involvement, resource allocation for marginalized students, and organizational efficiency. While some findings are inconsistent on how, exactly, boards influence the institutions they govern, there is enough evidence to support further research in this area in the community college

context. The link between board and organizational effectiveness, like many aspects of governance, is likely context dependent. If boards can have an impact on students' success at community colleges, it is important to understand what efforts have been made thus far to cultivate boards' effectiveness, and with what results. To that end, I now turn to two practices covered at length in the literature: board assessment and evaluation, and board development.

Cultivating Board Effectiveness

Board Assessment and Evaluation[13]. Two empirical studies in the community college board literature have focused on elements of board evaluation, including the areas assessed, the parties involved, and the distribution of board assessment results. In their national study of community college trustees, Vaughan and Weisman (1997) found that most board evaluations include an assessment of board goals, board/community relations, board/lead administrator relations, cohesiveness of the board, communication policies between board members and the college community, cooperation among board members, fiscal oversight, overall effectiveness of the board, and strategic/long range planning. Parties involved in the evaluation were usually board members and the lead administrator; very few boards included anyone else in the board assessment process (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997). Similarly, while assessment results were typically shared with the board and the lead administrator, they were rarely shared with other college stakeholders (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997). In a Delphi study of community college board assessment, Williams and Hammons (1992) identified 11 assessment areas with substantial overlap. Boards tended to evaluate institutional mission and educational policy, institutional planning, financial resources and management, board organization, board/lead administrator

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[13]Assessment is considered here to be the measurement of a board's performance, while evaluation is considered to be the process of coming to subjective conclusions based on that measurement. Obviously, there is significant overlap and interconnection between these processes.

relations, board/faculty relations, board/student relations, serving as a court of appeal, being a bridge between the college and community, and board/governmental relations (Williams & Hammons, 1992). Their participants felt that only board members and the lead administrator should be involved in the board evaluation process, and there was wide recognition that regular, effective assessment would yield enhanced board performance (Williams & Hammons, 1992).

Several authors of nonempirical pieces have argued for the importance of evaluation to improving board governance (Fisher, 2020; Gleazer, 1985; Ingram, 1979; Nielsen et al., 2003; Potter, 1976; Simmons, 1985). Polk and Coleman (1976) have offered an assessment tool that can be adapted to an individual board's needs, though Phelan (2021, 2022) has argued that the field of community colleges would benefit if a common governance effectiveness assessment were used for all boards. He offers guidelines for an effectiveness evaluation in alignment with the Covenant Governance methodology (Phelan, 2021).

Assessment tools validated in other governing board sectors include the Governance Self-Assessment Checklist (GSAC) (Gill et al., 2005), the Board Effectiveness Survey Application (BESA) (Harrison & Murray, 2015), and the most common, Jackson and Holland's (1998) Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire (BSAQ). Any of these could likely be used as a starting point for boards developing their own board assessment and evaluation processes. While assessment and evaluation appear to be an important part of cultivating an effective board, there is substantial room for creativity in how it is implemented in the community college setting. For example, future assessment processes may want to include a broader cross-section of participants, including students.

Board Development. Another aspect of cultivating board effectiveness that has received attention in the community college literature, but no empirical research prior to the study that

follows, is board development. Community college research on professional development has focused on faculty (e.g., Sansing-Helton et al., 2021; Wang & Hurley, 2012), and authors have emphasized the importance of board development efforts (e.g., Garfield, 2004; Gollattscheck, 1978), but scholars have not yet engaged board development and its efficacy as a research subject. Some authors have commented on different techniques used for board development, including board orientation (Davis, 1997; Gleazer, 1985), board retreats (Davis, 1997; Finkel, 2017), and conferences and workshops (Jensen, 1976; Perkins, 2012). The lack of empirical research on what board development approaches promote board effectiveness is a major gap in the community college leadership literature, but one that is filled in this review by research from other board governance sectors.

In the K-12 sector, Mestry and Hlongwane's (2009) work tempers enthusiasm for the possible impact board development work may have. Their qualitative analysis found that the delivery of training programs for board members did not cater to the contextual needs of previously disadvantaged schools, and despite attending training sessions, school governors lacked the necessary expertise and skills to manage school finances (Mestry & Hlongwane, 2009).

Research in the nonprofit sector may give more support for optimism, though. Brudney & Murray's (1998) study of 851 boards indicated that nearly 75% had made efforts to change as a result of dissatisfaction with some element of board practice, and that executive directors found the efforts to change at least moderately if not totally successful in improving board performance. Additionally, they found that planned board change was associated with greater organizational effectiveness (Brudney & Murray, 1998). Other studies have found that boards can improve as well. A case study found that dismissing two board members who were impeding

decision-making and action and then having the board complete training led to substantially improved effectiveness following board reevaluation (Taylor, 2005). In Jackson and Holland's 1998 study, they found that boards engaged in developmental interventions showed significant improvements in BSAQ categories, while boards of comparison sites did not. Mason and Kim (2020) offer a board coaching framework centered on understanding board dynamics and argue that the investment and involvement of executives and staff in governance, especially support for board activities, can influence overall board performance.

The research on what can be done to cultivate greater board effectiveness is currently very limited across sectors. With the evidence available, it seems reasonable to conclude that beginning with assessment and evaluation can be of some help when seeking improvement in board effectiveness. The success of efforts in board development that follow, though, is less assured. Future research should explore which board development efforts have the highest impact on desired organizational outcomes, and utilize resources for board development most efficiently. The study that follows examines how one form of trustee development relates to student outcomes, which I argue are an important indicator of board effectiveness in the community college sector.

Theoretical Engagement and Limitations

In this section, I outline the major theories of governance considered in the literature. Within board effectiveness literature, several theories have been offered to describe both how boards operate and to prescribe how boards could operate. I provide a brief overview of the major governance theories and related research findings from other board sectors. I then highlight the theory-related limitations of these bodies of literature, and offer suggestions for enhancing theoretical frameworks employed in the future.

The predominant model offered in community college contexts has been Carver's (1990) Policy Governance Model (PGM). In community college board development training sessions, claims that boards should "stay at the policy level" or "not get into administration" are invoking this model, which posits distinct roles for the board and the college's lead administrator. In PGM, boards are directed to approve policies in four areas: "ends policies," which direct a college toward achieving specific ends, "executive limitations policies," which outline the parameters within which lead administrators and other executive staff may act, "governance process policies" which indicate the governance processes to which the board has committed itself, and "board-staff linkage policies" which delineate the ways in which a board delegates authority to the lead administrator and holds the lead administrator accountable (Anderson & Davies, 2000, pp. 712-713, citing Carver & Carver, 1997 and Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Phelan, 2021).

There are several benefits to the Policy Governance Model (PGM). It provides a guiding, overall structure in a context where trustees may be new to governance. It privileges a board focus on long-term goals. If incorporated regularly into board practice, Kenney (1997) has argued that it can foster the kind of high-quality relationships that sustain college leadership through crisis situations. The ACCT perceived substantial value in the model, to the extent that it invested significant resources into training boards in the model in the late 1990s (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Like any model, though, it serves as a starting point, and boards may need theoretical guidance in areas beyond policy-making, like ethical decision making (Anderson & Davies, 2000). Still, the policy governance model has been the most popular one advocated for among community college boards.

PGM has also been used in other educational settings. Curry et al.'s (2018) study of a K-12 district's implementation of PGM found that it had an immediate positive influence on leadership practices and culture, through a consistent and almost dogmatic focus from the board chair was necessary for ongoing sustainability of the model.

In his 2021 book, Community College Governance 2.0, Phelan provides an overview of the major board governance theories from nonprofit and for-profit organizational contexts. Notably, other literature surveyed in the community college literature did not touch on these models, so it is difficult to determine the extent to which and likelihood that trustees would have received structured education in these models. I summarize the major tenets of these models as Phelan (2021) presents them in Table 3, because there is significant overlap between these theories and those that appeared in board effectiveness literature from other sectors.

Table 3

Governance Models

Model	Role of Board	Benefits	Limitations
Stakeholder Theory	Consider the interests, value creation, and satisfaction of all possible stakeholders as the organization's principal concern.	Recognizes that institutions exist within larger ecosystems and benefit from permitting all voices in that ecosystem to be heard.	Pragmatic challenges of gathering feedback from all stakeholders, bias of most vocal stakeholders, limited guidance on which stakeholders to privilege (e.g., giving students' perspectives more weight in board decision-making than non-student community members').
Agency Theory	Task an agent (e.g., lead administrator) to work on behalf of the board and incentivize that	Strong empowerment of lead administrator.	Assumes lead administrator is primarily motivated by self-interest.

	agent to make decisions in the organization's best interests.		
Resource Dependency Theory	Be selected based on the resources they have (e.g., time, talent, money, connections) that can significantly benefit the organization.	Recognizes the different strengths and value trustees may bring to their role.	Limited applicability for tax revenue-supported organizations like community colleges, which may not be directly involved in trustee selection.
Stewardship Theory	Empower a steward (e.g., lead administrator) who has strong alignment with the organization to serve as a guardian and advocate for the organization.	Assumes stewards experience significant personal and professional satisfaction from doing the work of the organization; often a good fit for the community college context.	Assumption that lead administrators will give of themselves so strongly can create organizational cultures that lead to burnout and job dissatisfaction.
Advisory Board Governance	Come together to provide counsel to an organization; be selected based on area of expertise or relationship to the organization.	Recognizes the strengths trustees bring to their role and seeks ways to put those strengths to good use for the organization.	Limited applicability in community college context—does not posit board authority to govern.
Patron Governance Model	Similar to advisory board governance, but with greater expectations of fundraising.	Can help build college foundations' principal amounts.	Limited applicability in community college context—does not posit board authority to govern.
Cooperative Governance Model	Collaborate to achieve organizational goals, without the traditional structures of board leadership (e.g., board chair).	May help foster a positive governing environment for some boards.	Lack of structure may violate policies for some boards.
Complementary Model	Work with the lead administrator in a concerted, collaborative, team-based, and overall complementary way.	Builds on strengths of traditional and policy governance models, offering ten principles that clearly outline board role, lead administrator role, governing structures,	Likely requires substantial buy-in from trustees to implement in a sustained fashion.

		and board and lead administrator evaluation and development.	
Hybrid/Vector Governance Model	Utilize different dimensions of board culture relative to innovation, stability, practices, and change.	Synthesizes multiple governance models into a single model.	Complex design may create confusion and limit applicability in community college context.
Governance Excellence Model	Act as a single unit and hold the lead administrator accountable.	Offers clear role delineation between board and lead administrator.	Requires board members be selected based on organization ownership—a for-profit assumption that does not apply in community college contexts.
Traditional (Structural) Model	Delegate operational responsibility to an executive and oversee the organization through regular information provided by common, board-mandated committees in essential areas.	As the foundation of most other governance models, serves as a helpful starting point and is likely familiar to trustees with other board experience.	Fails to ensure accountability from the lead administrator or board committees, requiring substantial addition of bylaws, policies, and other structures.
Consensus Board Governance Model	With the guidance of board policies and other mission documents, work toward the goal of attaining general agreement at the core of deliberations and ultimate action.	Can foster positive working relationships among trustees.	Requires a strong board chair who is effective at building consensus.
Competency Board Governance Model	Build competencies in four areas: behavioral, governance, technical, and industry.	Strong, multifaceted emphasis on board member development.	Emphasizes individual board member development rather than development of the board as a whole team.

In a recent issue of New Directions for Community Colleges, Eddy et al. (2022) identify the following additional, emerging theories of governance: culturally sustaining governance (Rall et al., 2020), descriptive representation (Brekken et al., 2019), and organizational learning

(Dee & Leisyte, 2017; Eddy & Kirby, 2020). The culturally sustaining governance model (Rall et al., 2020) begins the important work of centering student success, rather than overemphasizing the fiduciary role, in board governance within the 4-year higher education sector. Descriptive representation (Brekken et al., 2019) involves a governing body mirroring the community it serves. Eddy et al. (2022) argue that "most boards are usually woefully lacking in descriptive representation" of community college students, but offer no evidence for that claim—more research is needed on the contributions of student trustees, and the alumni status trustees may have with the institutions they govern. Finally, organizational learning emphasizes interactive processes that result in shared knowledge bases that shape organizational culture and reification of that culture (Eddy et al., 2022). These models may be beneficial in helping to center community college governance in student success.

In the nonprofit sector, several of the theories outlined above are used to help scholars understand board governance. These include agency theory, resource dependency theory, stewardship theory, and stakeholder theory (Cumberland et al., 2015). PGM receives attention in this space as well (Nobbie & Brudney, 2003; Taylor, 2005). While exploring governance models may be of some value, Gill et al.'s (2005) research is critical here; in their study of nonprofit organizations, they find:

> [There is] no relationship between the governance model employed and either board or organizational effectiveness […] the particular approach to governance mattered less than the fact that the board was paying attention to its governance practices and trying to improve its effectiveness. (pp. 288-9)

In the healthcare space, Collum et al. (2014) find that, consistent with agency theory, management involvement by members of the board of directors is associated with poorer hospital financial performance. Finding the appropriate balance between involvement and oversight for a board would appear to be an ongoing negotiation.

Based on his experience as a community college lead administrator and his interviews with college leaders and observations at other colleges, Phelan (2021) offers what he terms Covenant Governance methodology as the next generation of structural guidance for community college boards. I include it here because it is the most thorough piece of theory-based work on community college boards that this review yielded.

Covenant governance is built on what Phelan (2021) calls a "Governance Trinal"—the three components he identifies as critical to effective governance. These are (1) a unified, committed board; (2) a long-term, committed CEO; and (3) dedicated work from both the board and the CEO in service of others (Phelan, 2021). Phelan (2021) posits that these three elements operate at the core of a cycle of monitoring and evaluation and continuous improvement. He offers eight "high-performance practices" boards should observe through this cycle. Phelan (2021) offers several resources, including a scorecard for board evaluation, that boards can use to implement this approach.

While the covenant governance methodology builds on the strengths of several previous models and is rooted in Phelan's (2021) own experiences and observations, it possesses one key limitation. The methodology necessitates a long-term, committed lead administrator, which in the current era of short lead administrator tenures seems about as likely as massive increases in state funding—if colleges had it, many of the challenges boards face would be eased if not abated. Despite this limitation, the covenant governance methodology offers a useful starting point for trustees trying to understand their role and improve their boards. It is especially useful in that it is informed by and crafted to the specifications of the community college governing context.

One notable feature of Phelan's (2021) work is his thorough engagement with theory. While some pieces in the literature reviewed here offer descriptions of theories of governance or recommendations for employing a governance model, on the whole, theory has been weakly linked within board effectiveness literature. In an overwhelming majority of the empirical studies reviewed, there were no explicit discussions of the theoretical approaches undergirding the researchers' studies. Similarly, as with board practices, when theories are employed in community college board literature, they are often borrowed from other governance sectors with little translational, context-oriented work.

This relates to a broader problem within community college board literature—when theory has been employed, it is typically done so in a prescriptive fashion. The authors are recommending PGM, or Phelan (2021) is recommending the covenant governance model. Rarely are researchers developing or elaborating theoretical frameworks to describe what they've found. It is assumed that boards should stay at the policy level, or should not get involved in college operations, because these are what the prevailing community college governance models prescribe. While the emergent governance models offered by Eddy et al. (2022) serve an important contextualizing purpose in shifting focus toward student success in the community college sector, these theories do not appear to have been developed with trustee input. In the study that follows, I include trustee participants. Emerging theories of community college governance should include the perspectives of those tasked with governing.

Methodological Approaches and Limitations

In this section, I highlight the main methodological approaches used in board governance research. Within the community college sector, the work has predominantly been survey-based, and most surveys have included trustees and lead administrators in their samples. Surveys have

several advantages—they can be distributed widely, trustees can conduct them as their time allows without scheduling a meeting, and surveys can yield qualitative and quantitative data. Other approaches used in the community college board research have included interviews, case studies, and board meeting observations and analysis. These approaches are well-suited to community colleges because they allow a researcher to account for the localized context of a college district. Excepting analysis of survey results, there has been little in the way of quantitative approaches within community college board research. One surprising gap is the lack of analysis of how board practices or approaches may be linked to student success data and other quantitative outcome measures. Other gaps include a lack of document content analysis (a surprising feature, since so much of board work is captured in policy documents and board minutes), and a lack of interview and survey participants beyond trustees and lead administrators. Future qualitative research should include other important college stakeholders, including students, faculty, and staff who work with students.

In board effectiveness research from other board governance sectors, the same methodological approaches are used, but researchers have conducted substantially more quantitative work. Regression analyses are common, with researchers examining how certain board practices or characteristics are linked to organizational outcomes. More of this type of work should be employed in the community college sector to help fill the quantitative gap. In particular, MMR holds the potential to integrate the best of community college board research in respecting the localized, contextual nature of community college governance because it allows for an integrated analysis of different kinds of data from multiple sources. In the next chapter, I offer a rationale for why MMR is the best fit for the current study.

Chapter Summary

This review stemmed from a desire to understand what is known about governing boards and their effectiveness. What the literature revealed is a series of understandings for effectiveness. Whether a board is effective or not will depend on a number of factors— to start, who the individuals composing that board are, what they do, and how they do it. Other factors include how a board's work affects those on whose behalf it is carried out, and how responsive the board can be to serving those individuals better.

A persistent refrain in the literature reviewed here is that board governance is a highly context-dependent phenomenon. How effectively a board governs will depend on the organization it governs, and the mission, vision, and operational constraints of that organization. These factors will determine how one defines board effectiveness and selects criteria to assess it.

This review's findings indicate that effectiveness has been considered from several different perspectives—fulfilling roles and responsibilities, avoiding harmful behaviors, possessing a set of compositional characteristics, and employing certain practices. Some researchers have found links between board governance and organizational outcomes, though research in this area is inconclusive and, within the community college board governance sector, nonexistent. Some work highlights board assessment and evaluation, and development, though the conclusion seems to be that the act of trying to cultivate board effectiveness is more predictive than the specific tools or approaches employed.

In community college board research, the question of "on whose behalf board work is carried out" should be at the heart of what comes next. While scholars have recently lamented the lack of research on community college boards (Eddy & Gillett-Karam, 2022; Kater et al., 2022; Amey, 2022) efforts to conduct that research have been limited. The link between board work and students in existing literature is either not stated at all, or is assumed as obvious. This

creates both a danger and a missed opportunity. The danger is that boards may be making governance decisions that are not informed by students' needs and goals. This in turn leads to a missed opportunity—if there are ways in which board governance can better foster students' success, knowing them may empower college leaders to target future board development efforts for this success.

How might community college board governance be reimagined with students at the center? Only Vaughan and Weisman's (1997) study included a finding that trustees serve with their colleges' students in mind. It's unclear why more literature on trustees' motivations for service include so little mention of students, the stakeholders who most depend on a college's success. Throughout this review, I have emphasized the importance of considering each board from the context in which it governs. In the community college sector, it is time to reimagine boards from their context—governing institutions whose relentless mission must be ensuring students' successes. I take up this reimaginative work in the study that follows.

Chapter III. Theoretical and Methodological Approach

Before offering a description of my research methods in the fourth chapter, I outline in this chapter the theoretical and methodological assumptions that undergird the research design. I refer to both theoretical and methodological assumptions here because, to appropriate McLuhan's (1964) maxim, the methods are the message. That is, the methods chosen to conduct this study cannot and should not be extricated from the philosophical and theoretical assumptions that led to their choosing. The methods themselves were selected to answer questions undergirded by assumptions about knowledge.

The theoretical and methodological approach for this study sought to address a problem in community college board research. As indicated in the previous chapter, much of community college board research has been atheoretical, drawing theories from other governance sectors without translational and contextualizing work, or offering prematurely prescriptive governance theories. To begin addressing this problem, the current study uses a mixed methods research (MMR) (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) approach oriented in pragmatism (Dewey, 1908; Mead, 1982) and the related paradigm of dialectical pluralism (Johnson, 2017). Grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) offers an approach to qualitative analysis in this study that helps begin the theory development community college board research needs. This chapter begins by highlighting the challenges with theoretical approaches taken in previous community college board research. I then offer an overview of MMR in general, explicate the utility of a pragmatic approach guided by dialectical pluralism for this study, and describe the assumptions undergirding the research methods described in the fourth chapter. I conclude with a reflection on my positionality as a researcher and the approaches I have taken to develop and maintain reflexivity throughout this study.

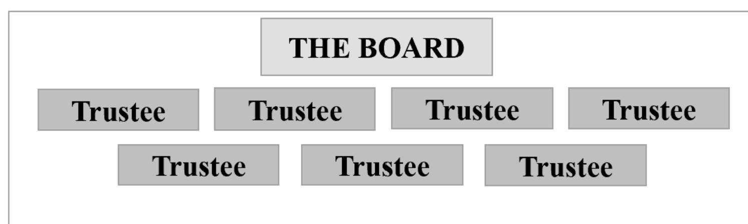
Current Theoretical Limitations in Community College Board Research

Here, I briefly review the main, prescriptive governance theories offered in community college board literature, explore the limitations of these theories and the broadly atheoretical approach in much of the literature, and offer the rationale for the approach I take: I have conducted this research informed by existing governance theories, but have chosen to refrain from choosing one and instead allow the work to inform emerging theoretical perspectives in the spirit of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

As described in the second chapter, the primary theoretical model of governance recommended in the community college board sector is PGM. PGM shares important similarities with Agency Theory and Stewardship Theory, in that all three prescribe a limited, high-level role for a governing board. In all three of these models, boards are to delegate authority for daily operations to their lead administrator, and then hold the lead administrator accountable for executing those daily operations. Boards are to be strategically focused and oriented toward the long term, not getting involved in the day-to-day operations of a college district. To get involved in operational concerns of the college is to micromanage. The recommended model is visually represented in Figure 1, with clean boundaries around the board and the college district, and a clear set of hierarchical relationships. Responsibilities are clearly delineated, and the board stays above the fray of college operations.

Figure 1

Prescribed Governance Model



Sets the mission, vision, and strategic plan. They also hire, fire, direct, and primarily communicate with

THE LEAD ADMINISTRATOR

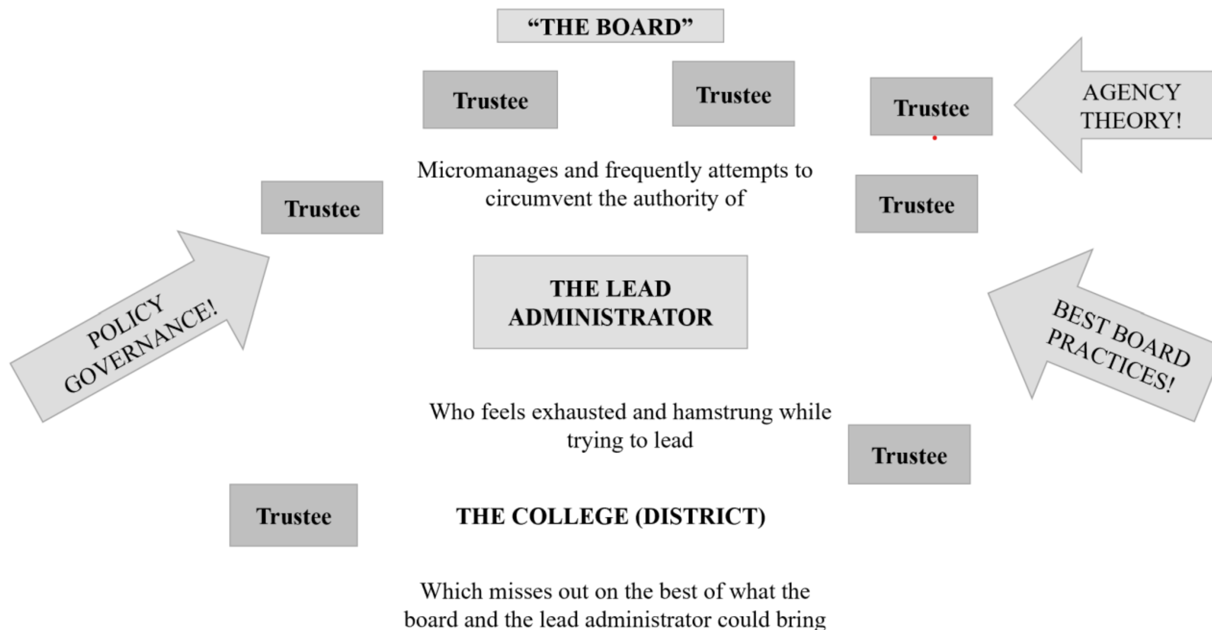
Who administrates the operations of

THE COLLEGE (DISTRICT)

In practice, however, the rogue trustee literature suggests that community college board governance can often end up looking more like Figure 2. Boundaries around the board and the college district are unclear or violated so often as to be nonexistent. The board does not act as a single entity; individual trustees engage in daily operations of the college in ways that are unhelpful or even harmful. Recommended board development protocols or education on the prescribed model are brought in to try and corral the problem and rogue trustees, with varying levels of success. No wonder short lead administrator tenures are making headlines (Weissman, 2022)!

Figure 2

Practiced Governance Model



If the model visualized in Figure 2 more closely resembles the governing experience at some colleges, what can be done to address it? While there is much of value in Phelan's (2021) Covenant Governance model, its "trinal" requires two components that many colleges likely cannot assume: (1) a unified, committed board; and (2) a long-term, committed CEO. As lead administrator tenures continue to decline (Weissman, 2022), practitioners need a theoretical framework for board effectiveness that reckons with the challenges community college face. How can community college governance be made more sustainable, both for lead administrators and for trustees, who may also not serve in their roles for very long? Instead of regarding trustees with "higher" political ambitions with distrust (e.g., Moore, 1973), might there be opportunities to create a supportive leadership development environment for trustees, lead administrators, and other college stakeholders as they learn together to lead on students' behalf?

To explore these and related questions, and to be accessible to the diverse audiences for whom this study may be relevant, I selected a methodological approach that embraces different kinds of data that may resonate more deeply with different individuals. As community colleges

are deeply practical (as are, often, the trustees who help lead them), it is beneficial if the methodological approach fits well with the philosophical orientation of pragmatism (Dewey, 1908; Mead, 1982). Because of the diverse goals and offerings of community colleges, and the diversity of people within a community for whom these colleges are important, an approach that allows for multiple perspectives and co-constructed realities is appropriate. Finally, given the limited nature of descriptive theoretical work in community college board research, an approach to qualitative analysis that facilitates preliminary theoretical development in this space is desirable. Thus, my methodological approach is MMR, situated in the philosophical orientation of pragmatism with dialectical pluralism. My focus has been to conduct high-quality, emergent, practically oriented work in an underexplored and undertheorized area of community college research. While I work to make explicit the theoretical influences and positionality I bring to this work, I have also refrained from selecting from prescriptive theories of governance and have instead chosen to let possible theoretical direction emerge through the research process.

Mixed Methods Research

MMR refers to a collection of research approaches in which researchers integrate quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). MMR is highly sensitive to personal, interpersonal, and social contexts, and proponents of MMR advocate that it allows for the combination of methods with complementary strengths and nonoverlapping weaknesses (Plano Clark & Ivanokova, 2016). A mixed methods approach allows a researcher to answer related qualitative and quantitative research questions, and to begin to answer those questions by drawing inferences from analyses of both qualitative and quantitative data (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). Putting different sets of data in conversation with one another empowers researchers to integrate findings in meaningful ways (Bazeley,

2015). A mixed methods approach has allowed me to robustly explore community college boards using several different data sources, enriching conclusions through a kind of cross-pollination of knowledges. By beginning the exploration of governing board effectiveness with a mixed methods approach, I have signaled that this topic should be studied with an openness not possible with strictly quantitative or qualitative approaches, and instead have let the iterative process of MMR inform the refinement of the research questions and the choice of relevant data and analysis strands. In the next section, I describe the philosophical orientation driving this study, and for which MMR has proven an excellent fit.

Philosophical Orientation: Pragmatism and Dialectical Pluralism

An important component of an MMR researcher's personal context is the philosophical orientation and related assumptions they bring to a study. My philosophical orientation with respect to this project is pragmatism, which posits that viewpoints on reality are diverse, knowledge is gained through iterations of independent observations and subjective constructions, and researchers' values influence their statement of research questions and their conclusions (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). I suspect that many who are drawn to the study of community colleges have a pragmatist perspective. Community colleges are deeply pragmatic institutions—at their best, they direct their offerings to address their students' needs, whether for career education, transfer to a 4-year institution, personal enrichment, or others. At the local level, governing board members are often driven by pragmatic motivations related to making a difference in their communities (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997). A pragmatist orientation resonates well in this context and has facilitated the inclusion of multiple perspectives on what and whom community colleges—and the boards who govern them—can be effective for.

While pragmatism can feel like a natural fit for research in the community college context, it is important for researchers to distinguish between what Biesta (2010) calls everyday pragmatism and philosophical pragmatism. In this context, everyday pragmatism is more a normative sense of practicality, or position that research ought to have practical results and/or applications. In contrast, Biesta (2010) argues that philosophical pragmatism operates not so much as a philosophical paradigm, but as a set of philosophical tools for research that seeks to solve problems rather than build systems, following Dewey's (1922) warning against system-building, or conflating the outcomes of inquiries with antecedent ontological conditions. In the context of this study, pragmatism informs critical elements of design like research setting and sampling, while appropriately limiting the claims that may be made based on the research findings. Pragmatism empowers MMR to, as Dewey (1905) put it, "think freely and naively" (p. 326). As he argues,

> [Pragmatism allows researchers] to enter into the realistic thought and conversation of common sense of science, where dualisms are just dualities, distinctions having an instrumental and practical, but not ultimate, metaphysical worth; or rather, having metaphysical worth in a practical and experimental sense, not in that of indicating a radical existential cleavage in the nature of things. (Dewey, 1905, p. 326)

In the underexplored research area of community college governing boards, pragmatism allows me to engage data available in the California community college system with openness and curiosity checked by my participants' realities of governance in that setting. Where another, more fixed philosophical paradigm might require inappropriately limiting methodological approaches in this nascent work, pragmatism provides a useful framework for considering the mixing of methods in this study and the working, but not final conclusions that may be drawn from its findings.

From pragmatism has emerged what Johnson (2017) calls the metaparadigm of dialectical pluralism (DP). DP as Johnson (2017) defines it is a process in which a researcher or research team carefully, systematically, and thoughtfully listens, understands, appreciates, and learns from multiple paradigms, disciplines, values, methodologies, and perspectives. It is motivated by a desire to work across boundaries while thriving amidst and because of differences and intellectual tensions (Johnson, 2017). As biodiversity strengthens an ecosystem, dialectical pluralism assumes that research is strengthened by intellectual diversity. Similarly, MMR puts different methods and the assumptions that undergird them in conversation with one another, in confidence that this will yield a greater contribution than qualitative or quantitative methods conducted in isolation. In the nascent stages of research on community college board effectiveness, finding strength in the invitation to difference and respect for multiple perspectives has helped me begin developing conclusions that are both more inclusive and, I hope, more useful.

In the present study, I have worked to make space for the tensions that come with the trustee role, including the diverse motivations trustees bring to their roles, and the at-times competing interests of different stakeholders they serve. Through the research process, I incorporated different data sources as the ongoing dialectics around community college board effectiveness took shape. Ultimately, this MMR study took a sequential, qual→qual→quan structure. The first phase was a qualitative content analysis of community college board evaluation documents; the second was a qualitative analysis of trustee interviews; and the final strand was a quantitative analysis of the relationship between one form of trustee development and student outcomes. While I describe each of the phases in greater detail in the next chapter, it

is worthwhile here to indicate how grounded theory informs my approach to analysis for the qualitative strands.

Grounded Theory Approach to Qualitative Analyses

I have taken a grounded theory approach to my qualitative analysis, with some limitations. This analysis is "grounded" in the sense that it draws its inductive, iterative, and theory-building focus from grounded theory. Grounded theory refers to a series of systematic, inductive, and comparative approaches for conducting inquiry for the purpose of building a theory (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Henwood, 2007). Grounded theory is a school of qualitative analysis birthed in Glaser and Strauss's (1967) seminal work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. While there have been many interpretations and variations of grounded theory in the last half-century, its name comes from the idea that theories, or conclusions we draw about how processes work, are "grounded" in our observations of a given reality (Creswell, 2013). Given the limited theoretical development thus far in the study of community college boards, a grounded theory approach has been useful for testing ideas and beginning the development of preliminary theoretical frameworks throughout the phases of this MMR study.

Grounded theory approaches have been used with diverse philosophical orientations, from positivist (the assertion that there is an objective reality that can be accurately observed and tested) to co-constructionist (the assertion that there is no one, "true" reality, but instead, that realities are co-constructed through social agreement) (Creswell, 2013). A grounded theory approach to analysis is process-oriented rather than predetermined by philosophical assumptions or the choosing of an "off the shelf" theory (Creswell, 2013, p. 83). In this way, its practices can be used to explore diverse strands of inquiry, including those explored based on a framework of pragmatism.

These practices can vary significantly, but most include some variation of the following processes: identifying categories that emerge from close engagement with the qualitative data (often from line-by-line coding), re-coding to test categories and identify sub-categories, developing hypotheses for understanding the subject of study, and verifying those hypotheses with the goal of generating a robust theory to explain a process or processes related to the study's subject. In response to a research question, grounded theory methods are rooted in a researcher's desire to answer with a theory. I address how grounded theory has affected my sampling, interviewing, and coding practices for qualitative data in the next chapter and note the limitations that have prevented a traditional grounded theory approach in this emergent research context.

Quantitative Analyses in MMR

By definition, MMR designs include a quantitative component. Critics of MMR have posited that mixing methods of data collection and analysis does not allow for sufficient engagement with the underlying tenets of quantitative and qualitative approaches (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). There is danger perceived in picking and choosing methods without robust engagement with the assumptions that underly those methods. In response, MMR asserts that there is value in putting quantitative and qualitative methods in conversation not only between studies, but within a single study, where the analyses interact and are informed by each other. In this study, a quantitative strand emerged in response to the previous two qualitative strands. Because these earlier strands yielded important findings related to students' successes, the final quantitative component sought to explore trustee effectiveness as related to student outcomes. Thus, this study includes quantitative analyses: preliminary, exploratory analyses of trustee professional development data, and series of regressions exploring the relationship between that data and student outcomes (Gordon, 2020). The quantitative component was shaped by the

qualitative analyses that preceded it and is brought into conversation with them in the final findings chapter. In this study, quantitative analyses serve as a valuable check on the qualitative data, refining interpretation of the earlier phases and resulting in richer final conclusions. The quantitative strand of this study is informed by the assumptions of exploratory data analysis (Hartwig & Dearling, 1979).

Data analysis approaches are exploratory rather than confirmatory when they regard data with an openness to a wide range of explanations, rather than a desire to see a hypothesis statistically confirmed or rejected (Hartwig & Dearling, 1979). The underlying assumption of an exploratory approach is that the more a researcher knows about the data they are engaging, the more effectively they can use that data to develop, test, and refine their theory—Hartwig & Dearling (1979) clarify that this approach involves two important postures: skepticism and openness. By incorporating the final quantitative strand, I have attempted to inform qualitative findings with both of these postures. Skepticism has allowed for the preliminary testing of a relationship alleged in the qualitative findings, while openness has yielded valuable descriptive information about a data source not previously utilized in empirical community college research.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

An important component of conducting research in the social sciences is articulating the relevant positionality one brings to that research. In this section, I outline my positionalities, noting areas where they have likely affected my research processes and interpretations. I also indicate the strategies I used to practice reflexivity, or mindfulness of the ways in which I may have affected my research and had it affect me (Thurairajah, 2019). It has been critical to develop and maintain awareness of the salient lenses and identities I bring to this work. Through this work, four lenses have emerged with greatest bearing on my interpretation of my findings.

The first of these is my experience growing up with the family I did, and especially my relationship with my dad, who has served on public boards longer than I have been alive. The next is my identity as a White woman, including the privileges and power dynamics that racial/gender status affects. The next is my background as a Californian—as one who grew up in the Golden State and still has great love for it, but who has spent my adult life living in other places. The final lens is my professional role as a board leadership consultant. To develop and maintain awareness of these lenses and how they influenced this study, I kept a reflexivity journal through each research phase (Thurairajah, 2019). For each journal entry, I noted elements of the research processes and emerging findings that I found striking and considered why I found them striking. Through written and voice memos, I reflected on how my identities were affecting how I conducted this work, and what those identities might mean to me and the research participants and contexts I engaged.

One aspect of my background that had a significant, humanizing influence in this research is my immediate family's ongoing record of board service. For as long as I can remember, my father has served on public, private, and nonprofit sector boards. Much of the family has followed suit, as two of my three siblings have served on nonprofit and public boards, my mother currently serves on a school board, and my sister-in-law serves on a county board of education. Family conversations often revolve around board situations and strategies. This family setting has given me a certain fluency in "speaking board." At a more relational level, my dad is the person with whom I have the most frequent phone calls. He and I serve on a nonprofit board together, and we are often talking through different boards and board decisions and strategies. The year that I was born, my dad was elected to a county board of supervisors. During his eight years on that board, I heard him say many times that being a county supervisor was the

easiest job in the world, because all he had to be able to do on a five-member board was count to three. Concurrently, my dad is an old school public servant. While he gets a certain rush from the wins that can come with board leadership, he also makes a conscious effort to subsume his own preferences for the will of the boards on which he serves. I have seen my dad fight hard in a meeting, lose a vote, and unfailingly support the majority decision of the board from that point on. In a state setting where community college trustees are all elected, it is not uncommon for the declaration, “These people are politicians” to be accompanied by a sneer. I hear such a declaration though, and think, “Who doesn’t love politicians?” Many, if not most of them, are charming and interpersonally skilled. They’re committed to enacting a vision. Are they sometimes driven more by ego than they should be? Yes. Does that mean they’re inherently untrustworthy? Not in my experience. The bias I bring to this work is that I encounter trustees and assume I will like them, that they have some skill in what they do, and that even the most egotistical and challenging of them can shift course, especially with skilled relationship-building. This is a major part of why I centered students in this research, and why I conducted it using a mixed methods research design. I knew my bias would lead me to give trustees the benefit of any doubt, and I wanted a quantitative component that could serve as a check on my possibly too-generous interpretations of the qualitative data.

My identity as a White woman proved salient to this work as well. My race/gender status confers privileges that likely influenced perceived power differences between myself and my participants (Hoffman, 2007). Factors like age, gender, race, and ethnicity can affect participants’ perceptions and, as a result, the interviews themselves (Sriram, 2016). Given the still-limited racial and ethnic diversity of community college trustees, it was unsurprising that I shared a racial identity with a slight majority of my participants, and the gender and race

differences between myself and several of my participants would have influenced several aspects of interviews. The headshot that accompanies my emails would have made my race and gender obvious from the interview recruitment stage and may have subconsciously influenced participants' desire to engage. In interviews, I would take note of how participants' discussed gender- and race-related topics like sharing or not sharing these identities with fellow trustees, constituents, or students; seeming to go into extra detail to contextualize for me cultural elements for groups of which I am not a part; and how White constituents' desires affect program availability at colleges. I journaled on these instances in my memos and made sure to include examples of trustees' race- and gender-awareness in my findings. To mitigate differences between myself and my participants, I looked for and referenced points of commonality, and followed Liamputtong's (2007) recommendation to share personal details and short stories that felt relevant for building rapport. With all my participants, I attempted to strike a warm, curious, and grateful tone in interviews and email interactions.

My background as a Californian has a significant impact on this project, and more specifically, my status as a product of the California community college system. Both of my parents graduated from the same community college where I and all three of my siblings would later take courses. Two of my siblings and my sister-in-law graduated from that community college, my dad served on its district board, and my mom is currently an adjunct faculty member there. I am someone who had to have the cultural bias against community colleges some people have explained to me, because it made no intuitive sense. Having grown up in California public schools in an area economically driven by agriculture, I was accustomed from an early age to a high degree of racial/ethnic diversity, religious diversity, and some socioeconomic diversity. My three closest friends in high school came from immigrant families with whom they each spoke

different, non-English languages in their homes. This made the relative diversity of my research participants unsurprising to me, and it felt normal to me to hear some participants talk about different ethnic groups' interests and political capital within their college districts' service areas. While I identify as a Californian, I also left California when I graduated high school. I frequently travel there for work and to visit family, but I have not lived there full-time as an adult. Thus, my positionality toward California is one of both insider and outsider. I have a great love for it as my home state, and my view of it is affected by the places I have lived since leaving it. In my research memos, I have tried to make explicit in my thinking Californians' tendency to regard it as the end-all, be-all. It is not that those in the California system think poorly of other states' approaches to community colleges—it is that they don't think of them. The strength, size, and diversity of the California community college system has its challenges, but it also has resources that do not translate to other systems. In conducting this research, I have worked to remain cognizant of the pluses and pitfalls of the California context—valuing what it can reveal, while noting that in the community college space, "biggest" does not mean "only" or "representative."

The final lens that is salient to this work is my professional role as a board leadership consultant. In the summer after my sophomore year of college, I was given an internship with a small organizational development firm to help with survey formatting and data analysis for a community college board evaluation. That internship developed into a now-decade-long working relationship, and in my role as a part-time associate with that firm, I've worked in many different organizations on board evaluations, executive evaluations, team development sessions, and organizational culture reform projects. I have also served in leadership roles on three different nonprofit boards, and I think about board service as a professional and personal calling. While this background is an asset in this work, the pitfall is that it can lead me to fit certain

interpretations to what I already believe. To counteract this, I have used my research memos as an opportunity to regularly assume a learning posture, noting what surprises have emerged and how they have challenged my previously held assumptions. I have also thought at length about how my findings influence my professional and personal practice on boards. One of the reasons I centered student outcomes in this research was that in my consulting work, I have rarely seen community college board evaluation be clearly linked to students. Certainly, this is related to the fact that the firm for which I work is generalist in its approach—we work with boards from different sectors and with different mission types and governance approaches. But for this study, I wanted to see how community college governance could be better contextually situated, with students as the focus.

Maintaining awareness of these identities and lenses has been critical to conducting this research, and I have valued the conversations with peers, mentors, and participants that have enriched and expanded my understanding of board governance. Regular memoing has helped me stay present and aware of how my identities influence my interpretations and has helped me draw richer and fuller conclusions.

In the next chapter, I describe the context for the study, the research design and phases my methodological and theoretical assumptions inform in greater detail, this study's limitations, and the quality and trustworthiness of this research.

Chapter IV. Research Methods

In this chapter, I describe the state context for this study and the MMR design I used to explore my research questions. I include first a high-level description of the overall design, followed by further detail on each of the phases included in the design. This includes my approaches for sampling and data collection, data analysis, and integration with each phase. I also include how I assessed the quality of this MMR study.

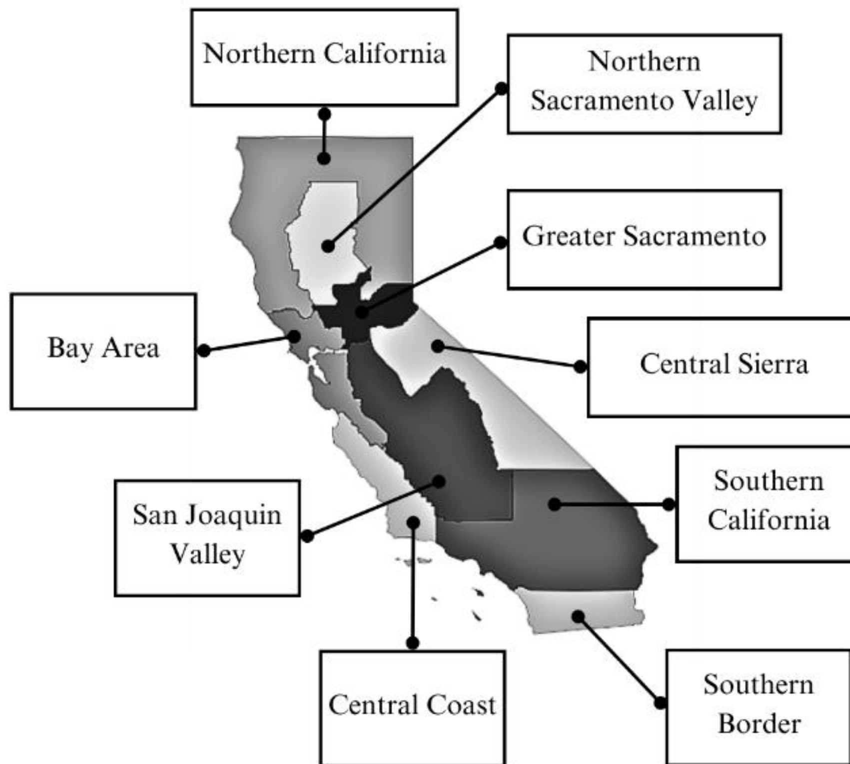
Research Context

The setting for this study is the California community college system—the world's largest higher education system, serving 1.8 million students through 116 colleges (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2023). The system serves students from diverse backgrounds and with diverse goals. Originally conceived as the broad-access component of the California 1960 Master Plan for higher education, the system continues to provide CTE and transfer-level education in preparation for transfer to a University of California (UC) or California State University (CSU), though its needs, purposes, and roles have grown exponentially beyond that initial charter.

California's colleges are divided into nine geographical regions, shown in Figure 1. These regions include Northern California, the Northern Sacramento Valley, Greater Sacramento, the Central Sierra, Southern California, the Southern Border, the Central Coast, the San Joaquin Valley, and the Bay Area.

Figure 1

California Community College Regions



Each of these regions has its own cultures, economic drivers, climate assets and challenges, and stakeholder populations. In addition to this relatively concentrated diversity, there are several factors that have made this context an ideal setting for each of the research questions considered in this study.

As indicated previously, my research questions are: First, how do community college trustees envision and evaluate their effectiveness? Second, how do community college trustees cultivate their individual effectiveness, and the effectiveness of their boards? Third, how do current trustee development efforts relate to student outcomes? The first research question was explored through a content analysis of community college governing board evaluation reports;

the second through interviews with current and former trustees, and the third through analyses of data for a trustee development program and student outcomes.

For the first research question and phase, California was an appropriate context because California community colleges are accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), which requires that boards conduct regular self-evaluations and make the results public. This provided a rich resource for investigating how trustees envision and evaluate their effectiveness, through the availability of the documents in which they note how they have evaluated their effectiveness.

The second research question and phase were suited because of my status as a Californian and the connections I was able to leverage in accessing research participants. While I describe the sampling for this phase more thoroughly in the next section, utilizing my personal and professional connections resulted in more interviews than I would likely have been able to access in other research settings. Additionally, trustees in California are elected officials, and it's possible that elected trustees may be more open to research participation than appointed trustees, as they may be motivated by a sense that such participation is a signal of their competency and (re)electability.

The third research question and phase were largely made possible because of the California community college system's trustee development program and its data accessibility. The California community college statewide membership association, CCLC, supports the work of all its member districts (which includes all the state's public community college districts) through advocacy, professional and policy development, research and district support services, and promotion of the colleges (Galizio, 2022). As part of its mission, CCLC has invested substantially in trustee development, creating a two-year trustee development certification

program, and it makes data on certificate-earners publicly available and accessible. Additionally, the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) partners with college districts to track and make available data on diverse student outcomes.

From a pragmatist researcher perspective, the data availability obviously makes California an appealing research site. Additionally, though, the diversity of its institutions in size, geographic location, services, and stakeholder groups make it an ideal setting to begin exploring community college governing board effectiveness. The nation may not always go the way of California, but the state's strong community college system and investment in trustee development and institutional research make it a useful proving ground to inform policy and practice in other states.

Research Design

The research questions for this study have best been explored through the approach of MMR, which facilitates the simultaneous and interactive exploration of qualitative and quantitative data as outlined in the third chapter. In this context, MMR has allowed me to put in conversation different perspectives on board governance, including its purposes and criteria for its evaluation. I have explored the first two questions through qualitative analysis of evaluation documents and interview transcripts, and the third through quantitative analysis of trustee professional development and student outcomes data.

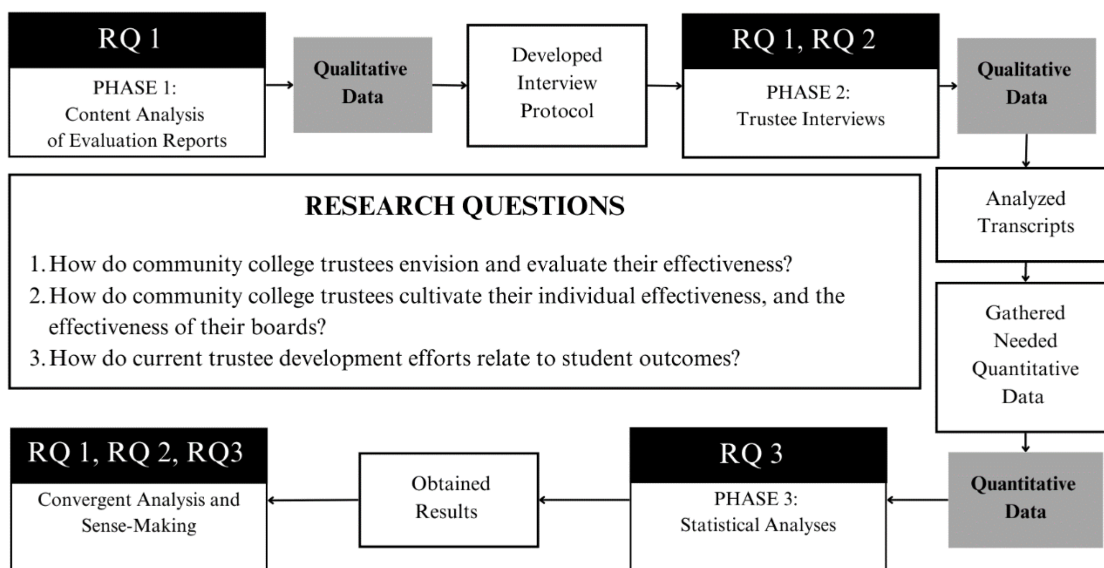
In this qual→qual→quan study, the first research question, how trustees—the individuals doing the governing—envision and evaluate their effectiveness, has been explored using content analysis of board evaluation reports, as well as interviews with trustees. Answering this first research question set a foundation for exploring the second and third research questions. For my second question on how community college trustees cultivate their individual effectiveness, and

the effectiveness of their boards, I relied on the qualitative interviews with trustees—a perspective too often left out of community college research. The third question brings the quantitative component into the study, exploring how current trustee development efforts relate to student outcomes through quantitative analyses of data on trustee professional development completion and student outcomes data. This was an important step for testing earlier findings and seeing where there was confirmation and contention. In MMR, this integrated analysis and synthesis of findings is a critical step, and it has enabled me to draw richer conclusions and form a stronger understanding of governing board effectiveness.

Figure 2 shows the procedural diagram for the methodological approach I used in this study. The diagram begins in the top left corner, with the first phase being a content analysis of board evaluation reports. This phase served as the starting point, in response to which subsequent research phases were conceptualized. Based on the content analysis results, I developed protocols for interviews with trustees. Based on the interview findings, I identified quantitative data sources and completed statistical analyses in response to the third research question. Upon completion of these phases, I conducted convergent analysis and sense-making in which I analyzed the data gathered through the different in concert with one another. Each phase of this study is described in greater detail in the sections that follow.

Figure 2

Mixed Methods Research Design



Phase 1: Content Analysis

The first phase of this study was a qualitative content analysis of board evaluation reports and descriptions of board evaluation processes in accreditation institutional self-evaluation reports (ISERs). For colleges accredited by the ACCJC, it is required that these documents be made available to the public. This study began with an examination of board evaluation reports because board evaluation can serve as a critical point of reflection for trustees.

As a method, content analysis allows for engagement with subject matter through "unobtrusive measures," meaning I could explore the data in this first phase without influencing later research participants' perspectives (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 223). By analyzing these reports, I explored how governing boards envisioned and evaluated their own effectiveness before engaging research participants directly. Content analysis asserts that the data under consideration have meanings relative to their particular contexts and purposes (Krippendorff, 2019). Because the evaluation reports were products of required board evaluation efforts, they

served as a ripe data source for the first research question, and an important first step in the sequential design. By beginning with the content analysis, I was able to ground later phases of data-gathering and analysis in the language that governing boards themselves use to describe their effectiveness.

Sampling and Data Collection

Because only ACCJC explicitly requires that board evaluations be made public, my purposive sample[14] for this phase of the study included public, U.S. two-year colleges that are accredited by ACCJC. These include colleges in California and U.S. Island territories.[15] Because this analysis served as a starting point for later phases, I wanted to incorporate institutions that were diverse both culturally and geographically within the ACCJC accreditation region. To achieve this, I adopted a purposive sampling (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) approach to select twenty California colleges from different regions within the state and with a wide range of enrollment; I also included the single community college in both American Samoa and Guam. The college districts, their region, and their enrollment as of this analysis are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Sample Institutions

Community College District (CCD)	Region	Enrollment
Feather River CCD	Northern California	3,454
College of the Redwoods CCD	Northern California	7,180
Butte-Glenn CCD	Northern Sacramento Valley	15,460
Shasta-Tehama-Trinity CCD	Northern Sacramento Valley	13,717
Sierra Joint CCD	Greater Sacramento	25,395

[14] This approach is also referred to as relevance sampling in content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019).
[15] 2-year colleges in Hawaii are also accredited by the ACCJC, but they were excluded from this analysis because they are governed by a single board that governs the entire public higher education system in Hawaii, including 2 4-year institutions. Thus, their comparability to a “local” governing board for a community college was too limited for this analysis.

Los Rios CCD	Greater Sacramento	108,084
Peralta CCD	Bay Area	51,171
Foothill-DeAnza CCD	Bay Area	49,234
Marin CCD	Bay Area	9,912
Monterey Peninsula CCD	Central Coast	12,944
Santa Barbara CCD	Central Coast	23,813
Yosemite CCD	San Joaquin Valley and Central Sierra	28,635
Kern CCD	San Joaquin Valley	46,680
College of the Sequoias CCD	San Joaquin Valley	16,154
Los Angeles CCD	Southern California	198,904
Barstow CCD	Southern California	4,418
Coast CCD	Southern California	64,413
Imperial Valley CCD	Southern Border	11,140
San Diego CCD	Southern Border	83,222
Grossmont-Cuyamaca CCD	Southern Border	38,297
American Samoa CCD	American Samoa	1,537
Guam CCD	Guam	2,055

For each district, I attempted to access two documents: the section of their ISER related to ACCJC Standard IV.C.10, and the related board evaluation report. Standard IV.C.10 relates to community college governing board evaluation:

> Board policies and/or bylaws clearly establish a process for board evaluation. The evaluation assesses the board's effectiveness in promoting and sustaining academic quality and institutional effectiveness. The governing board regularly evaluates its practices and performance, including full participation in board training, and makes public the results. The results are used to improve board performance, academic quality, and institutional effectiveness. (Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, 2014)

Most college districts' ISERs are made available on their websites as part of their communication efforts on accreditation. I sought the ISERs for each college district, and this usually led to being able to find a board evaluation report, as these reports were cited as evidence in the ISERs.[16] For districts that did not make their evaluation reports available online, I emailed

[16] For reports that were made available online, there were varying degrees of accessibility. For some colleges, a report had to be found by accessing board minutes. Other colleges, like Coast CCD, had entire an entire web page dedicated to board evaluation and records from previous evaluations (https://www.cccd.edu/boardoftrustees/board-self-evaluation.html).

the contact listed for the ISER. When a report still was not made available, I sent a second, follow-up email. In total, I was able to access board evaluation reports for 16 of the 22 college districts included in the sample. I analyzed ISERs for each of the 22 college districts in the sample. When an evaluation report was not available, but other evidence was provided in the ISER, I analyzed those documents as well—this included board meeting minutes for two college districts (the minutes were from the meeting at which the board evaluation was discussed). I analyzed 16 evaluation reports, 22 ISERs, and two sets of board meeting minutes from boards' discussion on their evaluations. In total, 40 documents were included in the dataset for this content analysis.

Table 4

Accessibility of Evaluation Reports

Community College District (CCD)	Evaluation Report Made Available Online	Evaluation Report Made Available Upon Request	Evaluation Report Not Made Available
Feather River CCD	No	Yes	--
College of the Redwoods CCD	No	Yes	--
Butte-Glenn CCD	No	No	Yes
Shasta-Tehama-Trinity CCD	Yes	--	--
Sierra Joint CCD	Yes	--	--
Los Rios CCD	No	No	Yes
Peralta CCD	Yes	--	--
Foothill-DeAnza CCD	Yes	--	--
Marin CCD	Yes	--	--
Monterey Peninsula CCD	Yes	--	--
Santa Barbara CCD	Yes	--	--
Yosemite CCD	Yes	--	--
Kern CCD	No	No	Yes
College of the Sequoias CCD	No	No	Yes
Los Angeles CCD	Yes	--	--
Barstow CCD	Yes	--	--
Coast CCD	Yes	--	--
Imperial Valley CCD	Yes	--	--
San Diego CCD	No	No	Yes
Grossmont-Cuyamaca CCD	No	Yes	--

American Samoa CCD	No	No	Yes
Guam CCD	No	Yes	--

Approach to Analysis

There were two main types of coding I used for each of these documents. The first was deductive and focused on the "nuts and bolts" of board evaluation processes—characteristics of how board evaluations happen, and who is included in them. The second was inductive and grounded, focused on the meaning expressed through the language of the evaluation reports themselves. I began the coding process for each document with both types sequentially (i.e., coding with closed, deductive codes followed by a first round of open, in-vivo coding), but for later rounds of coding and analysis separated these types. In the rest of this section. I outline the coding and analysis processes for each type in greater detail.

Deductive Coding. First, I developed a template in the software Scrivener that included space for attribute codes for each college's ISER and evaluation report. Attribute codes are closed codes that indicate basic descriptive information about a piece of data (Saldaña, 2009). Responses to the following questions were recorded as attribute codes for the ISERs:

- Who is involved in the evaluation process?
- What kind of evaluation is it (e.g., self-evaluation, external evaluation)
- Where or in what context is the evaluation completed?
- How often is the evaluation completed?
- How is the evaluation process executed?

For the evaluation reports, I recorded the following information as attribute codes:

- Number of questions
- Type(s) of questions (e.g., quantitative (Likert scale), open qualitative response)

- Evaluation categories

I selected these attributes in response to the significant variation among evaluation reports I noticed during the familiarization process, in which a content analysis researcher familiarizes themselves with their data to gain a sense of relevant concepts and topics (Schreier, 2020). Even within the California community college system, there is no standardized evaluation process or taxonomy of evaluation practices, so gaining a sense of the different ways boards conduct their evaluations was critical at this stage.

Analysis of these attribute codes was limited, except to note the substantial variation among evaluation approaches. I discuss this variation in greater detail in the findings chapter.

Inductive Coding. In the same template that I used to record my attribute codes, I included space for open codes related to the research question, “How do community college boards envision and evaluate their own effectiveness?” These initial codes were recorded using an in vivo approach, in which code names were recorded using exact words in the evaluation reports (Creswell, 2013). After completing the template for each college district in the sample, I wrote a short analytic memo noting anything striking or surprising, as well as noting trends that were emerging in common among districts.

After the initial round of open coding, I transferred my open codes into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, which I used to sort in vivo codes into focused codes. Focused coding is a form of second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2009) in which a researcher makes choices about the most salient and significant initial codes (in this case, the original, in vivo codes). Focused coding proceeded in multiple rounds, as I drafted focused codes and tested them against the data to assess fit, revising wording and definitions for my focused codes as needed. Once I felt comfortable that my focused codes captured the information emerging salient to the research question, I wrote

them down on small index cards and sorted these cards repeatedly to see what broader categories were emerging, in conjunction with reviewing my research memos. This sorting continued until I had developed a coding frame (Schreier, 2020[17]) that included four dimensions (the highest level of categorization in this analysis), and multiple categories and subcategories within each dimension. The coding frame is represented in Table 5.

Table 5

Content Analysis Coding Frame

Dimension	Categories	Subcategories
Board Skillship	Board and trustee conduct	• Values alignment • Navigating conflict effectively • One voice • Comply with ethics and conflict of interest guidance documents
	Board structural integrity	• Legitimacy and authority of board leadership • Utility a board finds in its committee structure
	Meetings	• Manner in which meetings are conducted • Utility of meetings • Compliance with public meeting laws
	Board member orientation and development	• Presence of orientation process • Ongoing board and trustee development
	Board evaluation	• Presence of evaluation process • Utility of evaluation process
Internal Institutional Responsibilities	Policy development and maintenance	• Fulfilling policy-making role • Primacy of policy role • Utility of policies
	Stewardship of other guiding documents	• Types of guidance documents • Alignment with guiding documents (e.g., mission statement)

[17] My approach differs slightly from Schreier's (2020). In Schreier's approach, she recommends developing a preliminary coding frame based on a subset of the sample. The coding frame is then tested and expanded as the rest of the sample is analyzed. In my approach, I developed the frame much later in the process, after coding all data in the sample multiple times. While I tested the coding frame and made some modifications before finalizing, it was not initially developed as a tool to aid in the coding process. Research memos served a similar function in this study.

	Internal functional responsibilities	• Facilities and construction • Faculty and staff engagement • Budget process
	Holding the institution accountable	• Monitoring institutional progress • Supporting student-focused initiatives and programs • Participating in the accreditation process • Promoting the interests of community constituents
External Institutional Responsibilities	Showing institutional support	• Holding, modeling, and promoting institutional values • Supporting specific institutional initiatives
	External functional responsibilities	• Legislative advocacy • Public and media relations • Fundraising
	Leveraging external relationships	• Trustees as bridges between colleges and external stakeholders • Promoting the interests of the college
Communication and Delegation	Relationship with lead administrator	• Delegation to lead administrator • Role differentiation between board and lead administrator • Holding lead administrator accountable • Supporting lead administrator
	Quality, direction, and flow of information	• Communication with and through lead administrator • Following communication protocols • Accessing information of appropriate quality and quantity • Using information in governance

As this was a sequential mixed methods study, the content analysis was conducted prior to later phases of the study. The findings chapter includes both the findings from this content analysis, as well as how those findings were reinterpreted in the later stage of convergent data analysis and sense-making.

Phase 2: Grounded Theory-Informed Qualitative Analysis of Interviews

The second phase of this study was a qualitative analysis of transcripts from the interviews I conducted with 14 community college trustees. Interviews were guided by the first and second research questions: (1) How do community college trustees envision and evaluate their effectiveness; and (2) How do community college trustees cultivate their individual effectiveness, and the effectiveness of their boards? While the final sample size did not prove large enough to achieve the saturation required by traditional grounded theory, my approach to analysis was rooted in grounded theory principles—grounding the analysis in low-level coding, completing regular memoing, and developing preliminary theoretical frameworks and testing them for fit.

Sampling and Interview Protocol

After completing the content analysis, I developed an interview protocol based on the content analysis findings, and initially sampled interviewees from the institutions included in the content analysis phase in an attempt to maintain interpretive consistency. I sent an initial recruitment email to 76 individual trustees and seven additional board or board administrative employee email addresses. This initial recruitment strategy yielded six interviewees. I then recruited the remaining eight interviewees through a combination of snowball and convenience sampling, reaching out to contacts I knew and those recommended to me by interviewees.

Participants represented eight different college districts from four different regions in California. There were seven men and seven women. Four participants were trustees in single college districts; the rest were trustees in multi-college districts. Table 6 summarizes their attributes.

Table 6

Attributes of Research Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Racial/Ethnic Identity	District Region	Single or Multi-College District
Nathan	Man	Lebanese American	Central Coast	Single
Harriet	Woman	White	Greater Sacramento	Multi
Joe	Man	White	Greater Sacramento	Multi
Sebastian	Man	Latino	Greater Sacramento	Multi
Thriddis	Man	White	Greater Sacramento	Multi
Mackey	Man	White	San Joaquin Valley	Multi
Geo	Man	Latino	San Joaquin Valley	Multi
Clarice	Woman	White	San Joaquin Valley	Multi
Deborah	Woman	Chinese American	Southern California	Single
Minnie	Woman	Latina	Southern California	Single
Sarah	Woman	White	Southern California	Multi
Moira	Woman	White	Southern California	Multi
Ángel	Man	Latino	Southern California	Single
Whitney	Woman	White	Southern California	Multi

Interviews were semi-structured, meaning I used a standard set of questions, but omitted some or asked additional follow-up questions in a manner that followed the conversation. The interview protocol was developed based on the results of the content analysis, and included questions related to how participants envisioned board and trustee effectiveness, and how they evaluated governing board effectiveness. I conducted the interviews in late 2022 and early 2023. A sample interview protocol is in Appendix C. In advance of the interviews, participants were sent a consent form that outlined the purpose of the research and how their data would be used. Additionally, they were given the option to consent to participation at the start of each interview. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and lasted about 90 minutes each. Participants were invited to choose pseudonyms for their interview transcripts; most did, but some asked me to choose for them. I recorded the interviews via Zoom onto my computer's hard drive, and then transferred the audio and video files to a password-protected external hard drive before securely deleting them from the computer hard drive. Recordings were used to create interview transcripts for analysis; recordings were deleted once transcripts were finished.

Approach to Analysis

For the interview transcripts, I used a qualitative analysis approach rooted in the principles of grounded theory. Consistent with grounded theory, the first round of coding was an open and generative form of low-level microanalysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), which let me begin to identify major topics that I found in the interview transcripts and to generate higher-level codes (Creswell, 2013). I began by noting open, in-vivo and low-level codes in transcript margins with a digital pen in the PDF Reader Xodo. After the first few transcripts, I began to note patterns I was seeing across transcripts and to develop higher-level codes. I used the software NVivo to organize my codes and record these higher-level codes across topics. Through subsequent rounds of coding, I tested and refined these higher-level codes, taking an iterative and intuitive approach to coding and re-coding until I felt confident in the broader themes that were emerging. As I continued the data analysis process, I recorded and wrote research memos, noting patterns and contradictions. I also used a small whiteboard to conceptualize and test different frameworks and relationships across concepts trustees had highlighted in the interviews, developing themes as a result. Coding examples are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Qualitative Coding Examples from Trustee Interviews

Transcript Data	**In-vivo and Descriptive Codes**	**Higher-level Code and Definition**	**Theme**
We have [a rogue trustee], and we've just decided to not, we created a guide sheet for meeting chairs on how to respond to her, how to manage her kind of in meetings. But that's what we've just decided to do at this point, because there's no reasoning with her. We've tried. She will not meet with you. If you try to talk to her, she'll say no. She's just not, she got fired from her principal job because of crazy. She was hitting kids. I mean, she's just a wild person. And somehow won reelection by 60 votes recently. And so we're stuck with her a little longer. But we do have a rogue trustee, and it does, I mean, every trustee is united against her. We might have disagreements [among] the other six, but she's not even in the same room as us.	Managing rogue trustee Every trustee united against rogue	Holding fellow board members accountable: Descriptions of situations where interviewees held or attempted to hold fellow board members accountable, or expressed that they wish they had	Effective boards hold others accountable and are held accountable
My perspective's a lot different. That's all there is to it […] It's not right and surely it's not wrong, but in between. As I told a person the other day, I lose more battles than I win, when it comes to looking at issues of social justice or what we're talking about. But the point is, I'm not going to quit.	Issues of social justice Not going to quit	Professional courage: Descriptions of topics or positions for which interviewee takes political or social risk	Effective trustees embrace their authority
One thing [my mentor] taught me is like, you need to know your board. So you never bring something to the board that's going to cause controversy [to the point that] it's not going to pass. [If you do that,] you're not going to accomplish what you're trying to accomplish. So by knowing your board, just knowing the personality and the values of your other board members and knowing if, if you bring the idea, if they, if at least you're going to get four people to support it, because our board is made up of seven people.	Know your board Majority vote Politics	Politically adept: Views or descriptions of events that show interviewees' skill in navigating politically charged environments	Effective trustees embrace their authority
The other thing you should have that I think makes an ideal [trustee is] passion for the college […] You should really love to be there, in the	Love for community	Public servant: Descriptions of	Effective trustees practice humility

sense that you want to make it a better community. And to be really, really good at it, you have to love your community because your goal here, it's not about you. It's not about, "I'm the star of the show." It's that when I leave my college, my community will be better because I served at this college and these programs are going to make a difference.	It's not about you Humility	situations or positions showing trustees' motivation to public service, or the manner in which the work of trusteeship is a gift	
In California, we have something called the Effective Trusteeship Program, ETP, and board members are encouraged to go through that program and get a certificate at the end. […] And I think that's one way to increase board effectiveness is to have a regular program of education, where you're learning about the latest, latest things that are going on, you know, in the world of education, and that's been helpful to me. I completed the first program and I'm now started working on my second certificates. So I just think that's really important, that you're staying engaged in learning always. I think it's as important for trustees as it is for the students on the campus.	Regular program of education ETP	Trustee training: Descriptions of professional development opportunities trustees have taken to grow in their role	Trustees cultivate effectiveness through individual trustee training
[Y]ou have to have board members that are willing to spend the time, reading their agenda. And not just reading the agenda items, but reading the staff reports and taking the time, of reading the material, and then taking the time to educate themselves on community college […] I didn't have any community college experience. I didn't know what I was doing.	Spend the time Didn't know what I was doing	Put the time in: Expressions of how it takes investment of time and effort to be an effective trustee	Effective trustees practice humility
I think each year we need to reevaluate what we're accomplishing […] to look back and say, "Okay, now that we've done this work, how are we moving forward with it? And are we able to analyze or are we collecting data? […] We had a decline of 10%, are we reducing that number?" I want to see numbers. I want to see financial reports. I want to see a student enrollment analysis. […] I think our job to be effective is to make sure that we're achieving those milestones. If we're not, then we need to reflect and say, "Okay, why aren't we doing this?" […] I feel that to be effective, we need to ask those questions.	Able to analyze data Data and metrics	Accountability through data review: Descriptions of how boards use institutional data to hold their institutions and/or lead administrators accountable	Effective boards hold others accountable and are held accountable

I was a big supporter of OER [online education resources] and I think we're one of the largest OER libraries. So the last estimate I heard was we saved students over $3 million in textbook costs through a digital textbook library.	Saved students money	Supporting students: Descriptions of specific initiatives or areas of need through which boards support students	Effective boards provide support
We hired him, got out of the way and let [the lead administrator] do his job. I think the board was really gracious about making sure that they supported him at least the first, absolutely the first year or two to make sure that he got through that period of grace.	Let the LA do their job	Support for LA: Descriptions of how boards support their lead administrators	Effective boards provide support
[T]here's an Excellence in Trusteeship program. […] So if you're a new trustee, you could sign up for it. And you get to attend different conferences, take different classes. And at the end of that program, they give you a certification, and throughout that program, they teach you how to be an effective trustee. […] So I think going through that program is important, especially if it's your first time on a board.	They teach you how to be an effective trustee ETP	Trustee training: Descriptions of professional development opportunities trustees have taken to grow in their role	Trustees cultivate effectiveness through individual trustee training
[Discussing the board evaluation at an annual retreat] gives you the time to talk about those things you can’t talk about as you’re sitting at the board level. Remember that as a board, the only time you get to chat with each other is literally when you’re sitting at that dais. And that’s a terrible place to have these chats. So most of the time, even though a retreat was in open session, we would be in a smaller room sitting around a table […] it’s super helpful to have that opportunity just to be able to chat with each other about how you think the board’s doing. Because you can’t ask that [in a regular board meeting]. There’s just no other good time during a year of meetings where the chair can say, “What do you guys think? Are we doing well?” […] I think cultivating board effectiveness happens by having board evaluation. I think it happens by having more workshops than you want, because it forces you to sit together.	Board evaluation Chat with each other about how the board’s doing	Board development: Descriptions of sessions where the full board together works on becoming more effective	Boards cultivate their effectiveness through whole-board development sessions.

Based on the findings in the analysis of the interviews, I developed the quantitative phase: analysis of the ETP professional development program made available by CCLC, which many interview participants pointed to as a valuable strategy for cultivating their own effectiveness. Given the underexplored nature of the program in research settings, I conducted an exploratory data analysis, followed by a series of regressions examining the relationship between completion of this trustee development program and student outcomes at trustees' districts. In the MMR process, this served as a valuable quantitative component for checking and enriching the conclusions drawn from the qualitative phases.

Phase 3: Exploratory Quantitative Analyses of ETP Certifications and Student Outcomes

The final phase of this study was a series of exploratory quantitative analyses investigating the third research question: How do current trustee development efforts relate to student outcomes? Because of the unexplored nature of this area of research, I conducted an exploratory quantitative analysis of trustees' ETP certifications and student outcomes in their districts, followed by simple linear regression and multiple regression/ANOVA analyses of the relationship between ETP certification and student outcomes.

Sampling and Data Collection

Data on ETP certifications were collected from CCLC using the Trustee Dashboard in their online Research and Data Center in the spring of 2023. When the study was conducted, there were 72 community college districts in the California system. Districts have either five- or seven- member boards, and statewide there were 440 trustees, 82 of whom had earned their ETP certification. ETP certification is the independent variable in the analyses. It is analyzed as a continuous variable (proportion of trustees in a district with their ETP certification).

Student success data for all 72 districts was gathered from the CCCCO Student Success Metrics web page. I conducted the analyses as point-in-time estimates, collecting the data for each dependent variable for the most recent academic year available: 2019-2020. Each of the variables is described in greater detail in the subsections that follow.

Independent Variable

The independent variable for regression analyses in this study was the proportion of trustees on a board who had completed their ETP certification.[18] ETP certification requires completing training in the following nine areas: Accreditation; Board Evaluation; Board & CEO Relations; Brown Act Training[19]; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Ethics; Fiscal Responsibilities; Governance; and Student Success. The program consists of participating in 27 sessions across the nine areas (ETP Program Overview, 2023). Upon registering for ETP, trustees have 24 months to complete the program and receive their certification. Trustees can complete trainings through CCLC events, local or national board training events, and through online or printed modules.

Dependent Variables

A total of 12 student outcome variables were considered. These variables were all continuous, measured as a percentage of total number of students in a selected student journey. In the California system, students are assigned to a student journey based on their educational goals in one of three ways: (1) based on the goals they select once they are enrolled, (2) based on the statewide OPEN CCC Apply application they complete in order to enroll, or (3) based on

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[18] As a robustness check, I also ran these analyses with ETP certification as a dichotomous variable, in which a board either had at least one trustee who had earned their certification, or none of its trustees had earned the certification.
[19] The Ralph M. Brown Act, typically referred to as the Brown Act, is California's public meeting law.

course-taking behavior that indicates adult education course-taking for Adult Education/English as a Second Language (ESL) and Short-Term Career Education. Students can be included in multiple student journeys in a given academic year. In addition to Adult Education or ESL, and Short-Term Career Education, other student journeys include Degree/Transfer and Undecided/Other. Definitions for each variable are provided in Table 8.[20]

Table 8

Dependent Variables

Variable Name	Definition
Skills Gain	Among students in selected student journeys, the percentage who had one or more skill gains, measured by advancing one or more course-prior-to-college or student-educational-function levels, or by improving one or more educational functioning levels in 2019-2020.
Course Success Rate	Among enrollments by students in selected student journeys, the course success rate in 2019-2020.
Transfer Level Math and English	Among students in selected student journeys, the proportion who completed transfer-level math and English in their first academic year of credit enrollment within the district.
Transfer Level Math	Among students in selected student journeys, the proportion who completed transfer-level math and in their first academic year of credit enrollment within the district.
Transfer Level English	Among students in selected student journeys, the proportion who completed transfer-level English in their first academic year of credit enrollment within the district.
Completed a Level of Education	Among students in selected student journeys who were enrolled in noncredit adult basic education or noncredit ESL in 2019-2020, the proportion who completed one or more levels of adult education by transitioning from ABE or ESL to adult secondary education in 2019-2020 or subsequent year for the first time ever at any institution.
Completed a Noncredit CTE or Workforce Preparation Course	Among all students with a noncredit enrollment on a CTE TOP code or a noncredit enrollment in a workforce preparation course, the proportion who completed a noncredit career education or workforce preparation course or had 48 or more contact hours in noncredit career education course(s) or workforce preparation course(s) in 2019-2020.

[20] For full, technical definitions, see Cal-PASS Plus - Student-Success-Metrics-DED (calpassplus.org)

Earned 9+ CE Units	Among students in student journeys, the proportion who successfully completed nine or more career education semester units in the selected year within the district.
Persisted at Same College	Among students in student journeys, the proportion who enrolled in fall 2019 and spring 2020 at the same institution, excluding students who completed an award or transferred to a postsecondary institution.
Attained the Vision	Among students in student journeys, the percentage who attained the Vision for Success definition of completion[21] in 2019-2020 or who enrolled in a four-year institution in 2020-2021.
Became Employed	Among students in student journeys who exited the community college system and did not transfer to any postsecondary institution, the proportion of students who were unemployed and became employed after exiting college.
Attained the Living Wage	Among students in student journeys who exited the community college system and who did not transfer to any postsecondary institution, the proportion who attained the district county living wage for a single adult measured immediately following the academic year of exit.

A wide variety of student outcome variables were selected because of the exploratory nature of this analysis.

Control Variables

In addition to the independent variable and the selected dependent variables, three control variables were included in the analyses. These included enrollment, region, and whether a district was a single- or multi-college district. Enrollment data were collected from the same source as the student outcomes data—CCCCO's Student Success Metrics. The information on region and single- or multi-college district was collected from CCLC's Research and Data Center. In Table 9, I provide the definition for each control variable and the rationale for its inclusion.

Table 9

[21] Includes earning one or more of the following: Chancellor's Office approved certificate, associate degree, and/or CCC baccalaureate degree, and had an enrollment in 2019-2020 in the district; or earning 12 or more units at any time and at any college up to and including 2019-2020 and then exiting the community college system to enroll in any four-year postsecondary institution in the subsequent year.

Control Variables

Variable Name	Definition	Rationale for Including
Enrollment	All students who had an enrollment as a non-special admit student in at least one term of 2019-2020	Institutional size can affect many variables and aspects of institutional culture.
Region	The region of California in which the district is located; there are nine regions including Bay Area, Central Coast, Central Sierra, Greater Sacramento, Northern California, Northern Sacramento Valley, San Joaquin Valley, Southern Border, and Southern California	California is a diverse state, with notable differences in population, cultures, economic drivers, home prices, and household incomes present across its different regions. While this control does not account for all variation, it provides a suitable proxy for major differences across regions.
Single- or Multi-College District	Whether a district has one college in which the college president is the lead administrator, or a district has multiple colleges in which the college presidents report to the lead administrator for the district.	A different kind of administrator reports to the board in each of these districts, and it is possible this difference in organizational structure affects governance.

Analytical Procedures

To get a sense of ETP certification across California, I began by conducting some exploratory analyses, identifying average proportions of ETP certification for a board (meaning what proportion of a board's members had completed ETP). I then compared ETP certification rates across college district regions, as well as certification rates across the demographics of gender, age, and race/ethnicity to see if there were any noteworthy trends. I used Microsoft Excel for all my analyses and visualizations of data.

Next, I conducted simple linear regressions to explore the relationships between ETP certification proportions of boards and each of the student outcomes student variables. These and the later multiple regression/ANOVA analyses were conducted as point-in-time estimates,

comparing the number of trustees who had completed ETP by academic year 2019-2020 with the student outcomes data for that year—the most recent year in which student outcomes data for the dependent variables were available. I began by creating scatterplots to see if there were any obvious relationships, and then calculated the F-statistic for each pair.

Next, I added the control variables to each model and conducted a multiple regression/ANOVA analysis for each dependent variable, as well as a sensitivity analysis to see if any of the control variables had any explanatory value in the model. After obtaining and interpreting the results for my analyses, I conducted the convergent analysis and sense-making to see how the findings from each phase confirmed, challenged, nuanced, and contradicted each other.

Assessing Quality of this MMR Study

One of the primary benefits of MMR is that it puts quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches in conversation with one another. Given the complexity that combining methods can create, though, it is important to assess the quality of both individual methodological components within the study, and the MMR study overall. Several different frameworks have been offered for quality assessment of MMR studies (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). These frameworks typically include criteria related to analyzing the appropriateness of the methods within the study, overall design study (including inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative methods and integrative analysis), and reporting of the study (e.g., O'Cathain, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Given the underexplored nature of community college board governance and the diverse types of data an MMR design allowed me to explore, I believe it was the best fit for this study's research questions. An important aspect of MMR is its iterative nature; the phases originally

planned changed significantly as the research progressed, and regular memoing was an important part of assessing how the research design could be adapted to best fit the findings and questions that were emerging from each subsequent phase. I drafted research memos throughout each phase, noting current findings, challenges, adaptations that were made, and any key concerns. Through regular dialogue with my advisor, I made informed changes as appropriate to the research questions and the findings as they emerged. This allowed me to assess the quality of the study in an ongoing manner and ensure each phase was as well-suited to the related research question(s) as possible.

One feature of O'Cathain's (2010) framework for assessing MMR quality is utility. Consistent with the pragmatist orientation for this study, I continue to explore how this study can serve as a valuable contribution, rather than an isolated exercise. In the final chapter, I highlight implications for different stakeholder groups, including trustees, lead administrators, and state community college systems. While I am still exploring the exact mode of communication, I intend for these findings to reach practitioners and trustees and am exploring avenues to ensure that happens. This work will influence my ongoing consulting practice, which is an important component of the positionality I described in the previous chapter.

Limitations and Caveats

While I have made many efforts to design and conduct high-quality research on community college governing board effectiveness, this research brings with it several limitations and necessary caveats. Here, I describe the limitations of each phase, and of the study as a whole.

For the content analysis, it is important to note that board evaluation reports and ISERs are limited in what they can tell us about how boards envision and evaluate their own effectiveness. As documents that are required for the accreditation process, one may reasonably

doubt the sincerity with which these documents have been developed, or even the degree of direct trustee involvement in creating them. Further, the documents are almost certainly likely to be revised by college staff members, and so may not genuinely reflect trustees' perspectives. This limitation is part of the rationale for mixing data sources in this study—to take a publicly available data source, and then check the information it yields against the perspectives trustees directly express.

The small sample size (14 interviews) of the second phase limits the richness of the conclusions yielded. While there was a great deal of consistency and synchronicity across the interviews, they were too limited in number to achieve saturation as appropriate to traditional grounded theory. Further, the reliability of participant responses may always be an open question, despite efforts taken to protect trustees' anonymity and create an interview environment in which they feel empowered to speak freely. Still, for an understudied population, this study has yielded important preliminary work. Trustees are not difficult to reach, but it proved difficult to get them to commit to 90-minute interviews. This is unsurprising, given that many of them are busy, working professionals. One approach that future researchers might take to circumnavigate this is interviewing former trustees; three of my participants were former trustees, which meant they had more time to be interviewed (and possibly, a greater desire to share their perspectives given their relative distance from the governance role).

The third, quantitative phase also brings significant limitations due to sample size (72 districts). The regression models were underpowered, and the correlational and descriptive nature of the research means that drawing robust conclusions is misguided. It may also be that completion of a professional development program is the wrong indicator for trustee effectiveness as it might relate to student outcomes. But the findings for this phase share early,

exploratory information, and cast light on the possible gap between trustee effectiveness and students' successes at community colleges.

While there are limitations to each of the phases and the findings are not presented as generalizable, there is a robustness to this study because of the interpretive consistency from conducting each phase in the same research setting. While the California context has its unique attributes, it has proven a rich resource, and the ability to conduct research on trustees in the nation's largest higher education system is one from which future researchers may also benefit.

Chapter V. Phase 1 Findings: Content Analysis

The first phase of this dissertation was a qualitative content analysis of 40 documents from 22 community college districts in California, Guam, and American Samoa. As a result of this analysis, several dimensions of governance emerged in response to the question, "How do community college trustees envision and evaluate their own effectiveness?" In practical terms of evaluation processes used, several commonalities held among the college districts, as well as some notable differences. These are covered in the section immediately following. Next, I offer the dimensions that emerged to reveal what boards envision their role to be, and the processes, practices, and principles they may consider in executing and evaluating that role. These dimensions are bolded in this summative statement: *Effective community college governing boards practice **Board Skillship** so that they can fulfill their **Internal** and **External Institutional Responsibilities** through **Communication and Delegation***. In the next section, I note the characteristics of governing board evaluation processes identified through the closed coding process, Next, I offer explication on the dimensions that emerged beginning with open coding and through subsequent rounds of testing and refining of codes to reveal subcategories. I conclude this section of the chapter with observations on the complexity of the community college governing board's role.

Characteristics of Governing Board Evaluation Processes

As outlined in the methods chapter, this part of the analysis began with a closed coding process directed at understanding the nuts and bolts of board evaluation processes. I found that the college districts all follow unique processes for evaluating their boards, but there are some notable points of commonality. All districts included in the sample conducted board self-evaluations—that is, the board members evaluated the board as part of (or as the entire) process.

Some colleges included other parties in the process. but there was substantial variation among the colleges in terms of which non-trustee individuals were included, and whether they participated in the evaluation (that is, provided feedback) and/or helped in facilitating it (e.g., an institutional research office staff member might gather data, analyze that data, and format their findings in an evaluation report). These non-trustee individuals included employees from a district's institutional assessment department (three districts), external consultants (four districts), and college administrators (four districts). Some districts included members of the public, usually through sending community members a survey that was completed during the evaluation process (four districts). 18 of the districts indicated that they conducted their evaluations on an annual basis; others did not indicate frequency (three districts) and one indicated that their evaluation process follows a two-year cycle. Boards used a wide range of assessment instruments, though all included Likert scale questions meant to gauge a board's effectiveness across different domains. The number of questions used ranged from 14 to 61. 11 college districts divided their evaluation items into categories. Common categories included those focused on the following topics (representative examples of category titles used in the evaluation reports are included in parentheses):

- Mission (Mission/Vision, Mission, Mission and Planning)
- Trustee and board conduct (Personal Conduct, Board Ethics, Board Meetings (Interactions and Dynamics))
- Finance (Financial management of the district; Fiduciary Role)
- Board roles and responsibilities (Board Responsibilities; Policy Role)

- Relationship with LA/Staff (Effective working relationship with Superintendent/President; Relationship with the Chancellor; Human Resources and Staff Relations)
- Community (Representation of Community; Community Relations)
- Quality of Educational Institution (Institutional Effectiveness; Institutional Readiness for Student Success; Educational Programs and Quality)
- Board Effectiveness (Board Effectiveness; Board Strengths; Weaknesses and Areas for Improvement; Board Development and Operation; Board Performance Goals)

While these categories provide a useful sense of the kinds of topics covered in the assessment instruments, subsequent stages of analysis indicated that some categories fit within broader dimensions of board effectiveness. These dimensions are the subject of the sections that follow.

Board Skillship

The first core category revealed that community college boards consider several criteria that might be used to evaluate any kind of governing board. That is, effective community college boards must be effective boards; they must do “board work” well and adopt practices and processes that have been found useful in many board settings. Elements of board skillship identified included board and trustee conduct; board structural integrity; meetings and management of board time; board member orientation, development, and training; and board evaluation.

Board and Trustee Conduct

How trustees conduct themselves interpersonally is central to a board’s effectiveness. In my analysis, I found four elements of interpersonal conduct that boards consider when evaluating

themselves. Effective boards conduct themselves in alignment with their values, they navigate conflict effectively, they speak with one voice after a vote has been taken, and they comply with their own ethics and conflict of interest guidance documents.

There are several values that boards consider when assessing their effectiveness. Those found in the evaluation reports ranged from showing bare-minimum levels of respect—"Board members treat each other with courtesy" (Guam CCD) and "The collective demeanor of the board is poised and professional" (Guam CCD)—to personally costlier values like mutual trust among board members (College of the Redwoods CCD) and "maintain[ing] and strengthen[ing] a sense of team, including positive and supportive communication" (Barstow CCD). Some boards expressed aspiration to a high degree of commitment to shared values for their trustees (Foothill-De Anza CCD), including reflecting "a climate of trust and respect" (Coast CCD). An effective governing board demonstrates some shared values in their interpersonal conduct, which sets an important foundation for effective conflict navigation.

Multiple evaluation reports highlighted effective conflict navigation as an important element of board effectiveness. Are board members "able to disagree without being disagreeable" (Guam CCD)? Is there enough relational security on a board to "accommodate the differences of opinion that arise during debates of issues" (College of the Redwoods CCD)? How effective is the board chair at handling disagreements (College of the Redwoods CCD), and do discussions remain "free flowing with full opportunity and respect for divergent opinions of all participants" (Imperial Valley CCD)? The evaluation reports suggest that effective conflict management plays an important role for community college board effectiveness. However, an essential part of effective conflict management in the board setting is the ability to end it well—

that is, to adopt a “one voice” position once a vote has been taken, regardless of the conflict that preceded it.

A tool that should perhaps be presented to every new trustee as part of their orientation is the following phrase: “I support the decision the board has made.” These versatile words can be used with many different college stakeholders to convey that a trustee adheres to a “one voice” governance approach, meaning that once a decision has been made, every trustee on the board supports it, regardless of their own position prior to a vote being taken. Several evaluation instruments include language to this effect—“once a decision is made, Board members cease debate and uphold the decision of the Board” (College of the Redwoods CCD); the board “acts as a whole” (Foothill-De Anza CCD, Yosemite CCD); members “acknowledge that they are only part of a seven-member Board” (Yosemite CCD); a board “expresses its authority only as a unit,” (Coast CCD), understanding that they have no legal authority outside board meetings (Coast CCD). Board members expect themselves and their peers to act as a “collective entity” (Peralta CCD) and “abide by and support the final majority decision of the Board” (Foothill-De Anza CCD). Given the frequency of “one voice” language in evaluation instruments, one can understand why several boards also emphasize a board’s ability to work and act as a team.

The final sub-sub-category that emerged within the sub-category of board and trustee conduct was compliance with ethics and conflict of interest guidance documents. Where values-based survey items highlight positive actions or attributes to which trustees should aspire, compliance survey items emphasize behaviors should avoid. Effective boards enforce “an effective code of ethics and hold to it regardless of settings or situations” (Shasta-Tehama-Trinity CCD). Trustees “avoid conflicts of interest” (Coast CCD) and “annually file a statement of economic interests” (Coast CCD). An effective board “consistently follows its own Board

ethics policy," which it regularly reviews (Guam CCD). Board members maintain confidentiality of privileged information (Coast CCD; Guam CCD). One evaluation report indicated that board members should "only consider any opportunity for employment by [their college] district after one year upon leaving office" (Foothill-De Anza CCD). Board effectiveness, then, includes both positive actions and values, as well as negative behaviors that ought to be avoided.

Board Structural Integrity

Board effectiveness is not purely a product of trustees' individual and collective behavior. There are systemic elements that can promote good governance. These include the legitimacy and authority of board leadership, and the utility a board finds in its use of a committee structure.

Board leaders—especially the board chair—must be selected in a way that other board members understand and can support. This is connected to "one voice" governance, as the board chair is often the de facto public spokesperson for their board. For a chair to fulfill their role effectively, "Board members [must] respect the power of the Chair to speak for the Board as a whole" (Guam CCD), since "the Chair serves as the voice of the Board when dealing with the public and media" (College of the Redwoods CCD). Board members ought to have been "legally appointed/elected to their positions on the board" (Guam CCD), and the chair should be "selected through an open election process in which all qualifications for that office are given consideration" (Sierra Joint CCD). In the best of cases, a board may think beyond its present composition, affirming the need for a "mechanism for providing for continuity of Board membership" (Yosemite CCD).

Many boards use committees to carry out their governance work, whether those committees are standing or ad hoc. Surprisingly, few evaluation instruments include items

related to those committees' effectiveness. One outlier is Imperial Valley CCD, which includes assessment for whether board members serving on committees "meet established timelines in accomplishing their task assignments and report to the board." As board members update their self-assessment instruments, they may benefit from considering how to incorporate not only their behaviors and responsibilities, but the board structures they use to streamline their actions.

Meetings

While there are many actions effective boards may take and attributes they may display while taking them, there is officially one temporally bound setting where a board's work happens: in meetings. Thus, several boards include in their evaluations some assessment of the appropriateness of their meetings. Effective boards conduct their meetings in an "orderly, efficient" (Yosemite CCD) and "mutually respectful" (Marin CCD) manner. During meetings, board members "ask questions relevant to the item(s) under discussion" (Guam CCD). At a minimum, "board members attend board meetings" and "meetings begin on time" (Guam CCD). Individual trustees help their boards be effective by reviewing agenda materials and being prepared for board meetings (Imperial Valley CCD).

The manner in which meetings are conducted is not the only aspect of their role in board effectiveness; they must also be useful for those governing. Utility of meetings appeared as a topic in multiple evaluation reports. To contribute to board effectiveness, meetings should "provide sufficient opportunity to explore key issues" (Coast CCD), including "some education or interpretation time, if appropriate" (Imperial Valley CCD). Effective boards meet "sufficiently often to accomplish all of the business of the district and to afford the public access on important issues on a timely basis" (Imperial Valley CCD). The role of agendas must also be considered. Agendas should be "relevant to the work of the board" (College of the Redwoods CCD), but not

overfull with "too much information […] to digest or not enough detail to adequately familiarize board members [with] the issues" (Feather River CCD).

As a local government entity, community college governing boards in California are required to comply with the state's comprehensive sunshine law (the Ralph M. Brown Act, commonly shortened to the Brown Act). As a result, several evaluations include items to assess a board's effectiveness in the public meeting setting. An effective board should "function in a formal public setting" (Yosemite CCD). The board should "understand and adhere to the Brown Act" and "share information at public meetings" (Coast CCD). While complying with state law is obviously critical, effective boards also recognize the important opportunity their meetings create for public engagement; effective boards "welcome participation by members of the community at appropriate times designated on the agenda" (Guam CCD).

Board Member Orientation and Development

No one is born a community college trustee, and effective boards recognize the value of orienting new members to their role. Aspects of orientation are not delineated, but several evaluation reports indicate the importance of orientation in general. Effective boards have "good procedures for orientation and training of new board members" (College of the Redwoods CCD) and "orient new members as soon as possible after they have been sworn in as trustees" (Guam CCD).

Effective boards also support ongoing development for all their members to promote continued improvement. They might encourage "all members to participate periodically in seminars, conferences, and board retreats" (Sierra Joint CCD), "strengthening [their] knowledge and capacities as trustees" (Marin CCD). One evaluation instrument goes so far as to prescribe a "professional development plan" for the board (Yosemite CCD). Some boards direct their

development efforts at specific initiatives, like accreditation (Guam CCD) or the use of data and research (College of the Redwoods CCD). Related to board member orientation and development is regular board evaluation.

Board Evaluation

Most boards that highlight board evaluation in their assessment instruments do so in a "box-checking" manner. Effective boards "conduct an annual board evaluation" (Imperial Valley CCD), and "regularly participate in self-assessments (College of the Redwoods CCD). The fact that these questions are structured to indicate a yes or no response is not necessarily a problem—like an annual physical, the act of evaluation itself may be an important form of preventative maintenance. Some boards do include some assessment of the utility of their evaluation process. A board evaluation may be judged effective based on whether the "results are used to improve board performance, academic quality, and institutional effectiveness" (Peralta CCD). Some boards use their evaluation processes as an opportunity to check their progress on the goals they have set as a board (Coast CCD).

The practice of board skillship is not simple or straightforward. While many of the topics highlighted in this section could be common to many types of governing boards, the community college provides a rich context for trustees to further develop their board skillship regardless of the other types of boards on which they may have served. Positive interpersonal conduct, legitimized board leadership and systems, well-run meetings, and ongoing opportunities for board development and evaluation are critical to the effective governance of community colleges. These foundational aspects should be in place as boards carry out the governance duties specific to community colleges.

Internal Institutional Responsibilities

Community college governing boards fulfill many responsibilities for their colleges. Some of these responsibilities are internal to the college district. Board members, in partnership with stakeholders internal to the institution, perform several functions critical to the colleges' functioning. These include policy development and maintenance, functional responsibilities fulfilled with the institution, and holding the institution accountable.

Policy Development and Maintenance

Several boards include in their evaluations some assessment of how effectively they fulfill their policy-making role. Effective boards maintain their "authority over and responsibility for policies" (Peralta CCD), as well as their independence as policy-making bodies (Peralta CCD). They review their policies regularly (Shasta-Tehama-Trinity CCD, Santa Barbara CCD, Guam CCD), and ensure their policies specify board "size; duties; responsibilities; structure; and operating procedures" (Shasta-Tehama-Trinity CCD, Peralta CCD).

There is also an emphasis in several evaluations on the board's "policy role" in opposition to (or at least, tension with) other possible roles a board might have. Boards are to "understand that [their] primary function is to establish [..] policies" (College of the Redwoods CCD) and to focus on policy rather than "administrative" matters or operations (College of the Redwoods CCD, Los Angeles CCD). Effective boards "clearly understand [their] policy role" (Coast CCD), and "differentiate [that] role from that of the CEO and college employees" (Guam CCD).

While much is made of the board's "policy role," there is little in the evaluation reports to illuminate what the policies might contain, or to evaluate the content of the policies. However, some boards do include assessment of their policies' match with their district's mission (Yosemite CCD, Santa Barbara CCD, Peralta CCD, Sierra Joint CCD) and values (Barstow

CCD). There is also a focus from some boards on the utility of policies—for example, one board includes a survey item to assess whether the board "relies on board policy in making decisions" (Coast CCD). Overall, though, there is little evaluation of the explicit content of policies, and instead a general focus on ensuring boards fulfill their policy role, as opposed to other, ostensibly inappropriate roles a board might be taking on.

Stewardship of Other Guiding Documents

In addition to policies, there are other guiding documents that boards are responsible for developing, reviewing, and maintaining, typically in partnership with college administrators. These include mission statements (College of the Redwoods CCD, Sierra Joint CCD, Foothill-De Anza CCD, Marin CCD, Yosemite CCD, Imperial Valley CCD), formalized goals, (College of the Redwoods CCD, Sierra Joint CCD, Imperial Valley CCD), vision statements (Yosemite CCD), and strategic plans and other planning documents (Marin CCD, Yosemite CCD, Barstow CCD, Coast CCD, Imperial Valley CCD). Some assessment instruments include assessment of how well a board's actions are linked to an institution's mission and goals (College of the Redwoods CCD) or how well different guiding documents are aligned—e.g., "Board goals align with institutional goals and objectives" (Sierra Joint CCD). Boards may be expected to "understand the complex nature" of a district's mission (Yosemite CCD) and "connection mission, vision, and strategic plan to the budget" (Marin CCD). The evaluation reports seem to make clear that boards maintain responsibility for the mission of a college district—but how this happens, and with the input of which stakeholders, remains murky.

Internal Functional Responsibilities

In addition to developing and maintaining policies and other guiding documents, boards also are responsible for action in key functional areas requiring long-term planning. These include facilities and construction, faculty and staff engagement, and the budget process.

While boards are typically not involved with facilities and construction in detailed ways, they are expected to be involved in construction bond processes (Yosemite CCD) and the planning and implementation of facilities master plans (Yosemite CCD). They may also be expected to promote utilization for certain district facilities, like performing arts venues or fitness centers (Barstow CCD).

Similar to the high-level approach boards are expected to take on facilities matters, clear parameters are delineated in evaluation reports for how boards should engage faculty and staff. Effective boards are expected to understand and follow parameters for collective negotiations with faculty unions (Sierra Joint CCD, Coast CCD) and to understand and ensure the implementation of participatory governance (Foothill-De Anza CCD, Yosemite CCD). In one instance, a board's "policy role" is linked to this functional area, as the board is expected to ensure that "Human resources policies provide for fair and equitable treatment of staff" (Coast CCD). Boards may also "encourage" (but notably, not compel) certain behaviors from faculty members, like participation in college graduations and the implementation of a reporting procedure and format for faculty sabbaticals (Yosemite CCD).

Perhaps the most significant functional area for governing boards in terms of attention given in board evaluations is the budget process. As several reports make clear, there is an expectation that boards maintain their fiduciary responsibility to the colleges, which appears to mean something like ensuring a balanced budget and appropriate fiscal practices district-wide. In a manner congruent with the other areas of functional responsibility, an effective board's finance

purview is oversight. Effective boards “authorize” (Los Angeles CCD) and “monitor” (Marin CCD) budget allotments and fiscal integrity. They maintain “ultimate responsibility” for financial integrity (Santa Barbara CCD) and should have “adequate and appropriate knowledge of” (Santa Barbara CCD) and be “informed about (Yosemite CCD) fiscal matters. In rare instances, a board may be expected to “maintain” (Barstow CCD) fiscal integrity or an adequate financial reserve (Coast CCD). In one instance, a board is expected to ensure that financial resources support “academic programs and student services [...] at a level that promotes quality, integrity, and improvement” (Feather River CCD). Sometimes, board effectiveness is linked to a notion of fiscal conservatism—a board should “invest [...] resources on items or initiatives of high value and rarely waste money” (Feather River CCD) or maintain adequate financial reserves (Yosemite CCD, Coast CCD). In most cases, the evaluation reports suggest that boards see their appropriate financial management role as one of oversight. This is closely linked to what may be a board’s most important internal institutional responsibility—holding its college district accountable.

Holding the Institution Accountable

Throughout the evaluation reports, there is a strong sense that board effectiveness entails remaining “high-level”—fulfilling the policy role, stewarding high-level, direction-setting documents, and approving and monitoring district budgets. Yet nowhere does this link between effectiveness and a high-level approach appear stronger than in assessment elements highlighting a board’s responsibility to hold its institution accountable. Effective boards do this in four primary ways: monitoring institutional progress, supporting student-focused initiatives and programs, participating in the accreditation process, and promoting the interests of community constituents.

If effective boards, as governance approaches like PGM (Carver, 1990) have purported, do not get involved in day-to-day administration of college districts, then what work does trusteeship entail? Based on the evaluation reports, a significant portion of it is monitoring institutional progress (and, one imagines, compelling organizational action through the lead administrator when progress stagnates). Trustees review various areas of institutional action as part of this monitoring—key indicators of student learning (Feather River CCD, Peralta CCD), student outcomes (Barstow CCD), academic programs (Foothill-De Anza CCD), annual goals and priorities (Coast CCD), implementation of policy (Foothill-De Anza CCD), and implementation of strategic, educational and facilities master plans (Coast CCD). Some boards are intentional about reviewing data as part of this effort—for example, Marin CCD tasks its board with "Utilizing a comprehensive integrated approach in monitoring and ensuring accountability for student success, SLOs [that is, student learning outcomes], institutional effectiveness and other metrics." Other boards take a more nebulous approach—Foothill-De Anza CCD's board sets the expectation that the board will "ensure quality teaching," while Coast CCD's board should "assure the district complies with relevant laws, regulations and accreditation standards," though one wonders how, precisely, boards might accomplish these tasks without overstepping their prescribed roles.

One key area in which boards monitor institutional progress and ensure accountability is through their participation in the accreditation progress. Trustees are expected to be informed of accreditation standards (Feather River CCD, College of the Redwoods CCD, Peralta CCD), and to be involved in the accreditation process in appropriate ways (Yosemite CCD, Barstow CCD, Coast CCD). As has been pointed out already, completing regular board self-evaluations is one

of the most obvious ways in which boards do this, but they are also expected to ensure other college areas are meeting accreditation benchmarks to prevent sanctions or loss of accreditation.

Arguably the most important way a board holds its institution accountable is through its support of students and initiatives dedicated to their success. It would be easy to elide students from the board evaluation process, asserting that these boards govern colleges, so therefore everything they do is obviously about supporting students. Instead, though, several assessment instruments highlight students' success explicitly. Several boards emphasize a key focus on students—effective boards base decisions on "the best interest of students" (Los Angeles CCD) or "what is best for the students" (Yosemite CCD). Several governing boards hold their institutions accountable through thorough review of specific student success data. Marin CCD's board utilizes "a comprehensive, integrated approach in monitoring and ensuring accountability for student success, SLOs, institutional effectiveness and other metrics." Sometimes, student outcomes are linked to specific board goals—at College of the Redwoods CCD) the board sought to address student success and equity at the institution in the past year "through [Institutional Research] information, by getting feedback from the administration, and by asking questions relative to student success" as well as through having members attend workshops and review reports. Yosemite CCD's board maintains a focus on "Quality, integrity, and improvement of student learning programs and services and the resources necessary to support them." While there are many things a board may do, effective boards keep at the forefront the key stakeholder their institutions serve—students.

While students may be the key stakeholder for colleges, boards also represent community members—specifically, the constituents in their communities who (throughout California and in other settings) elect them. While trustees serve as an important bridge between their college

district and their communities, one mode by which they hold their districts accountable is by voicing community concerns and ensuring alignment between college offerings and community needs. Effective boards spend time “learning about the concerns of the communities” (Feather River CCD) and “improv[ing] [their] relationship[s] with the communities that are served” (Feather River CCD). They “effectively listen to and communicate local concerns” (Shasta-Tehama-Trinity CCD) and assure that “district plans are responsive to community needs” (Coast CCD). They might insist on college action to meet certain community goals—for example, by “expect[ing] continued focus on developing a diverse and excellent workforce” (Barstow CCD). An effective board “reflects the public interest in the institution” (Santa Barbara CCD), “act[s] on behalf of the public and citizens in the district when making decisions” (Coast CCD) and “represent[s] the community it serves as elected officials” (Marin CCD). Part of holding their institutions accountable involves representing the outside and lay perspective of the local community.

Admittedly, the internal responsibilities boards have to their college districts create a certain tension—boards exist officially as part of their institutions, maintaining ultimate responsibility for the districts they govern. Concurrently, they are expected to hold back from daily administration, offering oversight but not execution. They are to make decisions in the best interest of students and other internal stakeholders, while also representing the interests of community members external to the institution. As we will see in later sections, this tension reappears, but does not cleanly resolve.

External Institutional Responsibilities

Just as community college boards are expected to represent community members’ interests to their institutions, there are many ways in which effective boards represent the

interests of their institutions to external stakeholders. These include showing support for their institution, fulfilling functional responsibilities external to their institutions, and leveraging their external relationships for their institutions' benefit.

Showing Institutional Support

Similar to the "one voice" manner in which all trustees are expected to support decisions their board has made through a majority vote, effective community college boards show support for the institutions they govern. They do this in two main ways: holding, modeling and promoting institutional values; and supporting specific institutional initiatives.

In the community college context, there are certain values that may not be familiar to members of communities in which colleges serve. Part of effective governance is having board members who hold, model, and promote those values to all college stakeholders, including external ones. One of these values is academic freedom—effective trustees "understand and protect academic freedom" (Coast CCD) as well as "student academic honesty, and specific institutional beliefs" (Peralta CCD). Additionally, an effective board may "foster and support a climate of academic excellence" (Santa Barbara CCD) and help show by their example that "teaching and learning are deeply valued" (Foothill-De Anza CCD). Other values important to many institutions include those related to reflective representation and equity for all students served. An effective board may seek to represent a college where "cultural diversity is celebrated" and the "worth and dignity of each individual is celebrated (Foothill-De Anza CCD) and encourage hiring and enrollment strategies to reflect the "ethnic and cultural diversity of the community" (Los Angeles CCD) the college serves. This may also translate to encouraging certain teaching practices—for example, the board at Los Angeles CCD "encourages the

development of curricula that impact the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the various ethnic groups represented in the District's student body".

One board, Barstow CCD, reifies institutional support from the board through the board's support of specific initiatives. These include supporting a comprehensive enrollment management plan and advance emergency planning and preparedness, as well as a comprehensive student achievement recognition program (Barstow CCD). Tying board support of their institution(s) to specific initiatives may be a useful practice for two reasons—communicating board support to the broader, often external public, and indirectly holding institutions accountable for making progress toward agreed-upon goals.

External Functional Responsibilities

Several external institutional responsibilities may seem nebulous, but there are three that likely would be familiar to trustees who have served on other boards (especially those in the public sector). These include legislative advocacy, public and media relations, and fundraising.

Effective boards have trustees who advocate effectively for their institutions and for the community college sector. They stay "involved in state and federal legislative matters" (Sierra Joint CCD) as well as local governments (Coast CCD) and "support increased funding for the colleges" (Yosemite CCD). They stay "up-to-date with changes in laws and government regulations" (Los Angeles CCD) and "defend the interests of the colleges and students within the political arena" (Los Angeles CCD). Part of effective advocacy is relationship management, and this is reflected in some evaluation reports. At Guam CCD, "the Board plans with the President how to best develop and maintain relationships with local state, and federal legislators for the benefit of the College", and at Barstow CCD, the district "expect[s] and support[s] Board

members' involvement in the local community and in state and national activities that promote district interests".

Closely linked to advocacy is the public and media relations work trustees do. Effective trustees cooperate with media outlets (Yosemite CCD, Los Angeles CCD) to promote a positive image of their college district (Yosemite CCD, Imperial Valley CCD). They remain cognizant of the fact that "their demeanor is part of the College's public image" (Guam CCD). There is some ambiguity, though, as to how trustees are to engage with news outlets. Los Angeles CCD, for example, encourages all trustees to "support efforts to ensure dissemination of complete and accurate information about the colleges," but College of the Redwoods CCD indicates in their evaluation that "the Chair serves as the voice of the Board when dealing with the public and media". While this ambiguity is not clearly resolved in these data, my expectation is that the preferred approach to media relations likely differs based on the kind of information being disseminated. It seems unlikely a board would take issue with any trustee sharing positive information, but would prefer that public comments on contentious decisions be left to the chair. Another possibility is that in highly effective boards, where trustees speak with "one voice" and represent a united front when speaking publicly, limiting media relations to the board chair is not necessary, and such limitation is implemented for punitive effect.

The final external functional responsibility that came up in the reports was fundraising. While no boards clarified set fundraising amount requirements or expected contribution ranges from trustees, boards are expected to actively support their district's foundation goals and fundraising efforts (Yosemite CCD, Coast CCD) and "actively solicit private sector and donor support" (Yosemite CCD).

Leveraging External Relationships

Community college governing boards have historically been the lay leaders of their districts. They are not professional educators in their governing role, regardless of whatever experience as educators they may have in other areas of their lives. This aspect of their governance legitimizes trustees as liaisons between colleges and their communities. A key role that boards fulfill for their colleges is leveraging their relationships external to the college district in a way that improves the district's position in the community in some meaningful way. Two threads emerged that explicate how trustees do this. First, they serve as bridges between the college and its external stakeholders, and second, they promote the interests of the college to external stakeholders through means additional to the external functional responsibilities highlighted in the previous subsection.

Bridging the gap between colleges and external stakeholders is an important role for trustees—it is also one that can be fraught with peril. The board at Sierra Joint CCD probably best articulates the delicate space boards occupy as they seek to "balance the interest of special interest groups versus the welfare of the District." This language acknowledges that boards have responsibilities to stakeholders both internal and external to the college. Other ways in which boards bridge these two sets of stakeholders are through remaining active in community affairs (Coast CCD), maintaining contact with community organizations (Los Angeles CCD), assuring that district plans are responsive to community needs (Coast CCD), and increasing partnerships with the K-12 education sector and local business community (Yosemite CCD). Effective boards "act as a community bridge" (Foothill-De Anza CCD), helping to manage the relationship between the college district and the communities it serves.

While there are multiple ways in which board members speak for external stakeholders, they are of course also most effective when they promote the interests of the college. As noted with respect to public and media relations, effective boards "work to promote and enhance the image of the college in the community" (Imperial Valley CCD) and promote a positive reputation for their institution among concerned stakeholders (Feather River CCD). There's also a sense, though, in which effective trustees absorb the impact of unwarranted attacks on the college. Sierra Joint CCD expects its board members to "handle complaints about the college," while trustees at Peralta CCD should "protect [the district] from undue influence or political pressure". Santa Barbara CCD's report indicates that an effective board "advocates for and defends the institution". Effective boards manage relationships with external relationships in a productive manner, but are also willing to go to the mat for their institutions when needed.

Thus far, the findings from this content analysis have shown that boards practice board skillship to fulfill responsibilities both internal and external to the districts they serve. One tension that has come up is the question of who trustees work for—is their primary responsibility to colleges, the students those colleges serve, or the constituents who elect the trustees? Community college governing boards exist in this space where they are expected to balance all three, and how they do this effectively is the subject of the next section—through communication and delegation.

Communication and Delegation

Given the many stakeholders to whom trustees are answerable, and the varied responsibilities board hold, their effectiveness in managing their relationships is critical to their overall effectiveness. One of the main categories that emerged in the evaluation reports was communication and delegation—the extent to which a board communicates and delegates well

largely determines how well it fulfills its responsibilities. Within this dimension, two subcategories emerged—the board's relationship with its lead administrator; and the quality, direction, and flow of information.

Relationship with Lead Administrator

A board's relationship with its lead administrator is a recurring subject in evaluation reports. A board's effectiveness appears rooted in the board's ability to delegate appropriately to its lead administrator, and to differentiate the lead administrator's role from its own. Effective boards also take a posture of accountability and support toward their lead administrators.

As language in the evaluation reports delineates the board's "policy-making role," it also differentiates the board role from the lead administrators. Boards are to "delegate full responsibility and authority to the [lead administrator] to implement and administer board policies" (Feather River CCD), refraining from getting "too involved in making decisions about operational details that ought to be made by management" (Feather River CCD). Like the report for Feather River CCD, multiple other colleges use the language of "full responsibility and authority" (Peralta CCD, Santa Barbara CCD), while Marin CCD's report contains slightly softer language: there, the board "appropriately delegate[s] responsibility and authority". Some boards demonstrate their understanding of their policy role through the manner in which they phrase their survey items on this subject—at Los Angeles CCD, the board "establishes policies and guidelines for the Chancellor in [their] administration of the District," while at Guam CCD, "The Board focuses on ends in making policy and leaves the implementation to the President" and at College of the Redwoods CCD, the board "focuses on policy in Board discussions, not administrative matters". There's a strong emphasis on boards not managing (Feather River CCD, Coast CCD) with some evaluations using the charged term micromanaging: trustees "gather

information independently without making unilateral decisions or micromanaging" (Yosemite CCD); a board "delegates administrative matters to the [lead administrator] and refrains from micromanaging the college" (Guam CCD).

If effective boards delegate authority and management responsibility to their lead administrators, how do they hold them accountable to the direction the board has set? According to the evaluation reports, accountability is an important component of the board/lead administrator relationship. Boards are to hold their lead administrators accountable (Feather River CCD, Santa Barbara CCD) and the primary way in which they do this is through an evaluation process (Peralta CCD, Foothill-De Anza CCD, Yosemite CCD, Coast CCD, Imperial Valley CCD, Guam CCD). By conducting regular (usually annual) evaluations of their lead administrators, boards can course-correct the board/lead administrator relationship. But doing so effectively requires an overall posture of support for the lead administrator.

The final thread that emerged with respect to the board/lead administrator is that of support. In general, boards are more effective if they desire a positive relationship with their lead administrator and take steps to develop and maintain such a relationship. Multiple evaluation reports include as a survey item measuring the extent to which the board "maintains a positive working relationship" with the lead administrator (Coast CCD, Guam CCD) with others using language to similar effect: "strong, effective working relationship" (Marin CCD); "strong [lead administrator]/board partnership" (Barstow CCD); "positive and supportive communication between trustees and the CEO" (Barstow CCD); "maintain a climate of mutual trust and support between the Board and the [lead administrator" (Yosemite CCD); and "there is a high level of trust and respect between the Board and the [lead administrator]" (Guam CCD). Notably, only one report in the dataset touches on the balance boards may have to strike in their relationship

with the lead administrator, as with every other relationship they hold as a board. At College of the Redwoods CCD, the board is expected to "be sensitive to the concerns of students and employees while maintaining impartiality and support for the [lead administrator]". Implicit in this posture of support is the fact that the board holds ultimate authority over the lead administrator's employment status. Scholars and practitioners have expressed concern over the short tenures of lead administrators (e.g., Birnbaum, 1989; Navarette, 2018) and conflicts with the board have been cited as a primary reason for these tenures (Westover, 2016). How can boards support their lead administrators without forfeiting their responsibility to hold these individuals accountable? This question is the subject of discussion in later phases of this study.

If the board/lead administrator relationship is to be a healthy and productive one, the content analysis reports indicate it takes an appropriate balance of support and accountability, of delegation and direction. One wonders, though, if scholars are correct to put the responsibility for dysfunction in this relationship primarily on the board's dais. Relationships—especially ones where trust is vital—are a two-way street. Appropriately, then, the final dimension in the content analysis relates to what travels on that street—the quality, direction, and flow of information boards access and receive to facilitate their governance.

Quality, Direction, and Flow of Information

There are several types of information boards need to govern effectively, and several different sources through which they access that information. As may be expected based on the findings on a board's relationship with its lead administrator, a significant portion of a board's communication happens with and through its lead administrator. Effective boards also follow communication protocols, access information of an appropriate quality and quantity, and use the information they receive to govern.

As their primary employee within a college district, a board is expected to “communicate regularly and openly” (Yosemite CCD) with their lead administrator. In response, lead administrators should “follow the rule of ‘no surprises’ by informing Board members as soon as possible about important matters concerning the College, its students and its employees” (Guam CCD). Related to the manner in which effective boards are to delegate management responsibilities to their lead administrators, boards are to keep their lead administrators informed about communications with other stakeholders. As Yosemite CCD’s report indicates, its board is expected to “Inform the chancellor of significant contacts by students, community members, faculty or staff that may have a bearing on District policy decisions”. Thus, boards primary point of communication regarding their college district is their lead administrator.

Community college governance is not characterized by free-flowing communication with all stakeholders. Several evaluation reports indicate that boards should follow designated communication protocols as part of their role. Trustee should “follow protocols regarding communication with college employees” (Coast CCD), “communicate through appropriate channels” (Foothill-De Anza CCD) and channel received concerns (Los Angeles CCD). While boards should “encourage open lines of communication between the District and the colleges” (Yosemite CCD), those lines should also be structured: Imperial Valley CCD’s board “reviews and implements established process for two-way communication with its constituencies”. There’s a sense of formality with respect to trustees’ communication, and not just in public meeting settings. Trustee communication is constricted to certain channels and approaches.

Boards are responsible for accessing information of appropriate quantity and quality to ensure they can govern well. There’s some variation among evaluation reports as to where the onus of accessing information falls, though. For example, an effective board might “gather

information independently" (Yosemite CCD), but it might also need to "receive adequate information" from others (Yosemite CCD). Trustees should read their board agendas and other informational documents provided to them (Los Angeles CCD), but they should also be given "the right kind of information" (Feather River CCD) so that they can be "adequately informed" (College of the Redwoods CCD). There may be ambiguity about what kind of information is the right kind—at Barstow CCD, the board is working on "continu[ing] to clarify the need for information required for board decision-making." Regardless of whether trustees actively solicit information from varied sources or it is provided to them by district staff, effective boards get the information they need to make the decisions they must.

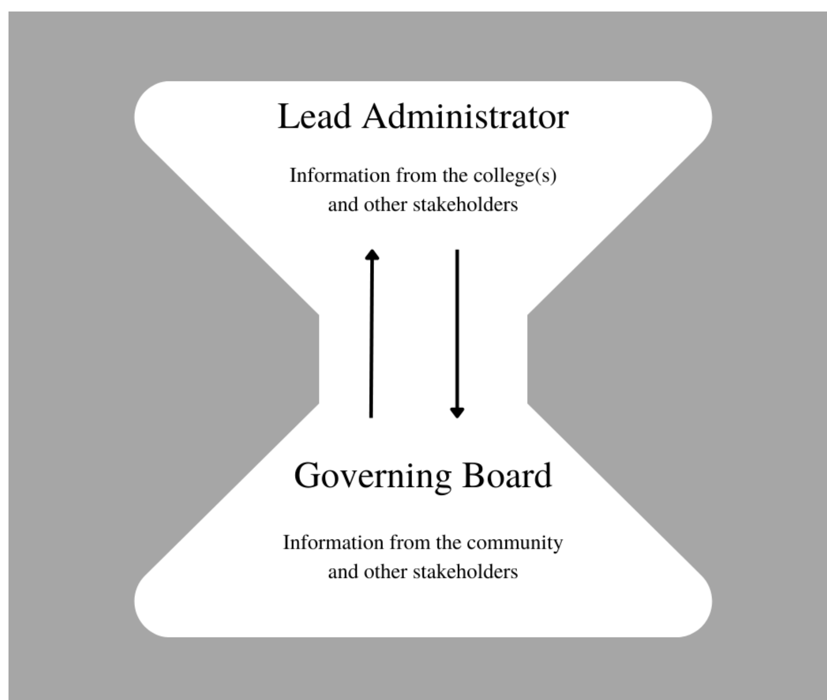
The quality and utility of information boards receive is the final sub-category that emerged in this category. Through whatever means individual trustees access information, the value of that information is how well it supports board decision-making and action. Overwhelmingly, the information boards highlight in their evaluation reports is related to student success. Boards review "key indicators of student learning" (ID 1; Peralta CCD), they are "kept informed with instructional program decisions in terms of what is best for students" (Yosemite CCD); they make "decisions about budget allocations [..] based evidence of program effectiveness and linked to plans to increase rates of student success" (College of the Redwoods CCD). One board gestures toward the accountability and communication in their board/lead administrator relationship: "The Board expects, and the President provides, regular reports on disaggregated student outcomes and uses the results to modify policy" (College of the Redwoods CCD). Another element of information utility is how boards use the information more generally. Foothill-De Anza CCD's board expects its trustees to "base personal decisions upon all available facts," while Los Angeles CCD's board "considers all pertinent background information in

making policy decisions." There's a sense of both needing to use the right information, and needing to use it well.

The quality of information boards access should be sufficient to inform their decisions. The direction of information varies based on the kind of information—data and other institutional indicators come from administrative staff to the board, with the lead administrator's input and/or (at minimum) awareness. Complaints or concerns from college stakeholders to the board are to be shared with the lead administrator, and the lead administrator is in turn responsible for keeping the board informed of major developments. Thus, the flow of information for community college boards is, to a certain extent, constricted, as it is to be passed through the board/lead administrator relationship, which serves as a kind of bidirectional funnel. This communication model is represented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Communication Between the Governing Board and Lead Administrator



In this image, the governing board is below the lead administrator not to indicate a top-down organizational hierarchy (in which case, the board would be at the top anyway), but rather to indicate the supportive posture effective boards take toward their lead administrators and, more broadly, the institutions they govern.

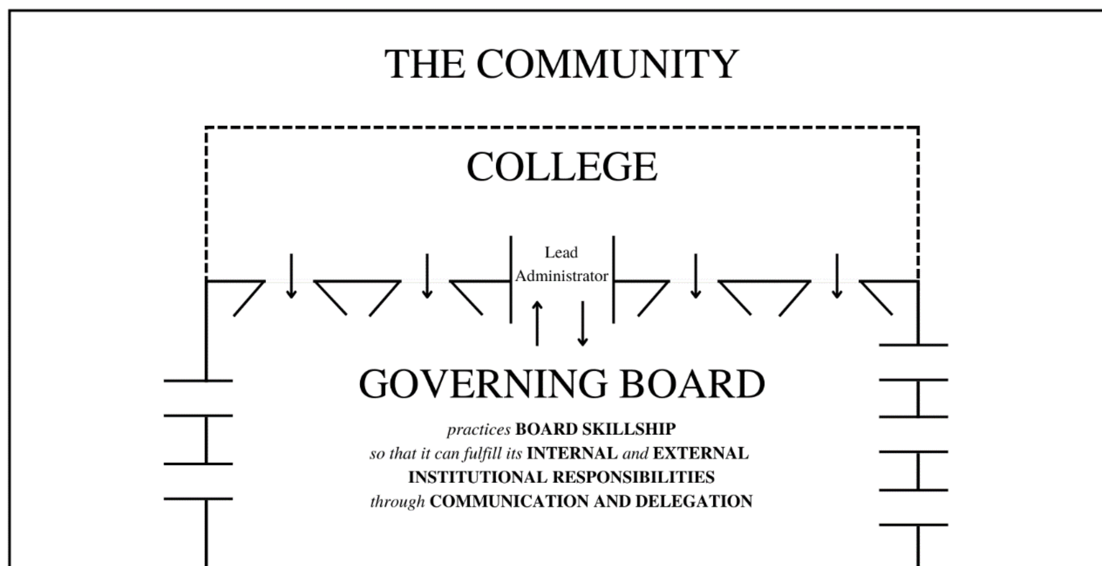
Content Analysis Findings: Conclusion

All boards in the dataset complete a self-assessment as part of their evaluation process. Self-assessments vary in length and categories assessed, but they all include Likert-scale questions where trustees are asked to indicate their degree of agreement with a statement on governance in their district. After analyzing board evaluation reports and ISER accreditation documents, I found that community college governing boards practice board skillship so that they can fulfill their internal and external institutional responsibilities through communication and delegation.

Figure 3 represents a framework for understanding board effectiveness based on the content analysis findings.

Figure 3

Framework for Governing Board Effectiveness



In this model, the college and the governing board that supports it are both embedded in the local community. The college's boundaries are porous; many stakeholders are connected to it and come to it from different paths and for varied purposes. For the governing board, though, access to the college is limited. They are directed to primarily liaise with the college through their lead administrator, though they may receive informational reports from other staff members or departments, as indicated by the gaps with "shutters" that may close (presumably at the lead administrator's direction). In contrast, board members are permitted no such shutters in their interactions with their community—board meetings are public by mandate, and board members remain individual board members when the board is not in session.

Board skillship, the practices and processes foundational to effective governance in most board contexts, is an important prerequisite for effective governing boards in the community college sector. Trustees must be committed to interacting with each other in an appropriate and productive manner; they should have leadership structures within their board that they trust and

use well; they should conduct meetings appropriately, and orient new trustees while ensuring ongoing development and evaluation for the full board.

Board skillship sets the foundation for board effectiveness. But at what, precisely, should community college governing boards be effective? The answer is fulfilling internal and external institutional responsibilities. Internal responsibilities include policy development and maintenance, stewardship of other guiding documents, functional responsibilities like approving the budget and overseeing facilities planning, and holding their institutions accountable. External responsibilities include showing institutional support, fulfilling external functional responsibilities like public relations and advocacy, and leveraging relationships external to the college district. The means through which this work is done is communication and delegation. Effective boards must navigate a delicate balance, liaising between their colleges and their communities. They source the information they need to make the decisions they must, and they support their lead administrators and institutions while holding them accountable.

No part of the board job is easy, whatever attempts have been made to simplify it. Boards must navigate and appease many masters along the way to serving students, but they must also never forget that they have ultimate responsibility and authority for their college districts. Board effectiveness must begin not with an oversimplification of the board role, but with an honest assessment of its scope. For that assessment, we now turn to the perspectives of trustees themselves.

Chapter VI. Phase 2 Findings: Qualitative Interviews

The second phase of this dissertation was a qualitative analysis of 14 interviews with community college trustees representing eight community college districts. This phase of the study explored the first two research questions: (1) How do community college trustees envision and evaluate their effectiveness, and (2) How do community college trustees cultivate their individual effectiveness, and the effectiveness of their boards? As a result of this analysis, six themes emerged. These themes, the research question they relate to, and their definitions are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Themes from Qualitative Interviews

Research Question	Theme	Definition
1	Effective trustees embrace their authority	Effective trustees understand the power and authority that comes with their role and are willing to leverage it for what they view as the district's best interests. They are willing to be courageous in their pursuit of what they believe to be right.
1	Effective trustees practice humility	Effective trustees have a sense that they must learn a great deal about the community college sector. They approach their role with a desire to learn and grow, and they appreciate and take advantage of opportunities to do so.
1	Effective boards hold others accountable, and are accountable to others	Effective boards foster a culture of accountability with themselves, their lead administrators, and their institutions. They recognize their responsibilities to many different stakeholder groups, and they create processes to ensure they are fulfilling those responsibilities.
1	Effective boards provide support.	Effective boards have a shared enthusiasm for the missions of their institutions, and they show support for those missions in several ways. These can be formal ways, like resolutions in support of particular programs or student groups, and informal ways, like

		speaking warmly about their lead administrators.
2	Trustees cultivate effectiveness through individual trustee training.	To cultivate their effectiveness, trustees take advantage as individuals of learning opportunities focused on community college sector content. These opportunities can take the form of conference sessions, online modules, and pursuing certification through CCLC's Excellence in Trusteeship Program (ETP).
2	Boards cultivate their effectiveness through whole-board development sessions.	To cultivate board effectiveness, boards engage in activities focused on their development as group or team in shared settings. Examples include retreats, team-building sessions, and discussions as part of the board evaluation process.

While I describe each of the themes in greater detail in the rest of this chapter, it is important to note here that the themes that emerged in response to the first research question were not viewed by respondents to be contradictory. For example, trustees did not seem to view humility and authority as attitudes or postures at odds with one another; they would describe how effective trustees leveraged considerable political connections while learning about a higher education sector they had little background knowledge of as though, as one respondent put it, "drinking through a firehose." Similarly, the idea that a board could be deeply supportive of their institution while holding it accountable was expressed with enthusiasm.

In contrast, cultivating individual trustee effectiveness was spoken of very differently than cultivating board effectiveness. Trustee training emphasized developing content expertise, while cultivating board effectiveness was centered on relationship-building within the board. In the findings that follow, I describe the distinction between trustee effectiveness and board effectiveness that appeared. While these areas certainly overlap, participants did not speak of them as the same entity.

I conclude this section with discussion of an integrated framework that reflects the interview findings and begins making sense of both trustee and board effectiveness in community colleges.

Theme 1: Effective Trustees Embrace Their Authority

Effective trustees understand and embrace the authority that comes with their role. In the participants' California context, they are all elected officials who bring rich and varied experiences to their trusteeship. To be effective, they must possess and cultivate political skill, including valuable political connections. Trustees are not shrinking violets. Those who embrace their authority are capable of and willing to leverage it when they judge necessary—at times, to an excessive level, as in the case of rogue trustees. When managed well, though, a high degree of authority can be a productive and beneficial trait for trustees.

Trustee Authority as Based in Experience

Trustees bring to their boards diverse experiences that influence their governance role. This diversity is represented in their experience serving on other boards, their previous experience with the community college sector, other professional experiences, and experiences as members and representatives of different cultural groups. Several participants emphasized the importance of having a board that represents diverse perspectives and backgrounds for the sake of reaching better board decisions. The experiences trustees bring to their community college role give them the confidence to ask relevant, important questions; participate in and/or chair board meetings effectively; and value the experiences of their fellow trustees.

In speaking of their prior board experience, trustees commented on their knowledge of "board process" and ability to navigate the procedural elements of board governance. All of the other boards referenced were either public governance boards, including city councils, K-12

school boards, county boards of education, and public utility boards; nonprofit boards, including foundations; and boards related to the 4-year higher education sector, including student government and alumni boards. Several participants had held other elected offices. One trustee shared how his previous experience on a parks and recreation board had prepared him for his community college trustee role:

> [W]hen you're a new board member, oftentimes, you don't know what your responsibilities are. And you don't know the process of getting things accomplished. So in the park and rec board, that's where I had to learn the hard way how to be an effective board member. So when I got to the college board, I was experienced on how to be more effective and how to work together in order to carry out our mission.

Another participant shared how a fellow trustee with robust board experience had prompted positive changes in a board that was floundering from a process perspective. Speaking of his board's outgoing chair, he explained,

> [S]he had done three or four terms at the school board. So she was super experienced in [the community's] local politics and in running meetings. She came in and fixed a lot. I mean, she came in and said, "This is weird. Why are you guys doing this? No one does this. This is weird. This is weird. This is bad." And she seriously changed a lot of things and [when she] became board president [she] was very calm, ran the best meetings [...] And because our meetings used to be chaotic, eight hours long, just pure chaos, she came in and reined it all in as our board president. So everyone loves that [...] [T]hat was a big problem, I guess, our board had, is everyone who was on it, except one, had no elected experience ever [...] Only one did [...] [The board president] adjusted a lot of our quirks that needed to be adjusted.

Prior board experience allows trustees to engage in community college board governance with a sense of orientation, of how things are supposed to go in a board meeting. Furthermore, as in the case noted above, it empowers them to serve on boards with confidence. One former community college trustee reflected on his experience being supported by his fellow board members to run for a statewide leadership position with CCLC:

> It helped me to realize that good board members can operate anywhere. And so as a board member, if I with a BA from a minor college could get on the [CCLC] board and be considered by the people on the board to be a really good board member who they

> enjoyed working with, it gave me confidence to leave that board and go to another water [agency] board and then become president of the statewide water association. So I think it's, all of a sudden I can work with PhDs and doctorates and masters, and I can work with the guy holding the shovel at the end of the water ditch, trying to figure it out […] as long as we all want our community to get better, it doesn't matter where you are on your education field or goals.

Effective trustees often bring with them substantive board experience, which they have used to cultivate their skill in navigating board processes and decision-making. Related prior leadership experiences that participants mentioned including representing and leading a public employees union and working in public transportation administration.

Another element of experience trustees referenced was prior community college experience. For several participants, this was rooted in their own experiences as community college students, either in the college district where they were currently serving, or in another district. Participants spoke about the "affordability" of community colleges and the high-quality instruction they had received as students. They expressed a sense of indebtedness to the community college sector, explaining how it had given them experiences they would not have been able to access otherwise. One trustee, a Guatemalan-American, spoke with great reverence of how the community college had helped him access the "American dream":

> Community college just saved me from south deportation [through the California Nonresident Tuition Exemption, known as AB 540] […] I've been provided, not just for myself, but now for my wife and family, access to healthcare, dental, mental health, as well as retirement […] but all that would not have been possible if not for that opportunity that community college afforded me […] I don't know how I can really translate that, how important the community college system is, obviously in California, but across our country. And I think this is why someone from a Third World country who was going to be a farm worker for the rest of his life is doing this work. […] And I think being part of that board to push pathway for citizenship to our dreamers, more investment into Pell, short-term Pell, all these different federal investments [because] I think I'm just one out of a million stories that we can show to legislators at a federal level of what a public investment is all about, especially in education.

Other participants who spoke about their own student experiences also expressed how they were strongly motivated because of those experiences.

Other types of community college experience trustees brought to their role included professional experience, as in the case of those who had worked in their districts before becoming trustees (participants included former faculty, administrators, and a college foundation director). There were also individuals with professional experience in the 4-year higher education systems in California. These participants expressed the value of their knowledge of the "organizational structure" of higher education institutions and concepts of "how [the California] system's supposed to work." Participants also referenced other individuals who had substantial experience in the community college sector, and the value that brought to the board: "[H]e knew all the faculty because he worked there for so long. He really understood the people and got them, so that was really good." Similar to prior board experience, prior professional experience in the community college sector gives trustees a working knowledge of the institutions they govern, and allows them to speak from the authority that knowledge confers.

Another element of trustee authority drawn from prior experiences was representing racial and ethnic groups. Participants spoke about a sense of responsibility to serve racial and ethnic communities they represented, and had examples of how they had done this. One trustee, an Asian American woman, pursued and obtained statewide leadership, and from there she cofounded the Asian American Pacific Islander Trustees & Administrators Caucus. Two other trustees, Latino men, spoke of representing their communities in different ways. Ángel[22] emphasized how the board "really represent[s] the entire district. Our student body is 90% Latino, so we're all a full Latino board." The other, Sebastian shared about a time when he had

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[22] All names used are pseudonyms that participants selected or directed me to select for them.

had to confront misguided prejudices as the only person of color on the board. A White trustee was arguing that one county needed a certain program more than a county with a higher Latino population, "'because Latino people don't want to go to college. Latino males in particular.'" Sebastian pushed back, but observed during this interview that the White trustee's attitude had not surprised him. He then shared how he, after earning his PhD, had helped several people through a doctoral program at UC Davis, with many of those mentees focusing their doctorates on student success or the success of people of color. Experiences that trustees from minoritized racial and ethnic groups bring encourage them to claim authority that historically has been kept from people like them.

Most trustees noted the value trustees with diverse experiences and perspectives bring to a community college governing board. Participants observed how different opinions caused them to reflect on their own views, and in some cases changed their perspectives on how to best serve students. They noted the different strengths each trustee brings, and how that helps a board as a whole make better decisions. One trustee said with frankness:

> I think one of the strengths [of the board is] the diversity of it. It's the thing I like the least, but it's also one of the strengths of it, that people have opinions [and] a commitment […] working with other people, you need to be a good listener and you need to understand the mechanics behind what [other trustees] are proposing or what they're talking about and where their experience lies, and be willing to hear and also be open to receiving information.

In addition to diverse views and backgrounds of fellow trustees, participants referenced "discrete knowledge bases" trustees might bring, as in finance and budgeting, from their professional lives. Participants also expressed value for the connections that come with a diverse board, whose members represent different facets of a college district's service area. This connects to the second manner in which trustee authority is demonstrated: through political skill, including political connections.

Trustee Authority as Political Skill

In the California context in which the participants govern, they are all elected officials. Thus, it is unsurprising that a major way in which they embrace their authority is through their political connections, and through their skill in navigating politically charged environments. Participants talked about strategies they use to build relationships with other local officeholders and state legislators, including regular coffee meetups and active membership in political parties. They referenced connections with four-year institutions and major employers in their area. Participants were clear that these relationships had had tangible outcomes for the community colleges, including access to state, federal, and grant-based funding, partnership on obtaining student resources like a small business center, and facilitating a smoother transfer process to four-year institutions. Trustees' political connections give them a degree of authority not only on their boards, but in their broader communities, and they are not afraid to use those connections for students' benefit.

Concurrently, trustees demonstrate considerable political skill. Multiple trustees connected their effectiveness as trustees to their ability to "know [their] board" and "count to four," meaning secure four votes, or a majority on a seven-member board. One trustee emphasized how her degree of political connectedness had caused every other candidate to back out of the race once she declared her candidacy. Political skill can give trustees a great deal of indirect influence. One trustee described how his consistent ability to "count to four" led staff to bring issues to him, because he could mention them to the lead administrator and in most cases, they would get addressed without coming to the board, because the expectation was that if that trustee brought an issue before the board, he would get his four votes. The trustee reflected on how this created a great deal of trust in him among the other board members, the lead

administrator, and the staff. Trustees able to leverage their political skill and exert their authority in that manner can make positive differences in their colleges.

However, the willingness to think primarily in political terms can damage relationships. One trustee described how he had attempted to circumvent a trustee with "extreme" views by running a candidate against her in the most recent election. He shared,

> [S]he won her reelection recently by only 60 votes. And because we tried to get her replaced, and I'll admit really quick that I did run a candidate against [her] in 2018, and yeah, that probably deteriorated the relationship at that point, but she was being a bad trustee, I thought.

When I asked for clarification on what running a candidate against this trustee had entailed, he clarified, "I recruited [the opposing candidate]. I funded her campaign. I managed her campaign." In this instance, the attempt to wield political skill backfired, as the "bad trustee" still won her election by 60 votes. A trustee on a different board shared how bad blood over two trustees who were men trying to influence a newly elected trustee who was a woman early on in her tenure had eventually caused an enduring rift, to the point that the woman trustee "is still very suspicious of their motives whenever they propose something […] we don't necessarily forget what we've [experienced in] the past." Because of the damage that can be done through relating in overtly political ways, one trustee pushed back against the value of being able to "count to four." He shared,

> If [a decision] happens with only four votes, [if] one person changes their mind, you could go the other direction again. The idea is, from my perspective, to try to seek consensus on as many things as you can […] And if you can't get a seven-zero vote, keep talking about it until you've talked it all the way to the point that they've been able to make a decision.

Given the politically charged environment that trusteeship can entail, aspiring trustees may want to carefully consider the role that politics could play in their ability to serve, no matter their educational expertise or commitment to a college district's mission. One trustee, Thriddis, shared

how the governing board for his college district had historically been very non-controversial and generally well-liked. Then, the district was able to get one of their satellite centers accredited as a college, and the former president of the single-college district was promoted to the chancellor role for a multi-college district with a commensurate salary raise. Members of the public were outraged over the salary increase, which prompted Thriddis to have a conversation with a fellow trustee:

> I remember sitting with a member who'd been a board member for 35, 32 years, and just super nice, absolutely loved the college with his whole heart. I mean, just a fantastic guy. That discussion [was], "You should probably retire." "Why?" [the other trustee asked.] "Well, because I don't know that you'll win this race. It's brutal out there. And to be honest, you should go retire being loved." […] And he did, and he's thanked me many times. […] He said, I was the only one that had that discussion with him. But he was very thankful.

In the community college context, trustees' political skill may be fire—a useful servant, and a bad master. Avoiding it in contexts where trustees are elected is impossible, though, and some trustees are able to leverage it well for the benefit of their colleges.

Trustee Authority in Action

Given the challenging context of community college governance, trustees need to embrace their authority in order to stand up for their colleges and their own decision-making. Several participants shared about instances where they had demonstrated considerable professional courage in advocating for an idea. One Latino trustee shared, "I lose more battles than I win, when it comes to looking at issues of social justice […] But the point is, I'm not going to quit." Sometimes, trustees advocate for matters that may be unpopular in one era of community college education, only to prove extremely important later. Early college was one example—a trustee shared that when she first became a trustee 12 years earlier, early college had

not been popular because of high enrollments at the time. She pushed for early college to build a "college-going culture" and faced "a lot of resistance." Reflecting, she shared,

> [T]oday, 12 years later, it's a very popular concept. And it's like, "Well, yes, we should be investing in them because […] that builds loyalty and it helps [students] in their early access."

One trustee shared how another trustee had tried to illegally pressure her into supporting union-only construction contracts for the college district. She shared,

> He used to be a congressman. So he'd come into my office and think he could convince me to join his side […] Sometimes he would get abusive. It was difficult and I'd have to ask him to leave my office.

As one trustee shared, the willingness to speak up from one's conscience is a critical component of effectiveness:

> [S]omething that I'm learning is that if I'm going to be an elected official on a board of trustees that represents something as big and as important as the college, I need to have the willingness to put myself out there more and to speak up more […] and to speak up more effectively. And if I don't, [the public] needs to find somebody that is willing to accept that role and responsibility.

Given all the pressures and demands that come with trusteeship, it seems obvious that it is not a form of service for the faint-of-heart. But what happens when trustees embrace their authority a little too strongly, without the necessary trustee humility in attendance? We turn now to a familiar villain in the research literature on community college boards—the rogue trustee.

Authority Overleveraged? Rogue Trustees Reexamined

Several of the trustees with whom I spoke were familiar with the term rogue trustee, as it had been incorporated into trustee training modules made available to them by CCLC. As explored in the literature review, "rogue trustee" is a term coined by scholar Terry O'Banion to describe trustees who attempt to commandeer a board for their own selfish ends, often leading to dysfunctional boards (O'Banion, 2009a, 2009b). Participants who had experienced rogue

behavior on their own boards described trustees who acted as though they would be a better fit for the lead administrator's position. One trustee shared of two rogue trustees,

> Basically, I think these trustees think they know better. And even though neither of them really have experience in a California community college in their careers […] I feel like they just want to be the [lead administrator], but not actually be the [lead administrator] […] they just feel they know better, they're smarter and that they know the community.

Other trustees had similar stories of trustees who tried to exert undue influence to achieve goals not shared by the rest of the board. Some rogues violated public meeting laws by trying to discuss agenda items with a majority of board members privately. Others were acting on behalf of labor unions or other special interest groups who wanted to see a lead administrator ousted. The main tool one rogue used to exert influence was being disruptive in meetings—insulting other board members, insulting the lead administrator, and intimidating staff. Multiple trustees talked about big egos as a hindrance to effective trusteeship. As one participant shared,

> I guess, we're all not real teachable […] if you run for an elected office, you have a pretty big ego. And I think when you have that many, seven elected officials, and then you have an administrative team that are highly educated and have a lot of knowledge, information, there's just built-in conflict and disagreement. And if you don't have the high level of respect for one another and respect for differences, then I think it creates a very difficult environment for seeking agreement and consensus in the decision-making process, particularly in the implementation of those decisions, where the staff and the community [need] confidence in the leadership that's in place.

Another participant expressed similar sentiments:

> [E]go is […] the biggest downfall of community college trustees. They think they know more […] and they also think they don't need training. They don't need to know what's going on. They don't need to understand a budget […] [they think they] don't need an education, which is crazy, because [they're] on an education board. So why would [they] say [they] don't need an education?

The influence of rogues is real and keenly felt on some boards. However, not every trustee identified as a rogue is always a rogue. Multiple trustees shared how "rogue trustee" can be used as an epithet (truly a niche one) for trustees who ask more questions than a lead

administrator or fellow board member might like. One trustee, Deborah, a woman who had held state and national leadership positions in the community college trustee space, shared how, from her perspective, rogue behavior has been incorrectly linked to short lead administrator tenures in California:

> Some of what I saw is that "rogue behavior" was often classified as rogue behavior if people just didn't agree with it, whether or not it was really rogue behavior. And one of the things that [CCLC] used to do, which really irritated me, and I called them out on this, was they had been doing this survey for probably, I don't know, 20 years now on [lead administrator]-board relationships. And what is the reason [lead administrators] most cite for the reason why they leave, why we have such short tenure of [lead administrators]? […] they always say, "It's the board." Well, you know what, they can say whatever they want. There's a lot of different reasons why people leave. And so I said to [the researcher], "When you keep coming out with this kind of research analysis and you say, 'This is the reason' […] I don't see how you expect boards and [lead administrators] to build a relationship because you're always going to blame the board. But there's a lot of different reasons why these [lead administrators] leave. One is they should be leaving sometimes because they're just not the right fit." […] so [CCLC is] doing a little more since. Since then, I know that they have been doing a little more in-depth analysis of the reason people leave and not just blaming it on the board. So, there is rogue behavior. I would say that I have seen lots of trustees ask really good questions and get tagged as rogue trustees because they're asking too many questions. They're asking for too much information […] But then I also have seen, and I have served with, trustees who are truly rogue trustees. They're just in it to show how smart they are, and they can beat everybody else.

While rogue behavior is certainly a reality, as Deborah acknowledges, "rogue" has also been used as an easy write-off label for any trustee who presses beyond what a lead administrator or fellow board member would like for the information needed to govern well. A trustee at another district, Harriet, shared about how she had been called a "rogue trustee" early in her experience of community college trusteeship:

> [W]e were in a policy meeting, and I talked with the [lead administrator]. And I said, "Do you think it might be possible if we could have maybe a student success committee and maybe look at data monthly so we can be better informed? It would help us to do policy." And one trustee, and keep in mind that I was coming on […] pretty liberal onto a very conservative, White male, nearly 70, in their late 60s, early 70s. And one of the trustees put his hand in my face, and he said, "It is not up to you to tell our [lead administrator] what to do. It is up to you to look at policy only." And I had to lean around his hand and

> look at the [lead administrator] and say, "I'm just asking if it's a possibility." And [the lead administrator] looked at the trustee who had his hand in my face and said, "No, let's let her speak, I'm kind of interested in this."

Not every so-called rogue is a true rogue. One of the challenges of the label even in the case of "real" rogue behavior, though, is that it can be dehumanizing and discourage efforts at further relationship repair. This is unfortunate, because several trustees shared stories of how they had managed to build relationships with individuals they had once imagined to be unworkable. One trustee shared about how he had had a history of disagreements with one trustee but had managed to build a relationship with her when they both became advocates for a board resolution on anti-racism and inequity in the wake of the murder of George Floyd.

> [She] and I were appointed [to write the resolution] because we were seen as the two most divergent views. [We] were appointed to write the resolution that ended up being one of the strongest resolutions for anti-racism and inequity that we could have ever passed. I had written some before that had failed, but this one was very powerful and had specific, immense […] funding to faculty, and it was very robust actually […] I will vouch for her that she did make an improvement after that, and we worked together on that […] So we just had all these opportunities after COVID [to start] to work together, and it's been working out […] I think me and her building a better relationship has helped make her less rogue because she'll talk to me and we'll maybe sometimes work it out together. That would not have been possible three years ago […] But now we can talk and work things out pretty well.

Harriet, the trustee labeled as "rogue" after requesting student success data, had a similar story or reconciliation with the trustee who had called her a rogue. After she publicly spoke out against the district health insurance provider refusing to cover gender transition healthcare for an employee's daughter, she was "yelled at" by that trustee.

> And so I told him that I would not be silenced. And I also told him, I called him and I said we needed to continue to work together in a positive way. And we had a great conversation after that, and he actually apologized to me.

One of the challenges of trusteeship is that individuals are put in working relationships with people from whom they may be very different. But the findings suggest that does not mean these

relationships are unworkable. Trustees have been able to work together with so-called rogues in the best interests of community college students.

The presence of rogue-like behavior, though, indicates that trustee authority is only one component of trustee effectiveness. Authority without humility leads to genuine rogue behavior rooted in unchecked egos. Thus, we turn now to trustee humility—an essential component of trustee effectiveness.

Theme 2: Effective Trustees Practice Humility

Humility is the dimension of trustee effectiveness that allows trustees to embrace their authority without becoming rogues. Humble trustees are those whose motivations are rooted in a sense of themselves as public servants. They come to the role with an understanding that they have much to learn about governance in the community college sector. Finally, humble trustees are willing to learn and be supported in their learning. Trustees who embrace both their authority and their humility are balanced—relentlessly pursuing progress for their colleges as well as improvement in their own governance.

Trustee Humility Expressed in "Public Servant" Identity

Most participants spoke about the importance of service in the trustee role, either identifying it as part of their own motivation and approach to trusteeship, or referencing it when discussing traits for an idea community college trustee. They used phrases and words like "public servant," "sense of service," "moral commitment," and "there for the right reasons." Descriptions suggested that participants viewed trusteeship as a kind of public duty, and they regarded the responsibility given to them by their constituents as one they needed to fulfill with discernment and character. Multiple trustees talked about the personal fulfillment they found in serving well—two trustees shared stories of being approached by individuals in public and

hearing how the colleges had shaped those individuals' lives. There was a strong sense among participants that their work as trustees, while challenging at times, was also a great gift because of the positive difference it allowed them to make. As one trustee shared,

> To be really, really good at [being a trustee], you have to love your community. Because your goal here, it's not about you. It's not about, "I'm the star of the show." It's that when I leave my college, my community will be better because I served at this college and these programs are going to make a difference. I can honestly say that I pushed really hard to get [a] forest management program started and funded. And I know that over the next 10 years there will be kids having jobs that they probably never would've thought about, and they're going to be really good paying jobs out in the forest where lot of kids want to be […] So an ideal trustee loves this community and wants to see it get better, and to be honest, willing to take risks that you could lose an election over […] Maybe you want to build a new education center that will really make a difference in the next generation. Might not help the people today, it might cost money, but it's going to make a huge difference. And you want to be looking out far enough that you make [those kinds of] decisions.

Effective trustees are humble because they regard their work as bigger than themselves. And because they recognize that it is work, they are committed to investing in learning how to do it better.

Trustee Humility as Investing Time in Professional Development

A recurring notion in most of the interviews was a sense that effective trusteeship takes considerable time and effort. Participants spoke about the need to "put the time in" to trusteeship, both to learn about issues specific to the community college sector, and to prepare well so that they could make informed decisions in board meetings. One trustee, Mackey, criticized trustees who he saw as not making an appropriate investment of time and energy:

> What I saw was, especially as new board members came on, they didn't seem to thrust themselves into the responsibility of their position to where they wanted to really learn what it is. What is your role as a trustee? What should you be doing? What should your concerns be? […] we had one trustee who got elected and they told [the lead administrator] that they thought it would be good if we had a softball game, board members vs. the cabinet. I'm thinking, that's not what we're here for. We're not here to play softball, and we're not here to play games. We're here to focus on students and

> student success. I think that's one of the biggest weaknesses, is [when trustees] don't want to roll their sleeves up and do the hard work.

Other participants expressed similar concerns about trustees who "just go to the board meetings" and may even express a need to leave meetings early if they "go too long."

When describing their own time investment, participants spoke about thoroughly reviewing documents ahead of meetings, including agendas, staff reports, and any supplementary materials. They highlighted the need to learn about California's higher education system, so that they could understand how the community college sector fits in. Several addressed the need to attend conferences put on by CCLC or ACCT, both to access content-specific training and to network with other trustees and learn from experiences in other districts. Other opportunities included study sessions conducted internally within a district, usually when college administrators presented to the board on a subject area, like finance or student counseling.

The time investment effective trustees put into their role comes at a personal cost. As the trustee Ángel shared, his seven-year-old daughter expressed to him that she liked that her dad was "giving back," but that she missed him because he wasn't at home as much and they weren't having dinner together as often. He continued,

> I know a lot of politicians say it's public service, but let me tell you, it's public service. I've used more [vacation] time in the last four years than the previous 12 years […] [The ideal community college trustee is] someone who doesn't have to work. The ideal would be someone who has a job flexible enough, so they can really be intentional and have the time to invest […] I think it took me some time to understand that different people are at different stages of their life and they make different commitments. At the time I was frustrated that not everyone appeared to have the sense of urgency or commitment. That was just looking at things through my own lenses.

Another trustee, Thriddis, articulated this tension thusly:

> You can be a board member and show up once a month and still be a board member and get your paycheck and get your healthcare and never do anything else. Or you can be a board member that literally tries to go to everything you can. I think the challenge with the community college and almost all local boards is that you can be as good as you want

> to be, but to be a really good member, it always takes time. And sometimes if you're working, you have a family, that's just challenging. I've always had the advantage of having my own space and my own company and so I could work around those types of things.

He then shared how, by attending a CCLC conference, he was able to meet the individual his district would go on to later hire as its lead administrator, highlighting the networking benefits of these kinds of time investments. Effective trustees recognize that they are not all-knowing on matters of college concern, and so they are willing to put the time in to learn and grow into their roles.

Trustee Humility as Willingness to Learn and Be Supported in Learning

Effective trustees are willing not only to "put the time in," but to be shaped by what they learn during their trustee journey. Nearly all participants reflected on how they had learned and grown at a personal level during their time as trustees. Many participants spoke about how being a trustee had helped them cultivate their curiosity, and an openness to learning from others' perspectives. Trustees referenced ways board service had changed their interactions with others, helping them to be more patient and forgiving with their fellow trustees and themselves. One trustee shared how his early judgments about a new board member proved to be misguided:

> There are people who get elected, have a chip on their shoulder, get in office and over time learn what it means to be in office […] I'm going to give you a perfect example. We had somebody elected two years after me who was a professor at the college and absolutely had a chip on [his shoulder]. And I was scared to death. I mean, he is a great guy, but I just thought, this is going to be terrible […] because he was the union president for years at the college […] and honestly, he became just a dynamic, wonderful, […] absolute jewel to work with. He understood the role of the board as well as anybody. And sometimes that made his old friends unhappy […] You have other people that get [elected] and never figure that out, and for their entire time [on the board] they're trying to get that one thing done that they ran [on]. And I think that you just have to be really careful in judging people when they're elected. Because really good [trustees] can come out of people [you think will] be terrible, and they turn out to be fantastic.

Effective trustees bring a learner's perspective not only to their own development, but those of their fellow trustees.

Multiple trustees spoke about how valuable mentorship had been as they developed in their roles. One trustee spoke about a formal trustee mentoring program offered by CCLC, where newer trustees were paired with more seasoned trustees in other districts. Another shared how meeting the women of the California Community College Women's Caucus at a CCLC conference had made her feel included and "refreshed." "[T]hat was so helpful to me," she said. "It helped me feel less in disequilibrium or that I was always wrong." This same trustee, Harriet, shared how a member of her board had helped her early in her experience on an otherwise all-men board:

> [This trustee] was wonderful to me. He could see me getting beat up at times. And one time he grabbed me by the arm, and he said, "Sit down." And he explained, he said, [...] "Politics in California, it's tricky […] When I got into politics, I realized I was going to have to take a close look at myself and adjust some of the ways I thought about things […] I'm telling you this because [this board] may be a very different group than you've been used to working with, and it's going to be okay, and you keep speaking your truth." […] So, I appreciated his help during that kind of difficult [time].

One trustee reflected on how his approach to trusteeship had shifted as he'd grown into the role with the help of mentors.

> [Having interim lead administrators as mentors] was a big, key part for me personally in learning things […] I've also grown. Like my first time, I was running…I was just focused on a lot of other things. And I've just become more dedicated to the role. I even ran for a third term when I wasn't planning on it. Because I felt there's things that need to be finished and done […] I've really cared about the issues, and I see how important it is to the whole area to have this school work well. […] I have to say, I've [also] learned how to work with my enemies. I mean, like me and [another trustee], we were really at each other's throats for a long time, four or five years, maybe longer. And eventually I learned how to put those differences aside and get to work with her on compromises. And we've been able to do that.

Effective trustees embrace the authority their role brings, while maintaining the humility necessary to continue growing in that role. A similar balance is necessary for governing boards as a whole, and that emerged through the third and fourth themes.

Theme 3: Effective Boards Hold Others Accountable, and are Accountable to Others

Effective boards embrace and model a governing culture of accountability. In our interviews, trustees spoke about accountability in ways that emphasized its bidirectionality—for every stakeholder a board holds accountable, they recognize that they are also accountable to that stakeholder. Several relationships of mutual accountability were referenced, including with the education sector as a whole, with the communities their colleges serve, with their lead administrator, with their institutions, and internally as a board.

Accountability with Education Sector

Trustees take their role as lay leaders of community colleges seriously. Several participants criticized cultural norms in the education sector that they do not encounter in other professional environments. While they did not see it as within their power to change these norms drastically, there was a sense that participants felt their lay influence provided an important, subtly corrective force (thought whether this force was effectual or merely symbolic was less clear).

Multiple trustees criticized what they viewed as the slowness of education to adapt to change, and an ineffectiveness in identifying and harnessing metrics to make improvements. One trustee, Deborah, articulated how belief that the mission of the college is a positive one can (perhaps counterintuitively) create resistance to evaluating it and insisting on evidence-based improvements:

> I am a big believer in metrics. I think you've got to be able to show that you're making progress. And it took me a long time to figure out how metrics were done in education

> […] Education seems to have a hard time figuring out the metrics for success […] I remember early on […] I would see us pour money into programs. And we'd still have terrible data outcomes. And I keep hearing from faculty, "Well, it takes a long time to see results." But there aren't any other industries where they allow you to have five and 10 years to show results […] you got to be able to show that you're moving the needle somewhere. So I think education has just been a bit protected in this, from being held accountable to do some things […] Being a public sector employee, I used to hear that also from government employees. "Well, we can't measure our success by that because we're providing a service for the citizens. We provide water for them, and they're always getting water. So it's fine." But if the water turns off half the time or if the water is dirty, that's not good quality of service. I just think that we always need to be more thoughtful and careful about how we're serving and how we serve them. How do we best serve them?

Deborah also criticized the condescension with which trustees are sometimes treated, in her experience.

> [As a trustee,] you ask, "Why aren't we looking at this?" [and the response was] always about, "You don't understand the depth of research that we have to do to really analyze all the variables." And okay, I get that. But having come from the public sector, which also kind of slacks off having to take, to be held accountable for some of this stuff, I mean, a private industry, I'll tell you, snap of a finger, you better be coming up with that data. But it took us a long time in the public sector […] to be held accountable to a customer service metric was just unheard of. And I see that a bit in education too. "We're too smart. We know what we're doing. You can't tell us anything. We've done years of research."

At this point in the conversation, Deborah started to apologize to me given my positioning as a researcher. I assured her that part of the reason I was writing this dissertation was that the trustee perspective had been overlooked in much of the literature, and she responded,

> Even those that include board perspectives, a lot of [education professionals] don't consider it to be valid, because who are we? We're just a bunch of community people who don't really know what it takes to really deliver education. We're just the receivers of education.

Multiple other participants expressed that part of their role was pushing to ensure that education was more outcome-oriented, and that changes were made based on tracked outcomes. One trustee, Sebastian, advocated for a better "intersegmental continuum" between public higher education institutions in the California system to ensure ease of transfer. Multiple trustees

commented on their ability to connect working professionals with faculty and address outdated approaches to curriculum, like a photography program that was still entirely focused on film development, and an architecture program that used drafting tables instead of computer-aided design software. Another trustee, Thriddis, reflected on how expertise in providing education does not always translate to skill in governance:

> I think that you find in college boards [there are] often a lot of retired administrators […] so they come out of an education background […] some of those can be incredibly helpful to have on the board […] one of the challenges [with] being on the board that I found, so I have a BA—that's as far as I got. And you go the college and everybody there is doctorates and masters, and you're like, I am in the room with the smartest people in my community, and we're still fighting about stuff that's so not important […] I always think the college boards should be the best run boards […] they're generally run by the people who are the best educated in your community by far. So they should be a piece of cake. And I find that common sense does not often go with education. […] Sometimes it doesn't work that way.

Trustees often see themselves as providing a check on some of the aspects of education as a sector that they find inefficient or ineffective.

With respect to how trustees are accountable to the education sector, participants spoke about accreditation and meeting statewide requirements. Both elements were compliance-focused, with one trustee commenting that he thought statewide regulation was helpful with regard to keeping the board focused:

> It's a good board. All good intentions. [But] if we didn't have state mandates, the student success funding formula, DEI stuff, we'd be in trouble. We'd be all over the map.

Trustees provide an important bridge between colleges and their communities. As a result, they function both as insiders and outsiders. Maintaining this balance of identities is critical with regard to the next stakeholder with whom they are accountable—their communities.

Accountability with Community

Trustees feel a strong responsibility to know, serve, and represent their communities. Nearly all participants spoke passionately about the need to represent their constituents—both individuals who had elected them, but also every population in their colleges' service areas. Trustees take a broad perspective on who they are to be serving. As one trustee, Ángel, shared:

> Obviously we really have to be connected to the needs of our constituents in our community. And that goes beyond the conventional wisdom of a taxpayer who's a voter, homeowner, business owner, but someone who may not be that—that new American, that immigrant family who also can benefit from ESL, or just non-credit courses […] anyone that lives not just within our district, but beyond.

Another trustee, Nathan, reflected on how the board had a responsibility to serve more than just the wealthy, politically engaged community members, describing the college district's location as "wealth disparate" and sharing how he wanted to see more board members building relationships with lower-income parts of the community. This idea was echoed by several trustees who spoke about the need to be engaged with different segments of the community and to be willing to hear different community perspectives. When pressed about how they did this, they spoke about attending college events throughout their district's service areas, getting to know different service groups and business owners, and maintaining a listening posture when interacting in public.

Multiple trustees spoke about their need to speak on the community's behalf and ensure colleges were meeting community needs. They saw this as an important service they provided to both the colleges and their communities. As one trustee, a Latina woman named Minnie, observed,

> Based on our experiences and outside relationships with our community, we're bringing information into the campus that [the college] may not know and understand, and hopefully we can examine [that information] much more closely. I feel that we have a lot of responsibility in terms of changing the course of teaching or also changing how we look at diversity, equity, inclusion, and access. I think having a diverse board will help open those conversations and really make people more accountable.

Another participant, Deborah, also addressed the need to provide the community perspective, even when there was internal pushback from a college district.

> The whole role of the trustees is really to be the voice of the community and to ensure that the community's needs are met in education through the community college. And I think there is a bit of resistance internally on that. I often hear internally from faculty and staff, "Well, what does the community know? We're the ones who have to serve the students." And of course you do, but we're the ones who are paying the taxes so you can do this. We're the ones who have to feel like when we vote for a bond, we're getting something that really makes sense. And we're paying to send our kids to the colleges, and we're hoping that they're getting good educations. I do think there needs to be some good communication across both sides, and not to be in one camp or the other.

As with other aspects of board accountability, boards are not unilaterally only accountable to their communities. They also hold their communities accountable by standing up to them when the need arises.

Trustees spoke about different perspectives on what program offerings colleges should have. Nathan shared how a college's role isn't necessarily do "do whatever the community wants," emphasizing how any institution has to choose where its resources are focused:

> We're a community college for sure, and we're supposed to serve our area […] but we have specific populations we're looking to serve, and you cannot do it all. You can do anything, but you cannot do everything […] And we have specific communities that are higher priority: students of color, low-income students. But sometimes the community, our community […] is a lot of very old, rich, White, retired people, and they want free pottery classes. Yes, could we have just listened to them only and have the whole school be free pottery classes? […] We probably could do that, but that wouldn't be what the point of the school is […] this is a big struggle. Who is the school for? […] There's very loud, invested people who are in the community who try to make it seem like they represent the entire area, when they represent their own group.

Another trustee addressed this need to prioritize course offerings, while acknowledging that performative programs, like those in athletics and performing arts, play an important role in drawing people into the college and building a sense of community ownership. As he put it,

> Nobody goes to watch their kids take an algebra test, but every parent shows up for their sporting event or their theater or their music events. And that's what builds the

> relationship with the schools. Even though STEM is more important, I mean, long term […] it does not bring the community into your school, which is desperately what you need […] not only to be a part of the community, but to have the community […] pass bonds that allow you to build things and keep your school up to date.

This need to balance different priorities in program offerings is an area where trustees sometimes must, and do, work against the preferences of community members.

Another way in which a board might hold its community accountable is in pressing against cultural norms the board does not believe are in students' best interests. A White trustee, Clarice, shared about how her board had to indirectly subvert the culturally political norms of its community for the sake of its students. Speaking about the board's DEI committee, she shared,

> I would say that the diversity, equity, inclusion committee has been very informative […] but as a whole, [this] county is a very, very conservative county. I mean a very, very, very conservative county. And just the words diversity, equity, inclusion can be loaded, because they're loaded in our society in general. So as a committee, we focus more on the student success and outcomes component […] So it's kind of edging it in sideways.

She then gave specific examples of how the board had gone against the will of many vocal community members, including by approving a Cezar Chavez Leadership curriculum and implementing vaccine requirements and campus closures as part of the COVID-19 response. Effective boards recognize and demonstrate their accountability to their communities while also holding their communities accountable to the needs of diverse student populations.

Accountability with Lead Administrator

Given the centrality of the board-lead administrator relationship in community college governance, it is unsurprising that a recurring topic in interviews was accountability with lead administrators. Participants emphasized that hiring the lead administrator and holding their "one employee" accountable to the strategic direction for the district the board has set was one of the most, if not the most, important roles a board has. They shared about formal evaluation processes they use to hold their lead administrators accountable, as well as more informal ways, like

keeping lines of communication open and insisting their lead administrators keep them informed about issues that arise. One trustee, Minnie, described the most important criterion for evaluating a lead administrator as “ensuring that the [lead administrator] understands the needs of the community.”

In addition to evaluating lead administrators, the clearest manner in which a board holds a lead administrator accountable is through their ability to fire and hire. Participants shared stories about lead administrators who had proved not to be a good fit for their districts. Participants who referenced firings or pressured resignations of lead administrators used phrases like “didn’t understand the culture.” Two participants referenced administrators who had come from other states and hadn’t been successful in learning the California system, including requirements around shared governance. Firing a lead administrator can be one of the most challenging actions for a board—two other participants talked about how their boards had come to fire a lead administrator only after challenging deliberations and considerable pressure from faculty and students.

The critical nature of hiring an effective lead administrator may be part of what encourages effective boards to be accountable to their lead administrators—to treat their lead administrators the way they as a board wish to be treated. Minnie described the dynamic this way:

> It’s a two-way street. We have to work together. And plus, we want to establish that trust, and so to have trust with the [lead administrator], we need to know that it’s full disclosure.

Multiple other participants talked about this need to build and maintain trust with their lead administrators, especially by respecting appropriate channels of communication. One trustee, Joe, explained that:

> When you have trustees that are trying to gather information from sources outside of the [lead administrator], it can be divisive because as they interact with a college president or some deans about a certain topic, just because you're an elected official and you're interacting with them, sometimes that person can feel like they have support for whatever project that they have in mind or whatever they'd like to happen […] it's not any kind of official support, but they get confused as far as the direction and the authority they have […] to align the priorities and the authority, the trustees actually really need to use the [lead administrator] for that process of aligning and direction and decision-making, and the [lead administrator] needs to make strong recommendations to the board of trustees as to what they think should happen.

Multiple other trustees echoed this idea that communication with other campus staff members should primarily happen through the lead administrator, and otherwise only with the knowledge of the lead administrator in most cases. One trustee shared about how, if he were going to be on a campus to meet with anyone, he would let the lead administrator know so that there weren't any surprises or rumors started. Minnie expressed a similar idea:

> I think it's really critical having those communication lines open through the [lead administrator]. And I think the [lead administrator] has a very important role in that because they work in between the staff and with the board. So we don't go directly to executive leadership unless our [lead administrator] says, "Feel free to go and talk to them about this particular issue and get their feedback." So we do have boundaries, which are good [and we respect those] unless the president says, "Feel free to meet with these people, go forward and gather information to help education yourself." And I think that's a mark of a really good leader.

Respecting a lead administrator through a relationship of mutual accountability is an important component of board effectiveness. While board members' communication with other members of its institution may primarily happen through or with the awareness of its lead administrator, there are several ways in which boards foster a culture of accountability with the institutions themselves.

Accountability with Institution

The primary way trustees hold their institutions accountable is through data review. Several respondents spoke about considering student success data and evaluating progress on

goals their boards had set for the institution. In part, trustees are required to do this, as the California community college system's Student Centered Funding Formula (SCFF) ties funding in part to student outcomes like earning degrees and credit certificates, transferring to 4-year institutions, completing transfer-level math and English within their first year, completing nine or more career education units, and attaining the living wage in their region. Trustees spoke about reviewing data and insisting data be made available as part of their formal role. One trustee, Moira, shared how data review was also tied to decisions around which programs to fund.

> [Student outcomes data reports have] a great deal of impact on what we, how we decide to spend our money, first of all. On the programs that we offer, and whether or not, you know, if they're not doing what they were set out to do, then why are we pouring money into a program? So we've had some of those conversations when there's a program that doesn't do what we thought it was going to do. Now, mostly we let those discussions take place on the campuses, and the overall information comes to us. But you know, the trustees don't hesitate to speak up when they think something isn't working the way it's supposed to. But we try to remember that our duty is to go through the [lead administrator] and let the [lead administrator] then go to the appropriate people that need to address these issues.

Another manner in which boards hold their institutions accountable is in their relation to staff, including faculty, administrators, and classified staff. Respondents talked about holding staff accountable through their lead administrator; the example one trustee gave was asking a lead administrator to develop his cabinet-level administrators further when the trustee felt written staff reports on board agenda items were late or incomplete. Other trustees spoke of making decisions they believed were in the best interests of students, even when faculty unions were very vocal in their disagreement. Examples included an all-White faculty union that was opposed to the hiring of a Black counselor to better serve Black students, and faculty who wanted to teach at times that were not ideal for students. One trustee shared about how she read the minutes from the academic senate meetings to stay apprised on issues of concern to faculty. This particular

trustee, Whitney, was a faculty member at a 4-year institution. She shared how that status uniquely positioned her to foster accountability between the community college board and faculty:

> Nobody else on the board has been a faculty member. And so [the faculty] see me as their conduit. So I think it works both ways, where I can tell the faculty union head, “I think you’re wrong. I think there’s more that you need to understand. Let’s just do it with data, the budget data.” But it always looks to them like we’re crying wolf, saying that things are going to be terrible in a couple years. [But] we need to tighten our belts.

Of course, boards are also accountable to their institutions. In addition to knowing their role and executing it well, trustees are accountable to include institutional stakeholders in decision-making through participatory governance. One trustee, Sebastian, shared how participatory governance law in California requires that there be collaborative decision-making between the academic senate and college administrators. He shared how the model supports a culture of accountability, especially as a former faculty member himself:

> I like it because I was on that end of it. I’ve been on the other end of it, and if you make a decision, you’re holding everybody accountable, because it was a collaborative effort […] If it goes wrong, [we can say] “Hey, you helped me make this decision” [so there’s] more buy-in.

Accountability is critical to board effectiveness, and nowhere is this truer than in a board’s ability to foster accountability as a board—that is, accountability to each of its members, from each of its members.

Accountability as a Board

An accountable board is one where its members know the board role and do their best to execute it as a board. To ensure accountability over time, boards conduct evaluations, and are not afraid to hold individual members accountable when needed. Additionally, they take the board’s image seriously, and try to ensure it reflects well on the college.

When asked about the role the community college governing board, respondents emphasized setting the mission and strategic direction for the college, managing their lead administrator (including hiring and firing when needed), setting the policies that guide the institution, and fulfilling their fiduciary responsibility, which seemed to mean developing the budget with the assistance of appropriate staff and then approving it. Only one respondent mentioned another responsibility, which was giving final approval to any curriculum used in the district. It was clear that respondents took these roles seriously—one trustee, Sebastian, noted that through policy, the board sets the “culture and the climate of the district.” One element of board accountability that came up in most interviews was staying at “the board level”—that is, not “micromanaging” the daily operations of the district. There was also a sense that trustees do not have any power as individuals. One respondent, before echoing the same responsibilities other respondents noted, clarified the collective manner in which the board must operate:

> [Our role is] primarily oversight. And I think the public doesn’t really understand this. Really, very few people understand that we don’t have any power individually. It’s only as a group, and it just depends on our votes.

Respondents had a consistent sense of their roles, and a sense of the boundaries of those roles. Staying within those boundaries is a component of board effectiveness, and an important way in which boards practice accountability.

Another way boards practice accountability is through board evaluation. Consistent with the findings of the content analysis, all respondents referenced some form of self-evaluation for the board. Most respondents’ boards linked their annual evaluation to an annual goal-setting process, where a board was evaluated against the goals it had set the previous year. Two trustees from the same district offered very different perspectives on a 360-style evaluation that had been implemented in recent years, which included survey components for staff and faculty, students,

and community members as well as for the board. One trustee described the assessment as "very, very thorough […] we are holding ourselves accountable in the face of the community," emphasizing how all the information about the process had been made public in an effort to solicit input and buy-in. Another trustee, from the same board, disagreed, emphasizing the community members surveyed may have "attended [the college] 40 years ago," but may not have a current, working knowledge of the challenges the board faces. He also criticized the limited number of respondents included in the survey, and felt the board was in the best position to evaluate its own progress. Whatever evaluation process is used, it seems that the conversation around the evaluation is what is most important. Trustees who spoke most positively about their evaluation processes emphasized the following aspects: (1) discussing the assessment process before implementation to make any needed changes (e.g., changing wording for a question or removing a goal that was no longer relevant); (2) including student outcomes data in their evaluation process; (3) linking the evaluation process to board goals; and (4) maintaining consistency in the assessment tools from year to year (when possible) to track progress over time. Some respondents also found it beneficial to have a party perceived as "neutral" in facilitating the evaluation process, whether an outside consultant or a staff member from the institutional research office. This allowed the board members to have a degree of distance from the process, so that no board member was perceived as having undue influence over assessment tools or data-gathering.

While annual evaluations seem to be an important part of regular board evaluation, there are other ways in which boards hold individuals accountable when needed. These ranged from vocally disagreeing with a trustee in public meetings, having frank discussions (especially at board retreats, where members of the public are less likely to be in attendance), and encouraging

shifts in board culture, like a trustee who shared how she and another trustee had slowly made it standard practice for all board members to attend some events at colleges throughout the year, like performances, athletic games, and graduations. One trustee shared how his board was holding a true rogue member of their board who was often disruptive in meetings accountable:

> We have [a rogue trustee], and we've just decided to not, we created a guide sheet for meeting chairs on how to respond to her, how to manage her kind of in meetings. But that's what we've just decided to do at this point, because there's no reasoning with her. We've tried. She will not meet with you. If you try to talk to her, she'll say no.

In addition to holding knowing and fulfilling their roles, conducting regular board evaluations, and holding individual board members accountable as needed, boards practice accountability by taking their board's public image seriously. Multiple respondents spoke about the value in boards being perceived as conducting effective meetings and coming to reasonable decisions, the dangers of not having that perception. One trustee, Thriddis, phrased it this way:

> [Students] should be able to watch a board meeting and go, "Oh, those people care about my college. They're not a bunch of bickering, yelling, screaming—they're actually running a very professional meeting. They can agree to disagree." […] So you can be an example. And I honestly think a college board should be the example to all the rest of the boards of the community.

Maintaining concentric levels of accountability—internally as a board, and then with the institutions, the lead administrator, the community, and the education sector—is a critical element of board effectiveness. But it must be balanced with the other critical element—board support.

Theme 4: Effective Boards Provide Support

The fourth theme that emerged in the data related to how boards provide support. Effective boards are supportive ones. They maintain a supportive culture internally, based on trust and oriented toward the future, with structures in place to support effective board work and decision-making. They support their lead administrators, institutions, and communities. But at

the heart of community college board governance, as all respondents shared, is their support of students. In this final subsection, I cover each of these levels of support, beginning with boards themselves.

Support for Board

There are two types of support given internally on a board. The first is supportive in the structural sense—that is, supportive boards have structures in place, like meeting practices, committees, and leadership plans—that help support a board's effective functioning. Respondents shared about meeting practices, like designating a certain amount of speaking time for members of the public (including faculty union representatives), agenda planning, and keeping a "board log" of topics of interest to trustees, that allowed board chairs to run meetings in a focused and efficient manner. These structures support a board's work, helping that board to be more effective.

The second type of internal board support is interpersonal support. Effective boards invest in developing an interpersonal dynamic based in trust, a willingness to embrace conflict healthfully, and an agreement to represent a united front once a board decision has been voted upon. Multiple respondents from different boards spoke about the value their boards found in hiring an external consultant to help facilitate building trust. As Mackey, a trustee of a large multi-college district shared,

> One of the processes that I thought helped the board during my time was working with [external consultants]—having somebody that are professionals that can take the board out of its […] official role of sitting on the dais and listening and voting […] taking that and putting all that aside and talking to you as individuals and making you communicate as individuals and learn more about who you are and who I am. [Building] a little bit better understanding of you as a person and your viewpoints and maybe a little bit about your background, so I kind of know a little bit more about where you might be coming from, and I have a better understanding.

A trustee from a different board shared how getting to know her fellow trustees through team-building sessions with an external consultant had helped build trust.

> I think once you get to know people, too, you understand their perspectives better. You understand their hearts better. And I think every single person on that board, whether I agreed with them or not in the beginning and certainly now, I think everybody wants what's best for students. And I think we need to assume the best intentions. And in the beginning, they were getting to know me too, and I was getting to know them too. And so I think even though people might not agree, if you can have that trusting relationship where you assume the best, it can work. […] We did some training on team-building, and we shared some things about our past and things that were difficult for us and that we were striving toward and things that we were most proud of […] We shared about our families. When you get to know somebody better, it helps you to, before jumping to a conclusion, to better understand what is leading them to that perspective.

Several other trustees shared similar sentiments of how board retreat sessions focused on getting to know each other had helped build trust and helped them assume positive intentions from their fellow board members.

Assuming positive intentions is especially important for effectiveness as boards engage in conflict. Several trustees described what they believed to be a healthy debate dynamic on their boards, where trustees felt free to ask questions and share different perspectives, but then in which all trustees supported the majority decision of the board once a vote had been taken. There was a strong sense that disagreement was an important part of governance. The trustee who expressed this idea most directly put it this way:

> I think you have to be willing to work with your [fellow] board members. And I think the interpersonal relationships with them are vastly important. I think the other thing is, you have to build trust with them. And I don't mind if a board member has a total disagreement with me. I don't care, honestly, what they think of me, as long as they tell me. I don't want to be stabbed in the back. I want to be stabbed in the chest. I mean, I want to know what's coming, and I'm honest with that. I am more than willing to have a knock-down, drag-out fight in front of a board and then go have a cup of coffee afterwards, because we can agree, probably, as board members, on 90% of what we need to have happen, and then we can fight over the 10%. To make the best college possible, we all need to make sure we cover the 90% of things that are just normal, things we have to get done to make sure we're supporting all the students in every area of our district. And then we can fight over the 10%. But that does not mean that our relationship needs

> to get hurt. You know, you don't need to kill yourself over the 10% and have no relationship with the rest.

The willingness to build relationships with fellow board members that can endure conflicts is an essential component in creating a culture of support. One trustee, Sarah, emphasized how important this internal board culture was.

> It's been really wonderful how supportive [my fellow board members] are of my learning as a trustee, because you know, not all boards support at that level; I mean, it costs money to travel. It costs time and resources […] They support with whatever I need to do my job. They're 100% behind that, financially and emotionally supportive That's the best, most respectful approach any trustee can provide another.

She continued by sharing how another trustee was finding it difficult to travel to Sacramento for board development conferences and advocacy sessions because of his back pain. She said to him that if he needed to fly to Sacramento, he should. He thanked her, and she reaffirmed the importance of him being able to do his work. She shared that as an example of the supportive environment their board has created.

When a board has an internal culture characterized by support, that support extends to other college district stakeholders—none more so than the lead administrator.

Support for Lead Administrator

While a major part of a governing board's role is to hold their lead administrator accountable, boards also want to see their lead administrators succeed. They are responsible for hiring these leaders, and maintaining accountability as described above (e.g., ensuring transparency in communication) helps facilitate a positive working relationship. Going beyond accountability, though, to supporting a lead administrator and assuming positive intentions on their part can help a lead administrator become even more effective in their role. Multiple respondents spoke about how important it was to empower lead administrators to do their job of

managing day-to-day operations, and to refrain from micromanaging as a board. One trustee shared how his board provided support for a newly hired lead administrator:

> [During the search for a lead administrator] we had lots of good choices, but we had one that I think was obviously the best choice—he fit our community well. We hired him, got out of the way, and let him do his job. I think the board was really gracious about making sure that they supported him at least the first year or two to make sure that he got through that period of grace. And by that time, he had proven himself and pretty much everybody was starting to like him. Doesn't mean he didn't get tough questions, [but he went on to become] a leader within the state community college system, and he kept us involved and made us go out and become better board members.

A mutually supportive relationship can foster not only more effective boards, but more effective lead administrators.

Support for Institution(s)

Trustees are an important public face for their institutions. Because of their role, there is little that they do to directly support day-to-day operations at colleges, but they provide support in two important ways. The first is in being, as one trustee of a multi-college district put it, "the district's cheerleaders for all the colleges." Many trustees shared about attending different college events, like performances, groundbreakings on new buildings, athletic events, and of course, graduations. One trustee shared about the stories she would get when wearing college-branded gear out and about town:

> They [would begin] to tell me their story of either themselves or their little sister [who attended the college]. And so, everywhere I go, the community owns our colleges. So you just tap into that now and continue that connectivity. It's critical, I believe, for a board to function well, and for the college to be supported. [In all the college service areas] I'll get the same gushing. It's an eye opener, you know. And then you get to hear the anecdotal evidence about how critical the college is in that community, on so many layers.

In addition to showing public support for the colleges, boards support college employees beyond the lead administrator by expressing admiration in formal and informal ways. Formal ways included showing public recognition through awards given at board meetings and other public

events and approving a budget with competitive salaries for employees. Informal ways included expressing appreciation verbally and being willing to help with tasks when feasible—one trustee gave the example of being at a conference hosted at the college and offering to make copies when a last-minute run of more documents was needed. This trustee characterized his willingness to help in small, informal ways like this thusly:

> [I'm] happy to do that, because the reality is, my job is to make [college employees] wildly successful. And if my [lead administrator] and staff are wildly successful and they love their jobs, then I have been wildly successful. Whether my constituents think that or not, I think that's the important part.

Effective boards recognize that their institutions are the means by which a district's mission gets accomplished, and they support these institutions accordingly.

Support for Community

Given their role as bridges between the colleges and their external communities, it is no surprise that an element of board effectiveness is supporting the community. The primary manner in which trustees support their communities is through working together with them to build shared assets for the community and the colleges. Trustees shared about getting bonds passed to build facilities that would benefit college students and community members (like a performing arts center), as well as working with cities and counties to address affordable housing needs near college campuses. Other examples included getting to know major employers and business alliances (like chambers of commerce), K-12 governing boards, and city and county governing bodies to collaborate on college initiatives to meet community needs, like new programs aligned with regional workforce needs and using campuses to test sustainability initiatives. Seeing and demonstrating the value of board/community relationships is an important component of community college governing board effectiveness.

Support for Students

It may seem cliché to say that students are at the heart of everything a college does. But for all the trustees I interviewed, it was clear that supporting students was their primary motivation for pursuing board effectiveness. Every single trustee shared both tangible and symbolic ways in which they supported students. Tangible examples included developing funding partnerships to access scholarships for Dreamer and DACA students, lobbying for pay parity for student trustees on a board, finding funding and working with other private, public, and nonprofit entities to meet students' needs holistically (like food, housing, transportation, and medical care in addition to academic instruction), and saving students money by investing more in online educational resources, among others. Many trustees spoke about how they had supported students through the COVID-19 pandemic, approving emergency funding and lobbying for additional funding to address needs like laptops, wireless internet connection, virtual course platforms, and other assets students needed to transition to virtual education.

Symbolic ways in which boards support their colleges' students that participants shared included passing resolutions in support of student populations—for example, a resolution expressing solidarity with AAPI students after an anti-Asian hate crime was reported in the area—and giving student groups opportunities to speak and share about their experiences and accomplishments in board meetings. Trustees also shared how their boards were working to better serve all their students, including those from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, through board education on diversity, equity, inclusion, and access.

While the above, specific examples are ways in which trustees support their students, participants also shared that supporting students was not just a series of actions, but a guiding principle for their board's governance. Several trustees noted how students and their success were at the heart of every decision a board makes, and for effective boards, this shared focus

brings a sense of equilibrium to even the sharpest of disagreements. When I asked one trustee, Harriet, what criteria she found most helpful for evaluating her board's effectiveness, she responded,

> Well, however the students are doing. I think that [the board] keeps student success first in [our] minds [as we consider] every agenda item on our board packets. [We're asking,] how will this affect student success and outcomes for our students?

Whitney, a trustee at a different district, expressed how a shared commitment to students' success formed the foundation for an effective board who could work past disagreements:

> [The board's work is] all about the students. We have a sign in the board meeting room that says, "How does this help our students?" So that's supposed to always be top, in the top of our minds, that even though we're talking about construction of a heater somewhere, we're supposed to be thinking about how students benefit from any decisions we make […] And really [in any] decision we make, students come first in everything. Because our product is students—students who go through various programs, meet various requirements, and then go on and contribute to the community. So that's number one. And I think, even though I've talked to you about some disagreements on our board, that's something that we understand—all of us. Just, some of us have different ideas about how we get there.

Another trustee, Geo, concluded our conversation with the following sentiment when I asked if he had anything he wanted to add:

> To sum it up or something, I mean, us as trustees, we support the students by setting the direction and goals of our college district. So, we need to make sure that everything we do, we have students at the center.

Keeping students at the center of decision-making is a practice of highly effective boards, and it is the feature that drives all other elements of board and trustee effectiveness.

Theme 5. Trustees Cultivate Effectiveness Through Individual Trustee Training

Trustee training is trustees' individual utilization of educational resources in the community college context. Since trustees are lay leaders in the community college setting and may bring little knowledge of the 2-year higher education sector, there are many opportunities available to them to help them learn and grow in their role.

Opportunities that trustees identified as helpful were primarily those made available by CCLC. Participants shared how they had found value in attending workshops and conferences hosted by CCLC, where they could network with trustees from other districts and learn skills like interpreting different types of student outcomes data. Several trustees highlighted the flexibility of education modules, like the free webinars CCLC makes available, as beneficial for helping them grow in their trusteeship.

One particular program that trustees utilize to cultivate their effectiveness is a certificate program CCLC offers: the Excellence in Trusteeship Program (ETP). The program, vetted by the ACCT and ACCJC, includes training in the following nine areas: Accreditation; Board Evaluation; Board & CEO Relations; Brown Act Training[23]; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Ethics; Fiscal Responsibilities; Governance; and Student Success. Upon registering for ETP, trustees have 24 months to complete the program. The program consists of participating in 27 sessions across the nine competencies ("ETP Program Overview," 2023). Trustees complete training through CCLC events, local or national board training events, and through completion of online or printed modules, and must complete a certain number of training units in each area. Trustees who have completed ETP in the past are eligible to go through a recertification program in which they complete 16 training units in 24 months.

Most of the participants interviewed for this research had completed ETP and expressed having found value in it. Moira, a trustee at a multi-college district, had completed the program and was pursuing her recertification. She shared how it helped her stay up to date on current community college issues:

> I think ETP is one way to increase board effectiveness, through having a regular program of education where you're learning about the latest things that are going on in the world

[23] The Ralph M. Brown Act, typically referred to as the Brown Act, is California's public meeting law.

> of education. That's been helpful to me […] I just think that's really important, staying engaged in learning always. I think it's as important for trustees as it is for the students on the campus.

While other participants expressed similar sentiments, one trustee who had not completed the program shared his doubts about how successful it was in making trustees more effective. Sebastian, a Latino trustee in a different multi-college district who had served on the diversity committee for CCLC, offered the following critique:

> I got people a little flustered when I asked the question, "Okay, someone gets their excellence award" because [CCLC are] really pushing it hard. "Can you give me the evidence that shows that they're a better board member?" Nobody can answer that question […] Now, when I got on the diversity committee, they added I think six to eight hours on DEI for a board member. It's a lot of time. [The whole program], it's like 36 hours. And [the sessions] are expensive. It's a moneymaking thing for CCLC. [When a board member completes ETP], that's still not […] going to show evidence that you're a good board member. Yeah, you have your little certificate, but it's tough because everybody's perspective and upbringing is different, and you're not going to lose that ever.

It seems likely that there is some benefit to earning ETP certification and completing other CCLC offerings for trustee training, particularly for new trustees with little experience in the 2-year higher education sector. However, Sebastian's critiques of a lack of evidence for the program are warranted. Based on this, the third phase of this dissertation examines how ETP certification relates to student outcomes to answer the third research question: How do trustee development efforts relate to student outcomes?

Theme 6. Boards Cultivate Their Effectiveness Through Whole-Board Development Sessions

Board development refers here to full board participation in activities focused on three areas: shared direction-setting (as in a goal-setting session), team-building and fellowship, and learning together about topics relevant to their college district. Based on the responses, board development in the first two areas typically happens at board retreats, while board development

in the third area typically happens in study sessions, which may be special board meetings focused on a single study topic for the board, or as part of a board retreat.

Respondents noted that the two areas of shared direction-setting, and team-building and fellowship, were often incorporated in the same settings. Like all board meetings, board retreats are required to be public events, but certain measures are taken to lessen the likelihood of members of the public attending. These include focusing the entire agenda on topics or exercises related to team-building and shared direction-setting (like discussing board evaluation results), and holding the retreat at an atypical location, like a hotel conference room or other venue some distance from the usual board room. This separation from usual board duties helps foster greater openness and willingness to share and get to know each other.

Study sessions, or sessions in which a board focuses on a single study topic of relevance to their college district, are another approach through which boards cultivate their effectiveness. Study sessions may be related to particular topics of interest or concern for a board, or they may be related to board orientation conducted internally to the college district. One trustee, Moira, shared how they're typically planned in her district:

> Whenever we think there's something that trustees ought to be better informed about, then we'll do a study session. We might bring in someone who's an authority in that field, or we bring in people from our own district who have that expertise.

Later in our conversation, Moira shared about a coalition of trustees on the board who had been causing some issues by disrespecting other board members and breaking public meetings laws, but indicated that that issue had been worked through. I asked how the board had navigated that tumultuous period, and she shared how study sessions had been an important component:

> We had extra study sessions. Study sessions are open to the public, because legally, they have to be, but generally speaking, nobody [from the public] comes to them, because [the board is] just going to be talking. We're not going to be taking action. So that gave us the

> opportunity to, because there were very few, if any observers, that gave us the opportunity to be really frank and talk things through. And we did.

Another trustee, Thriddis, echoed the idea that boards can bond through more secluded settings like retreats and study sessions.

> [Discussing the board evaluation at an annual retreat] gives you the time to talk about those things you can't talk about as you're sitting at the board level. Remember that as a board, the only time you get to chat with each other is literally when you're sitting at that dais. And that's a terrible place to have these chats. So most of the time, even though a retreat was in open session, we would be in a smaller room sitting around a table […] it's super helpful to have that opportunity just to be able to chat with each other about how you think the board's doing. Because you can't ask that [in a regular board meeting]. There's just no other good time during a year of meetings where the chair can say, "What do you guys think? Are we doing well?" […] I think cultivating board effectiveness happens by having board evaluation. I think it happens by having more workshops than you want, because it forces you to sit together. […] And some of us are bored out of our minds, some of us are not, or some of us don't care, whatever. But it forces you to all be in the same room. And so I think that a board should do some workshops during the year.

Taking opportunities to have frank discussions and work together as a board to reflect, set direction, and learn together is crucial for cultivating board effectiveness.

Conclusion: Emerging Frameworks for Trustee and Board Effectiveness

The qualitative analysis of fourteen interviews with community college trustees revealed that effective trustees are those who embrace both authority and humility. They are unafraid to take their roles on and ask hard questions, advocating fiercely for what they feel is best for their colleges and leveraging their relationships and political skill on behalf of their college community. They are also humble, fully appreciating the ongoing learning necessary to become and stay knowledgeable and effective and viewing their trustee role as an act of public service.

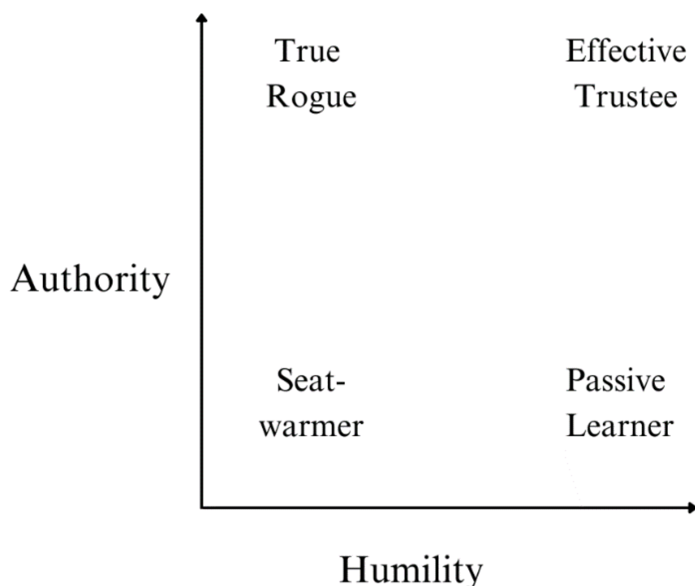
Effective boards are those that practice both accountability and support. They practice both of these postures internally as a board, with their lead administrators, the institutions they govern, and their communities. They are lay leadership bodies who recognize their unique

position in holding the education sector accountable while being accountable to state mandates, and they govern on a firm principle of support for the students their districts serve.

But what happens when any of these elements—trustee authority, trustee humility, board accountability, and board support—are missing? Based on the interview findings, I developed an emerging framework for understanding. The framework for trustee effectiveness is shown in Figure 4:

Figure 4

Emerging Framework for Trustee Effectiveness



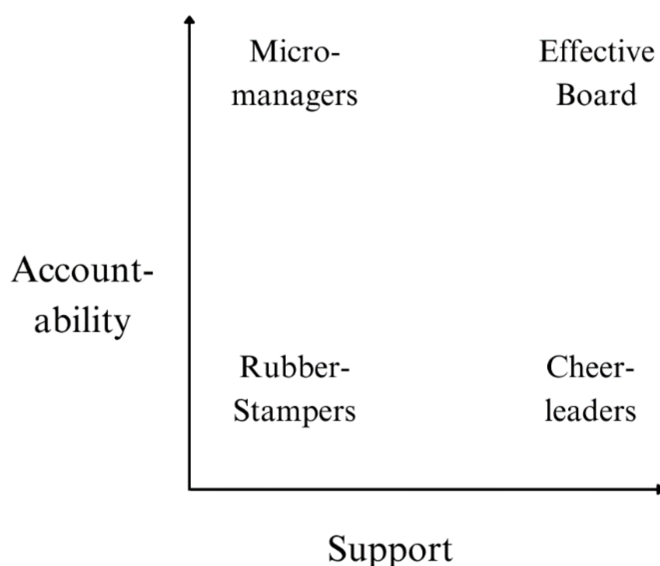
In this framework, trustees need both high levels of authority and humility to be effective. Trustees who embrace only the authority that comes with their role, without embracing the humility, are true "rogue trustees" in the way that rogues have been understood for the last several years (O'Banion 2009a, 2009b). Trustees who embrace neither their authority, nor their humility, are seat-warmers. These are the trustees respondents referred to who show up to a monthly board meeting and collect their payment, but who never put the time in to become more

effective in the role. Finally, trustees with a great deal of humility who never embrace the authority that comes with their role remain passive learners. They may learn a great deal about the community college sector and the needs of their community's students, but they never take on the positioning of someone who can help address those needs. Effective trustees are humble and authoritative; they are willing to be uncomfortable, and are willing to make others uncomfortable in pursuit of realizing their college district's mission.

A similar emerging framework for board effectiveness is shown in Figure 5:

Figure 5

Emerging Framework for Board Effectiveness



In this framework, boards need to practice both accountability and support to be effective. A board that provides accountability without support becomes a board of micromanagers, trying to assert influence and direct operations in a manner outside their role. Boards who provide neither accountability nor support are rubber-stampers, likely approving whatever their lead administrator sets before them without question or further action. A board who provides support, but not accountability is a board who "cheerleads"—hyping the college district and using their

influence to speak well of it, without questioning anything the college district does or helping it improve in any way.

The participants in this phase of the study have contributed to our understanding of what board and trustee effectiveness entails, and how it may be better cultivated. But how do we know if anything that is done to cultivate effectiveness has any effect? The work in the next phase of this dissertation explores this question further and provides some preliminary insight.

Chapter VII. Phase 3 Findings: Quantitative Analyses

The third phase of this study was a series of exploratory quantitative analyses that investigated the following research question: How do current trustee development efforts relate to student outcomes? Based on the findings of the qualitative interviews, CCLC's ETP certification program was selected as a current form of trustee development that could yield information about the relationship between trustee development and student outcomes. Initial exploration of ETP certification included identifying average proportions of ETP certification for a board, ETP certification rates across regions, and certification rates across genders. Next, I conducted simple linear and multiple regressions and ANOVA tests to explore the relationship between ETP certification and student outcomes. The independent variable was the proportion of trustees on a board who had completed CCLC's ETP certificate program. The 12 dependent variables were a selection of student success metrics for each college district, made available by CCCCO. The regressions were conducted as point-in-time estimates, comparing the number of trustees who had completed ETP by academic year 2019-2020 with the student outcomes data for that year. No evidence was found for a relationship between ETP certification and student outcomes, suggesting that this form of trustee development does not significantly affect students' success.

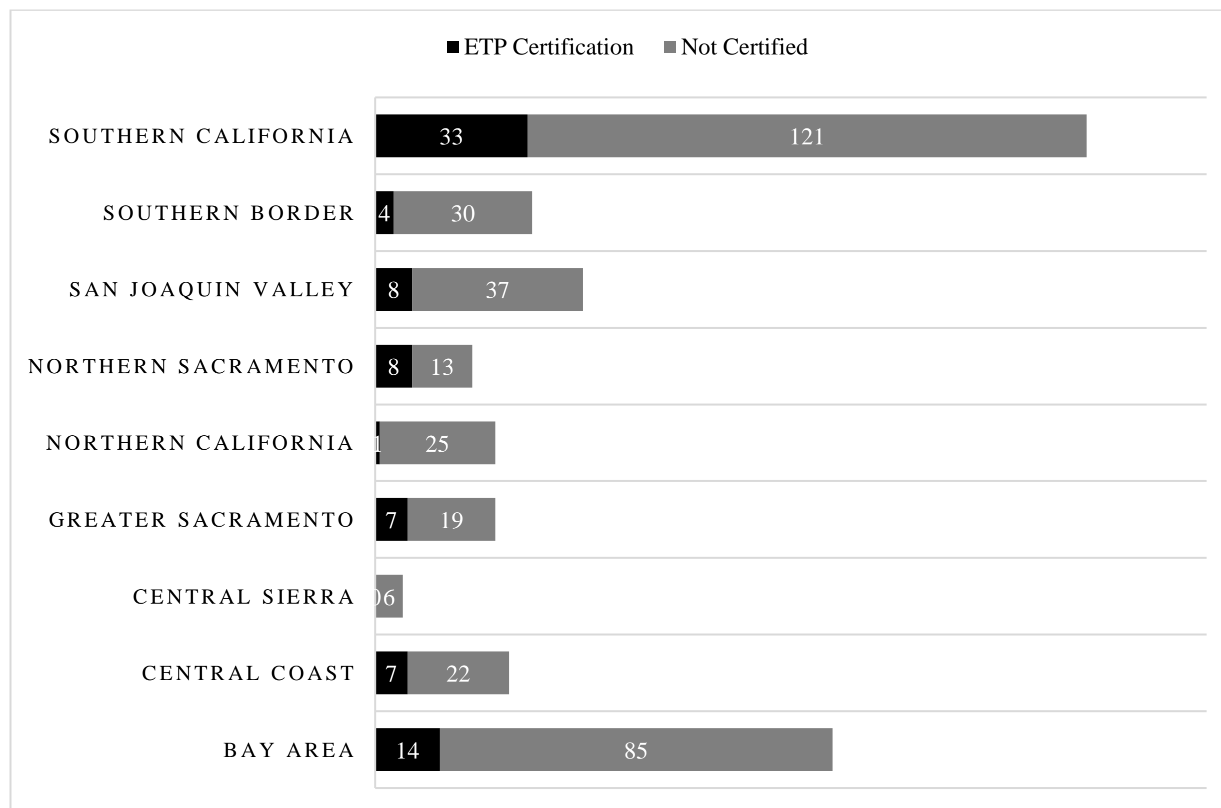
Descriptive Analysis Results

This initial set of analyses were conducted to give a sense of an underexplored dataset. I compared rates of ETP certification vs. non-certification across regions; district type; and trustee demographics, including gender, race/ethnicity, and age. The overall rate of ETP certification is 19%; 82 of all 440 trustees statewide have earned their ETP certification.

Figure 6 shows the different rates of ETP certification compared to non-certification across California's community college regions.

Figure 6

ETP Certification by Region



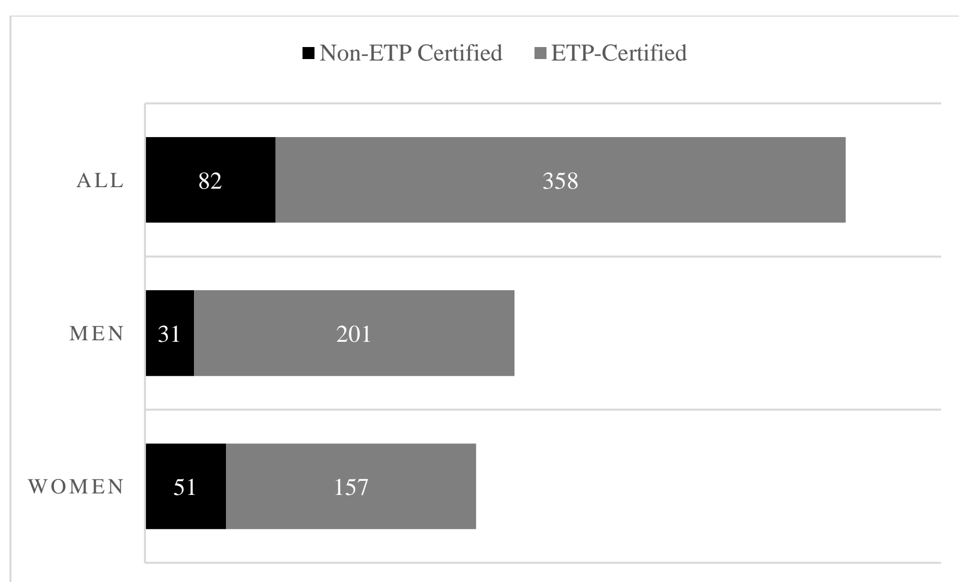
No region had a majority of trustees with ETP certification. The region with the highest percentage of trustees with ETP certification was the Northern Sacramento region; 38% of trustees in that region had earned their certification. Next highest was the Greater Sacramento region, with a 27% certification rate. This is likely due in part to these regions' geographic proximity to Sacramento, where CCLC's offices are located and opportunities for ETP training are often held. Trustees who live closer to Sacramento likely have an easier time travelling to ETP training opportunities, and it is cheaper for districts in these regions to fund trustees' travel. The only region with no completions was the Central Sierra region, which only has six trustees

total and from which travel is more limited. The mean certification rate across all regions was 24%, and the median was 22%.

Next, I examined ETP certification by gender. Available data are gathered through the lens of a gender binary, so only data on women and men were available. The rates of ETP certification by gender compared to overall certification are indicated in Figure 7.

Figure 7

ETP Certification by Gender



Statewide, women trustees have earned their ETP certification at nearly twice the rate men trustees have (25% of all women trustees compared to 13% of all men trustees). This may be related to the fact that trustees are mostly men (53%). While the gender gap between trustees has narrowed in recent years, trustees are still majority men, and it may be that women trustees feel a greater pressure to earn possible social indicators of trustee competency like an ETP certificate.

Finally, I explored ETP certification by race/ethnicity. Recorded racial and ethnic groups include Asian/Pacific Islander (API), Black or African American, White, Hispanic/Latine, Native

American or American Indian, Other, and Undeclared. The rates of certification by race/ethnicity are indicated in Figure 8:

Figure 8

ETP Certification by Race/Ethnicity

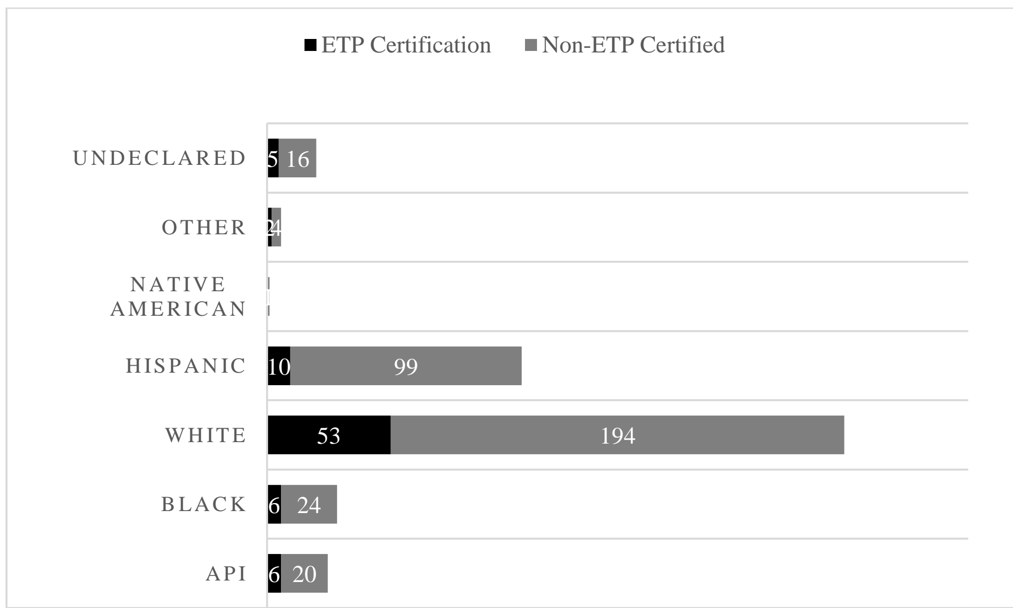
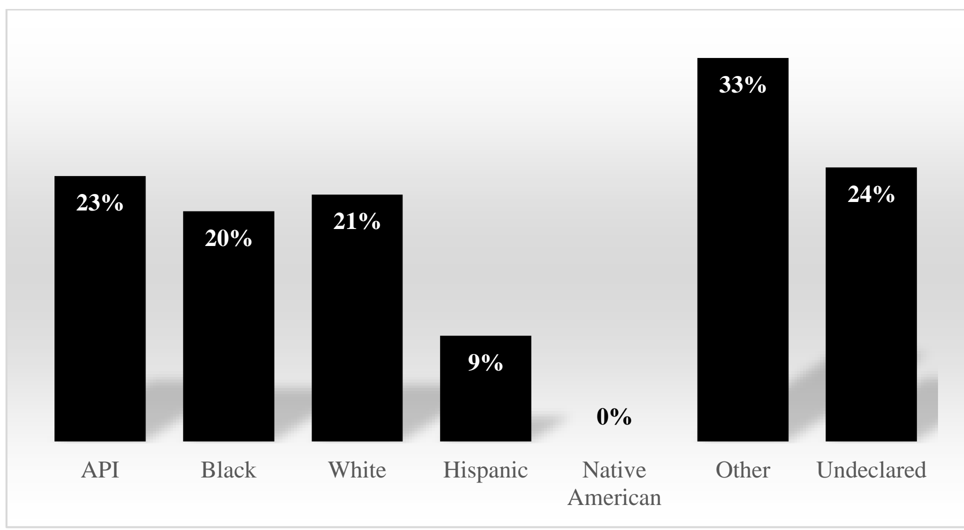


Figure 9 shows the percentage of total ETP certificate earners, disaggregated by race/ethnicity.

Figure 9

Race/Ethnicity of All ETP Certificate Earners



Rates of ETP certification vary considerably by race/ethnicity. Given that nearly one quarter of California community college trustees are Hispanic/Latine (109 of 440 total trustees), future research might explore possible cultural and accessibility reasons for the lower ETP certification rate among this group, and what other avenues trustees of all races and ethnicities use for their own trustee development.

Simple Linear Regression Findings

The simple linear regressions explored the relationship between proportions of boards' ETP certification and 12 student outcome variables. The simple linear regressions yielded no evidence of a relationship between ETP certification and student outcomes. The model being tested was:

$$SO = \alpha + \beta_1 ETP + \varepsilon_1$$

In this equation, SO is each of the student outcome variables under consideration: skills gain, course success rate, transfer level math and English, transfer level math, transfer level English, completed a level of education, completed noncredit CTE, earned 9+ CTE units, persisted at the same college, attained the vision, became employed, or earned a living wage.

None of the simple linear regressions were statistically significant. The results for each analysis are summarized in Table 11:

Table 11

Statistics for Simple Linear Regressions of ETP Certification and Student Outcome Variables

Dependent Variables	R Square	Total df	F Statistic	Significance F
Skills Gain	0.002	69	0.141	0.708
Course Success Rate	0.006	70	0.440	0509
Transfer Level Math and English	8.133E-07	70	5.612E-05	0.994
Transfer Level Math	0.000	70	0.028	0.867
Transfer Level English	7.894E-05	70	0.005	0.941
Completed a Level of Education	0.019	30	0.569	0.456
Completed Noncredit CTE	0.002	55	0.117	0.734

Earned 9+ CTE Units	7.340E-05	70	0.005	0.943
Persisted at Same College	0.007	70	0.493	0.485
Attained the Vision	0.023	70	1.610	0.209
Became Employed	0.021	70	1.455	0.232
Living Wage	0.024	70	1.724	0.194

None of the results were significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The variance in degrees of freedom is due to missing data from some districts for the dependent variables. The small values for R Square indicate that the differences in proportion of ETP certification across districts does not explain differences in student outcomes. After obtaining these findings, I added three control variables and conducted a series of multiple regression/ANOVA tests with the same dependent variables.

Multiple Regression and ANOVA Analyses

The final component of the quantitative, third phase was a series of multiple regression/ANOVA tests exploring the relationship between ETP certification and student outcomes. Three control variables were added for these analyses: enrollment, region, and district type (multi- or single-college district). The model being tested for each dependent student outcome variable (SO) was:

$$SO = \alpha + \beta_1 ETP + \beta_2 Enrollment + \beta_3 Region + \beta_4 DistrictType + \varepsilon_1$$

I calculated enrollments in units of 10,000 to simplify the equations (e.g., an enrollment of 23,000 students would have been calculated with enrollment as 2.3). For each of the same 12 student outcome dependent variables, I found no relationships with ETP certification. Table 12 shows the summarized results for each analysis.

Table 12

Statistics for Multiple Linear Regression/ANOVA of ETP Certification and Skills Gain

Dependent Variable	R Square	Total df	F Statistic	Significance F

Skills Gain	0.059	70	1.036	0.395
Course Success Rate	0.087	71	1.595	0.186
Transfer Level Math and English	0.025	71	0.426	0.789
Transfer Level Math	0.041	71	0.720	0.581
Transfer Level English	0.023	71	0.498	0.737
Completed a Level of Education	0.207	31	1.359	0.272
Completed Noncredit CTE	0.0491	56	0.671	0.615
Earned 9+ CTE Units	0.023	71	0.389	0.816
Persisted at Same College	0.033	71	0.579	0.679
Attained the Vision	0.072	71	1.297	0.280
Became Employed	0.086	71	1.583	0.189
Living Wage	0.069	71	1.250	0.299

None of the results were significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.[24]

While there may be other benefits to trustees earning their ETP certification, there is no evidence to suggest at this time that it is correlated with improved student outcomes. These findings may seem surprising, given the positive tone with which most interview participants spoke about ETP, and the sincere passion for helping students they all expressed. Given participants' considerable political and social connections within their communities, I was especially surprised that no significant correlations were identified between ETP certification and either becoming employed or attaining a living wage. It may be that trustees with the most substantial social connections that may lead to improved student employment outcomes may also have the most packed schedules, and thus may not make time for trustee development as formatted in ETP.

Overall, it is troubling that no relationship was found between ETP certification and student outcomes. It is possible that trustee development takes longer than the 24 months trustees allotted to complete ETP to have an effect on students. However, the program was first offered in

[24] As a robustness check, I repeated these analyses with ETP certification as a dichotomous variable, in which a board was identified as having any trustees who had completed the program or none. No significant results were found.

2013. Some of the trustees who earned their certification early on still serve on their boards. Further, trustees are elected to four-year terms in California. This means that, if a trustee takes 24 months to earn their ETP certification, they may only have an additional 24 months in their tenure, depending on the outcome of the election that follows. If a trustee spent half of their term on development, one would hope to see some improved outcomes for students in the districts that trustee helps govern. The fact that this proves not to be the case has significant implications for further research and future board development efforts. We turn to these implications after the final step in mixed methods research: an integrated analysis of the findings from each phase.

Chapter VIII. Integrated Findings for All Three Phases

A key step in MMR is integrating the findings of the different phases. This allows a researcher to see how findings from one phase are confirmed, challenged, or complicated by findings from other phases, leading to richer conclusions. In this section, I summarize the findings from each phase and reexamine them in light of the findings from the other phases.

Through Phase 1, the content analysis, I identified several dimensions of governance related to how trustees envision and evaluate their own effectiveness, bolded in the following statement: *Effective community college governing boards practice* ***Board Skillship*** *so that they can fulfill their* ***Internal*** *and* ***External Institutional Responsibilities*** *through* ***Communication and Delegation***. Board skillship, the practices and processes foundational to effective governance in most board contexts, sets the foundation for board effectiveness. Through practices and processes, they fulfill their internal and external institutional responsibilities; like stewardship of policies, budgets, facilities plans, and other guiding documents; and holding their institutions accountable. External responsibilities include showing institutional support, fulfilling external functional responsibilities like public relations and advocacy, and leveraging relationships external to the college district. Boards fulfill these responsibilities through communication and delegation, liaising between their colleges and their communities. They source the information they need to make the decisions they must, and they support their lead administrators and institutions while holding them accountable.

The second phase of this study confirms and nuances much of what was found in the content analysis. In the qualitative interviews, the following themes emerged in response to the research question, “How do community college trustees envision and evaluate their effectiveness?” (1) Effective trustees embrace their authority; (2) Effective trustees practice

humility; (3) Effective boards hold others accountable and are accountable to others; and (4) Effective boards provide support. Both the content analysis and the interviews highlight the interstitial nature of the trustee role. Trustees are bridges between their communities and the institutions they govern, leveraging their relationships on the colleges' behalf. In both phases' findings, holding institutions accountable and supporting them publicly emerge as important board functions. Many of the roles highlighted in the content analysis findings regarding stewarding policies and other guiding documents were echoed in the interviews, and both sets of findings emphasize that students are at the heart of effective boards' governance. While trustees do not manage the day-to-day operations at the colleges, one of their most important roles is holding their institutions accountable for progress on institutional outcomes.

The findings from the interviews expand and challenge the findings from the content analysis. The image of a board that proceeds from the content analysis findings is one that emphasizes the functional. Boards have certain tasks and responsibilities, and they are effective to the extent that they execute those tasks and fulfill those responsibilities. They are supposed to interface well with every stakeholder involved in the college district, and to remain "at the policy level," delegating operations of the college district to the lead administrator. Each of these elements are, to a certain extent, captured in the latter three themes of the interview findings, related to trustee humility, board accountability, and board support.

What the interviews add is trustee authority—the ideas that trustees have teeth. They are political movers and shakers, well-connected in their communities and capable of challenging ideas they don't feel suit their institutions or their communities. To a certain extent, the evaluation reports (and the literature on rogue trustees) infantilize this aspect of trusteeship. Trustees are either supporting their lead administrators wholeheartedly and vocally, or they are

challenging and earning themselves the dreaded moniker “rogue trustee.” The interviews, however, show that when trustees come with a posture of humility—of wanting to learn all they can, to do the best they can on students’ behalf—their authority is a strength. They seek lead administrators that are the best fit for their community context and students’ needs, and they fire lead administrators that turn out not to be the right fit. Effective trustees, and the boards they compose, push their institutions to be better, and are not afraid to fight for the resources their institutions need.

But to what effect? In my conversations with trustees, they all centered students and students’ success. They spoke eloquently and passionately about how students are at the heart of their governance and the missions of their institutions. And yet, the regression analyses in the quantitative portion of this study found no correlation between how many trustees on a board (if any) had completed ETP, and any of the student success metrics considered. In the literature review, literature from other board governance sectors linked board effectiveness to organizational outcomes. While the present study has its limitations, this preliminary analysis has found no such link between one form of professional development trustees identified as contributing to their effectiveness, and organizational outcomes in the form of student outcomes.

Taken together, the integrated findings give us a fuller picture of community college governing board effectiveness. There are many functional and operational responsibilities that come with community college governance. Effective trustees, and the boards they compose, embrace these responsibilities enthusiastically, trying (and sometimes failing) to fulfill them with the right balance of authority and humility, accountability and support. And yet, for all the effort, time, and skill invested in governing well, there is no evidence to suggest that the trustees

"putting the time in" to grow in their role through a statewide trustee effectiveness certification program are having any measurable effect on student outcomes at their institutions.

Certainly, it would be incorrect to say that trustees have no impact. Every trustee I interviewed gave examples of impressive, student-focused initiatives they had supported and secured resources for at their colleges. The challenging political context of trustees' positions means that sometimes, effective trustees lose subsequent elections, and their expertise and organizational knowledge leave the dais with them. And yet, the quantitative findings are sobering. There may be much that trustees and boards can do to improve their effectiveness with respect to supporting students' success, but at this time, board members earning certificates for their excellence in trusteeship leaves a desired effect unobtained.

Chapter IX. Discussion and Implications

This study began from a desire to understand governing board effectiveness in the community college context. Given the mission of community colleges, I have considered how board effectiveness may or may not be linked to student success through each phase of the study. MMR studies culminate in a meta-inference that integrates the claims from analyses of both qualitative and quantitative data (Creamer, 2018; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This chapter begins with an articulation of this study's meta-inference, and then contextualizes it within the research and current theoretical work on governing boards and other relevant higher education threads. I then offer implications for community college practitioners, as well as policymakers and accrediting bodies. Next, I offer suggestions for future research. Finally, I conclude by summarizing the study.

Meta-inference: How Individualized Approaches to Board Effectiveness Limit Progress in Community College Governance

The findings for both the content analysis and interviews centered students. Community college trustees in California appear to be a passionate collection of individuals, and they seem to be deeply committed to doing right by their college stakeholders, and especially by students. Many of them are alumni of community colleges—some of them of the very institutions they now govern. They support community colleges publicly, professionally, and personally—many trustees, including some interviewed for this study, have been proud to see their children graduate from community colleges. Despite their political skill, trustees are not powerbrokers removed from colleges' missions. Many of them are passionate public servants, and the best of them are fierce advocates for their colleges' students and the community college sector more broadly.

And yet, current approaches to improving the effectiveness of community college governing boards fail to utilize trustees' strengths, or to help individual trustees with good intentions become effective agents of better board governance The most commonly used theories of community college board governance, and the public meeting laws that determine how and when boards may convene, insist that boards operate as collective entities. Agency theory requires the delegation of authority to an agent—in this case, the lead administrator (Phelan, 2021). The perennially popular PGM dictates that trustees must stay at the policy level, not getting involved in the administration of day-to-day college operations (Carver, 1990). Individual trustees, we are reminded, have no authority as individuals. They only have authority as a collective, governing entity. No individual trustee may direct a lead administrator—only the board as a whole may direct the lead administrator, speaking with one voice. When a vote on a policy or resolution is taken, all differences among individual trustees are elided. The board has now made "the board decision," and all trustees on that board have a responsibility to support that decision, whatever misgivings they may have privately had, or public votes in opposition they may have made.

This idea—that boards are collective entities, and must operate as such—is not, on its face, a problem. The problem is that, while boards are encouraged to operate collectively, energies are focused on developing or correcting individual trustees. The challenge that current governance paradigms perpetuate, and that the present study elucidates, is that while boards must operate collectively to be effective, very little about how they currently cultivate their effectiveness is collective. Most trustee development is packaged as just that—trustee development. ETP stands for the excellence in *trusteeship* program. Effectiveness is reduced to individual trustees consuming content modules, with no assessment of how well or to what

extent those trustees have engaged those modules (C. Sandoval, personal communication, February 27th, 2019). Furthermore, board effectiveness is elided into trustee effectiveness—the assumption appearing to be that a collection of well-informed, passionate trustees will compose an effective board. And yet, boards with more trustees who have completed substantial professional development to cultivate their effectiveness have no better outcomes for their students than boards where no trustees have completed ETP.

Certainly, some content-based learning is necessary for new trustees. In their historic position as lay leaders, they need orientation to the diverse goals and unique attributes of the mission of higher education. For example, trustees may need to be introduced to the "awkward economics" (Winston, 1999) of higher education, where budgetary needs and fiduciary responsibility may have different or more nuanced meanings than they do in for-profit settings with which trustees may have professional experience. Even trustees with prior experience in the higher education sector may need education on how the community college board is situated among different policy-making bodies; for example, in California, the board receives its authority through a state statute (California Education Code § 70902 (1976)), and contracts with the statewide board of governors as a result. There is much that is particular to the community college governance context, so providing content-based learning opportunities for individual trustees is critical.

At the same time, board effectiveness is not the sum of the effectiveness of individual trustees. It is based not in content knowledge or individual skill, but in collective, relational skill and good will. Boards are effective only insofar as they are effective teams, able to focus together to make progress on shared goals. But public meeting laws present a barrier to the kind of relationship-building that might serve the development of board effectiveness. In the second

phase of this study, trustees shared about how meetings that members of the public rarely attended—like board retreats or study sessions—were often the most helpful venues for having authentic conversations among trustees. But these types of meetings are typically outliers—not routine occurrences—and the result is that it can be very difficult for a board to do the kind of relationship-building necessary to be collectively effective. In a 2020 article in The Atlantic, Conor Friedersdorf touches on this challenge:

> Imagine a large family, perhaps your own, undertaking a series of four-hour road trips every month in a 12-person van. Even if everyone loved one another unconditionally and had no argument about anything more consequential than where to stop for lunch, passengers would get on one another's nerves. Small annoyances would build up over time until tiny transgressions touched off major rows. Being on a civic council is like that, except you don't love the other people, the arguments are about the most intractable problems faced by your community, and everything is done in public.

The same could be said of many community college governing boards where members have not been able to get to know their fellow trustees and develop a shared sense of positive intentions and commitment to students.

Collective, relational effectiveness is important for trustees not just within the context of their own board's effectiveness, but also because of how boards are politically situated among different levels of policymakers and stakeholders. Boards have an impact in their formal role, but they also have a mediating influence between state-level bodies, and stakeholders at colleges who are directly interacting with students in colleges' daily operations. The same skills that may yield effective boards from an internal, institutional perspective are likely those that boards who are effective within their political situation as mediators.

We cannot claim boards should only function as collective entities and then, through public meeting laws that do not allow board relationship-building to happen in closed session

and individualized approaches to trustee development, excessively limit boards' ability to become effective as collective entities.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Before turning to the practical implications for community college stakeholders, a deeper discussion on governing boards and their role in higher education is needed. Researchers have recently lamented the lack of research on higher education governing boards (Morgan et al., 2023), and community college governing boards in particular (Amey, 2022; Eddy & Gillett-Karam, 2022; Kater et al., 2022). There is a clear need to engage boards more fully in higher education leadership research, and some scholars have begun deeply needed, equity-focused theoretical work that centers governing boards in the 4-year sector (Morgan et al., 2023). But in a recent issue of New Directions for Community Colleges (October, 2022) that focused on trustees, the authors and editors appeared to favor freshening up older research (most of it summarized in Chapter 2 of this document) over conducting new, empirical studies. The only recent data that included trustee perspectives cited in the issue was not based on a peer-reviewed study, but on a short, largely demographic survey conducted by ACCT, a national lobbying organization. No wonder that the title for the final, summative chapter in the issue was, "Community college boards of trustees: The more things change, the more they stay the same?" (Amey, 2022). One imagines that, if one reviews older research through the lens of current issues without considering recent trustee perspectives, much about boards of trustees will indeed seem the same.

What perpetuates this vague sense that boards matter, but not enough to engage community college board perspectives and issues in contemporary research? Based on the

findings from the literature review and first and second phases of this study, I offer two nascent, possible explanations.

The first is that the outsize influence of O'Banion's (2009a, 2009b) work on rogue trustees has created a deficit-based approach to considering trustees. I imagine O'Banion's (2009a, 2009b) work resonates deeply with lead administrators, board chairs, and other stakeholders who have had to endure the disruption a true rogue can foster. This likely contributes to the degree to which the rogue trustee concept has spread in trustee development, as my participants' familiarity with the term (but not necessarily the research behind it) would indicate. As noted in the sixth chapter, the rogue label is one that is perhaps over-applied. But putting that aside, even true rogues are ultimately only as effective as their ability to "count to four"—to get a majority vote for their positions. The posture among researchers and practitioners should not be, then, "Look what a problem rogues can be!" but rather, "How can we cultivate boards with such resilience and integrity that they mitigate the damage a true rogue (or even two) might cause?"

The second possible explanation for the lack of research including trustee perspectives is related to the first. Frankly, highly effective boards are likely more challenging for their lead administrators. They might not take information and recommendations at face value, even while assuming positive intent. They may passionately and articulately argue for positions that are not aligned with the views of professional educators, including those who administrate statewide systems. It's easier to blame trustees for a lack of content expertise, and keep them occupied with development opportunities focused on developing that expertise, than to carefully and seriously engage their perspectives and ideas in a way that might lead to change. As Dunn argues in his 2003 analysis of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 and subsequent state-imposed

requirements for higher education, policy making can best occur with a blending of elected and nonelected official's values and preferences, with elements of both Finer's (1936) accountability from elected officials and Friedrich's (1960) responsibility from nonelected officials. Boards have much to offer, and many trustees are motivated public servants with students' success at the heart of their governance. How do we utilize their strengths more effectively, accepting that doing so will bring great challenge and reward?

One board theorist has recently offered a new way of approaching boards that may help. A recent article from Brennan (2022) views boards from a team-based perspective, assessing whether boards function as teams, and how team effectiveness approaches can be utilized to improve board effectiveness, as well as provide researchers and practitioners with a humanizing lens through which to view boards. While Brennan's (2022) context is boards of directors in the corporate/for-profit sector, her conclusions shed light on the challenges for boards governing community college districts. While boards do not always function as teams, there are benefits from applying ideas from team coaching to a board context—especially the role of psychological safety, or the idea that people will perform as individuals rather than as team members if they do not feel psychologically safe enough to express their views freely. There may also be benefit to reconsidering which decision-making processes may best support inclusion of diverse perspectives, as Mendelberg et al. (2014) have explored.

Another useful strategy to foster greater board effectiveness might be to borrow from recent work on collaborative learning among undergraduate students. Conrad and Lundberg (2022) define collaborative learning as:

> When two more people learn from, with and for others in shared problem-solving that is focused on the pursuit of promising ideas for addressing real-world challenges and opportunities. (p. 31)

Their work offers several practices for collaborative learning, including developing shared endeavors, cultivating a culture of trust, obligating each member of a group to seize responsibility for back-and-forth dialogue, preserving spaces for diverse and contrarian perspectives, encouraging self-reflection, questioning the self and others, and holding participants accountable (Conrad and Lundberg, 2022). Such an approach could be a breath of fresh air in politically charged, contentious board environments, where communication may be more about signaling solidarity on cultural worldviews rather than reasoned deliberation (Wagner et al., 2014). Community college boards can certainly become contentious political arenas, especially given the broader cultural battles being waged in and on higher education as a whole (e.g., Taylor, 2022). Instead of targeting development efforts predominantly toward individual trustee content training, what might happen if we approached community college governing boards as capable teams-in-the-making, and approached board development from a collaborative learning perspective? Trustees have a heart for students—participants spoke with great warmth of their experiences supporting students at graduations, learning from their student trustees, and hearing from student groups at board meetings. How can we empower boards to govern in a way that makes a difference for the students they want to see succeed, rather than penning boards in with perhaps-excessively restrictive governance models? In the sections that follow, I offer my suggestions.

Implications for Practitioners, Policymakers, and Accrediting Organizations

For trustees, I offer the following recommendations: take advantage of the content training you may need to inform your decision-making in the community college context. Concurrently, do not settle for individually based development opportunities alone. Advocate on your board for full-board development in settings that promote frank discussion and relationship-

building. Be relentless in ensuring that your board's goals are linked to student outcomes, and continually evaluate with your fellow board members how you can all develop policies and fulfill your internal and external institutional responsibilities in a way that ensures greater student success over time.

For lead administrators, I recommend working with your board and your staff to develop a robust and rapid internal orientation process. Take advantage of state and national trustee development resources where feasible and useful, but not at the expense of orienting trustees to your local institution's context, communities, challenges, and triumphs. Concurrently, do not mistake orientation for board development. While it is important to orient trustees to the community college sector, this is not a substitute for the kind of team-oriented development that might help your board partner with you most effectively in leadership. In collaboration with your board, elucidate an aspirational board culture that suits your local and institutional context, and invest in developing and fortifying it. When a true rogue trustee gets elected or appointed, utilize the political skill already present on your board to marginalize, sanction, and, if needed, remove that individual. Finally, be eager to partner well with your board. Do not regard your board as an obstacle to your vision for your college district; cultivate your own relationships with trustees and with the board as a whole. Regard your board not as an incompetent boss, but as an informed and worthy mentor.

Finally, for board evaluations to be meaningful, accreditation organizations should delineate clear expectations for board evaluation and development. Evaluations should satisfy some consistent criteria across institutions, rather than allowing all boards to create their own approaches to evaluation. Ensure that student outcomes are represented in board evaluation

processes to begin fostering a stronger link between boards and the students on whose behalf they govern.

Directions for Future Research

As emphasized above, there is a great need for further research on community college governing boards. Updated, peer-reviewed descriptive research is long overdue, and there are many potential threads to explore. One that is virtually non-existent is board succession-planning. How can boards and colleges think about gaps in their boards' expertise, and identify potential candidates or appointees that might help fill those gaps? Researchers should also take advantage of underutilized data sources to study governing boards, including data made available by statewide community college systems. Additionally, future research should incorporate trustee perspectives as well as those of other college stakeholders—especially students—to answer questions related to community college governance. We need diverse perspectives to influence future governance models, and to inform dearly needed theoretical work in this area.

Conclusion

This mixed methods study of community college governing board effectiveness has initiated necessary research in a long-neglected area of community college research. A content analysis of governing board evaluation reports shared that boards practice board skillship to fulfill internal and external institutional responsibilities through communication and delegation. Qualitative interviews with current and former trustees indicated that effective trustees embrace their authority and practice humility, while effective boards cultivate a culture of accountability and provide support for their institutions and students. Trustee development opportunities are largely content-focused and individually conducted, while board development opportunities are process- and relationship-focused, but less widely available. Despite trustees' apparently sincere

commitment to students' success, preliminary quantitative analyses showed no relationship between completing a trustee development certification program and improved student outcomes. This study has initiated a long-overdue exploration of community college governing board effectiveness, and this area of community college leadership research is ripe for further exploration.

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Appendix A

IRB Exemption Letter

Minimal Risk Research IRB
7/6/2022

Submission ID number:	2022-0839
Title:	Effective for Whom? A Mixed Methods Study of Community College Governing Board Effectiveness
Principal Investigator:	Xueli Wang
Point-of-contact:	Erin Hastey, Xueli Wang
IRB Staff Reviewer:	Olyvia Kuchta

The MRR IRB conducted a review of the above referenced initial application. The study was determined to meet the criteria for exempt human subjects in accordance with the following category(ies) as defined under 45 CFR 46:

(2)(ii) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation (low risk)

If this study falls under VA regulations, you must get final approval from the VA Research & Development Committee prior to starting research activites.

NOTE: If the research under this exemption application becomes subject to FDA regulations, or other changes are made that could affect the exemption status, you must contact the IRB as the IRB's exemption determination may no longer apply.

You have identified the following financial sources to support the research activities in this IRB application:

None.

If this information is incorrect, please submit a change to modify your application as appropriate.

To access the materials the IRB reviewed and accepted as part of the exemption determination, please log in to your ARROW account and view the documents tab in the submission's workspace.

Although the human subjects research described in the ARROW application referenced above was determined to meet the federal criteria for exemption and thus does not require continuing review, please be aware of your responsibilities related to the conduct of the research and when additional IRB review is required. Prior to starting research activities, please review the Principal Investigator and Study Team Responsibilities in the Investigator Manual, which

includes a description of the types of changes that must be submitted to ensure the research continues to comply with the conditions of the exemption and/or category(ies) of exemption.

If you have general questions, please contact the Minimal Risk Research IRB at 608-263-2362. For questions related to this submission, contact the assigned staff reviewer.

Appendix B

Email Recruitment Script

Subject:

Appreciate your vital input regarding how community college trustees' work supports students' success

Body:

Dear Community College Trustee,

My name is Erin Hastey, and I'm a PhD candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. I'm conducting new research on community college board effectiveness, and would deeply appreciate learning from your knowledge and perspectives.

The goal of this study is to see how community college boards can support students' success at their institutions. Since trustees play a pivotal role in leading community colleges, I'd like to learn about the impact you and fellow board members have on students at your institution.

Would you like to participate in an interview? Interviews will be no longer than 90 minutes and can be conducted via Zoom or by phone. Every trustee who completes an interview will receive an entry into a drawing for a $1000 donation to their college district's foundation.

Please let me know if you have any questions about the study. Thank you for all you do to support community college students.

Best,

Erin Hastey, MA
PhD Candidate, UW Madison
hastey@wisc.edu

Appendix C

Sample Interview Protocol

Background/rapport building:

- Tell me about your connection to this college district.

- Did you have any experience working with or serving on boards before this one?

Questions related to envisioning board effectiveness:

- Describe for me the role of this board.
- What do you think is the most important work this board does?
- How might you define board effectiveness in this context?
- What processes or practices help facilitate this board's effectiveness?
- What is this board's relationship with the [district's title for lead administrator] like?
- Are there other offices or staff in the district that help the board fulfill its role?
- What kinds of information does this board need to do its job well?
- Where does it get that information?
- What relationships outside the college district are critical for this board?
- How does this board's work support the district's students?
- Describe for me the ideal community college trustee.
- What opportunities are available to help trustees on this board grow in their role?

Questions related to evaluating the board's effectiveness:

- Describe for me your board's evaluation process.
- What criteria do you find most helpful for evaluating this board's effectiveness?
- What are strengths of this board that you've noticed?
- What are some opportunities for additional focus and development for this board?
- Could you tell me about any specific board initiatives that are linked to students' success in this district?
- Tell me about a time when you've been really proud of this board.
- Tell me about one of the most significant challenges this board has faced.
    - How effective do you think the board was in addressing that challenge?
- How have you grown as a trustee during your time on this board?

Appendix D

Consent Form

University of Wisconsin - Madison
Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Study Title: Effective for Whom? A Mixed Methods Study of Community College Board Effectiveness

Principal Investigator: Xueli Wang (Phone: (608) 265-4748; Email: xwang273@wisc.edu)

Student Researcher: Erin Hastey (Phone: (608)228-8972; Email: hastey@wisc.edu)

Description of the research
You are invited to participate in a research study about community college board effectiveness. Trustees play an important role in leading community colleges, and the research team would like to know more about the impact the governing board has for students at your institution.

You have been asked to participate because you are a trustee or college stakeholder at a public, 2-year (community) college. We believe your perspective on your college's governing board would be a valuable contribution to helping researchers and college stakeholders better understand how boards can be more effective for students.

The purpose of the research is to see how community college boards can support students' success at their institutions.

This study will include trustees and other stakeholders for public, 2-year (community) colleges in the United States. "Other stakeholders" may include students, faculty members, or staff members, including college and college district administrators.

Interviews for this study will be conducted online via Zoom, or in person at a location of your choosing.

What will my participation involve?
If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to complete an interview that will take no longer than 90 minutes.

Your participation will require 60-90 minutes of your time for one interview.

Recording information
Interview audio recordings will be used by the research team to draft transcripts of interviews.

The audio recordings will only be retained until transcripts have been completed; audio recordings will then be securely deleted.

Are there any risks to me?
Several measures are being taken to protect the confidentiality of data, and to ensure that interview data is not linked to your personally identifiable information. There remains a risk of breach of confidentiality if sensitive, personal, or identifiable information is revealed in open-ended responses. This could result in a risk to participants' reputation and/or employment.

Are there any benefits to me?
There are no direct benefits to participation. Benefits of this study include helping researchers and college leaders better understand how governing boards can best support students' success. This will inform board assessment and board development programs.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
This study is confidential. Neither your name nor any other identifiable information will be published.

Only approved members of the research team will have access to interview audio recordings and interview transcripts. All data files will be kept on a password-protected drive, and interview participants will be invited to select pseudonyms to ensure their identity is kept confidential. De-identified responses will be linked to trustees' institution to enhance the interpretation of public data for that institution.

Identifiers will be removed from any identifiable private information. After such removal, data could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent.

If you participate in this study, we would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow us to quote you in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

Whom should I contact if I have questions?
You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think that participating in the research has hurt you, talk to the research team or contact the Principal Investigator Xueli Wang at (608) 265-4748.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or have complaints about the research study or study team, call the confidential research compliance line at 1-833-652-2506. Staff will work with you to address concerns about research participation and assist in resolving problems.

If you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study, you may do so without penalty.

If you agree to participate in our study, please check the applicable boxes, type your name in this form, and return it to the interviewer. Thank you for your valuable time and input.

By checking the boxes, typing my name, and entering the date below, I am electronically signing this consent form.

☐ I consent to participating in this research interview.
☐ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without my name.

Participant Name: Date: