AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Helen Barker Garrett for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education presented on November 28, 2016

Title: The Influence of the Completion Agenda on Decision-making by Community College Career and Technical Education Program Deans

Abstract approved: ______________________________________________________

Shelley I. Dubkin-Lee

Abstract

This study documented the influence of the completion agenda on decision-making by community college career and technical education (CTE) deans. Ten career and technical programs deans were identified as the sample for the study. Washington State was selected because of the Student Achievement Initiative that was developed as a completion agenda initiative and a performance based funding model. A narrative analysis was used to code data from transcripts of a single in-person interview conducted with each one of ten CTE deans at seven technical colleges in Washington State. The interview questions were designed to discover the participants’ perceptions of the internal and external forces that influence CTE deans’ decision-making and the influence of the completion agenda. The major findings of this study were developed within the theoretical framework of Resource Dependency Theory. Results indicated that there are number of internal and external factors influencing CTE dean decision-making with budgeting and faculty interactions being the most prevalent. These factors showed a strong connection to Resource Dependency Theory and it is clear that the CTE deans perceive
limited control on factors which impact their decision-making. Further, the influence of the completion agenda was not viewed as significant and the deans were neither threatened nor inspired by it. The respondents expressed a perceived conflict between providing immediate career opportunities for the students they serve and meeting the requirements of the completion agenda. The CTE deans struggled between supporting their students’ interest in receiving training to move into the workforce and the need to graduate more students to meet the needs of the Student Achievement Initiative. These findings support the need for further research on the influence of business and industry on CTE students’ ability to earn more degrees and certificates to meet the needs of the completion agenda. The research suggests the benefit of community college CTE deans partnering with employers to allow students to move up or into the workforce while having release time or support to complete associates degrees to meet the completion agenda goals.

*Keywords:* Completion agenda, performance and outcomes based funding, Washington State Student Achievement Initiative, career and technical education, Resource Dependency Theory, community college leader/dean decision-making.
The Influence of the Completion Agenda on Decision-making by Community College Career and Technical Education Program Deans

by

Helen Barker Garrett

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APPROVED:

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Dean of the College of Education

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Dean of the Graduate School

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DEDICATION

For Em
Chapter One: Focus and Significance

“Setting a goal is not the main thing. It is deciding how you will go about achieving it and staying with that plan.” (Landry, n.d.) This quote by the long-time coach of the Dallas Cowboys, Tom Landry, provides a perfect description of the challenge faced by United States institutions of higher education that are expected to heed the call of the “completion agenda” without one plan which has proven to be successful. The term completion agenda is generic and simply refers to a directive to inspire, fund, and incentivize more post-secondary degrees and certificates at the four-year and two-year institutional level. O’Banion (2010) observed that for more than a century the Student Access Agenda led the community college movement, and between 1990 and 2010 it was the Student Success Agenda that became the overarching goal for community colleges. The pressure for higher education institutions, community colleges in particular, to graduate more students is not new, but the incentives from a variety of entities including the President of the United States, private foundations, state governments, employers, and the public has taken on a new level of intensity since the Great Recession of 2009. As a result the recently minted Student Success Agenda evolved into the Completion Agenda, with a fine-tuned goal supported by a national and urgent imperative to move students through the system quickly and with efficiency. O’Banion (2010) labeled the completion agenda as a “tectonic shift” (p. 45) since there has never been a community college movement so widely supported by deep pockets and focused on by entities worldwide. He noted that the focus in almost all cases is the students who most widely attend community colleges: low-income, underprepared, and underrepresented.

The nature of the problem is particularly acute with community college students not earning a sufficient number of degrees and certificates. Although the goals of the completion
agenda may be widely identified, it is not clear who knows the successful plan that can be executed to achieve these goals and to determine what role community college administrators, specifically career and technical education (CTE) deans (higher education mid-level managers/leaders), play in meeting the goals of the completion agenda. With the pressure on CTE deans to meet the demands associated with supervising faculty and staff, meeting student needs, and responding to the future employee training expectations from local business and industry employers, it is unknown if meeting the goals of the completion agenda is a factor in their every day decision-making.

Manyika, Lund, Auguste, Mendonca, Welsh, and Ramaswamy (2011) stated that more than 21 million new jobs need to be created in this decade to put Americans back to work and that the six sectors having the greatest job growth are health care, business services, leisure and hospitality, construction, manufacturing, and retail. These areas, which are traditionally taught in community college career and technical education programs, account for 66% of today’s employment and 85% of the new jobs created. While the completion agenda places pressure on community colleges to increase the number of associate degrees, career and technical education deans face local economic and workforce development pressure to produce trained workers, some requiring associate degrees in health professions such as dental hygiene and nursing, and for other students simply gaining new skills in areas such as welding or auto body repair programs. The question for the career and technical education deans to answer in the context of potential administrative and funding pressures from the completion agenda is do all of these students need an associate degree or certificate to earn family wage jobs and to find meaningful employment?
O’Banion (2010) noted “Complete can mean finished, ended, concluded; the completion agenda carries the connation of an endpoint” (p. 45). He wondered if there is a danger of returning to the terminal-degree idea from the 1940’s where much emphasis was placed on the degree and certificate as the endpoint of a student’s college experience. Community colleges took decades to escape this paradigm and to be seen as an educational experience to attract and enroll lifelong learners. Today’s learners must be prepared for the challenges of not just their first job after earning an education, but of the next five or six jobs. The responsibility is on the community college leaders, who understand and support the community college mission dedicated to lifelong learning, to make sure that the federal and state agencies behind the completion agenda do not make an assumption that our work is done when the sought-after degree or certificate is earned (O’Banion, 2010).

Moore (2015) provided insight into one faction of these community college leaders, the faculty, and explored their social construction for a shared meaning of change, in this case as it related to the completion agenda. Moore’s research found that the faculty interviewed were aware of the external changes to their work associated with the completion agenda and its impact.

Lang (2016) evaluated community college student affairs officers’ perceptions of their institutions assessment of student learning outcomes, an aspect of a student’s educational experience that relates to the completion agenda. Lang’s study, like Moore’s, found that the senior student affairs leaders were aware of the higher education reforms movement messaging and that they felt the pressure to improve student outcomes as a result.

However, the literature review for this study did not yield research on the role of another sector of community college leaders, the CTE deans, and their related decision-making as it pertains to the completion agenda. There is potential with the current national and state focus on
the completion agenda, as detailed in the “Background of the Problem” section of this chapter, that community college CTE deans may feel compelled to focus their limited resources and decision-making on issues related to their academic programs which yield more degrees over the programs and courses for which students are more likely to simply take classes to acquire training or learning. Kenton, Huba, Schuh, and Shelley (2005) stated that Resource Dependency Theory (RDT) explains the behavior of an organization dependent on another, higher organization and the actions needed to survive and function in that dynamic. Using the theoretical framework of RDT, outlined further in this chapter, this study will explore whether CTE community college deans’ decision-making might be impacted by the completion agenda goals that may focus on two-year institutions’ outcomes such as degree and certificate production in exchange for state funding.

Shulock and Offenstein (2012) noted that often, community college career and technical education students make far more progress in completing course work than they do in acquiring credentials in their fields. Students coming to community colleges today struggle to find an effective path at the community college to develop job skills to be able to gain family-wage jobs and launch viable and sustainable careers. Students in community colleges are represented by military veterans joining the civilian workforce at midcareer, displaced and dislocated workers needing to retool for new employment opportunities, underrepresented and underprepared students who may arrive with credit for prior learning or apprenticeship training, and former college students needing to combine credits to earn a degree (Connecting Credentials, 2016). These students may choose to enroll in CTE programs and could be impacted by the decision-making of deans overseeing these areas in terms of new curriculum program development and faculty hiring. Furthermore, if the completion agenda goals established within the deans’ states
or institutions are tied to funding in exchange for degree and certificate completion, as is the case in performance and outcome based funding as described in Chapter Two of this study, it is possible that the resources and decision-making by the CTE deans could focus on high degree producing programs over those for which students are more likely to enroll in classes but not necessarily complete a degree or certificate.

In a study on California community colleges’ career and technical educational programs, Shulock, Moore, and Offenstein (2011) reported that many transfer-bound students do not bother to earn an associate degree in some technical transferable fields due to a perceived lack of market value. They observed that many career and technical program students are older, working adults who value the coursework over earning degrees as a way to increase their job security or to seek advancement, and as many as 10% already had earned certificates or bachelor’s degrees. Many students in the study were seeking certifications for industry or licensure and did not need or have intentions of earning a degree or certificate that could be tracked and reported toward a completion agenda outcome.

Career and technical education deans partnering with local advisory councils may feel pressure to produce a skilled workforce rather than meeting the demands of the completion agenda. Bailey, Leinbach, Scott, Alfonso, Kienzl, and Kennedy (2003) observed that community college students are more sensitive to the varying demands from the local labor market than are four-year college students. They are more likely to seek an occupational credential, see themselves as employees rather than students, and work while enrolled. Kienzel, Alfonso, and Melguizo (2007) reinforced the unique relationship between students studying in career and technical education programs at community colleges and the local economy by stating that businesses look for students with sub-baccalaureate credentials locally, while students with a
sub-baccalaureate education tend to look locally for employment. The authors noted that since institutions are closely tied to local business and industry, the local economic climate is especially important for community college students.

The question remains: what will it take for institutions to meet the goals of the completion agenda and to assist community college students with meeting their graduation and career goals? The literature on the completion agenda goals and initiatives is replete with suggestions for improvement to be implemented by community college executive teams in response to changing funding models, by faculty to realign their curriculum and offerings, and by student affairs professionals to provide different academic support. There does not appear to be a role or direction for career and technical education deans. Career and technical education deans face conditions that are not ripe for producing more degrees and certificates. As an example, Shulock et al. (2011) characterized California community college career and technical education programs as not being a system priority; offering weak transfer pathways and credential structures; and having poor accountability systems, underdeveloped data, costs that are higher than transfer programs, and a lack of integration within the institutions operationally.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain insight and to assess what influence the completion agenda and its stated goals have on decision-making by community college deans; specifically deans overseeing faculty and staff in career and technical education programs. A quickly aging baby-boomer workforce has created a demand from business and industry on community college CTE programs to produce new workers (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). Career and technical programs have been identified as a unique area of focus for the completion agenda since it is not necessarily the goal of the students and the employers waiting to hire those
who have been trained in these programs to earn an associate degree or certificate. Romano and Palmer (2016) noted that community college students often enter with intentions of earning a degree, but research shows that most do not earn a credential or complete a degree. Students studying in health programs at the community college level, many of which require an associate degree for employment, earn degrees at higher levels than students who may find employment in high-demand labor markets and leave the college prior to completing a degree or certificate, as in computer technology, for example. The labor market conditions of the region for the community college can impact college completion outcome rates, depending on whether a degree or certificate is required for employment.

**Research Questions**

The research questions for this qualitative study are defined as:

1) *What internal and external forces do career and technical education dean decision-makers in Washington State technical colleges perceive are impacting decisions they are required to make for the programs they administer?*

2) *What evidence exists to demonstrate the influence of the completion agenda on career and technical education dean decision-making?*

3) *Do career and technical education dean decision-makers perceive that there is a conflict between providing immediate career opportunities for the students they serve, versus degree completion (meeting the needs of the completion agenda)?*

These questions were asked to determine whether and/or how the completion agenda factors into CTE dean decision-making. These interview questions were designed to solicit from the dean being interviewed his or her awareness of the completion agenda and how it may have a positive, negative, or no effect on the decisions she or he makes. Questions were asked to assess
how deans interpret the completion agenda and what influence it has on their routine decision-making. The answers were analyzed from the deans’ interview responses seeking evidence on whether they did or did not make decisions as a result of the constraints placed on them with funding models resulting from the completion agenda. By utilizing the tenets of RDT, an analysis was made on whether concerns with funding being removed or reduced has an impact on the decisions made by CTE deans.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study analyzed the influence of the completion agenda goals, as manifested by initiatives and funding from federal, state, or private foundation sources has on the actions of the dependent organization (community colleges and specifically upon career and technical education deans). RDT provided the logical framework for the literature review and supported the specific research questions and the design of the study’s methodological approach. RDT states that “the unequal distribution of valued resources make the emergence of asymmetric exchange and power relations between organizations inevitable” (Johnson, 1995, pp. 3-4). While community colleges have always had to rely upon local taxes, tuition revenues, and state appropriations for their funding sources, the particular focus of this study was on the new and additional funding sources, such as performance based and outcomes based funding which are being supported and touted by the completion agenda, and how deans may be influenced by RDT in their decision-making.

As a social organizational theory, RDT examines the role of external constraints on organizations. This theory states that when leaders and decision-makers, initially college presidents and executive team members, face external constraints, such as with a completion agenda funding models like Performance Based Funding (PBF) or Outcomes Based Funding
(OBF) which dictate that certain measures have been met, the dependent organization will make an attempt to free itself from these constraints. The leaders in an institution may also choose to accommodate the change in order to avoid facing the prospect of their particular academic programs or even their institutions no longer being in existence (Kenton et al., 2005).

Christensen (1997) provided insight into the impact of resource dependency on industry and organizational leader decision-making that applies to this study. He observed that most executives (in this case community college leaders) believe that they are in charge of their organizations, making critical decisions, and when they make decisions their followers follow. But in practice it is those who provide the revenues or funding who actually call the shots. He stated that this observation supports what he considers the controversial theory of resource dependence, which maintains that an organization’s “freedom of action is limited to satisfying the needs of those entities outside the firm (customers and investors, primarily) that give it the resources it needs to survive” (p. 118). The contention some have with resource dependency is that leaders and decision-makers are powerless to have an impact on the organization because of their dependency on the demands placed on those who provide the funding. He stated that resource dependency theorists therefore conclude that the role of the leader who must adapt to the needs of those who support the organization financially is solely symbolic. Ultimately he agreed that the successful organizations are those that realize the important of the entity providing the funding over the executive decisions.

Walters (2012), referring to the Complete College America (CCA) non-profit organization dedicated to increasing the number of degree and certificates attained in the United States, stated that the primary strategy suggested by CCA is to shift to state-level performance funding. By moving from state appropriated funding based on FTE enrollment alone to one that
rewards institutions for outcomes achieved such as credentials earned or classes completed, it acknowledges that funding is a power incentive and will allow states to also align their fiscal policies with their goals to support economic prosperity and the needs of workforce development. He concluded with a bold statement that could support Resource Dependency Theory’s impact on community college dean decision-making: “CCA’s premise is that colleges and universities will not do the right thing unless they are paid to do so; it’s all about the money” (p. 34).

As the interviews for collecting data from career and technical education deans unfolded, with the questions framed within Resource Dependency Theory, it was interesting to listen and look for support or lack of support for the notion that these deans must adhere to the completion agenda and related funding sources in the process of making decisions for their academic programs.

**Background of the Problem**

The need for a completion agenda to encourage students to fulfill their educational goals by earning a degree after attending a community college or university may seem unnecessary, yet the statistics tell another story. Previously a nation that once led the world in college completion rates, the United States now ranks 16<sup>th</sup> in the world for 25-34 year olds (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). The problem with the number of degrees and certificates earned at community colleges in the United States may be related to there not being enough students pursuing a post-secondary education. In 2012-2013, 43% of all undergraduates students or roughly 10.5 million students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015b), or nearly half of the United States undergraduates, attended 1,100 community colleges to take credit classes (Hosansky, 2015). Of the 2.9 million students aged 16 to 24 who graduated from high school between January and October in 2014, only 68.4% went on to study at two-year and
four-year institutions in the fall of 2014 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Eighty percent of students entering a community college indicated that they intended to earn a bachelor’s degree or higher, yet after six years after they first enrolled, only 15% had done so (Shapiro, Dundar, Chen, Ziskin, Park, Torres, and Chiang, 2012). The likelihood is low that students will earn an associate degree within the 150% normal time (three years). This is evidenced by only 29.4% of students beginning at two-year institutions in 2010 completing degrees within three years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015b). When compared to the 2013 six-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduates who began their pursuit of a bachelor’s degree at a four-year institution in the fall of 2007 at 59%, one can see that the rate of completion for first-time in college, community college students is far lower than for those beginning at a four-year institution (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a).

Bailey et al. (2015) postulated that in addition to the publication of graduation rates exposing community college rates less than 20%, and even in single digits, four additional circumstances contributed to the national and statewide focus on the completion agenda. As business and industry technologies evolved, family-wage positions began to require an education beyond a high school degree. By 2018 it is estimated that approximately two-thirds of all jobs in America will require employees to have earned a postsecondary degree or certificate (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). Policymakers and the labor market required higher-level credentials, such as community college associate degrees and certificates. The completion agenda moved beyond the attention of policymakers and educators into the mainstream media.

Once President Obama’s 2009 American Graduation Initiative called attention to the completion agenda, it was not long before additional and similar initiatives appeared on the scene. Private foundations, anxious to support the desired increase in college graduation rates,
launched fund-raising efforts and initiatives. These included the Lumina Foundation’s “Big Goal,” designed to achieve a 60% degree attainment rate for 25-64 year olds by 2025, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation drive to double the number of degrees and certificates awarded among low-income students. By 2013, these private foundations had invested $343 million. The National Governors Association followed with its goal of creating eight million more college student graduates by 2020 (Huber, 2013).

American Association of Community Colleges (2012) asserted that the American dream is at risk and that there is a significant opportunity for community colleges to improve on counseling and advising students, aligning programmatic and degree offerings to more closely meet the demands of the labor market, and teaching students the skills required in the 21st century for the United States to remain globally competitive. The report states that the redesign which will result in an increase of degree credentials will not come simply because of more funding or from goals established through a myriad of initiatives, but from the commitment of community college leaders and their ability to reallocate existing resources to finance effective educational practices.

Definitions of Terms

Higher education, like any industry sector, is riddled with terminology not necessarily found in everyday vernacular. Roberts (2010) encouraged researchers when writing their dissertation to define terms with common meanings or that could be easily misunderstood. Roberts’s direction to define terms operationally was especially important for this study’s main topics of the “completion agenda,” “CTE dean decision-maker,” “performance based funding,” and “outcomes based funding,” which could easily be left to the interpretation of the reader if not defined carefully. In order to provide for ease of reading of this document the following key
terms have been provided.

- **Career and Technical Education (CTE)**
  
  Career and Technical Education is a term that applies to both the secondary and post-secondary educational systems. It is also referred to as vocational or work-related education. CTE is used to describe programs within community colleges designed to prepare students for entry-level technical positions in business and industry. The term Professional-Technical Education is also used and can be interchanged with this term. This can occur after earning an associate of applied science or simply by taking courses offered in CTE programs at the community college level (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014).

- **Community College Dean (CTE Dean)**
  
  Russell (2000) defined an "academic dean" as an administrator who supervises faculty, provides leadership for department chairs in academic units with multiple departments or divisions, and oversees the fiscal operations of the academic discipline area. He or she typically reports to an executive team member such as an associate vice president, executive dean or vice president.

- **Decision-Making**
  
  For purposes of this study, decision-making is left open to the interpretation of those interviewed. Generally speaking, it refers to fiscal decisions related to supervising faculty and staff, curriculum development, advisory council interactions and appointments, and equipment purchasing.
• **Completion Agenda**

The term completion agenda is generic and simply refers to a directive to inspire, fund, and incentivize more post-secondary degrees and certificates at the four-year and two-year institutional level. Shapiro et al. (2012) provided context for a definition of the completion agenda that President Obama’s first budget proposal included a five-year, $2.5 billion Access and Completion Incentive Fund designed to support states to assist low-income students with completing their college education. This budget proposal was further supported by the President’s announcement in 2009 of his American Graduation Initiative (AGI) to pave the way for America to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. The AGI was a call to action that would require five million more students to earn college degrees and certificates in just 11 years.

• **Full-Time Equivalency (FTE)**

FTE is a method to convert the number of part time students or faculty into an equivalent full time status for the purpose of standardization. For example, if you were counting 30 students who are each enrolled in six credit hours, it would equal 12 FTE students if the full-time status standard were 15 credit hours. This differs from headcount that represents all students and faculty, regardless of enrolled credits or teaching assignment (Goldstein, 2012).
• **Performance Based Funding (PBF)**

Performance based funding ties state funding for institutions directly to meeting established performance indicators (Cohen et al., 2014). Public higher education institutions funded with performance based funding are done so by measuring outcomes such as retention rates, course and degree completion, and job placement rather than by utilizing measures such as enrollment and hours of instruction. PBF typically focuses on six components: goals, performance indicators, success criteria, indicator weights, allocation methods, and funding levels (Harbour, 2002).

• **Outcomes Based Funding (OBF)**

Miao (2012) defined Outcomes Based Funding (OBF) as a variation of performance funding. OBF is based on agreements between state funding entities and institutions of higher education to provide a certain level of funding should the institution meet expected established outcomes. OBF is built into the base funding for the institution with an expectation that pre-identified outcomes will be met and funded accordingly, while performance based funding is provided as a supplement to more traditional forms of funding such as full-time equivalency (FTE) enrollment.

• **PBF 1.0 and PBF 2.0 (Also referred to as OBF)**

Another term for PBF is PBF 1.0, as the traditional form of performance based funding that provides state funding to institutions of higher education in the form of a bonus over and above the regularly allocated funding. PBF 2.0 or Outcomes Based Funding, which is just beginning to be utilized in
states such as Ohio and Tennessee is not a bonus, but instead is the basic formula upon which state appropriated funding to public institutions in each state is based (Dougherty & Reddy, 2011).

**Practical Significance of the Study**

With the research demonstrating that there is a wealth of information on the completion agenda and what a wide number of organizations vested in student success have identified as the means by which to meet the agenda’s goals, what is needed from a practical standpoint is information on what role the deans as decision-makers at the community college can have in guaranteeing its success.

After reading this study, community college executives and CTE deans may utilize the findings in this study to take into consideration the unique impact the completion agenda has on fiscal decisions related to community college CTE programs. The findings could support a CTE dean’s argument that there are additional factors to take into consideration when making decisions beyond responding to the pressure and demands of the completion agenda. As highlighted by Bailey et al. (2015) in reference to support for the transition of the cafeteria style model of course offerings and advisement to the guided pathways, in order to create and sustain the guided pathway model, which supports the completion agenda, the community college needs a critical mass of faculty and staff ready to collaborate, engage, and support such an improvement. It is the deans who oversee the faculty and staff who could have an impact on their engagement in the process and potentially move the completion agenda goals to implementation.

As an example of the contributions this study could provide to the puzzle for meeting the goals and action plans for the completion agenda, McClenny (2013) alludes to the reaction of community college leaders, faculty and staff as they are more willing to look at the honest data
related to community college students’ experiences through their institutions’ participation in Achieving the Dream (ATD). ATD, along with the Center for Community College Engagement includes nearly 200 institutions committed to using data and research to implement change on their campuses designed to fulfill the goals of the completion agenda. McClenny contended that true change would require faculty members to engage with campus deans, executive team members, and staff in discussions on their institution’s student experiences and outcomes and to involve themselves in the redesign of the curriculum to support an increase in degree and certificate completion. As the managers of the faculty, the deans may impact the role the faculty could play and therefore have an impact on the completion agenda.

Financial support for the completion agenda is manifesting by changing to state funding models in the form of performance or outcome based funding and increased availability of foundation grant support (Dougherty & Reddy, 2013). As community college budgets are typically managed at the executive level (Goldstein, 2012) the question arises as to what is the level of awareness on the part of the career and technical education deans of the completion agenda-inspired financial mandates or incentives. Do deans take into consideration the influence of the completion agenda as they make decisions related to faculty hires, curriculum development or changes, and do they make use of the advice coming from their business advisory councils? The research is relatively silent on the career and technical education deans’ awareness of the completion agenda and their role in fulfilling its goals as the managers of the faculty.

Following the path of those entities that are critical for the success of the completion agenda, there is a potential gap that this study may address. Both research and common media have articulated the interest of the federal and state governments in the completion agenda, and
foundations such as Gates and Lumina have sponsored a multitude of initiatives to determine what needs to be done to fulfill the agenda. These initiatives focus on the role of the faculty, administration, and student support services, but the role for the dean, especially of career and technical educational programs, has not been specifically identified or researched. As the managers for the faculty, who ultimately have influence over the students for whom we are trying to increase degree attainment and goal completion, what influence does the completion agenda have on the deans? This study has the potential to provide insight to answer this question. It may also provide guidance to proponents of the completion agenda at the federal and state government levels, as well as within the foundations, into the level of sensitivity demonstrated by the behavior of the deans, as managers of the faculty, to the related financial constraints or opportunities presented.

**Scholarly Significance of the Study**

Since President Obama’s announcement of his commitment to the American Graduation Initiative in 2009, articles can be found both on his renewed focus on the completion agenda and community colleges, in particular. With the subsequent investment and support of the completion agenda by funding entities such as Lumina and the Bill and Melinda Gates foundations, research can be identified documenting their efforts. Yet, during the literature review phase of this study it has become evident that there is a lack of research and literature available on the specific influence of the completion agenda on the decisions made by community college career and technical education deans. As a manifestation of a response to the completion agenda, performance funding’s specific impact on the number of community college students earning CTE degrees and certificates and the effect on the CTE mid-level deans’ decision-making was
not addressed in the literature (e.g., Dougherty and Reddy, 2013; Hillman, Tandberg, and Fryar, 2015). This issue warrants further study.

This dearth of literature on the completion agenda’s influence on community college career and technical education deans may be related to the amount of time it takes for research to be conducted, peer reviewed, juried, and printed in a research journal. Given that the resurgence of the completion agenda and its perceived importance to the federal and state governments, foundations, colleges and universities began around the time of the Great Recession of 2009 and with Obama’s launch of the American Graduation Initiative, it may be that literature will become available when more time has passed. It could also be that those who would take into consideration the role that the career and technical education deans play at community colleges are not the same researchers who are focusing their research on how to guide community colleges’ administration, faculty, and student affairs professionals to meet the goals of the agenda.

Resource Dependency Theory is a theory that might naturally apply to the decisions made by community college administrators and deans. Research was not discovered in the course of this study evidencing the relationship between Resource Dependency Theory and the dean decision-making literature described in Chapter Two of this dissertation. This study has the potential to add to the body of research on Resource Dependency Theory by providing empirical evidence from the interviews and subsequent study findings, that this theory does have an impact on the decisions made by career and technical education deans at the community college level.

Based on the researcher’s experience with the gap in the literature around the completion agenda’s specific influence on the decision-making by community college career and technical
education deans, the results of the findings from this study have the potential to address the lack of research in the literature.

Summary

The completion agenda is a generic term describing directives to inspire two- and four-year institutions of higher education to fund and incentivize initiatives to increase the number of degrees and certificates earned. While the completion agenda can trace its roots to the 1947 Truman Commission, the resurgence in both the research journals and common media came with President Obama’s AGI during the Great Recession of 2009. Calling for the United States to become the highest producer of college graduates by 2020, which would mean production of an additional five million degree and certificates, the AGI spurred on actions by foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates and Lumina to heed the call of the completion agenda as well. Initiatives such as Lumina’s Achieving the Dream, Gates’ Completion by Design, Complete College America, and the National Governors Association’s Compete to Complete all identified problems associated with students not earning enough degrees and certificates and possible solutions to address the deficits. Community colleges became the central focus of the completion agenda with nearly half of all United States undergraduates attending two-year institutions.

The completion agenda along with a stronger demand for accountability by policymakers at the state government levels has resulted in a resurgence of performance and outcome based funding models. The dependency of the community colleges on state funding to supplement tuition, fees, and other funding sources to remain fiscally solvent supports Resource Dependency Theory as the logical theoretical framework for the study.

Initiatives underway that are designed to meet the goals of the completion agenda clearly identify steps to be taken by senior administration, faculty, and student support services. What is
not clear in the research is the role of the career and technical education deans, as the managers of the faculty and as mid-level community college leaders, in meeting the completion agenda goals.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

“The greatest gift you can give yourself as a researcher is to read and analyze the literature surrounding your study as early as possible” (Roberts, 2010, p. 85). Roberts imparted these words of wisdom, and Boote and Beile (2005) supported this idea by stating that performing a sophisticated, substantive, and thorough literature review is a precursor to conducting sufficient and significant research. By reviewing the literature on the proposed study topic, one can confirm whether this problem needs researching or has already been researched to death (Merriam, 2009).

The purpose of this literature review was to study current research related to the completion agenda’s influence on decision-making at the community college career and technical education (CTE) dean level. At many points while conducting the literature review this topic was nearly abandoned due to the failure to find references and research on this very specific topic. Reassurance from doctoral faculty and advisors, sitting community college presidents, and CTE deans convinced the researcher to push on with the understanding that this presents the ideal condition in which to conduct research and to produce a dissertation.

Themes Explored

Finding articles and research on this specific topic was significantly challenging. For example, Dougherty and Reddy’s (2013) preparation for writing their most recent book *Performance Funding for Higher Education: What are the Mechanisms? What are the Impacts?* included a thorough review of the impact of Performance Based Funding (PBF) in all of the major electronic databases, in websites of state higher education coordinating boards who had implemented PBF at some point, and in a significant review of abstracts and summaries. Their
search resulted in just 60 studies that analyzed national data or documented specific state implementations.

While an attempt was made to identify ancillary topics for the literature review that intersected with the specific focus of the dissertation, such studies were not found. Figure 2.1 presents a graphical representation of the approach used in this literature review researching satellite topics, labeled as themes, inherent in the title of the dissertation.

The research presented in Chapter Two serves to contextualize the topic of this study, as opposed to presenting a review of interrelated studies in the literature review. The study’s themes served as a foundation for the methodology used for the data collection described in Chapter Three.

**Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion**

Conducting research in the literature on a topic that is paper-thin created a natural circumstance for identifying what would be included and excluded in this study. The focus of this literature review was limited to source documents related to each of the themes explored. It included the unique characteristics and scope of community colleges and excluded a focus on the influence of the completion agenda on university level decision-makers. The studies reviewed referenced community college settings in order to provide context for the study and to assist with addressing the research questions. Although PBF and OBF models are mandated by state legislatures to fund both two-year and four-year public colleges and universities, this study excluded any reference to university student graduation, persistence, or educational goal setting, except to contrast the community college experience.

The research for this study was conducted by interviewing CTE deans in Washington State, as opposed to executive team members at higher levels within these community colleges.
Technical colleges within Washington State were included in the Seattle, Washington, area. This design was purposeful to research the possible influence of the completion agenda on decision-making career and technical deans who may not be directly privy to statewide policy making activities, community college executive-level decisions related to funding, or public and private foundation-funded initiatives. Therefore an attempt was made to identify literature that related to community college administrators at the dean level and not senior-level administrators.

**Key Database and Search Terms Used in the Literature Search Process**

Prior to writing this literature review, Creswell’s (2012) and Roberts’ (2010) chapters on reviewing the literature and writing the review were read. Literature reviews from sample dissertations were reviewed to provide the researcher with a diverse exposure to constructing this chapter of the dissertation. Roberts’ (2010) guidance to begin by identifying keywords and descriptions proved to be extremely helpful, along with tips on how to read, analyze, synthesize, organize, and write the literature review. Creswell’s (2012) suggestion to create a literature map provided a structure to assist with organizing the literature collected related to the topic.

When performing the initial literature review for the dissertation topic, the Oregon State University library website was accessed for lists of databases and searched for journal articles and books using the ERIC (EBSCO Host) database. Google Scholar was utilized to find articles using relevant search terms and the original source documents were located and read. Titles found in Google Scholar were entered into the OSU ERIC (EBSCO Host) database to ascertain whether the article was peer reviewed and to access journals without cost to the researcher.

References found at the end of various resources were studied, searched for, and located in the ERIC (EBSCO Host) database and Google Scholar. A multitude of doctoral dissertations, both quantitative and qualitative, were read about similar topics. The dissertations provided an
example of how to organize the literature review in a manner which supported this study’s research questions and planned methodology.

Zotero was the database used to track the references, and the use of the tag feature allowed key search terms to be associated with the various literary sources. This also provided a natural method by which to track authors citing similar concepts and allowed for the identification of the themes used in the literature review.

A sampling of some of the primary search terms used for this study included:

- *Completion agenda*
- *American Graduation Initiative*
- *Truman Commission*
- *Career and Technical Education*
- *Community College Deans*
- *Performance Based Funding*
- *Outcomes Based Funding*
- *Economic and Workforce Development*
- *Decision-making*
- *Achieving the Dream*
- *Resource Dependency Theory*
- *Student Achievement Initiative*
- *Complete College America*

After reading sources associated with these satellite topics, it became evident that there are experts on the topic of the completion agenda and performance funding, so researcher names were utilized as search terms such as “Kevin Dougherty,” “Jung Cheol Shin,” “T. Sanford and J.L. Hunter,” “Joseph C. Burke,” “Sandy Schugart,” “Thomas R. Bailey,” “Shanna Smith Jaggars,” “Davis Jenkins,” “Terry O’Banion,” “Nancy Shulock,” and “Deborah Bragg.”

The nature of this topic focused on community college dean decision-making and those conducting research on this would not likely be two-year faculty and administrators, but rather researchers in doctoral programs focused on higher education research. Understanding this, the author of this study joined The Council for the Study of Community Colleges; an organization composed primarily of university-level researchers, in an attempt to find more research on and related to the study’s topic. Additional resources for this literature review were identified in
organizations focused on community colleges such as the Education Policy Center, American Council on Education, American Association of Community Colleges, and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Publications from these organizations typically do not qualify as peer-reviewed scholarly literature review references, but they provided insight into discussions related to the study’s topic.

**Theme #1 – The Completion Agenda and Initiative Examples**

A logical theme with which to begin was to research literature on the completion agenda. The author’s intention with this was to look for any research on the completion agenda that mentioned its impact on community colleges and perhaps even on the CTE dean decision-making. The hope was that references would be found to provide support that this is topic under discussion both by scholars and practitioners.

While using Google Scholar to find articles on the completion agenda and entering this search term approximately 127,000 results were returned. Finding articles in scholarly journals and in the common media on the completion agenda was not difficult; the challenge was finding articles specifically addressing its impact on community college CTE dean decision-making.

The completion agenda’s roots stem from the 1947 Truman Commission Report on Higher Education. When veterans returned from World War II, it became evident that the four-year universities could not accommodate the vast number of students looking to earn a college degree. As a result, the Truman Commission Report on Higher Education focused on expanding college access and lowering financial barriers, allowing an opportunity for post-secondary higher education for all citizens, not just those with means. Looking to junior colleges as a logical place to accommodate veterans, the Commission created a new purpose for the two-year institutions and re-named them “community colleges” to reflect their integration into the life of the
community and their focus on offering terminal vocational educational degrees and not transfer programs alone (Gilbert and Heller, 2013). The Commission believed that at least 49% of the population had the ability to complete at least two years of post-secondary education with 33% having the potential to continue and earn an advanced liberal arts degree or professional education in a specialized field. The key recommendation of the Commission was to double the college attendance rate by 1960 with enrollments growing from 2.4 million in 1947 to 4.6 million students (Gilbert and Heller, 2010). As a result of the recommendations of the Truman Commission Report on Higher Education, access to higher education expanded significantly over the next decades. The total fall enrollment in all post-secondary institutions of higher education between 1947 and 2011 grew from 2.3 million to 21 million, and in the 40 years between 1970 and 2010, fall enrollment in community colleges expanded from 2.2 million to 7.2 million. The Truman Commission’s Report on Higher Education recommendations and support for the community college sector provided a post-World War II growing economy with a mechanism to train more workers and to increase access to students of color and students of lower economic backgrounds (Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins, 2015).

Despite the rapid growth in enrollments at the nation’s two-year community colleges spurred by the Truman Commission Report on Higher Education’s recommendations and the return of the World War II veterans taking advantage of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the G.I. Bill, the 1980 to 1982 recessions and the Great Recession of 2009 that tightened state budgets and reduced support for higher education put a new spotlight on the need to produce better measures for outcomes and to assess institutional effectiveness (Romano and Palmer, 2016). As a result, President Obama was prompted to announce the American Graduation Initiative 63 years after the debut of the Truman Commission Report on Higher
Education. President Obama challenged the United States to produce the highest number of college graduates, an additional five million degrees and certificates, in the world by 2020 (Obama, 2009). Pressure from lawmakers and the public in light of declining resources to fund higher education demanded evidence that colleges and universities were putting Americans back to work and to address the ailing economy. The Great Recession of 2009 shifted the focus from measuring the quality of the students entering colleges to measuring the returns of attending, such as completion, evidenced by more degrees and certificates awarded (Romano and Palmer, 2016).

The shift from a focus on simply creating access for students to attend community colleges to focusing on measuring outcomes and the addition of a specific measure to compare institutional completion rates first began with the passage of the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act of 1990. Title IV financial aid regulations from the Department of Education required institutions to publish graduation rates, and for the first time, there was a specific outcome that would allow students to compare institutional completion rates. Thirteen years later, President Obama proposed a college ranking system, and two-thirds of the states’ policymakers began in earnest to tie funding to outcomes over the previous FTE (full-time equivalent) enrollments (Bailey et al., 2015). With this shift in focus on the need to measure degree completion, outcomes took on a new level of importance nationally, and with financial support burgeoning from private foundations such as Lumina and Gates, the completion agenda moved front and center into the educational limelight.

The American Association of Community Colleges, with support from the Gates and Kresge Foundations, lent its voice to the completion agenda by producing the 2012 report from the 21st-Century Commission on Community Colleges, *Reclaiming the American Dream:*
Community Colleges and the Nation’s Future. The Commission was asked to safeguard the community college mission to provide millions of diverse and often underserved, first generation students with a high-quality education, while simultaneously challenging community college leaders to redesign and reimagine their institutions. To meet the goals of the wide variety of completion agenda initiatives, the report recommended three R’s for reimagining the community colleges: Redesign students’ educational experiences, Reinvent institutional roles, and Reset the system (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012).

As early as 2010, on the heels of the announcement by President Obama of his American Graduation Initiative, the American Association of Community Colleges, along with the Association for Community College Trustees, the Center for Community College Student Engagement, the League for Innovation in the Community College, the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, and the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society identified their solutions to support the completion agenda with their jointly signed document entitled “Democracy’s Colleges: Call to Action.” Their goal was to produce 50% more students with high-quality degrees and certificates by 2020. Among their many suggestions for institutional reform were suggestions to enhance instructional programs, contextualize general education, increase program flexibility, and institute mandatory requirements to accelerate students’ progress through developmental education. These suggestions all called for enhanced faculty engagement and increasing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff (McPhail, 2011).

Bailey et al. (2015) suggested that faculty and student services professionals need to engage in meeting the goals of the completion agenda by moving away from the delivery model of “cafeteria style course offerings” to a “guided pathways” model. The cafeteria style model
refers to poorly explained programs of study, transfer, and career choices during rushed initial advising sessions, freeing students to choose from a wide variety of seemingly disconnected courses, and leaving students to navigate the enrollment processes and planning on their own. The authors argued that to raise the number of completions, the nation’s community colleges need to implement clearly identified guided pathways to degree and certificate completion and redesigned instruction to facilitate student learning and success. A significant number of reforms that have been suggested to support the completion agenda have not produced the outcomes desired because community colleges have not instituted systemic changes to move the organization’s focus from access to a focus on access with success.

Walters (2012) named the Complete College America, a national nonprofit organization created in 2009 to raise the number of credentials earned in the United States, as the “standard bearer of the completion agenda” (p. 34). Walters related being told by reformers that college and university administrators and faculty do not care deeply about students succeeding to graduation, that they are not good managers who know how to focus on productivity analysis and they do not effectively utilize instructional technologies. He concluded that college and universities need to organize together and to welcome what he considers the positive aspects of the completion agenda, promote efforts for institutional improvement, and to develop more systems and projects to improve learning and success in order to support increased graduation rates.

As president emeritus of the League for Innovation, Terry O’Banion partnered with the League for Innovation in the Community College to create “A Primer for Community College Faculty, Administrators, Staff, and Trustees” (O’Banion, 2013, p.1) which is filled with suggestions for community college administrators, faculty, and student services staff on how to
meet the goals of the completion agenda. He proposed the creation of the “Student Success Pathway: A Model for Institutional and Student Planning (SSP)” (O’Banion, 2013, p. 10) to assist community college students with navigating enrollment processes and learning in order to raise the number of credentials attained. O’Banion suggested that the SSP is a flexible model that can be tailored for diverse groups of students and take students from high school into admission/intake steps, through first-term courses, and to continuing progress on to graduation. Hallmarks of the SSP are “milestones” and “momentum” (O’Banion, 2013, p.12), benchmarks used to gauge both institutional and student progress. The marks are set by each institution and focus on a variety of accomplishments such as earning 15 or 30 college-level credits, completing developmental coursework, filing a plan to graduate, and transferring to a four-year institution; as students accumulate these milestones, they gain momentum toward completion.

Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2010) addressed the issue of why the completion agenda is the hot topic in higher education circles today. The Great Recession the United States experienced in the late 2000s was one of the prime reasons community colleges caught the attention of the federal administration and the common media with factory closures and sweeping layoffs sending displaced workers to the nation’s community colleges to re-tool and hone their skills for reemployment. At the same time, jobs requiring at least an associate degree were growing twice as fast those that did not require a college degree.

Students come to community colleges for a variety of reasons including to earn an associate degree, first-year (short-term certificates) or second year certificate (long-term certificate), to take classes to prepare to transfer to the four-year universities, and for personal enrichment. With the push for more students to complete degrees and certificates to meet the
demands of the completion agenda and in many more instances than before, to meet job posting criteria, the number of students earning degrees is on the rise (Carnevale et al., 2010).

Dadgar and Trimble (2014) stated that between 2000 and 2010 there was a 151% increase in the number of short-term certificates awarded, increasing the share of students holding this credential from 16% to 24% in just one decade. While these statistics bode well for community colleges funded by performance and outcome based funding models, this study noted that earning an associate degree or long-term certificate has been associated with an increased likelihood for the certificate holder to find employment, earn higher wages, and obtain additional work hours. However, there are minimal or no positive effects in the research for those earning short-term certificates.

An additional factor to support the increased attention on the completion agenda is the cost of earning an associate degree or certificate and the rising cost of higher education for community college students. Complete College America (2014) stated that the standard rate by which to measure graduation rates for two-year community college is now three years. The national student loan debt has surpassed three trillion dollars, the figure for the combined credit card and car loan debts in America. With the average cost for every extra year of community college being $15,933 plus calculated lost wages of $35,000 annually, one solution for lowering the cost of a two-year degree or certificate is to provide incentives for students to graduate sooner.

Goldstein (2012) observed that the stressed U.S. economy began to have a marked effect on higher education in the U.S. in the 1990’s. Until then, higher education in the U.S. was considered a public good, an experience that was good for all and a benefit for the entire society. Public perception began to shift to the new idea that earning a post-secondary degree was a
private good, available to those who chose to purchase it, and questions began to arise as to whether higher education was being managed effectively. Reductions in state funded allocations for the community college sectors led to institutions raising tuition at rates that exceed the inflation rates. As a result of failure of revenue increase to keep pace with increased operating costs, the College Board reported for fiscal year 2012 that tuition rates rose 8.7% at in-state public two-year institutions even though inflation only averaged 1.6% during 2010, when the 2012 tuition prices were being set (Goldstein, 2012). Romano and Palmer (2016) provided data from a study conducted between 1998 and 2011, by Desrochers, Lenihan, and Wellman, indicating a decline of 23% in tax appropriations per community college student FTE between 2001 and 2011. At the same time that there was a 42% increase in net tuition, indicating a greater burden placed on community college students to carry the burden of paying for college.

While there are a multitude of initiatives related to the completion agenda highlighted both in research journals and common media, four stand out among the rest and serve as strong examples: Achieving the Dream, Complete College America, the American Graduation Initiative, and the Washington State Student Achievement Initiative.

**Achieving the Dream.** The Lumina Foundation, along with many national and local agencies, invested over $150 million for an initiative beginning in 2004 entitled Achieving the Dream: Community College Count (ATD). This initiative was purposefully intended to improve institutional outcomes, to increase semester-to-semester persistence, to help underprepared students to succeed in college-level work, and to improve the graduation rates for community college students (Bailey et al., 2015). Zachry Rutschow, Richburg-Hayes, Brock, Orr, Cerna, and Cullinan (2011) described the ATD initiative’s design to build a culture of evidence utilizing individual student records and additional data to evaluate student performance over a designated
time period and to use this data to identify barriers for student academic success. Community colleges participating would then use this data to develop and implement strategies for interventions to improve student outcomes, and to assist with bringing successful programs to scale. The idea behind the initiative is to see measurable and positive results from these interventions resulting in students progressing more quickly through development coursework and increasing student completions. Zachry Rutschow et al., (2011)’s report on the 26 Round One colleges revealed that four out of five were able to adopt new practices based on a moderate to strong culture of evidence; and one fifth of the colleges, which had weak institutional research capacities, struggled to implement the recommend practices. The report also indicated that while the colleges instituted a wide variety of strategies to improve student success, most of these were small in scale and reached less than 10% of their target populations.

A unique distinction for this grant-funded initiative is the role played by faculty at community colleges participating as researchers to improve how they teach in order to have an impact on student academic success and move the dial positively for degree and certificate completions. Hagedorn (2015) observed that the aspirational goals of ATD require the collaboration and cooperation of the entire community college, including faculty. Each participating college is required to create teams consisting of faculty, staff, administrators, and institutional researchers. These teams create their success initiatives; establish timelines for implementation; plan for assessment; and scale the programs for full campus integration. ATD provides each campus with two veteran community college leaders as coaches to facilitate the planning for the initiatives, implementation, and assessment. One coach serves as a leader and the other as the data coach. The colleges are expected to provide evidence for student success by collecting, analyzing, and monitoring longitudinal benchmarked data (Hagedorn, 2015).
Hagedorn noted that the initiative was initially funded by Lumina with a $75 million investment over 10 years and that several foundations, including the Gates Foundation, have joined since the initiative launched in 2004. Achieving the Dream (n.d.) highlights the success of the initiative, including the provision of information on Dream, which is the annual meeting for the colleges in the Achieving the Dream network. The event convenes over 1,900 policy-makers, practitioners, and investors to focus on the completion agenda and increasing student degree attainment and success. Attendees learn from each other to gain insight into data driven decisions and supported best undertaken to increase the number of degrees earned and to meet the goals of Achieving the Dream.

**Complete College America.** Historically, higher education in the United States, especially at the community college level, has intentionally encouraged higher enrollment numbers by offering extensive course options for students, day and night, weekends, and in every possible major. The idea was to give students options; however, the result of this cafeteria model of course offerings and degree attainment has resulted in major exploration without guidance, the accumulation of excess credits, higher expenditures for students, and fewer students graduating on time or graduating at all (Bailey et al., 2015; Complete College, 2014).

Complete College America (2014) represents an independent collective that came into existence to encourage states to evaluate the degree completion data, to view low completion rates as an important issue, and to make a commitment to change the current paradigm. Complete College America identified leaders to carry out its goals, and the results show that an impact has been made. Through Game Changers, an alliance of 35 governors called the Complete College America Alliance of States, efforts are being made to address the President’s call for completion. As of December 2014, 26 states have implemented or are working to
implement performance based funding, and 22 states are transforming remediation courses to improve completion (Complete College America, 2014).

Complete College America’s Guided Pathways to Success (GPS) is another example of a strategy to support the completion agenda that addresses the barriers to completing associate degrees and certificates on time: unavailable necessary courses, uninformed major choices, perceived loss of credits when transferring, and excessive credit accumulation (Complete College, 2014). GPS was established in 2009 with a single mission: to partner with states to close the gaps for attaining degrees and certificates by the traditionally underrepresented students and thereby increase the number of students in the United States earning quality college degree and career certificates (O’Banion, 2013).

Complete College America (2014) described the GPS solution as best practices to support completion such as math aligned to the majors, the use of meta-majors or clusters of majors, academic mapping, enrolling in critical path courses early, and intrusive academic advising. The intention of GPS is to assist colleges with implementing new initiatives and strategies to take on practices at the colleges with negatively impact student progression and completion: the loss of credits when transferring, lack of information about available majors, critical courses for a degree or program not being available, poorly designed remediation sequences, low credit enrollment per student, and credit requirements that are excessive. GPS prescribes that every major be organized into a pathway of planned courses which are sequential and facilitate a path for students to graduate on time. With the help of advisors guiding their effective and efficient paths to completion, students are expected to progress in a timely manner by sticking to a set of structured courses. With GPS, undeclared students are admitted into meta-majors that represent broad clusters such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), health professions,
business, education, and liberal arts. As the students proceed through the meta-majors, they are then able to narrow their studies to more specific majors such as chemistry, nursing, and accounting (Complete College, 2014).

GPS has served to eliminate the uncertainty of what classes to take and as a result has lowered the cost of attendance. With GPS participating institutions are expected to provide clear maps toward degree and program completion, to closely monitor the students’ progress, and to provide the courses necessary to complete degrees and certificates in a timely manner (Complete College, 2014). Scott-Clayton (2015) stated that an important determination of student success is the structure of the pathways or, more often than not, the lack of structure, from the point of admission through to completion. GPS supports Scott-Clayton’s solution for community college student success to be able to navigate a plethora of program of study options by providing a default of fixed planned options, instead of choosing from an overwhelming set of courses.

**American Graduation Initiative.** O’Banion (2013) cited President Obama as one of the champions of the completion agenda by referencing his comments on February 24, 2009 to a joint session of Congress where he pointed out that 50% of the students who start college never finish and said that was leading to the country’s economic decline because countries that out-teach the United States will out-compete the nation in the future. President Obama stated his goal to guarantee that every child have access to a competitive education since every American will need more than a high school diploma. He boldly stated to Congress that the country needed the talents of every American and presented his goal of having the United States produce the highest number of college graduates by the year 2020.

President Obama (2009) formalized this goal into the American Graduation Initiative (AGI) that was announced at Macomb Community College in Detroit, Michigan on July 14,
2009. While addressing the 6.5 million Americans who at the time of this speech had lost jobs since the Great Recession of 2009 began, he addressed the need to reform the health care system and lower the deficit. He then affirmed that the people of the United States needed to be prepared for the jobs of the 21st century and to provide the skills necessary to compete in a global economy. Referencing President Lincoln’s signing the law to usher in the land grant colleges and President Roosevelt signing the GI Bill, President Obama launched the AGI. He presented the steps toward accomplishing this goal: increasing Pell Grants by $500, creating a $2500 tax credit for four years of tuition, and simplifying the FAFSA financial aid application process. The goal of helping 5 million more Americans earn degrees and certificates in the next 10 years was outlined the AGI, and Obama proposed to pay for it by ending wasteful subsidies to private lenders and banks for student loans.

Recognizing that community colleges receive less funding than their four-year counterparts, and that with declining state investments, community colleges are needing to cap enrollment and cut programs due to budget shortfalls, President Obama (2009) placed his focus on the two-year institutions. With the AGI he promised to offer competitive grants in order to inspire and challenge community colleges to pursue and implement innovative and productive strategies for completion in exchange for more federal funding. He challenged community colleges to improve on developmental education and to put colleges and workforce development together to match what is being taught at the community colleges with what is needed by business and industry.

Kotamraju and Blackman (2011) commented on the likelihood of the AGI being successful by calculating that in order to produce the five million additional degrees suggested by President Obama, at a rate of one half million in each of the next 10 years, the number of
baccalaureate and sub baccalaureate awards by postsecondary U.S. institutions would need to increase annually by 16%. They stated that since 25% of all degrees earned annually in the United States are associate degrees and 13% are certificates of less than a year of study, for community colleges to reach the goals of the AGI would mean increasing graduation levels annually from the current 1.5 million to 1.75 million per year until 2020. This would represent about 250,000 community college degrees and certificates each year. The question they posed is are community colleges prepared for this if the AGI should become law?

Despite President Obama’s enthusiasm for the AGI and what it might have meant for community colleges and the students served, Congress was not able to fund the initiative. The president’s administration continues to challenge community colleges to meet the completion agenda, but the burden of financing this has now fallen to the two-year institution sector (Boggs, 2010).

**Washington State Student Achievement Initiative.** Washington State’s implementation of a performance based funding model adopted in 2007, titled the Student Achievement Initiative (SAI), was included in this literature review for two reasons. One, it represents a seasoned and well-documented implementation of a completion agenda, manifested as a performance based model funding initiative, that went into effect even before the launch of President Obama’s American Graduation Initiative in 2009; and two, it provides information the context for the researcher’s proposed site for the data collection described in the Chapter Three, Methodology section of this study. By including information on the SAI, the researcher hopes to find the influence the SAI implementation had on decision-making by deans at the Washington State technical colleges.
Belfield (2012) described the SAI in Washington State as a completion agenda initiative that uses intermediate measures of performance and funding incentives to encourage the adoption of practices in order to increase completion rates and student progression at the state’s community and technical colleges. With this initiative, community colleges earn points, called achievement points, as students meet established educational milestones. These range from remedial/developmental education through to the completion of training programs and earned credentials. Shulock and Jenkins (2011) observed that the SAI’s established framework of achievement points to be attained by students attending Washington State community colleges created a robust process for incentive funding by the state. The strength of the SAI is that it rewarded colleges for guiding students to reach milestones along the path to completion instead of only funding the completion of degrees and certificates.

While researching the history of the SAI, information on the original version prior to the current iteration illustrated a point directly relevant to the purpose of this study and the focus of the influence of the completion agenda on community college career and technical deans. Nisson’s (2003) dissertation detailed the impact of the precursor of the SAI on one community college in Washington State and was a reference rich with information to support this study. The original version of Washington State’s performance based funding model did not succeed due to the lack of involvement in decisions related to its structure and components by two-year administrators, including college deans. Participants in Nisson’s study revealed that due to the short-term involvement of the Washington State community college leaders and the short timelines for implementation, faculty and staff quickly became disengaged from the plan.

Hillman et al.’s (2015) study on the SAI revealed that while the initiative was implemented as a performance based funding model designed to increase the number of
Washington students earning associate degrees and certificates and improving retention rates, research has shown that SAI has had little impact on retention and the increase of associate degrees earned. The initiative did result in more short-term certificates, awards that supported the completion agenda’s goals, but these credentials proved to be less valuable than long-term certificates and associate degrees in the workplace. The authors observed that performance based funds reforms extend beyond just linking funding to performance, and that state officials and community college leaders need to agree upon performance goals and measures prior to state funding awards. Collecting and reporting completion numbers and adherence to performance measures, regardless of the amount of funding at stake, the authors contended could impact institutional decision-making and performance.

Shulock and Jenkins (2011) studied Washington State’s implementation of the Student Achievement Initiative (SAI) as an example of a response to the completion agenda with a performance incentive policy for the state’s 34 community colleges. The Washington State Board for Community and Technology Colleges led a taskforce comprised of State Board members, community college presidents, college trustees, and faculty to design a set of principles upon which the SAI would function as a mechanism to provide accountability to policymakers and the public.

Jenkins and Shulock (2013) observed that the SAI included intermediate measures for assessment when awarding state funding and did not focus on completion rates alone. Previous iterations of performance based funding in Washington State failed because the focus was on long-term goal attainment, and rewards were not given for intermediate measures such as increased transfer and retention rates. The SAI also provides data to the state legislature on students’ pathways and progress toward completion, and this is rewarded accordingly. This
approach allows institutional leaders to identify which students are not meeting milestone measurements and implement interventions in response. The SAI’s unique strategy and approach to performance based funding has led researchers and advocates to dub it a role model for performance based funding 2.0.

Research on the SAI reveals the benefits of including community college leadership, including CTE deans, when developing a performance or outcomes based funding model in response to the completion agenda. If campus personnel can see the benefit of monitoring and reporting on completion and retention rates of their students to obtain state funding in a way that supports institutional goals, they are more likely to participate in changes related to the goals of the funding program.

**Theme #2 - Performance and Outcomes Based Funding**

Including a section on performance (PBF) and outcomes based funding (OBF) as sample manifestations of the completion agenda is a logical theme for inclusion in this literature review and was the original sole focus for this study. A review of the limited research on this topic was included in the literature review in anticipation of finding studies tying performance and outcome based funding to CTE dean decision-making.

Moore and Russ-Eft (2016) stated that starting in the second half of the 2000s, a national revitalization of interest in institutional accountability in the value of a higher education degree led legislators to become more deliberate in defining key performance indicators and related funding appropriations. With this renewed focus the funding models moved from a focus on performance to outcomes. The distinction between PBF and OBF can be challenging for the casual reader to discern in state funded models tied to the completion agenda. Even after delving deeply into the research for this chapter, it is easy to confuse the two. PBF ties state funding for
institutions directly to meeting performance indicators as a form of bonus funding to traditional state funding (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). OBF is built into the base funding for the institution with the expectation that pre-identified outcomes will be met and funded accordingly (Miao, 2012).

PBF allocates some amount of funding based on performance indicators such as course completion, time to degree, transfer rates, the number of degrees awarded, or the number of low-income and minority graduates. The use of performance funding models and measurable outcomes is having an unintended effect on institutional decisions for determining curriculum, setting admissions’ standards, managing the cost of compliance, and raising concerns about grade inflation and the lowering of academic standards (Dougherty & Reddy, 2011).

From a practice-based perspective, legislators are supporting new performance funding initiatives in response to business and industry and to solve the unemployment problems in their districts; these initiatives sound like a logical solution (Walters, 2012). The initiatives give politicians the ability to generate more funds from the public as well as to redirect funds that traditionally go to state supported health and human services and/or corrections programs (Zarkesh & Beas, 2004).

The legislative reasons to employ performance funding models and require community colleges to meet identifiable and measurable outcomes include: (a) changing institutional behavior by how funds are apportioned, (b) creating stronger awareness of state priorities by institutional management and faculty, (c) increasing the use of data for institutional planning, and (d) incentivizing new student services and academic policies designed to support student success (Dougherty & Reddy, 2011). However, there is no solid evidence that performance
funding has made a positive impact on the number of sub-bachelor degree community college completions (Albee, 2010, Hermes, 2012).

Performance funding is an example of state officials reacting to pressure from their constituents looking for greater efficiencies and lower costs for higher education. As tuition costs rapidly rise, state revenues decline, and the operation costs for institutions increase, parents and students are distressed and place pressure on legislators to act. Simultaneously, business leaders seek an improvement in the quality of college graduates and want government spending on higher education to decrease and to thereby lower taxes (Dougherty, et al., 2013).

Dougherty and Reddy (2013) stated that few studies on the significant impacts of PBF analyzed how impacts were produced. While these quantitative studies did reveal that PBF resulted in changes to institutional policies, practices, and programs, these studies are far too few in number to allow definitive conclusions to be reached. Given the dearth of studies on the impact of PBF on the community college mission and for the new PBF 2.0 funding model, it is apparent this is not a topic that has been overly researched. As important as the measured outcomes such as graduation, retention, and job placement rates are, the literature on PBF has provided limited information to support that these outcomes are being realized as a result of the funding model or what factors are actually supporting these outcomes. This is primarily due to the limited number of studies on the impact of PBF and because these studies focus on the outputs and not the organizational processes necessary to facilitate these desired outcomes (Dougherty & Reddy, 2013).

Performance funding may seem like a logical method by which to create more workers from community colleges, especially from CTE programs capable of producing workers to replace the growing number of retiring Baby Boomer generation workers; however, the research-
based justifications in the literature on performance funding do not provide solid evidence that performance funding significantly increases completion, retention, and graduation rates (Dougherty & Reddy, 2011). PBF models have faced a number of obstacles, including a lack of enough state funding to support student success and improved outcome initiatives at the college level, inappropriate established performance measures, insufficient capacity by colleges to manage and report institutional data, faculty grade inflation and lowering of academic standards, restrictions on admissions of less prepared students and even the discontinuation of programs not producing graduates (Community College Research Center, 2014). As an example of the negative impact of the completion agenda: one Florida community college faced with standards set by the Florida State Legislature in a PBF model terminated two CTE programs. A metric in the Florida funding model required placements for graduates in jobs earning an excess of $9.00 an hour. As a result of the new metric in the funding model, the institution eliminated both nursing assistant and childcare provider education programs, even though the local community depended on graduates from these disciplines (Dougherty & Reddy, 2011).

This initial foray into a literature review on the performance based funding models, used in nearly half of the United States over the past 30 years, presents one consistent finding: there is limited research supporting the use of performance measures for funding institutions of higher education, particularly community colleges, as directly improving student success outcomes such as graduation and retention. Research on performance and outcomes based funding is limited in scholarly journals and more prevalent in publications such as The Chronicle of Higher Education. The studies found by the author primarily focused on the specifics of a state’s implementation of performance and outcomes based funding or the failure of research to
demonstrate its impact on student success; no sources were found to tie the impact of these funding models to CTE mid-level dean decision-making.

**Theme #3 – Business and Industry and the Completion Agenda**

My original curiosity around the issue of the influence of the completion agenda on CTE dean decision-making centers on the intersection between the deans’ dual allegiance to strategic directions related to the completion agenda from college leadership as it relates to budgetary and managerial issues and to the demands and needs from their workforce development advisory council and business partners in the community college district. Research on the relationship between the goals of the completion agenda and its connection to economic and workforce development provided the foundation for this subsection of the literature review for this study.

Sixty-three percent of all new and replacement jobs in the year 2018 will require a credential beyond high school, and more than half will require a bachelor’s degree. Of the 68% of high school graduates studying at two and four-year institutions of higher education, only 28% will receive an associate degree in three years. With more than 13 million unemployed workers in the United States, and with more than three million open positions, jobs cannot be filled due to the gaps in training and skills (Business Roundtable, 2012). Manyika et al. (2011) cite the reason for this gap as the mismatch between the fields of study students are choosing and the demands from business and industry. Future job seekers need better information on which to base their educational plans and training decisions in order to earn the degrees and certificates for which work after completion can be found.

Shulock and Offenstein (2012) observed that while the completion agenda focuses on both institutions producing more bachelor’s and associate degrees, the largest number of projected job openings require less than a bachelor’s degree to provide family-wage earnings.
This is where community colleges can step in to offer an array of career-oriented certification and CTE degrees and certificates. Community colleges must partner with local business and industry to tailor their curriculum offerings to meet the demands of the labor market and to create programs that are valuable and accessible to students with a wide variety of preparation and at different points of their careers. The authors concluded in their study of California community colleges, CTE, and the completion agenda that program offerings from two-year institutions must be evaluated and redesigned to meet regional business and industry needs by establishing a vision for these partnerships and to fund them accordingly. CTE deans need current economic labor market data for developing curriculum and pathways to degree and certificate completion and are able to develop strong accountability systems to report out the student outcomes. Shulock and Offenstein (2012) noted that CTE programs often have higher average costs than college transfer programs and resource allocations are not always predictable and reliable. These programs often receive no more per FTE funding than college transfer programs and CTE deans seek grant funding and financial support from business and industry.

In response to the completion agenda and demand for the training of future workers students are enrolling in community college job training programs to earn more short-term certificates (Katsinas, D’Amico, Friedel, Adair, Warner, and Malley, 2016). The authors called for policy changes needed at federal and state levels to put America on top for degree and certificate completions. However, while community colleges awarded 75% more degrees and 122% more first-year certificates between 2000-2001 and 2012-2013, productivity increases are declining due to cuts in state higher education appropriations, and budget plans do not reflect the appropriate funds to increase the number of degrees and certificate needed for industry demands.
Shulock and Offenstein (2012) noted that less than one year short-term certificates may have limited value on their own; however, when stacked as credentials with work experience with a longer-term certificate, they have increased value with business and industry. This places a demand on the completion agenda to include the value of degree and certificates in the labor market and to encourage CTE students to complete acquire credentials in their programs, rather than simply completing coursework to obtain skills.

The pressure on community college leaders, such as CTE deans, from declining state funding and budget shortfalls for their academic programs is increasing the demand for partnerships with local industry to remain fiscally solvent. When business and industry provide financial support through these partnerships, there is an expectation for the production of high skilled workers as a return on investment. These partnerships have resulted in a shift by the community college partners to focus on business and industry as their primary constituents (Desai, 2012).

As businesses struggle to fill open positions and look to the community college sector to provide training a question arises, is there a need for degree and certificate completion, or can students and future workers acquire the learning and skills gleaned by just completing the courses? Spark and Waits’ (2011) research showed that as governors and state policymakers look toward meeting the goals of the completion agenda, they are coming to realize the community college sector cannot spur economic growth in their state unless student success and degree completion are connected to the needs of the marketplace. They noted steps taken by the more proactive states in support of the completion agenda and business and industry needs as 1) acknowledging the role of higher education as an economic development engine, 2) asking higher education to utilize labor market data to develop courses and degree programs preparing
graduates for high-demand, high-paying positions, 3) incentivizing higher education to seek input from state and regional employers on the skills they need, 4) tracking the impact of higher education’s degree and completion success on business and industry, and 5) using performance based funding to reward institutions that match the needs of the local labor market to the their programs and student outcomes (Spark and Waits, 2011).

**Theme #4 - Community College Dean Decision-making**

This theme was chosen expecting the literature to be scarce and with the assumption that researchers would not be likely to focus on so specific a topic. This theme provides a pivotal foundation for the study by providing a review of research available on community college dean decision-making. The articles provided research and insights into the unique aspects of the community college dean experience, yet they did not focus on the CTE dean experience exclusively or on decision-making related to the completion agenda. Despite the wider focus of this theme, the content was useful for this literature review as it provided insights on the research of dean decision-making. This may prove to have been particularly helpful prior to conducting the dean interviews during the data collection process.

Robillard (2000) stated, “the first obstacle to performing research on deans is the lack of definition associated with the term dean” (p. 3). The author observed that based on research he conducted that the community college dean has a difficult job. These deans serve as a mediator among students, administration, faculty, and staff. They must carefully manage the fiscal resources of their units or divisions and provide guidance on how these funds will be allocated and utilized. Deans are subject to both internal program evaluation and review and are accountable to external mandates as well. Compared to their university counterparts, the community college dean typically has a greater variety and volume of activities to manage, due
to a consistent shortage of funding and deficient level of staffing. Robillard identified the responsibilities unique to the community college dean, including a need to perform program assessment on a routine basis to stay current with industry needs and demands and the need to develop partnerships with community business and industry leaders and organizations.

Wild’s (2002) dissertation studied the stress of working as a community college dean and began by stating that little research exists on the specific experience of the community college dean in the literature. Wild explored the responsibilities of community college deans and their role in guiding and supporting the education efforts of the community college. Labeled by Wild as a “middle manager,” the dean is charged with managing interactions among students, faculty, administration, and staff and is often faced with complex decision-making. Reference was made to the challenge faced by these deans to manage with reduced fiscal resources, accommodate growing demands from students and faculty, accountability to state governing agencies, and respond to the hiring expectations of local business and community constituencies. Deans face significant stress as they attempt to meet the mission and goals of their institution under challenging work conditions.

Research by Seagren, Wheeler, Cresweil, Miller, and VanHom-Grassmeyer (1994), while now dated, provided a descriptive term of “jugglers” that current community college mid-level deans would likely relate to. Positioned between administration and the academic divisions, these midlevel academic leaders are required to make decisions successfully among competing priorities, agendas, and interests of concern to faculty, students, and senior level administrators.

Shults (2001) wrote about the challenges resulting from the vast number of retirements in community college leadership as discussed in current literature. Shults pointed out that community college deans are the heart of these institutions, carrying out the day-to-day
operations of the college. They represent the future leadership upon whom boards and long-
tenured presidents need to rely in order to succeed and continue the goals and missions of the institution.

The research articles on this topic provide similar definitions of the role of the community college deans and describe the stress of their jobs and decision-making. A picture is painted of a “sandwich generation” position having to answer both to the senior administration and to provide support, resources, and directions to those they supervise. There was no specific mention of the unique role of the CTE deans to manage divisions that require extensive and expensive capital equipment, to adjust constantly changing curricular demands to stay current with industry standards, and to maintain effective relationships with advisory councils as well as local business and industry.

The studies mentioned provide a framework for the role of community college deans and their participation in decisions related to initiatives designed to heed the call of the completion agenda. The references reviewed reinforced the importance of including the dean’s decision-making for the programs they know and understand and upon which local industry depends.

**Critique**

The research reviewed and addressed in the four themes in this literature review provided a foundation for the study, even though specific focus on the experience of the community college CTE decision-maker was not found. Research on the decision-making activities of CTE deans in light of the completion agenda does not appear to be a topic presented in scholarly journals or in non-peer reviewed publications. It is likely that this is a topic of interest and discussion among CTE deans; however, documentation of this as a pressing issue was not found in the literature review. The completion agenda is a topic often present in social and print media,
and despite its recent focus from President Obama’s American Graduation Initiative, research in professional and peer reviewed journals is slim. Information is available on performance funding; however, as mentioned in this review, identifying research by multiple authors was challenging and may not provide the necessary confirmation and corroboration. Theme #1, The Completion Agenda and Initiative Examples, provides a rich source of literature evidencing noted and successful implementations of an initiative to increase the number of community college degrees and certificates earned in response to the completion agenda. In Theme #4, Community College Dean Decision-making, the literature review suggested that the community college dean must respond to higher-level decisions as well as lower-level demands. None of this literature, however, addressed decision-making in light of the completion agenda.

The topics in the themes presented in the collection of research articles and books identified tend to result in more qualitative than quantitative studies acknowledging some established completion agenda initiatives, descriptions of performance and outcomes based funding models, the connection between business and industry and the completion agenda, and the plight of the dean’s role in the institutional decision-making hierarchy and behavior. The majority of studies reviewed typically reflected a qualitative data collection methodology using case studies and interviews as opposed to experimental studies more often presented in quantitative studies. Given the lack of relevant literature to suggest variables and relationships, it appears prudent for this present research study to use a qualitative approach.

Summary

The purpose of study for this qualitative dissertation was to determine the influence of the completion agenda on decision-making by community college CTE program mid-level deans. By interviewing Washington State technical community college deans as the decision-makers
representing a variety of CTE programs within a state that has responded to the completion agenda with performance based funding since 2007, this study hoped to identify empirical representative data to support that influence from the completion agenda exists. The research questions will ask: (1) What internal and external forces do career and technical education dean decision-makers in Washington State technical colleges perceive are impacting decisions they are required to make for the programs they administer, (2) What evidence exists to demonstrate the influence of the completion agenda on career and technical education dean decision-making, and (3) Do career and technical education dean decision-makers perceive that there is a conflict between providing immediate career opportunities for the students they serve, versus degree completion (meeting the needs of the completion agenda)? The approach to researching the literature was identified in this chapter and a sampling of search terms were provided. Items that were included and excluded in the literature review were explained.

Four topical themes that are related to the topic of this study were explored in this literature review. These include a sampling of completion agenda initiatives; information on performance based and outcomes based funding, research on the relationship between business and industry and the completion agenda, and community college decision-making at the level of the dean. The overarching themes provided information influencing the creation of the interview questions and a framework for the analysis of the data to be collected.

By researching the completion agenda, the author discovered the plethora of documentation on the pressures from this agenda to push for more community college degrees and certificates to be awarded. As a result there are incentives for two-year institutions to respond, whether as a reaction to state funding models based on performance and outcomes or from students needing higher credentials than a high school diploma. The question remains as to
the influence the completion agenda is having on CTE deans and the decisions made on a daily basis.

Performing the literature review for the study’s topic was a needle-in-the-haystack situation with the researcher combing through articles hoping to find mention of the experience of the CTE community college dean decision-makers. The articles reviewed provided peripheral information related to the narrow focus of this study and reinforced the need for additional research on this topic. The topic of this study lends itself to a qualitative study, much like the majority of references reviewed, with a methodology for data collection focused on interviewing a minimum of 10 CTE deans at five technical community colleges in Washington State. With no specific references identified on this specific topic, it is likely the results of this study will provide both practitioners and scholars with new research to document the influence of the completion agenda on decision-making by CTE deans.
Figure 2.1 Literature Review Themes Explored

Theme #1: The Completion Agenda and Initiative Examples
Theme #2: Performance and Outcomes Based Funding
Theme #3: Business and Industry and the Completion Agenda
Theme #4: Community College Dean Decision Making

The Influence of the Completion Agenda on Decision-making by Community College Career and Technical Education Program Deans
Chapter Three: Methodology

This section provides a map of the process used by the researcher to collect data in order to answer three research questions. As researcher for this study, my positionality/bias, philosophical approach, and guiding theoretical perspective are detailed and outline how Resource Dependency Theory informed the research design. A description of the data sources and the data is provided; the methodology utilized for analysis of this data, along with procedures to ensure trustworthiness, and procedures to protect human participants are included. Limitations are anticipated, with the proposed methodology and summary of the methods follow.

Research Questions

The research questions for this qualitative study were defined as:

1) What internal and external forces do career and technical education dean decision-makers in Washington State technical colleges perceive are impacting decisions they are required to make for the programs they administer?

2) What evidence exists to demonstrate the influence of the completion agenda on career and technical education dean decision-making?

3) Do career and technical education dean decision-makers perceive that there is a conflict between providing immediate career opportunities for the students they serve, versus degree completion (meeting the needs of the completion agenda)?

Knowing differences may have existed among the study’s technical colleges in Washington State in terms of fiscal resources, organizational structure, and decision-making processes in use by the deans, the researcher chose not to define what kinds of decision-making would be addressed in the body of the research question.
Using the framework of Resource Dependency Theory to guide the interview, the research questions were designed to assess how deans, in general, act when facing funding constraints and to determine if the sample interviewed in this study behaved in the same manner.

**Philosophical Approach**

Merriam (2009) stated that in interpretive research the assumption is that reality is socially constructed, and that there is not just one reality, rather a multitude of realities or interpretations for each event. The interpretive/constructivist philosophical approach for conducting research describes the process of individuals seeking to understand the world in which they live and that one’s experience includes how the experience has been interpreted. Researchers do not locate and discover knowledge; instead, they build or construct it.

Haverkamp and Young (2007) framed the interpretative/constructivist paradigm as providing many equally valid social realities. The knowledge gained in the process of conducting research documenting an interaction between individuals is co-constructed. It comes not from a direct observation but rather from the interpretation of the researcher. It is assumed that the researcher will influence the research process and that the researcher will examine and disclose how his or her personal beliefs and values have influenced how the meaning of the data collected has been constructed. Knowledge is created during the researcher-participants interactions over time and may achieve significant depth.

Creswell (2012) explained the constructivist approach as one where the researcher explains the feelings and reactions of those being interviewed to a particular experience or process. This approach focuses more on the meanings the research participants place on an experience than simply gathering facts and data. The researcher therefore becomes a part of the study by interpreting the reactions of the participants to the phenomenon being presented.
A benefit to this study was the inclusion of several different technical community colleges representing a variance in institutional resources, size, geographic locations, and programs of study. Given this spectrum it can be expected that there is not one consistent reality among individuals performing similar positions and that the experiences of those being interviewed included their interpretation of their decisions under the influence of the completion agenda. The researcher approached the development of the open-ended questions and subsequent data analysis with an interpretive/constructivist philosophical approach. During the analysis of the data, the interpretive/constructivist philosophical approach provided the researcher with an opportunity to participate in the research by actively interpreting the responses of those being interviewed.

**Positionality/Researcher Bias**

The researcher is a mid-level administrator at a Pacific-Northwest Research I university and is familiar with the impact of the completion agenda from 16 years of experience at her previous institution, a mid-size Pacific-Northwest community college. The researcher was aware going into the study that there was a bias and an expectation that the data collection process would reveal that the completion agenda has a negative impact on decision-making by career and technical education community college deans. The negative impact, as defined by the researcher, would be that decisions are made to accommodate the demands of meeting the goals of the completion agenda that do not meet the needs of the students and/or local business interests.

By actively listening to the stated feelings and reactions of the participants in relation to how the completion agenda did or did not impact their decision-making and by using the interpretive/constructivist philosophical approach, the researcher attempted to keep this bias in check. This bias was acknowledged during the data interpretation process and when presenting
the study’s findings. Specific procedures were utilized to ensure trustworthiness of the study; these measures are detailed later in Chapter Three.

**Guiding Theoretical Perspective**

Resource Dependency Theory (RDT) provided the foundation for development and presentation of the interview questions; as well as analysis of the themes revealed after data coding. RDT is the framework underlying the notion that decision-makers working in career and technical education divisions within a particular state need federal and state funding to survive. If continued funding is partially or fully dependent on conditions resulting from the completion agenda, the decision-making behaviors of the CTE deans could be impacted.

Johnson (1995) provided a formal definition of RDT:

Resource Dependence Theory is a theory of organization(s) that seeks to explain organizational and inter-organizational behavior in terms of those critical resources that an organization must have in order to survive and function. An open-systems theory, the resource dependence suggests that a given organization will respond to and become dependent on those organizations or entities in its environment that control resources which are both critical to its operations and over which it has no control. (p. 3)

RDT focuses on resources, the exchange and flow of resources between organizations, power differentials created due to the unequal resource exchange, the constraining effects this dependence has on an organizational action, and the efforts by leaders within the organization to manage the institution’s dependence (Johnson, 1995).

RDT derives from systems theory and uses the theory’s principles as it pertains to organizations. Systems theory is defined as a “thing with mutually inter-related parts called subsystems. Each subsystem affects the others and each in return depends on the whole” (Bakhit,
Tompkins (2005) stated that organizations as a system must watch for changes from their original goals, monitor their environments, and adjust their goals, environment, and internal structures in order to maintain organizational equilibrium. Community colleges are open systems and receive feedback from their local communities, businesses that hire their graduates, the state governments that provide funding, politicians who impact funding, and the families of the students (Bahkit, 2014). This element of RDT was taken into consideration during the data collection process in the interviews with the open-ended questions. If the researcher were to explain RDT to CTE dean decision-makers, they might recognize its applicability to their financial decision-making under the completion agenda. However, this was unlikely to arise naturally in the responses to the open-ended questions designed. Taking this into consideration, the open-ended questions had RDT as a framework, as outlined in the Data Sources and Description of Data section of this chapter.

RDT, which is a form of isomorphism, dictates that organizations, such as community colleges, will model themselves to fit the expectations of those upon whom they depend for funding and other resources (Askin, 2007). When analyzing the data collected in the interviews, this framework was used to assess whether CTE dean decision-makers made decisions related to faculty hiring, curriculum, and responded to advisory committees to meet the expectations and demands of those providing departmental funding as well as business and industry employers. The emphasis by state funding entities on meeting performance indicators, such as degree and certificate completion, job placement, and transfer rates, reflected RDT in the stories shared by CTE decision-makers. RDT embraces the idea of organizational dependence, and the researcher looked for the indicators of dependence in the responses from the interviewees such as references.
to the importance of state funding related to the completion agenda and its importance to the community college, the relative scarcity of the funding, and the degree to which the funding is available (Johnson, 1995).

While analyzing the data collected from the interviews, using a narrative analysis to identify themes, the researcher looked for elements of RDT to be evident. Did the responses from the CTE dean decision-makers reveal that they perceive the state funding agencies as Bakhit’s (2014) identified “environmental actors, which hold resources that organizations need to survive, give those actors power to impose constraints and put demands on the organization”? (p. 899). Did they perceive that the financial decisions they are making for their CTE departments are related to their dependency on the state funding sources and that the legislators have power over their resources, decisions, and ultimately their college mission (Bakhit, 2014)?

**Sampling Plan**

Washington was chosen for its proximity to the researcher and because this state responded to the national completion agenda in 2007, prior to President Obama’s American Graduation Initiative, with the implementation of an innovative performance incentive policy for community colleges called the Student Achievement Initiative (SAI) (Shulock & Jenkins, 2011). Washington’s 34 community colleges support and serve a wide variety of communities spanning the state, with 19 of the 34 in the Seattle-Tacoma urban area (see Figure 3.1). The intention was to interview dean decision-makers at technical community colleges in the Seattle area with varying levels of budgets, economic resources, variance in local business and industry economic situations, and representing institutions with and without faculty unions.

The study’s original goal was to have a sample size of five Washington State technical community colleges with interviews from a minimum of two dean decision-makers from each
technical community college. Due to challenges around identifying CTE deans that met the study’s protocol requirements of a minimum of six months in the current position at their current institutions, the study expanded to seven community colleges offering CTE programs, and 10 deans were interviewed. Technical community colleges were chosen due to the programs focusing primarily on CTE. A homogenous purposeful sampling was utilized by approaching 10 potential CTE deans to identify the initial interview candidates. Once data collection began, an opportunistic and snowball sampling technique was utilized to find additional interviewees. This was done at the end of each interview by asking the CTE dean if there was anyone else, after their having answered the questions that should be included in the study. This snowball sampling proved to be very successful, especially given the difficulty of finding CTE deans that fit the unit of analysis requirements as defined in the IRB Protocol. The CTE deans in the Seattle/Tacoma area Washington State technical community colleges are generally known to each other and are a relatively small population from which to identify a sample; this justified the original and follow-up sampling methodologies identified.

CTE at community colleges can be organized differently at each institution and labeled uniquely as well. The Association for Career and Technical Education website (https://www.acteonline.org) provides extensive information on career and technical education in Washington State. Washington State has adopted the Career Clusters model for organizing its secondary and post-secondary career and technical education. The data collection for this study attempted to interview decision-makers who represented a cross-section of academic areas within the 16 Career Clusters as shown at the end of this chapter in Table 3.1 State of Washington Career Clusters. Table 3.2 Academic Areas for CTE Deans Interviewed at the end
of this chapter provides information on how many of the 16 Career Clusters were represented by the 10 CTE deans interviewed for the study.

**Data Sources and Description of Data**

An exploratory sequential design mixed methods study was originally proposed for this study. Qualitative data was to be collected in phase one on the historical impact of the completion agenda on CTE dean decision-making by utilizing document analysis and interviews. Phase one was to be complemented by quantitative data collected and analyzed in phase two, with a survey of 500 CTE community college deans and presidents who are members of the Association for Career and Technical Education. This approach was replaced with a qualitative research approach utilizing interviews to collect data, both to lessen the time required to complete the study and to allow for a deeper analysis of the themes presented.

**Unit of Analysis.** The unit of analysis was mid-management dean decision-makers, below the executive level, responsible for CTE academic units. Each individual technical community college had different titles for those responsible for oversight of the various CTE programs. The decision-makers included in the study were those to whom faculty report directly and therefore were academic divisional deans. Decision-making deans were those who are responsible for departmental budgets, supervising, hiring, firing, and evaluating college faculty, and have control of or influence curricular offerings. Depending on the size of the school, the decision-maker directly responsible for faculty supervision, budgets, curriculum offerings and hiring may or may not have been at the executive level.

**Recruitment Process.** Employing strict adherence to the initially approved IRB Protocol recruitment plan, the deans to be approached had to demonstrate that in their capacity as Career and Technical Deans, they were supervisors of faculty, and they needed to have been in their
position as a CTE dean for a minimum of 12 months at the institution where they are currently employed. As the recruitment process unfolded, it became quickly evident that, given the nature of community colleges’ shifting organizational structures and changes in the technical colleges’ leadership, the IRB Protocol needed to be redrafted and reapproved, changing the minimum number of months from 12 to six months. Furthermore, the original study proposal sought to interview a minimum of 10 CTE deans at five technical colleges in Washington State. Again, with changes in staffing and a dynamic organizational structure at many of the institutions, the final study resulted in 10 CTE deans being interviewed at five technical colleges and two community colleges with technical programs, with three of the institutions having just one dean interviewed at each.

The recruitment plan began with potential participants identified by analyzing college organizational charts and directories available on public institutional websites to determine whom to interview at each individual institution. A spreadsheet was made to track the names and contact information and the CTE disciplines supervised in an attempt to have a diverse selection of divisions over which the CTE deans were responsible. When CTE deans were not identified or contact information was not available on the institutional websites, the institution’s Human Resources department was contacted or a Google search was performed looking for information on the CTE deans. Often times CTE deans, once identified, would recommend other CTE deans to approach with whom they were familiar from their state wide professional organizations.

Those identified for interviews were initially sent a recruitment email, along with the proposed interview questions and a consent form. If a CTE dean did not respond to the recruitment emails after two weeks, follow up phone calls were made with an invitation to participate. This qualitative study’s data was collected through one-on-one in-person interviews
conducted at seven individual Washington State technical community college sites. The interviews were audio-recorded by tape recorder and through the researcher’s MacBook Pro recording tool.

Broad categories for the protocol focused on the familiarity of the interviewees with the national completion agenda and its impact on fiscal decision-making. The open-ended interview questions designed by the researcher utilized Resource Dependency as the theoretical framework.

The interview questions were divided into four categories: (a) establishing the participant’s basic requirements for participation in the interview such as their supervisory and budget oversight responsibilities; (b) the interviewee’s awareness of the completion agenda; (c) the participant’s perception of the impact of the completion agenda on their decision-making; and (d) the participants’ perceptions of the pressure from employers to produce trained workers vs. the pressures of meeting the completion agenda goals. The questions posed to each interviewed CTE dean were:

**Category I**

Basic requirements for interviewee participation: supervisory and budget oversight responsibilities

**Questions**

What is the extent of your supervisory responsibility at your institution?

Which career and technical education program faculty and staff are you responsible for managing and hiring?

What is your budgetary responsibility and level of financial decision-making related to the faculty and staff in your division?

What internal and external forces impact the decisions you are required to make for the programs you administer?
Category II  
The participant’s awareness of the completion agenda

Questions  
How would you define the completion agenda?

Resource Dependency Theory  
Evidence for external constraints from a higher authority and that are known to the decision-maker

What would you consider to be a manifestation of the completion agenda at your institution?

What is your familiarity with Washington State’s Student Achievement Initiative (SAI), which is an example of completion agenda implementation?

Category III  
The participant perception of the impact of the completion agenda on their decision-making.

Questions  
If you are familiar with the SAI, what impact has it had on the decisions you have made in regards to your division?

Resource Dependency Theory  
When circumstances change the institution can accommodate change or face non-existence

What factors inform your decision-making as it relates to curriculum offerings?

What factors inform your decision-making as it relates to faculty hiring?

Beyond pedagogy, what do you perceive to be any pressures faced by your CTE faculty?

What decisions have you made that may not comply or support the completion agenda?

Does the decision-maker attempt to free themselves from the constraints placed by the higher authority who may control resources?

Category IV  
The participants’ perceptions of the pressure from employers to produce trained workers vs. the pressures of meeting the completion agenda goals.
Questions
What conflicts exist between providing immediate career training opportunities for the students in your CTE programs and meeting the needs of the completion agenda with degree and certificates earned?

How is your decision-making influenced by the demands and expectations of business and industry employers in your service area?

Interview Protocol. The 10 interviews were conducted in person between June 3, 2016 and July 21, 2016 with CTE deans from seven different technical colleges in Washington State. Each CTE dean was presented with another copy of the consent form and informed that the interview needed to be recorded. All agreed to be recorded and signed the consent forms. As incentive to participate, interviewees were offered a copy of the results of the study with a copy to their presidents. Per IRB (7468) protocol, each CTE dean was asked the identical pre-approved 14 questions with the only questions posed by the researcher being those necessary to clarify a response or to affirm what had been said. The CTE deans were sent a follow-up thank you by the researcher with a signed copy of their consent form for future reference.

Per the Oregon State University Research Protocol for this study, only the researcher utilized the tape recordings made during the course of the interview. The principal investigator and the student researcher will have access to the tape recording and all transcribed notes. All tape recordings were destroyed after the transcription process was completed and all data collected will be retained by the principal investigator in a secure password protected computer for three years post-study completion.

Analyses and Interpretation
The qualitative research type used was narrative analysis. It is recognized that in a qualitative study the researcher is the primary instrument of the data collection. Merriam (2009)
referred to Creswell’s statement that a narrative study “tells a persuasive story told in a literary way” (p. 211). The concept of rich, thick descriptions was utilized to contextualize the study so research findings have transferability to other states impacted by the national completion agenda (Merriam, 2009).

**Coding Techniques.** After the conclusion of the interviews, transcriptions of the audio-recorded interviews were created and imported into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software program used to store, organize, and facilitate the coding of the interview data. Memos were created in NVivo documenting the researcher’s reactions to the interviews and again after the transcribing and coding process was completed. The researcher watched hours of instructional videos on how to utilize NVivo for coding the transcribed interviews and a rough and uninformed first coding cycle ensued. Realizing that coding qualitative data from interview transcripts was not an intuitive and innately learned skill, the researcher read texts on coding and analyzing data and utilized them to perform a second coding of the data.

With the newly acquired understanding that a code identified while analyzing qualitative data is usually a short phrase or word that is symbolic and is designed to capture the essence or attributes of language or visual data (Saldana, 2013), the first and second coding cycles were approached in dramatically different ways. The initial first coding cycle and approach used was to create a list of codes gleaned from the problem statement for the study, from the three research questions, from the theoretical framework of Resource Dependency Theory, and from an assumption of what codes would make sense after conducting the interviews and spending 30 hours transcribing. Saldana’s (2013) first cycling methods of Descriptive Coding, In Vivo Coding, and Initial Coding described the methods utilized for the first pass at coding. Descriptive Coding is topical and provided insight into what was heard in the course of the interviews. In
Vivo Coding was utilized to capture favorite quotes from the CTE deans and coding to an actual word or phrase used in the interview. Strauss (1987) called Initial Coding “Open Coding” and described it as a coding process that is unrestricted and often involving line by line analysis that result in concepts that fit the data. Table 3.3 First Cycle Coding at the end of this chapter lists the codes identified in the first coding cycle performed for this study.

After studying the difference between codes, themes, and categories it was evident that a second coding cycle needed to take place. The coding needed to provide a mechanism for truly “listening” for the undertones of what was being said both literally and subtly. Saldana (2013) stated that the goal of Focused Coding as a second coding analytic process is to allow for the development of categories with focus on their individual properties and taxonomy. With Focused Coding, the development of themes and categories should not be forced to fit a pre-conceived set of codes. As a result of this, the second coding of the transcripts from the CTE deans was organic, free form, and without boundaries. This led to a deeper and more descriptive coding process that eased the way for the development of categories and themes. Table 3.4 Second Coding Cycle at the end of this chapter lists the codes identified in the Second Coding cycle performed for this study.

**Analysis Techniques.** The researcher performed a preliminary exploratory analysis of the data to identify categories from the coding which was then used to develop themes, which assisted in answering the study’s research question, and to form an understanding of the central phenomenon being explored. Resource Dependency Theory provided a framework for the analysis along with the incorporation of the research discovered in the literature review. Saldana (2013) defined themes not as something that is coded, but instead is an outcome of the reflective analysis, categorization, and coding of the data set. Saldana noted that the exact definition and
function within a study’s analysis varies among researcher technique sources, but that it serves to identify what a unit of data means and describes an extended sentence or phrase. Corbin and Strauss (2015) provided guidance on the analysis of data for a qualitative study using a term of “constant comparisons” (p. 7) that involves breaking down the data into pieces to look for similarities and differences. By grouping the similar data sets, categories naturally appeared that assisted with the creation of themes. The results of this analysis are presented in Chapter Four of this study.

**Procedures Used to Ensure Trustworthiness**

Merriam (2009) stated, “the validity and reliability of a study depend upon the ethics of the investigator” (p. 228). Given the previously stated potential for bias in the researcher in believing that the completion agenda has an impact on the decision-making of community college CTE deans, it is vital that rigorous procedures were utilized to ensure trustworthiness of the study. Three methods were utilized: (a) member checking; (b) researcher’s position or reflexivity; and (c) peer review/examination (Merriam, 2009).

**Member checking.** Member checking refers to a procedure of returning to subject(s) in the study to confirm the data collected and transcribed by the researcher is accurate. Member checking was used with one of the CTE deans interviewed verifying the accuracy of the information presented in the study. The researcher sought insight from this dean on the accuracy of terminology that is unique to the Washington State Technical Colleges used in the study, such as the Student Achievement Initiative, and I-BEST. The particular CTE dean chosen for the member checking was familiar with the majority of Washington Technical College deans and the researcher sought feedback to insure that the identity of any specific dean was protected in the
study. The feedback from the CTE dean was analyzed and where appropriate was used to made edits on the study as presented.

**Researcher Position or Reflexivity.** After analyzing the data the researcher engaged in a critical self-reflection process to check assumptions, biases, and investment in the outcome of the study to ensure trustworthiness of the findings and the study. Knowing that a bias existed prior to the data collection phase, the researcher constantly had to keep this bias in check during the interviews, while transcribing the recordings, and most importantly in the theme identification process. This was accomplished by writing memos in NVivo after each interview documenting the researcher’s reactions to what was said by the CTE deans. It was helpful to keep the known bias at bay by adhering to the strict IRB Protocol of asking the same questions to each of the CTE deans. By keeping silent and only nodding encouragingly while the CTE deans spoke, any bias for approval, surprise, or disapproval of the interview responses was not revealed. When writing Chapters Four and Five of this study the researcher took a neutral stance, as it relates to the results of the study and the identification of the themes, to insure that bias did not affect the study findings.

**Peer Review/Examination.** Throughout the dissertation data collection and writing process, the researcher consulted with a CTE dean at her former institution. This consultation included seeking feedback of the researcher’s interpretation of the data and themes identified as well as gaining assistance in identifying bias on reporting the study results.

**Strategies for Protection of Human Subjects**

Qualitative data collection requires the researcher to gather significant data over a period of time directly from individuals presenting their personal views in response to the interview questions (Creswell, 2012). As a result, it was necessary to disclose fully any potential risks to
those being interviewed and to detail the mechanisms employed to protect the identity of the study participants. The researcher completed all steps required of the Oregon State University IRB in an expedited review process.

The researcher, of course, knew the identity of the study participants, who were therefore, not anonymous, and assurance was provided in the IRB consent process that each dean’s confidentiality would be maintained. Aliases of D1 to D10 were given for the study participants, and specific program names and institution names were masked as a protection for the human subjects involved. The sensitive position of a CTE dean, situated between the executive administration and the faculty and staff, created a need for confidentiality in this study. CTE deans aspiring to promotion within their community college organizational structure who presented responses to interview questions that may not support Washington State’s SAI performance based funding or additional completion agenda initiatives may not have disclosed their opinions and feedback to the questions openly without the protection of hiding their identities.

There was a possibility that those interviewed, even with the commitment from the researcher to mask their identity and institution, may have hesitated to share experiences in making decisions influenced by the completion agenda in a state that has implemented a completion agenda initiative. If the study participants revealed during the interviews that decisions are or were being made and may appear not to support the completion agenda in Washington State and/or the SAI, there could have been concern that this information could be shared with their executive level teams.
Limitations

There were limitations to using a sample larger than seven institutions based on the time necessary to conduct interviews at different times and locations. Though the researcher intended to conduct at least one interview at each of five selected institutions, there was a risk that not all invitees would be willing or interested in participating.

Washington State’s long-time successful implementation of PBF may have limited this study, since more states have disbanded PBF after implementation than those that have adopted and maintained this form of funding (Dougherty & Reddy, 2013). By undertaking a study of institutions located within one state the study may result in a lack of generalizability. Dougherty and Reddy (2013) reaffirmed this by stating that the qualitative research literature on PBF includes a number of limitations and that the primary limitation is that very few studies examine this phenomenon in more than one state at a time. As with this study, by limiting the research to one state, variables such as the funding models impact on institutional and student outcome that differ by state implementation were not factored into the data analysis and findings.

Summary of Methods

The research questions for this qualitative study were defined as:

1) What internal and external forces do career and technical education dean decision-makers in Washington State technical colleges perceive are impacting decisions they are required to make for the programs they administer?

2) What evidence exists to demonstrate the influence of the completion agenda on career and technical education dean decision-making?

3) Do career and technical education dean decision-makers perceive that there is a conflict between providing immediate career opportunities for the students they
serve, versus degree completion (meeting the needs of the completion agenda)?

The researcher’s positionality/bias, philosophical approach and guiding theoretical perspective using Resource Dependency Theory were described. An explanation of the data sample to include career and technical education decision-making managers at a minimum of seven technical community colleges in Washington was outlined and the recruitment strategies explained. The protocol for the interview questions was revealed, including a structure by which Resource Dependency Theory was used as the framework for the development and presentation of the initial open-ended questions.

A narrative analysis was used to sort and identify the themes stemming from the recorded interview notes. The findings were reported in a narrative discussion after preliminary exploratory analysis uncovered themes related to the study’s topic. Resource Dependency Theory served as a framework for this data analysis incorporating research discovered in the literature review.

Three procedures used to ensure trustworthiness: (a) member checking; (b) researcher’s position or reflexivity, and (c) peer review/examination were presented. The strategies for the protection of human subjects were identified and the limitations of this methodology were listed.

The next chapter presents the findings from analysis of the data and how the findings respond to the research questions. The theoretical framework of Resource Dependency Theory was incorporated into the presentation of the findings, along with a compilation of a current literature review as it related to the study topic.
Figure 3.1. Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Table 3.1 *State of Washington Career Clusters*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agriculture, Food &amp; Natural Resources</th>
<th>Architecture &amp; Construction</th>
<th>Arts, A/V Technology &amp; Communications</th>
<th>Business, Management &amp; Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Training</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Government &amp; Public Administration</td>
<td>Health Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality &amp; Tourism</td>
<td>Human Services</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Law, Public Safety, Corrections &amp; Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Science, Technology, Engineering, &amp; Math</td>
<td>Transportation, Distribution &amp; Logistics</td>
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</table>


Table 3.2 *Academic Areas for CTE Deans Interviewed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Washington State Career Clusters</th>
<th>Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Food &amp; Natural Resources</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture &amp; Construction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, A/V Technology &amp; Communication</td>
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<td>Business, Management &amp; Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Training</td>
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<td>Government &amp; Public Administration</td>
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<td>Health Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospitality &amp; Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
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<td>Law, Public Safety, Corrections, &amp; Security</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science, Technology, Engineering, &amp; Math</td>
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<td>Transportation, Distribution, &amp; Logistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
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**Total Programs Administered by Interviewees** 89
### Table 3.3 First Coding Cycle

<table>
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<th>Research Question #1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisory committee Influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Decision Making</td>
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<td>Industry demands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influence on curriculum development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influence on faculty hiring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal forces</td>
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<td>Resource Dependency Theory</td>
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<table>
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<th>Research Question #2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Completion agenda defined</td>
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<tr>
<td>I-BEST</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influence of completion agenda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influence of SAI</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<th>Research Question #3</th>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict between jobs and agenda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industry vs. completion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-completion agenda</td>
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### Table 3.4 Second Coding Cycle

### Second Cycle Coding

<table>
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<th>Research Question #1</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Accreditation as an external influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advisory committee influencing curriculum</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Advisory committee influencing faculty hiring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory committees are critical for survival</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deans feeling like they should do more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions deans make about faculty hiring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employer demands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrollment impact on decision making</td>
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<tr>
<td>Executive leadership influence on decision making</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Faculty need additional training</td>
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<td>Grants as external funding influence</td>
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<td>Helping faculty find money to meet new needs</td>
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<td>How curriculum decisions are made</td>
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<td>Influence from WA state on decision making</td>
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<td>Managing budget responsibilities</td>
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<td>Need money for equipment</td>
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<td>Supervision workload not sustainable</td>
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<td>Time as a challenge for decision making</td>
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### Research Question #2

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<td>Barriers to supporting completion</td>
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<td>College wide completion agenda involvement</td>
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<td>Dean making decisions because of completion agenda</td>
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<td>Faculty becoming aware of completion agenda</td>
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<td>SAI as performance based funding</td>
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<td>Skepticism about the value of the completion agenda</td>
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### Research Question #3

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<td>Yes a conflict career vs. completion agenda</td>
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**Chapter Four: Findings**
The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain insight and to assess what influence the completion agenda and its stated goals have on decision-making by community college deans; specifically deans overseeing faculty and staff in career and technical education programs. This chapter provides information on the study’s theoretic framework of Resource Dependency and the data collection sites, a description of the interviews, an overview of the analysis process followed, and the results of the narrative analysis of the data collected during interviews with 10 career and technical education community college deans in Washington State. Resource Dependency Theory was used to develop the open-ended interview questions posed by the researcher and in the analysis of the data to address three research questions:

1) *What internal and external forces do career and technical education dean decision-makers in Washington State technical colleges perceive are impacting decisions they are required to make for the programs they administer?*

2) *What evidence exists to demonstrate the influence of the completion agenda on career and technical education dean decision-making?*

3) *Do career and technical education dean decision-makers perceive that there is a conflict between providing immediate career opportunities for the students they serve, versus degree completion (meeting the needs of the completion agenda)?*

Four overarching themes were identified from analysis of the study’s data:

1) *Limited control*
2) *Dependency*
3) *Indifference*
4) *Cognitive Dissonance*

**Theoretical Framework**

Resource Dependency Theory served as a guide for the creation of the open-ended
interview questions and facilitated the narrative analysis of the data. Pfeffer and Salancik (2003) observed that organizations would survive based on their effectiveness stemming from the management of demands from other organizations upon which they depend for support and resources. When the environmental pressures on organizations change, organizations risk the prospect of not surviving if they do not change their activities to respond to these environmental factors and organizational survival depends on the effective acquisition of and maintenance of resources. Resource dependency occurs when organizations change their environment in response to these external forces, and it predicts that organizations will attempt to manage the constraints and uncertainty that result from the need to acquire resources from the environment.

**The Data Collection Sites**

Washington State technical two-year colleges in the Seattle/Tacoma area were chosen as the sites for data collection from career and technical education division deans due to their proximity to the researcher. While Washington State has 34 community and technical colleges under the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, five of the community colleges in the Seattle metropolitan area have added Applied Baccalaureate degrees to their curriculum and have dropped the word “community” from their institutional titles. Therefore, the initial intent for data collection efforts was conducting interviews at strictly technical colleges. As the recruitment process unfolded, it became clear that the number of CTE deans qualifying under the IRB designated protocol for holding their positions a minimum of six months at their institutions was limited. Additional two-year colleges not known as technical colleges were added where CTE deans met the selection criteria. All of the institutions in the data collection sites offer academic programs in professional-technical/career and technical education disciplines.
The interviews took place in June and July of 2016 and were conducted primarily in the offices of the CTE deans; two interviews were held in local coffee shops for the convenience of the study subjects.

The Interviews

The 10 CTE deans who agreed to participate in the study all had responsibilities for a variety of academic areas within career and technical education and, in some cases, college transfer programs as well. All of the deans had held their positions for a minimum of six months at their current institution and had faculty directly reporting to them.

The CTE deans invited to participate in the study were sent the 14 interview questions and the consent form with their recruitment email. At the start of the interview, the CTE deans who accepted were asked to read the consent form with the researcher present and to agree to be audio-recorded. All agreed to be recorded and were supportive of the study. The CTE deans were informed that they would be asked the questions and there would not be a dialogue with the researcher. They were informed that the researcher would clarify for understanding if necessary, and otherwise would not verbally engage during the interview.

The CTE deans were all asked the same 14 questions in the same order and manner. The only additional questions posed by the researcher were to clarify a response for understanding and to repeat interview questions when asked. The questions posed to each interviewed CTE dean were sorted into four categories:

Category I
Basic requirements for interview participation: supervisory and budget oversight responsibilities

Questions
1. What is the extent of your supervisory responsibility at your institution?
2. Which career and technical education program faculty and staff are you responsible for managing and hiring?

3. What is your budgetary responsibility and level of financial decision-making related to the faculty and staff in your division?

4. What internal and external forces impact the decisions you are required to make for the programs you administer?

Category II

The participant’s awareness of the completion agenda

Questions

5. How would you define the completion agenda?

6. What would you consider to be a manifestation of the completion agenda at your institution?

7. What is your familiarity with Washington State’s Student Achievement Initiative (SAI), which is an example of completion agenda implementation?

Category III

The participant’s perception of the impact of the completion agenda on their decision-making.

Questions

8. If you are familiar with the SAI, what impact has it had on the decisions you have made in regards to your division?

9. What factors inform your decision-making as it relates to curriculum offerings?

10. What factors inform your decision-making as it relates to faculty hiring?

11. Beyond pedagogy, what do you perceive to be any pressures faced by your CTE faculty?

12. What decisions have you made that may not comply or support the completion agenda?

Category IV
The participant perceptions of the pressure from employers to produce trained workers vs. the pressures of meeting the completion agenda goals.

**Questions**

13. What conflicts exist between providing immediate career training opportunities for the students in your CTE programs versus meeting the needs of the completion agenda with degree and certificates earned?

14. How is your decision-making influenced by the demands and expectations of business and industry employers in your service area?

The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and through the researcher’s MacBook Pro recording tool. No notes were taken during the interview by the researcher, and each dean’s business card and signed consent form were collected at the end of the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, the recordings were archived on a laptop and external hard drive for security purposes. After each interview, a memo was created in the NVivo software to archive the researcher’s impressions and reactions to the interviews. The interview subjects received a thank you email and a copy of the consent form that had been signed by both parties the week following the interview.

**Analysis Process**

To analyze the data and identify themes and categories, the researcher used the qualitative research type of narrative analysis. Merriam (2009) characterizes narrative analysis as the “study of experience through stories” (p. 202), listening to the stories that people tell and analyzing how they share their experiences. The researcher was able to simply listen to the CTE deans’ responses, knowing that their words were recorded by multiple electronic devices and could therefore capture their emotions, behaviors, and reactions as questions were posed. Their experience in sharing their thoughts on the completion agenda was as important to the researcher as their literal answers.
After the interviews concluded, the audio recordings were transcribed into Microsoft Word and the text imported into NVivo software. The interview data transcribed did not include incidental words such as “So,” “Um,” “Uh” etc., and if a sentence stated by the CTE dean included a reference to their or another’s institution, this was simply transcribed as “my” or “another” institution to protect the confidentiality of the interview subjects. Care was taken to transcribe their exact phrasing in order to capture the essence of the interview in the transcripts.

**First Coding Cycle**

Utilizing the tracking features in the NVivo software, a first coding cycle was completed with a list of codes created prior to reviewing the transcript data. These initial codes came from the study’s problem statement, from the three research questions, from the Resource Dependency theoretical framework, and from the researcher’s general impressions after listening to the ten interviews. See Table 3.3 *First Cycle Coding* at the end of Chapter Three for a list of the first cycle coding. As part of the first coding cycle the researcher made memos on what was “heard” along with specific favorite quotes. After studying the results of the first coding cycle and researching more fully how to code data for a qualitative study, the researcher knew a second cycle coding was needed.

**Second Coding Cycle**

During the second coding cycle coding the researcher “listened” to what the CTE dean was saying for both the literal statements, and what might be the meta-message in the transcribed dataset. Upon review of the transcribed data from all 10 interviews, the researcher again used the NVivo software to track the coding and favorite quotes from the CTE deans. Post-transcription memos were created to record the researcher’s reactions to the interviews. See Table 3.4 *Second Coding Cycle* at the end of Chapter Three for a list of the codes.
Interview Memos Highlights

The use of memo writing as part of analysis for a qualitative study provides the researcher with tools to clarify and magnify the data, generate ideas, and inform the coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). After each interview concluded the researcher captured impressions from listening to the interview before the transcription process. This “raw” response to the data provided insight to potential biases. The researcher observed the subtleties of how the CTE deans responded to the questions and the impact of the interview on them. Writing memos after reviewing each interview helped capture the unique character of each dean as well as their familiarity with the completion agenda.

Below are highlights from the memos written after each interview. The coding for the deans is D1 through D10 and pronouns were changed to “they” and “their” to protect the confidentiality of the CTE deans.

D1 Interview

I found it interesting how quiet the dean would become when it was a topic that they did not have a lot to say or perhaps they felt bad that they weren’t doing. When they were confident about an answer their voice became stronger and louder. There were also many laughs, which I interpreted as nervous laughs. I can already hear in this first interview undertones of why Resource Dependency is such a logical theoretical framework for this dissertation. The dependency that the professional-technical programs have on industry and their advisory boards is strong, and they have to run a careful balance of listening to what jobs will be out there for the students, but to also make sure the industry leaders understand the pressure of the completion agenda. After interviewing D1, which was my first, I was very emotional. I realized that all of my classes, all of the research I had done
to date, the writing of my literary review, and even the hard work on very carefully choosing these questions had paid off. Here was a real life CTE dean thoughtfully responding to my questions. They gave answers that aligned with what I expected in some cases, but not necessarily in others.

**D2 Interview.**

This was my second interview and I became concerned that I was going to not have the conversation about the completion agenda after talking to this subject. They went down a long and exhaustive track about purchasing equipment and were defining it completely differently. This actually could be a good argument that deans are not tracking on this in the way we might think they are. But once they understood what I meant they took it in the direction of Student Achievement Initiative and they gave really solid examples. The way they spoke about their decision-making gave me a sense that they felt somewhat disempowered and at the mercy of the administration. It was as if their division was far away from the rest of the college.

**D3 Interview**

This dean had a complete understanding of what the completion agenda is, and they gave the best definition of all of the deans. They referred to the creation of short-term certificates as an attempt to adhere to the completion agenda and I was so happy that they mentioned what I had learned in my research that industry does not really value them as a tool for employees to be better trained. They seemed to enjoy talking about this and they understand where their bread is buttered, so to speak.

**D4 Interview**

D4 was clearly a newer dean. They acknowledged this, and it was evident in how deeply
they did not go as compared to other deans. They were familiar with the completion agenda and spent the majority of their time giving solid examples of how they were addressing it.

**D5 Interview**

This was the most confident dean of all that I interviewed. They had a wide-eyed approach and hope for the future. I could tell that they were approaching their decision-making with confidence and drive. Their language was colorful and full of quotes. They had a singsong approach to the interview and clearly they understand the completion agenda.

**D6 Interview**

They had a strong sense of the completion agenda and clearly their institution has embraced it. They spoke in a way that was not what I would expect of a dean, like referring to "butts in seats." As far as the interview they provided excellent insight and backed up what I have been studying.

**D7 Interview**

This dean was very knowledgeable about the completion agenda and the Student Achievement Initiative. They really underscored repeatedly their understanding of the importance of accreditation. They seemed to not be rattled by it (the completion agenda), kind of just gently appreciating it, but focusing primarily on the needs of business and industry.

**D8 Interview**

They became very quiet when I was asking about the Student Achievement Initiative.
Again, when I asked about that and they did not have a lot to say they get really quiet.

**D9 Interview**

This interview was the hardest to schedule. It was clear from the start of the interview that this was not a dean who had worked in CTE for a long time. Their definition of the completion agenda was not centered on students earning degrees or students earning degrees or certificates.

**D10 Interview**

This dean was by far the most fun and the most engaging of all of the interviewees. They have a spirit that is open, optimistic, informed, and addictive. They were so careful to clarify when I asked a question, used my name often, and really wanted to get it right.

**Post-Transcription Memo Highlights**

The process of transcribing was arduous and exhausting, and created an opportunity for the researcher to become familiar with the responses to questions and to note the volume changes in their voices, their non-verbal reactions such as laughter and pauses, and to listen deeper than the spoken words. After completing the transcription of each interview post-transcription memos were written. Below are highlights from some memos that were written after each interview was transcribed.

**D1 Interview**

I remember being so nervous for this first interview and being so thrilled that they were responding with answers that I was hoping to hear. It was so helpful that I could not respond to keep my bias in check. After conducting the rest of the nine interviews and coding this interview, I can see their newness as a CTE showing. There is somewhat of a helpless overtone to their responses and I can see frustration in between the lines. They
have not yet had a lot of time to be a CTE dean and to deal with the CTE faculty and the completion agenda. It is interesting that they did not mention much about SAI, but they alluded to it throughout the interview.

**D2 Interview**

This dean was far more representative of what I am getting at with the impact of the completion agenda on the trades. They were an example of a dean who was not super intense as an administrator, but very much in touch with what industry needs with curriculum, equipment, faculty, and trained workers.

**D3 Interview**

I just love this dean’s truthful look at the completion agenda and what is going on. Their grit and wise quotes give such a voice to how these deans are looking at the completion agenda.

**D4 Interview**

They did understand that students do not always behave in a manner that supports the completion agenda, and they were willing to share that they have a little problem with it, as a result.

**D5 Interview**

I was surprised that they did not address the relationship between their programs and the advisory committees and industry since they oversee program X. Again, I think being relatively new might have caused that omission.

**D6 Interview**

I was really struck after listening to the audio recording with how articulate and
connected this dean was with their institution’s activities related to the completion agenda, and I was impressed that they had already earned their doctorate.

D7 Interview
It is interesting to me how many of these deans have earned or are seeking their doctorates. We all seem to be on the same path where we know how important it is for advancement, but are all working so hard and having so much responsibility now as deans. The pressure that many of the deans feel or felt while being a doctoral student along with the wide variety of responsibilities as a college administrator was evident.

D8 Interview
This dean was really serious and I noticed that they very rarely said "me" or "I" and spoke of “us” instead.

D9 Interview
After transcribing this interview I wondered if they have not been exposed to CTE technical college education very long and especially in Washington State under the SAI.

D10 Interview
After transcribing the prior nine interviews, it was clear that this CTE dean was deeply immersed in the completion agenda and demonstrated the strong understanding of the nature of the completion agenda.

Category and Theme Development
Once each of the first and second coding cycles was completed categories were identified from a review of the collected data. In a low-tech process each individual code title was recorded onto sticky notes, one set on pink represented the first coding cycle and one set on purple represented the second coding cycle. After placement on the wall the sticky notes were arranged
into categories. As a result the codes were consolidated into logical categories within each of the study’s three research questions. Figure 4.1 Themes and Categories at the end of this chapter illustrates the categories that developed from the analysis of the data after completing the first and second coding cycles.

In preparation for the development of themes, the researcher re-read what had been written in the literature review on Resource Dependency Theory as the foundation for this study, and a further literature review was conducted on the topic. The Resource Dependency Theory framework created around the interview questions was reviewed: 1) Evidence for external constraints from a higher authority and that are known to the decision-maker, 2) When circumstances change the institution can accommodate changes or face non-existence, and 3) Does the decision-maker attempt to free themselves from the constraints placed by the higher authority who may control resources? The interview and transcribed data set memos and all of the transcript data set materials after forming the categories from the first and second cycle coding exercise were reviewed once again. The experiences of listening to the CTE deans as they shared their thoughts and ideas was synthesized with the research on Resource Dependency Theory, and as a result of this analysis four themes naturally appeared: limited control, dependency, indifference, and cognitive dissonance.

Definition of Terms from Transcribed Dataset

Prior to presenting quotes from the interviewed CTE deans the following definitions are provided for frequently used terms.

- **Advisory Committee/Councils**

  Per the Washington State Legislature’s RCW 28B.50.252 all districts offering vocational education programs must have local advisory committees as defined:
Districts offering vocational educational programs—Local advisory committees—Advice on current job needs.

(1) Each local education agency or college district offering vocational educational programs shall establish local advisory committees to provide that agency or district with advice on current job needs and on the courses necessary to meet these needs.

(2) The local program committees shall:
(a) Participate in the determination of program goals;
(b) Review and evaluate program curricula, equipment, and effectiveness;
(c) Include representatives of business and labor who reflect the local industry, and the community; and
(d) Actively consult with other representatives of business, industry, labor, and agriculture.

[ 1991 c 238 § 77.] (Washington State Legislature, n.d.)

Over the course of the interviews the term “advisory council” and “advisory committees” were used, and these terms are interchangeable.

- **Career and Technical Education (CTE)**

  Career and Technical Education is a term that applies to both the secondary and post-secondary educational systems. It is also referred to as vocational or work-related education. CTE is used to describe programs within community colleges designed to prepare students for entry-level technical positions in business and industry. This can occur after earning an associate of applied science or simply by taking courses offered in CTE programs at the community college level (Cohen et al., 2014).

- **I-BEST**

  I-BEST stands for Washington’s Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program. The program was pioneered by Washington’s community and technical colleges and is designed to teach students work, college-readiness, and literacy skills quickly so they can move through their coursework more quickly and move faster into finding living wage jobs. By taking courses from two instructors at
once, one teaching basic skills in English, writing, and math, while the other provides job training, students receive preparation for their college level coursework while studying in the career field of their choice (Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, n.d.)

- **Professional-Technical Programs**
  
  This term is often used interchangeably with Career and Technical Education. Cohen et al. (2014) noted that terminology around occupational education has never been exactly the same with words such as vocational, semiprofessional, occupational, terminal, career, vocational, and technical all used to describe this form of community college education. The word technical traditionally was used as a definition for education and training designed to prepare students for work in industrial and scientific fields. The term Professional-Technical Programs is utilized by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, as opposed to the general term of Career and Technical Education (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, n.d.).

**Analysis Results**

The three research questions for this study provided a framework to present the results of the narrative analysis of the transcribed data set, the interview and post-transcription memos. The four themes that were derived from the analysis, the categories, coding, and sample responses from the CTE deans are presented below. References to the CTE dean interviews are coded once again with an alpha-numeric code to protect the confidentiality of the individuals. All samples and quotes appear without providing information that would identify the individuals or institutions involved in the study. The quotes presented represent the actual responses by the
CTE deans to the interview questions and have not been edited for correct grammar. The combination of the categories and related quotes from the CTE deans led to the natural development of the themes of limited control, dependency, indifference, and cognitive dissonance.

**Research Question One**

The first research question for the study was: What internal and external forces do career and technical dean decision-makers in Washington State technical colleges perceive are impacting decisions they are required to make for the programs they administer? Out of the coding for internal forces, two categories naturally rose to the top: budgets/funding and faculty influence. The rest of the categories were diverse enough to create a third “potpourri” category representing a mixture of factors which impact their decision-making: not enough time, curriculum development, institutional culture, enrollment/FTE, student needs, and executive leadership. For external forces, four categories became apparent: accreditation, advisory committees, employer demand, and state influence. Table 4.2 *Internal and External Factors Influencing CTE Dean Decision-making* at the end of this chapter provides an overview on the internal and external factors the ten CTE deans identified and mentioned in the interview as having an influence on their decision-making. The theme of limited control arose out of the analysis of the internal factors and dependency from the external factors addressing research question one.

**Internal and External Influences on CTE Dean Decision-making.** In order to assess the influence of the completion agenda on the CTE deans’ decision-making, it was vital to begin by identifying the specific internal and external factors, which influenced the decisions made for the programs they manage. Below is an overview of the categories that were derived from the
first and second cycle coding of the transcribed data. Examples are provided from the transcribed data set for the ten interviews and highlight each category.

**Internal Factors**

*Budgeting.* Goldstein (2012) defines a budget as a planning document, as a reflection of the priorities and values of the organization, and a “manifestation of decision-making in an enterprise” (p. i). He observed that the concept and nature of budgeting in higher education could be especially confusing and complicated due to the fact that higher education is a political entity, rather than just an economic one. A direct question on budgeting was asked and it was clear that how budgets are explained, managed, and executed was the top internal factor influencing CTE dean decisions. References made reflected the mystery behind how budgets operated at their institutions, their limited control over their budgets, and the pressure they felt from the faculty to be able to expend more on their programs and equipment needs. The following comments were made related to budgeting as an internal factor in their decision-making.

**D1:** Planning, budget planning, development, purchase requisitions that may be over…faculty chairs can sign for anything less than $2000 so anything $2000 and above. We do monthly monitoring of those budgets in our office and office support to make sure we are in line with the plan. So planning, ongoing monitoring and then occasionally if we need to move money around, different program areas, if that is appropriate.

**D2:** I would say that internally then what we are most motivated by is the sense of urgency or the relative importance of it (budgeting) directly for the programs. (It) is competitive so there is only so much money to go around and depending on the mood of the finance office and the upper administration that sometimes they ask to have budgetary plans in place.
D4: Tracking how many classes you offer and then the part time faculty salary benefits for those classes and compared to what we did last year and if we cancel a class and you have a little bit of extra money and want to run an extra classes figuring out where that money comes from. As a dean I will be responsible for making sure at the end of the fiscal year that it balances out to zero.

D5: External, often times it gets to be about grants in my area; for lack of money, opportunities to apply for grants sometimes can be troublesome. Looking for opportunities to fund what you are trying to do is sometimes quite challenging.

D7: And then funding from external, as well. Any new funding sources that are out there are obviously going to impact what we do.

D8: My job in that is to monitor the budget and to keep us within where we need to be. There is always something that goes on that is not planned for you, you know you have a microtone go down in and then it’s kind of working around to find extra monies for some emergency things to allow instruction to continue, because ultimately that’s our job to make sure that instruction will continue and then everything that goes along with that. I think the huge requirement in that is creating relationships, broad, holistic relationships with every one on campus so you can have those conversations.

D10: I have total responsibility for every one of those instructional areas. I develop the budgets, or if they are grants or they are operational funding, state funds, so once it comes I manage every aspect from top to bottom.

Faculty. Bolman and Gallos (2011) observed that “the first law of higher education leadership: If you lose the faculty, you lose” (p. 84). The hiring and supervision of faculty as CTE deans was the second strongest internal factor influencing their decision-making across a wide
spectrum as related to their control of the faculty in their divisions. Comments were made about the limited control the CTE deans had over setting the salaries of their faculty and of their control over the budgets for software, hardware, and equipment needs.

**D1:** The connection I would make is looking for faculty with interpersonal skills because taking somebody from course one, day one through to completion, and enter our programs sometimes students will be with their faculty through the entire time unlike a comprehensive community college they have a handful of faculty and they change all of the time so it is really important that in hiring faculty that they have an understanding of who our population is and do they have interpersonal skills to work within that environment.

**D2:** Obviously, I do have control largely most of the control over their (the faculty) program budgets. When you are thinking about the money that faculty are going to spend for the development of their own program then the deans and the faculty work together on that primarily. We help the faculty understand how much money is in the budget and then the faculty have the authority that is granted to them by myself and the other workforce deans here to really figure out how to best make use of that money to plan for their own needs.

**D5:** In a technical college many times faculty come from industry – I want to know what do you know about technical colleges in the 21st century, and then why do want to work here specifically, why did you pick this college and tell me a little bit about what do you know about adult learning. I’m not looking for the best academic response. This is the first time they are coming into this environment, they are nervous and excited, and most of them say it’s time to give back.
D6: I mean there is always a monetary thing. The reality is that we just don’t pay our professional technical well. They are on the same pay scale as everybody else. We have a hard time differentiating pay scales. So, you look at our folks we are asking to teach programming. If they are a really good programmer they are making six figures in industry and we are wanting to bring them in at $52,000 a year.

D7: You know one of the things that I really have to think about is making sure that our faculty represents the community that we serve and a lot of times that is difficult for me at our trades campus because our city is a very diverse community in terms of underrepresented minorities, gender, you know. I’ll have programs that are predominantly represented by superordinate group and it can be difficult to find faculty. So, diversifying the faculty is a huge concern of mine, and something that we work on addressing.

D8: Our faculty are very involved in the decisions about their programs, and the decision making, they are our subject matter experts. Keeping them relevant about in their subject matter is important.

D9: There is a lot of factors behind hiring faculty. But you look at specifically do they have that passion to teach, that is one of the things. Number two, you look at their experience as a subject matter expert. Sometimes it’s hard to make that transition from subject matter expert to into actual teaching, so we have developed onboarding for that because we understand that it’s really hard. So that and passion and I also would say, a person that really wants to teach. The actual requirements for teaching, which we have requirements set for that.

*Not enough time.* Bailey, et al. (2015) noted that faculty and staff at community colleges
feel stretched too thin and overworked and that expecting to add more hours to their days seems impossible. Morgan and Barden (2015) observed that we have more access to knowledge and professional development opportunities than we will ever use and that technology has provided leaders with the ability to share at levels higher than ever before. Yet, we continue to feel short of energy, attention, and time. This was evident in the comments made by some of the CTE deans and the frustration was evident both in their words and their non-verbal actions during the interviews.

**D2:** I would say individual pressures are the fact that the faculty always feel as though that the college is not attuned enough to their own needs and that their have to move pretty quickly through the four quarter system for a four quarter college. They don’t get much time to reflect on their own practices before the next quarter starts again. So they just barely have time to get their shop cleaned up I feel that they work very hard and it is difficult for them to step and to do any planning. Especially if there is planning for change. If it is planning to reinforce a routine they have set up they have been able to figure that out. But when it comes to planning for a something a little different they don’t have enough time for that.

**D3:** And probably the last one that ought to be made is time. You know I have conversations with my program coordinator that there are things we know we need to do, but we just not going to do that. So in some ways, my workload and her workload and my time influences some of program level decisions just because we are not going to address some things.

**D5:** Time, lack of time to do all that we need to do. Finding the time, finding the money to do what needs to be done.
Curriculum development. CTE deans are responsible for all aspects of curriculum development for the programs they oversee, including professional-technical education, and in some cases depending on the institutional organizational chart structure, academic transfer programs, developmental education, and continuing education programs. Curriculum may be defined as:

A set of courses or the totality of experiences that the college designs for its students; it is always rationalized as being practical. The curriculum responds to society and in turn shapes society, sometimes lagging, sometimes leading (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 32).

When asked about curriculum development as a factor in their decision-making, the CTE deans presented a variety of responses reflecting the connections between their decisions as leaders and the influence from the faculty, advisory committees representing the different employers and industry, and student needs.

D3: The biggest factor in my decision-making about curriculum is my faculty. They are the subject matter experts. If you go back and look at the area that I have emphasis over and realize that I don’t have the expertise in any of those areas to second guess them on curricular decisions. Now, what I can contribute to them is the policy level understanding of what is going on. I have to be really cognizant of not just saying yes to everything that comes up and also not saying no when something really does need to change so I need, I need to have an awareness of what my faculty are telling me and the ability to take it apart and understand it.

D5: So curriculum is driven in my division, first and foremost we have to address what the standards are for compliance for accreditation. Outside that scope of that is the responsibility to make sure we are in alignment with what is permittable (sic) by the
curriculum committee. That is a good representative body, because that is faculty and staff from across the college community. And then it is my having conversations with my faculty to see in your area of focus what it is you’re attempting to do, why are you doing that, and what are the outcomes and those are the kinds of things.

D6: When we are looking at new program development another external driver is the overall labor market so within the community and technical college system we have to be able to show labor market demand for new programs. I can’t just decide that I ‘d really like a program in X, I have to actually show that there is a labor market demand for that program.

D7: The employers will often come to us even if they are not on the advisory board and tell us that the students that you are producing are missing something and we're either having to retrain them or hire somebody else so we’d like you address that and we’ll do that through curriculum.

D8: Community need, certainly. If our students can’t get work than we have no reason to offer the program. Now there are some programs that you are going to run even though there is a lower expected wage because we need to support the community and it might not make sense, perfect sense when you think about budgetary return on investment, but it is the right thing to do. But we do really look at need and can we make a living wage, can our students make a living wage when they are done?

D9: We have to specifically look at through our advisory boards. We have to look at is whether our curriculum is viable to today’s standards of the industry at this time. So we have them come in as advisory board members and look at our curriculum and say ok, for this we aren’t even teaching this anymore, this particular method is old, therefore we
need to make a curriculum revision, which we do, which we can do. So we do that once a year. We look at any revisions that we have to make, we make the corrections on that that we have to make and present it to our curriculum and teach it to the students.

**D10:** So from the prof-tech perspective or career tech ed., I would say the biggest factor are the industry and making sure that we are changing our programs to be robust and preparing students for what they are going to hit when they get into the job.

**Institutional culture.** Strange and Banning (2001) defined colleges and universities as organizations that disseminate knowledge, seek to educate students, and to serve the community. Higher educational organizations have divisions of power, labor, and communication structures that are designed to accomplish a particular set of goals. The institutional culture is defined by how the academic units are organized, their reporting structures, and the policies and procedures created to meet institutional goals. A number of CTE deans alluded to institutional culture as a factor influencing their decision-making, and references were made to the unique aspects of leading professional-technical programs among college transfer programs.

**D3:** But, on top of that, or aligned underneath probably better, is culture. I came into this institution and realized that there is a lot of past practice not in the collective bargaining sense perhaps, but certainly in the cultural sense, where this is how we’ve always done it. And that affects a lot of what we do. There are some instances where those two things conflict the past practice and the guidelines of the policies and procedures, but if you just starting enforcing the letter of the law it would be too much of a cultural change.

**D5:** The whole idea of shared governance is becoming a big thing. And what does it look like, and making decisions and my faculty are staying hello, no, you don’t get to make
that decision alone, what about us and it is about academic freedom which is in our realm and not your realm.

D8: Then we also to have a lot of good understanding around what is available in Counseling and Advising and Student Services because they are under a different VP. And then the internal policies and procedures of the college. Making sure we are following those. So kind of a broad overview of what is going on with that.

Enrollment/FTE. Community colleges face unique fiscal challenges related to the changes in the economy. During economic downturns when unemployment rises, enrollment may surge at the community colleges while state and local appropriations lower, resulting in lower revenues. Likewise when unemployment rates lower, community college enrollment declines and the revenue from tuition and fees decreases (Romano & Palmer, 2016). Cohen et al. (2014) noted that community colleges face several funding challenges. Two-year institutions dependent on the local tax base are subject to the strength of the local economy, employment rates, and taxes paid by the local taxpayers. Some programs, such as college transfer programs, have lower costs and serve a wider portion of the public. Career and technical education programs at the community colleges are often the highest-cost programs and demand more expenditures per student, with greater benefit for the student than for the public. Institutions face rising costs associated with health care for employees, and with staff and faculty salaries under negotiated contracts. The pressure to maintain or increase enrollment rates is ever-present and was mentioned as a factor in decision-making by several CTE deans in the study.

D2: Mostly I would say that decision-making is influenced… it has to do more often than not when we have a program that is doing poorly with enrollment. If we are doing well in enrollment that we have this whole built in system in getting that kind of input. If we
have a program that is doing poorly than we have we have a process to analyze that program and then part of that process is to go out to industry and to analyze the data for the demand and the wage and all that stuff that aids with the employment prospects of people coming out of that program.

D4: Enrollment is a key driver these days. Our Washington Technical Community College System is down 3% enrollment for our state enrollment, and our institution is at a 20 year low in enrollment and it is really clouding a lot of our decision-making because we have classes that we have to run to fulfill a student’s degree requirements and we do not have enough students. And, we are frantically starting new programs and then trying to figure out to get the word out to the community that we have these new programs is a challenge. So that’s the one of the biggest factors.

D7: Internal it is almost always driven by enrollment and budget. So, we are a public institution and we receive funding from the State of Washington and we are allocated a certain number of full number equivalents so internally there is a great deal of pressure to maintain full enrollment, which is probably not unusual for a public institution and to balance our budget and not overspend. One thing that we face that a lot of other technical schools face is there is an inverse relationship between employment and college attendance. When there is a lot of unemployment out there we typically see a lot of students coming back for retraining, when employment is good, and we are in a pretty good job market right now, we tend to lose our students because they leave early because they are offered jobs before they complete.

D8: Right now enrollment and retention is such a big thing for us. It is informing all of our decisions.
D10: Internally, I think it’s a little bit more the enrollment numbers. How many do we have? Kind of the FTE chase. More students, less money, is pressure. Grow their programs.

Student needs. Bailey et al. (2015) noted that over 10 million students, more than half of the nation’s undergraduates, access community colleges for their education each year and the failure of these students to complete their college degrees impacts the overall economy. The impact of student performance on the economy is of equal importance to the disappointment and frustration felt by the millions of college students who do not reach their educational goals. O’Banion (2013) observed that the focus on student success has moved beyond simply increasing enrollments. Defining student success for the community college student depends on the values and interests of the various stakeholders including students, faculty, administrators, and state agencies. The definition becomes debated between those who may have a stronger interest in a liberal arts/general education and those who favor workforce training. The impact of meeting the needs of the professional-technical education students was another factor influencing the decision-making by CTE deans interviewed for this study.

D4: Student complaints (laughs) they come to me so that definitely drives a lot of my decision-making on faculty and from a supervisory perspective. I use it for coaching faculty on how to be better in the classroom. I also use it for deciding on whether to keep or lose a part timer.

D8: I try to think about fit. I try to think about how is this individual going to fit with our student population? How are they going to fit in the college culture that we have and the college culture that we have is one of inclusion. But you really have to care about the students and you have to be able to meet the students where they are and get them to
where they need to be. I ask a lot about classroom management, your experiences with lower social-economic students, people of diversity, and try to get that.

**D9:** Another thing is the diversity piece, having a better understanding of our ESL students, and our students of color. We’ve created a forum for our men of color here on our campus to look at why they are not graduating from our programs to look at specifically of what we might need to change, in other words meeting them where they’re at, I teach them from that perspective I think is very important. I don’t think a lot of college professors actually do that, they say I’ve done it for 20 years and I’m gonna continue to do it this way.

**D10:** Other factors are looking at our faculty dynamics and our student body and trying to mimic our student population the best we can and being very intentional to recruit a broad pool. I will often hire someone with no teaching experience, they would never do that on the academic side, because we can teach them how to teach. We can’t teach them how to be great at their profession, but we can teach them eduspeak and so I will often go to bat for the person that I think will be the best person for the students despite their lack of 20 years of teaching.

*Executive leadership.* Community college leadership is dynamic and complex, and leaders must meet student needs with fluctuating resources, financial uncertainty, delicate faculty relations, external stakeholder demands, and shifting local, state, and federal financial support (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). CTE deans in a mid-level role need to find a balance between adhering to the expectations and demands of the college executive leadership and boards of education, while addressing the constraints and needs of the students, faculty, public, and local workforce who need their services and support (Rosser, 2000). Over the course of the 10
interviews executive leadership was mentioned as a factor in decision-making for the CTE deans.

D2: For example, it could be that a trustee ends up meeting someone important at a City Club meeting that works for a community based organization and they want to have a partnership of some sort so all of a sudden it becomes quite urgent for deans to affect that particular partnership regardless of the value of the overall agenda to the college.

D3: Among the internal factors are also kind of the president’s vision. Which direction the president wants to take the institution and the vice president’s vision. The vice president of instruction what he has in mind for how we are going to go about things.

D5: My role, my responsibility is to align with the thoughts of my president.

External Factors

Accreditation. Cohen and Kisker (2010) referred to accreditation agencies as “a powerful shadow government” (p. 521), since only students attending accredited institutions qualify for state and federal grants and loans. American higher education has been historically self-regulated through accreditation agencies that are private associations subject to review by the U.S. Department of Education to insure they employ specific criteria in their assessment of institutions. While an institution receives accreditation for the entire organization, community college career and technical educational programs are particularly dependent on the accreditation bodies specific to their various academic programs. The U.S Department of Education (2016) produces procedures and criteria for the Secretary of Education to oversee the quality of public postsecondary education, including nursing education, in particular, and to designate state agencies as reliable authorities for providing education. The accreditation agencies insure that institutions employ qualified personnel, manage their operations effectively, and receive adequate financial support to carry out their operations.
The topic of accreditation and the pressure to adhere to the standards set forth by the state agencies and regional accreditation bodies was mentioned frequently as a factor influencing decision-making by the CTE deans.

D5: The other things is accreditation they really do limit what we are able to do in some areas, for instance, if I want to start another cohort, oh great but you have to go through this accrediting body. We wanted to start an evening cohort, that would be innovative, different in the state, but we had to go through our accreditation and they were “no, I don’t think so, we have to check that out.” That was in the way of getting to incumbent workers, or to provide opportunities for people who absolutely work during the daytime, willing to be in the evening, be in an extended program.

D7: The other one is national or regional accreditation so a lot of our programs and in addition to the college having accreditation through the Northwest Commission as an organization a lot of the programs have professional accreditations. So those national, regional accreditations they influence and impact our curriculum, because they have demands that we have to meet and they are all typically related to competencies that the field and profession had determined are essential for our graduates. So making sure we aren’t doing anything that would get us out of compliance.

D8: Program specific is accreditation and other outside agencies that give approval for programs to continue. Many times their requirements are different than the college’s or even the State of Washington’s. We have to adhere to the highest level of requirement.

D10: Well, we do have our accrediting bodies, that is another big influence and factor. Most of the programs in my area have some kind of accreditation above and beyond the college accreditation, so for lack of a better word dictates a lot of what we do.
Advisory committees. Brint and Karabel (1989) analyzed the history of community college vocational or CTE programs and noted that their success depended not only on stable student demand, but also the availability of jobs once the programs were completed. Assessments of local labor force demands and regional economic needs provide support for the development of new vocational programs and the partnerships formed between the CTE programs and local advisory committees become vital to their success. Advisory committees, comprised of local and statewide business people, provide guidance on current industry practices, advise CTE deans on purchasing state-of-the art equipment, and support students enrolled in cooperative education and internships prior to completion of their programs.

All Washington State community college districts offering vocational education programs must have local advisory committees, per the Washington State Legislature’s RCW 28B.50.250 (Washington State Legislature, n.d.). These advisory committees provide the community colleges with advice on the courses necessary to meet current employment training and working conditions, and the state mandates that they participate in the determination of program goals, review and evaluation of program curriculum, equipment, and program effectiveness. The law states that the advisory committees must consist of business and labor representatives who reflect the community college district community and local industry.

Nearly all of the CTE deans mentioned, more than once, the importance of advisory committees to their work as well as the impact on the decisions the deans make. The influence of the mandatory advisory committees was mentioned as influencing the curriculum, equipment purchases, faculty hiring, and employment opportunities for the students served at the various institutions.
D1: Advisory boards could use some assistance, because they are an external group, but they should intimately know the details of our program and I think that is really critical to the survival of a professional-technical program.

D2: I have an industry advisory committee for each one of my prof-tech programs of 8 to 10 individuals that seems to be about a good operational size of people who represent a diverse cross section of that industry or trade group. We try to get people who are employees who are managers who are owners and maybe some people who are even retired and have an interest in the trade or the business. And then they give input into these program instructors. We have two or three different meetings a year for each program and then at that those meeting one of the parts of one probably their most important task as an advisory committee is to approve curriculum. The advisory committee will then review the curriculum that we currently have on file and then give their stamp of approval for it for another year. However at that time they will, we will also ask for their input and recommendations for changes. Maybe we’ll go out to a shop and they’ll be several committee members will say hey, you know we haven’t use that tool in 10 years but instead we are instead doing this process or you know this is what we are seeking coming down the line and the faculty member will be very interested in that. What I do strategically is to keep my ears very close to the ground when it comes to these conversations because what I’ll do is I will get the advisory committee to recommend that this such and such thing be purchased since it is the industry standard piece of equipment and I can use that for leverage for the budget request that we have to provide as evidence for the ones I mentioned where you have more major equipment.
D4: The feedback from our advisory committee is also critical driver. We have real
good advisory committees who are really committed to help us make sure that our
programs are relevant, our graduates are well trained, and prepared. We check in with
them quarterly and in two of my programs this year faculty requested a deeper drive with
their advisory committee to really do a holistic review of their curriculum. They host
them as interns, they hire them when they graduate, so they are our best proof that what
we are doing is right. They are seeing it from the inside and then the end-product.

D6: So when you think about prof-tech I would say that the biggest external driver is
certainly industry so it is really critical that we have well functioning advisory
committees and that we stay well connected to our local industry and understand what
they want out of our graduates and understand where our students are going to work. It is
hugely influenced. We are so in touch with them. I think there is always this delicate line
because we can’t just, we aren’t as nimble as we would like us to be so you have to figure
out what the trends are not what the fads are with business and industry. Those folks
have to be a significant driver of our curriculum, because if at the end of the day if we are
not turning out students that meet the demand of industry then our students aren’t going
to get jobs and it’s really circular. It has really, really influenced, at my current college.

D7: You know one of the things that some folks may not realize is that all of the
professional technical education programs in the State of Washington at the public
institutions we are required are to have an advisory board for each program and at our
institution we have to have at least two advisory meetings a year and one of those
meetings each year has to be that advisory board essentially reviewing our curriculum
and approving it. Or, making recommendations for changes. So, the influence is
determined by the make up of those boards which is going to include organized labor, major employers, sometimes previous alumni, some times community partners so that’s going to be a strong influence.

**D10:** So we have very aggressive efforts to make sure our advisory committees are robust and that they are value-added for our community members and that we are listening. Listening day to day, I think as a dean making sure we are actively listening and being influenced by the advisory committee and not vice versa. So that is probably the biggest aspect making sure that know what we are listening and we know what is changing.

**Employer demands.** Historically, the connection between community colleges and business and industry expanded significantly in the 1970’s when the market for college graduates declined and federally funded programs poured into the two-year sector to promote vocational training. By 1977 85% of the community colleges had developed new occupational programs in response to industry demand (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Today, employers in the community college districts provide critical information to community college leaders and students by identifying key skills needed to enter and advance in their business sector, by advising on program and curriculum design, by offering on-the-job training, and by hiring graduates (Grobe, Martin, & Steinberg, 2015). Six sectors represent the areas for the greatest job growth, accounting for 66% of today’s employment and a projected 85% jump in new jobs through 2020: health care, business services, leisure and hospitality, construction, manufacturing and retail (Manyika et al., 2011). With training for these sectors being provided predominantly by CTE technical academic programs, the close relationship between local business and industry and the CTE programs is vital to their survival and for the future employment of the students.
Most of the CTE deans interviewed emphasized the strong connection between their programs and student success, and their relationships with local business and industry employers. Their heavy reliance on employers serving on advisory committees and/or to those in key partnerships with the CTE deans’ institutions was evident in their interview responses.

D1: Oh wow, professional and technical education relies on upon external influence from employers. And so when employers will ask or say or demand in some way that training that happens in a certain context, certain way, a different tool, a different piece of equipment, a different piece of software there are so many different ways that we are moving and shifting to meet their demands that really puts pressure on our programs to change.

D2. When you think of the whole global system of CTE instruction is that industry changes fast where colleges are a little slower. We do our best to change to the input of the advisory committee and of course the faculty member’s industry contacts, but the truth is that the faculty member will quickly go stale in their own occupation because they are not there any more.

D3: There are other formal mechanisms for that, we get the in demand or decline list from the Employment Security Department that tells us which fields are going to be paid for by certain programs and which aren’t so that affects how much weight we put behind something because it affects how much enrollment is going to come to those programs.

D4: Keeping current in their industry and that is a mainstay for technical colleges and a challenge we have always had.
D6: One of the first thing students want to know when they are applying is what does you graduation rate look like and what does your job rate look like, where are they going to work and how much money are they going to make. That’s the biggest external driver to being well connected to industry.

D7: Oh yeah, that as a technical institution it is, that is really the first influence and the most important influence that we have is from business and industry. They are essentially driving our coursework, our training, the equipment that we buy, the investments that we make. That is the probably predominantly where the driving influence is even beyond state funding and SAI. We are really listening to industry. The employers will often come to us even if they are not on the advisory board and tell us that the students that you are producing are missing something and we're either having to retrain them or hire somebody else so we’d like you address that and we’ll do that through curriculum.

D8: Sometimes the challenges that we have is business’ expectations of how quickly changes should be able to be made. Certainly, when I was in private industry if I made a decision I could implement tomorrow, pretty close. However, when you are trying to create a training opportunity that meets employer demand, you have to create a curriculum, you have to do your analyses and do these kinds of things. So, it is not going to be the “we can put together a training program tomorrow, we can put one together in six months.” We need to make sure we have enough students for a long enough time so we can recoup the initial investment and hopefully have a sustainable program when we are done.
D10: External I’ll say we are very much driven by the local economy. If they are hiring more employees, they are cutting others so those kind of external pressures dictate the size and scope of our programs where we are, what kinds of programs we are offering, so paying attention to your local economy is essential. I think depending what is happening on in our local economy there is lot of pressures to grow, to accept more, which I think sometimes compromises the integrity of the program, but it is the politics.

Federal /State influence. As the cost of higher education skyrockets and the value of a college degree has come into question, the pressure on community colleges to be accountable for their outcomes has moved well beyond the confines of the college campus borders. Accreditation agencies, federal and state funding entities, and member associations have all created a need for community college leadership to demonstrate adherence to processes demonstrating accountability and compliance (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Beyond regulatory connections between state and federal influences on decision-making, the reliance on state and local tax revenue is high, accounting for 46 percent, almost half of the total operating revenues in 2011 (Romano & Palmer, 2016).

The CTE deans were sensitive to the influences of federal funding, especially the impact of financial aid on their students and the need to be in compliance with Washington State legislation as factors in their decision-making.

D3: There are the guidelines from the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, which cover all kinds of things like budget and program development and program changes and things like that. Underlying those guidelines are the RCWs and the WACs that apply to community colleges in the State of Washington, which we refer to
more often than people would think probably for clarification on exactly what our responsibilities are in those different areas.

**D7:** I run probably about three million dollars of federal grants, so the grant agencies have their own rules and regulations which certainly influence what we do and how we do it. Externally, always as a campus dean I am responsible not just for certain instruction, student services, security, so you have Title IX compliance, you have Title IV financial aid regulations, security and safety.

**D8:** Externally for me, of course financial aid is a big deal and how financial aid changes their requirements and their timelines so that is something that is difficult for us because we would like to be a lot more, we’d like to be able to react quicker. We can’t react as quickly as we’d like to.

Research question one focused on the internal and external forces impacting the decisions of the CTE deans’ decision-making. The question yielded a significant variety of responses, as evidenced by the sample responses presented here. The deans’ responses emphasized the limits of their control over the programs they manage and oversee and demonstrated a dependency on others to allow for their decision-making, specifically with faculty and employers.

**Research Question Two**

The second research question for the study was: What evidence exists to demonstrate the influence of the completion agenda on CTE dean decision-making? The researcher’s definition of “completion agenda” was not provided to the CTE deans prior to or during the interviews, and as a result, the responses to its meaning and influence varied. An analysis of the transcribed data identified four categories: the completion agenda defined, influence of the completion agenda, institutional influence, and specifically the Student Achievement Initiative. Sample statements
from the CTE deans appear below to illustrate formation of each of the four categories. The theme of indifference was derived from studying the data collected and assisted with answering research question two.

The Completion Agenda Defined

Research conducted for this study found there is no one single source for the definition of the completion agenda. It finds its roots in a wide variety of federal and state legislation, proposed initiatives, private foundation grant activities for the community college sector, and within the institutions’ goals, missions, and values. Kelly and Schneider (2012) tied the inception of the completion agenda to a shift in priorities in higher education policy. The authors noted that after four decades of focus on providing college access, President Obama’s 2010 American Graduation Initiative calling for America to have the highest number of college graduates in the world by 2020, the Gates Foundation’s goals to double the number of low income students earning a college degree, and the Lumina Foundations’ Big Goal to increasing the number of American earning a college degree by 60% by 2025, contributed to a shift towards degree completion, and the completion agenda was born.

The CTE deans were asked a simple question: “How would you define the completion agenda?” The results varied significantly in their definitions and length of response. Given that this topic is the central focus for this study, all of their initial definitions are presented below.

D1: To check the box, (laughs!) So, the completion agenda for us is I think a little different, than, it is different, but it is not from the whole movement for more students to get degrees and certificates, especially because we are training folks to get right into the workforce, but sometimes they complete their training and skills they need before they actually complete (school’s name) credentials.
D2: Well, I can only guess and so when I look, my guess would be if I am looking at it with an optimistic set of perspectives than I would say that the completion agenda would mean we are looking at a set of objectives or tasks that the college wants to finish that are really important.

D3: Hah…(big sigh and then a big guffaw/laugh). I guess I would define it as the collection of policies and initiatives that take forward this country’s commitment to moving people through their educational process into completion more quickly and efficiently. Everything from the White House on down, it’s, I mean I guess there is a completion agenda document somewhere that encapsulates it, I don’t know what body actually holds that.

D4: I would define it as helping students earn certificates and degrees. As opposed to meeting their lofty goals, the completion agenda is more specific on credentials. That is how I would define it.

D5: Oh my goodness. (sighs) That’s a good one. It depends on who you’re talking to (laughter). I would say that completion is the understanding that as students come to our college campuses and decide they want to enroll, that we help to move them, that we help them to persist and that we move them to completion meaning... In the true sense it means graduation, walking across that stage, diploma in hand, say hey, look mom and dad I did it.

D6: Hmmm…so the completion agenda, I would define the completion agenda as just as this shift in focus from “butt in seats” to what those butts are actually doing in those seats.
D7: That is a good question. I am not sure if I have a definition for it. Just in general terms you know you think of it as the goal of having our students earn a credential. From our standpoint when we think of the completion agenda we think of a lifetime career or pathway. So we think of our role in those steps and those pathways. And making sure that students leave with some kind of sort of credential that they can build upon and that is going to improve their ability to earn and to continue to learn.

D8: We want more people to complete.

D9: Completion agenda, you have to look at again every standard as far as the accrediting body has some kind of threshold, some kind of standard for testing.

D10: From my perspective? In a nutshell I would say making sure that we are intentional about students being aware of their choices and once they decide, they have a pathway to completion.

Influence of the Completion Agenda

Over the course of the interviews the CTE deans provided insight into how the completion agenda influences their decision-making by sharing how they saw it manifest relative to their academic programs.

D1: Other things that have folded out of it have been decisions to realign programs pathways and structures so most recently we have taken a program and got rid of some elective courses that just never had enough students in it to one, run it, fiscally it did not make sense, but two there was so many options and at a certain point on the pathway students got confused and it wasn’t sustainable we took some time to clean up that program pathway.
D2: Some of the decisions that I have made that are really based off of the SAI is that, for example, we have a document that is a public document for students and for advisors and for deans and for anyone who is interested in the totality of a program and the name of the document is basically the “Program of Study” or its delivery model and it shows you all of the different courses the student would need to take in which quarters in order to complete a program and so the old version just mentions the academic components of the students pathway with the words “general ed, see advisor” so it doesn’t actually articulate what the academic courses are that need to be one to in order to get a certificate of competency or their AAS degree. Knowing that I chose to make sure that all of our Program of Study documents have the 90 and 100 level courses and that they are clearly identified so that it doesn’t become just tribal knowledge for an advisor. It becomes knowledge that the student and also quite frankly the faculty have in their hands so they can then encourage the students to enroll in the right course.

D3: When you are operating under something like the completion agenda, we for example, look every June at who has had a enough credits to qualify for a certificate, whether they want the certificate or not, if they tick that little lever on their way to their degree we are going to put a tick mark in the box because they completed something, whether they intended to or not they ran past that goal post so we are going to take the score for it. Which “yay!” and in some ways it is a metric worth knowing, but in other ways it is not really meaningful to the student or to us as the provider of the education because their goal is still down the road, but because we are asked to create and count our completers that is obviously what we are going to do. So that is sort of the graceless side of it.
**D4**: When I first got here the first thing I did was to look at the enrollment in my programs. And the one that was most precarious, oh my goodness, we have to fix this now and the answer that we came up with was the implementation of cohorts, which really is a direct growth out of the completion initiative. Because I looked where we losing students we had a random situation come up where a faculty member was complaining that a lot of students were asking for entry codes to get into particular classes and we had student services run the data and these were classes that the students in no way are ready to take. They needed the entry code because they were trying to leap over prerequisites. But clearly it was an indicator that the students had no idea of what classes to take next. The faculty were shocked because they knew the program sequence and they just assumed that students knew it. And, we know from all of the data that a cohort model increases retention for all of the right reasons so I didn’t have to do a big sell with the faculty on moving to cohorts.

**D6**: For the longest time we have been paid by just the number of students we have in our classes and the completion agenda to me is really about more accountability about what we do with those students when they are there and it does make a difference if our classes are full because we retaining students versus if there full because we are just cycling through students who never finish. I think with professional technical I think it has made a big difference in students getting their related instruction. It has shifted to say that it is not enough for them just to complete their professional technical courses they have to complete their related instruction, as well.

**D7**: And for me that credential could be as short as a twelve-credit certificate of training, which helps them to become more employable, or it could be to added to your degree. It
could be dozen hours toward their apprenticeship, toward their journeyman status. You know, from our standpoint when we think of the completion agenda we think of a lifetime career or pathway. So we think of how our role in those steps and those pathways. And making sure that students leave with some kind of sort of credential that they can build upon and that is going to improve their ability to earn and to continue to learn. I’ll have a company come to me and say we want to hire some of your welders and my response is well they are not completed yet and we’d like for them to get that credentials. So we’ll work out an arrangement where I’ll allow the students to go work for them and while they are working we’ll grant them college credit. So they can both earn a living and meet their financial demands and but also complete their credentials.

D8: I guess it would depend on your interpretation of the completion agenda. The completion agenda in my opinion is not just to complete the maximum number of students, but rather to complete the maximum number of qualified students or students that have met the course objectives and rigor. If you wanted to look at it that way, I have upheld rigor over completion in some areas. Because I do not think we are doing anybody any kind of favor if we just passed you and you are unable to get a job or keep a job when you get out and not that we can guarantee employment.

**Institutional Influence**

Often when responding to prompts related specifically to the influence of the completion agenda the CTE deans referenced actions taken by the institution as a whole, beyond what they are doing with their academic programs and spheres of influence.

D1: People are talking about completion on campus now and the conversations are no longer around how many students do we have on day one of the quarter, it is now is
talking about how healthy is your program, looking at how many enrollment day one, how many students are completing, and what does that look like for your program area. A committee was established two years ago to address completion and we have done various exercises with the broader community and it has really been good to establish that. We established it and then within the Board, the trustees took completion initiative, I think one in part, because it was important to our president and they saw people are starting to pay attention to it and they saw the national movement and it is now one of their three strategic priorities. The manifestation is in existence.

D3: At our school? A manifestation of distress. (Laughter). An increase in the scrutiny of student records.

D5: If you talk to our president, completion it would mean the whole monty, you’re working, making sure that students persist through taking core academic classes your classes, addressing everything that needs to be done for accreditation. If you were to talk to people over in budget and finance, they would say the same thing, students need to pay back the money, in some way, we need to get them to end point so it’s a value added to them. If you were to talk to folks over in student services, those working in the re-training area might say short certificates are good so if we can get these folks in and get them short certificates, that’s an aspect of completion.

D6: I think the other pressure does come a bit from the completion agenda in that they are being asked maybe for the first time to think about what their students are doing outside of their program. Especially the more technical programs. The more kind of quote un-quote academic of the professional-technical programs has always been, you think about the business degree, their students are already taking Econ and things like that just as part
of the core, but you think about an automotive program for the first time they are being asked to really care about whether or not their students took math or English and things like that. Because of there is a level of accountability placed on them about their program numbers on whether their students completed. The completed my program is not enough, it has to be that they actually earn a degree.

D8: Part of our completion campaign is educating the students about how important it is to actually complete. You might be able to get a job now, but if that job goes away and you don’t have your certificate or degree how is that going to help you get your next job? It is also helping our faculty, many of who come from industry and many who do not have degrees themselves to the importance of completing that. I get it and if I am trying to feed my family and somebody is going to offer me a job, my knee jerk reaction is to go feed my family and not stay in school. Certainly our work with ATD helped support the completion agenda and that is really listening to the students and finding out where their barriers are, we’ve initiated mandatory early success courses, we have also changed our advising model to where we have advisors that are assigned to specific program areas, and we are also trying to look at some short term certs, if people need to leave a program early they have a something they can take with them that is industry recognized.

D9: What do you mean? Uhhhh, I mean we have things we’re doing as far additional staff, but there is no policy per se that I’m aware of that we’re doing here at the college. The State of Washington, I’ve noticed they have these student navigator people who actually come in to look at your completion and they will present a form or a platform for helping the students complete programs. So they look at things specifics of study skills and things of that nature.
D10: Having focused conversations with faculty who at the end of the day are the best advocates, in my opinion, for the completion agenda. They have them (the students) the most, they see them the most, they touch them the most, so if you can keep them motivated and engaged I think it gets straight to the students.

Washington’s Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program (I-BEST).

Several CTE deans referred to the I-BEST when noting how their institution had responded to the completion agenda.

D6: In my division specifically one of the major impacts has been the addition of an IBEST. We added an academic IBEST this year so, Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training. That is a mechanism by which you are intentional about paring students in basic skills with college level instruction to help bridge that gap for them and make it more of a seamless pathway for them. Which has a significant impact for students, but has significant SAI gains, along with it.

D7: We have added I believe four what’s known as IBEST programs. So, we offer a second instructor with our trades instructor and to make sure that the students who test in low on their classes or Compass are making rapid progression and gains in those core so that they are showing some completion. That is also really tied in with financial influence because IBEST is a program in the State of Washington that not only helps us with SAI, but it helps us with funding because the FTE reimbursement is enhanced and it is essentially an additional .75 FTE on top of the 1.0 FTE that we get for every 15 credits that a student takes. So, that’s one way where that really influences how we develop and design our class work.
D10: Once of the areas here at the college are students that go from the basic skills arena into the college level. Where I come in is with IBEST I have been working really hard with the full support and endorsement of the vice president, taking our divisions and saying we need to be more intentional in this area. Students are coming in basic skills and then they are not getting into anything else, so they aren’t moving along the continuum.

Student Achievement Initiative

Dougherty and Reddy (2013) hailed the two Washington State’s Student Achievement Initiatives (SAI) as an exemplary performance based funding initiative designed to increase student outcomes such as graduation rates and job placement. Washington State’s first iteration of the SAI impacted both public universities and community colleges between 1997 and when it sunset in 1999. The second iteration, enacted in 2007, applies only to community colleges, and its success comes from its focus not only on graduation rates, but intermediate achievements, such as completion of development education and college mathematics. Dougherty and Reddy credit Washington State’s SAI success with having a significant influence on the development of performance based funding in states across the country such as Ohio and Tennessee.

The CTE deans were specifically asked about their familiarity with the SAI, as an example of the completion agenda, and its influence on the decisions made by the CTE deans for their divisions. Their responses varied from significant familiarity with the SAI to no knowledge.

D1: Pretty familiar with it, not the details, I know that the colleges are, it is an allocation program that is based on performance, so performance based funding situation, it has evolved from its initiation to today in terms of how colleges get points and I know that professional technical programs are not in those formulas and they don’t fare very well because it is geared toward a community college mindset and students come in that
traditional community college transfer. In response to the question seven: If you are familiar with the SAI, what impact has it had on the decisions you have made in regards to your division? D1: None

D2: I am pretty familiar with the SAI and so what that means to me is that there are students achieving index points that students can earn through various benchmarks that they pass through that are indicators of possible completion. Among them might be completing a math class and then completing another math class or earning a certain amount of college credits and so the State of Washington has taken an initiative in starting to push the colleges toward focusing their efforts to complete more students by dangling a financial carrot in front of them by saying hey, we are increasingly putting more of your budget money into SAI points so that you have to show us some performance points that you are providing some opportunities for students to complete. Sure, we're are focused on that too, so a lot of the things that we’ve been doing intentionally lately have been focused on making sure that students have the opportunity to do those right things early that will help their completion. Among them is early success in math.

D3: I am fairly familiar with it. I have never had the responsibility in any of my positions for actually tracking it or applying for our points or assigning our points or anything, but I understand how it works … I know the importance of them to the institution in terms of generating funding and how it sort of creates that feedback loop with the completion agenda because the data you are tracking you find students along the way that has this other purpose of feeding into your SAI benchmarks so you can get those points. I see
them coming in, but as I said I haven’t ever had any responsibility for tracking them or implementing them.

D4: We are also starting a guided pathway effort here. I think a guided pathway is going to more deliberately help us to earn student achievement points because we will get them through those steps in a more predictable way.

D5: You know what? I should know more about SAI. I know that the points count and that there are certain categories and things go where. It’s actually an area that I need to study more. So I’ll be honest about that.

D6: Obviously I am very familiar. My college is heavily, heavily focused on what Student Achievement means and how I guess to understand the rules of that system and move our students through. With the completion agenda where you get kind of student achievement points at those different critical points of student’s progress you can’t just look at did they make it in you have to look at what they did.

D8: Probably not at much as I should be although we are going to become more familiar with it especially with the allocation model that is coming down from the State Board. Not much more than that. (Big sigh)

D9: I’m not familiar with it.

D10: I am very familiar with it. I wasn’t a big fan when it started, I can’t remember, it was probably a decade ago. The way I see it is that we used to just get the resources to do what we needed to do and then there was a hold back. So there was a monetary incentive to make sure students were moving along that continuum. I think that it helps us an institution looking at where we are gaining points and where we are not and to maybe redistribute resources or be more intentional.
The CTE deans in the study had a wide variety of responses when asked to define the completion agenda, to demonstrate its impact on their decision-making, and to reflect on the SAI and its impact on their decision-making. Four categories came through from the coding for research question two: the completion agenda defined, influence of the completion agenda, institutional influence, and specifically the Student Achievement Initiative.

**Research Question Three**

The third research question for the study was: Do career and technical education dean decision-makers perceive that there is a conflict between providing immediate career opportunities for the students they serve, versus degree completion (meeting the needs of the completion agenda)? Analysis of the transcribed data set resulted in two coding categories for this research question: conflict between jobs and the completion agenda and non-completion agenda actions taken by the CTE deans in their programs or at their institutions. The theme of cognitive dissonance was derived from studying the data collected and assisted with developing a response to research question three.

*Conflict Between Jobs and The Completion Agenda.* Washington is one of four states, along with North Carolina, Ohio, and Minnesota, where higher education institutions are expected to influence the economic prosperity of their states by educating students to possess the skills necessary to increase and improve the state’s economic growth (Sparks & Waits, 2011).

While this may be the case in Washington State, the CTE deans noted that local business and industry employers depend heavily on the partnerships with career and technical education programs to provide workforce training, but not necessarily on earned degrees or certificates. Shulock and Offenstein (2012) stated that the mission of career and technical education is to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in employment or in further
higher education in a subset of fields deemed technical and career focused, and yet students pursuing career technical programs make far more progress in completing course work than they do in acquiring credentials in their fields.

In their responses to a number of interview questions, the CTE deans provided their insights on the possible conflict arising between immediate career training opportunities for the students in their programs and meeting the needs of the completion agenda with degrees and certificates earned.

D1: There are kind of two goals I think we serve, we serve one we want to train people our mission is to get them the skills so they are employable, but two, same time the college receives a benefit when they actually complete all of their courses in that pathway, but sometimes those goals don’t match up and so what we’ve been spending a lot of time doing is trying to figure out where’s the gaps, how can we get closer aligned to or at least start counting not only degrees or certificates, that is the check the box, hey how many students got degrees or certificates this year and completed degrees and certificates there are other successes in there that should count and someone got through their training and took industry certification and was certified, but didn’t do maybe the last three or four courses of their pathway, shouldn’t that count? We are trying to figure out what completion is and what, how it matters.

D1: I think the first one is that what the industry wants to see may not be exactly what counts as completion. You know it is our mission, I would say our system mission to, in workforce development programs to train folks with the skillset so they are employable and hopefully in the industry they were trained in, right? Sometimes that is before they
meet those credentials, the 45 credits, you know getting the degree. So, really capturing that as a success point I think that is a point of conflict.

D2: I would say that now knowing a little bit more about what you mean by the completion agenda that we have set up certain programs with short term certificates and even though there may be some bonus points for a student to earn certification than we are doing this in programs sometimes where we know that they are just going to exit out of that so they are not completing by the terms of the completion agenda. But we also feel that it might be in the best interest of the students to get out and get work so that there are certain programs where we have done this intentionally with faculty which may help their short term enrollment too because there are people who are interested in just learning that one process. But if you look at their overall level of completion it might be low because the people are there to get that shorter term certification. That may be one example where our decision has been at odds with the SAI point’s collection piece.

D3: Probably the biggest conflict that I have seen between the completion agenda and actually preparing people for gainful employment is the unintended consequences toward the rush toward boot camp and short term certificates to get that completion tick mark, but what we hearing from industry are that these are not necessarily good enough to really prepare anybody for certainly long-term career success. But, I think but part of what the completion agenda does is say, “oh yeah, there you go you are job trained now.” We’ve ticked your tick mark, we’ve trained you for a career and we have sent you out. And I think in the long term when we start looking at the economic stats we will not have increased employment or wages earned that much, if that’s all we do is pump people out with these short certificates.
D4: Maybe for someone coming in from industry who just needs a couple classes so to the extent that we can bundle some classes into short certs would help with this. Often times we won’t even know kind of what they are here for and why they are just taking classes, they are here to take classes and then they leave, but they got what they needed. So that would technically be a ding against the completion initiative. I have a little bit of a hard time with the completion initiative sometimes when we don’t value the fact that a student has gotten exactly what they needed and that is a good thing.

D5: Completion for them means I can feed myself and my family, and I can go out and I was making $10 an hour over here, but now I am going out and make $18/hour and I’m not going to stay and take that math or English class, who cares? I’m gainfully employed, right?

D6: We see this in our trades more than any other academic programs that I can imagine. They are unemployed when they come in and after three quarters they can leave and can go to work and earn $40 or $50 an hour and you have somebody who is trying to support a family and kids and things like that and they are currently unemployed it is really hard to tell them that no, you need to stay and finish school because the long term effects of not finishing will catch up with you. So I think that this is where that opposition happens.

D7: So, for example, I’ll have a company come to me and say we want to hire some of your welders and my response is well they are not completed yet and we’d like for them to get that credentials. So we’ll work out an arrangement where I’ll allow the students to go work for them and while they are working we’ll grant them college credit. So they can both earn a living and meet their financial demands and but also complete their credentials.
D9: For career and technical colleges, the goal is not necessarily a degree. Even though all our programs have associate degrees, that’s not necessarily the goal for every program. Some programs just have the certificates.

D10: I would say health care is the best illustration so there is the need; we are certainly not meeting the needs in our county or in our state in our Allied Health Professions. We can serve 10 times as many, why we can’t is clinical opportunities. So here is the unmet need and the second part is why aren’t we doing it?

Non-Completion Agenda Actions. The CTE deans were specifically asked what decisions have they made that may not comply with or support the completion agenda. Based on the responses and long pauses before an answer, this appeared to be the most challenging question asked in the interview.

D1: Say that one more time. (Long pause) Nothing specific comes to mind. I can’t think of something where I have said “well, no let’s not do that because that wouldn’t really achieve completion.” I bet I’ll think of something tomorrow. I’m sorry.

D2: There are things that you should put in the student’s interest first even though they may not meet the needs of the completion agenda. One good example is welding basics and they learn welding basics as part of their program, and we know that a lot of students as soon as a student learns how to drive something or learn how to weld will choose to go to work because they have some basic skills there and there is demand in the industry so even though they just had basic welding they have some confidence and they go out and get a job as a welder in a small fab shop and then they can kind of go to work for their uncle. You do get that sort of stuff happening and if we were to you know put that stuff at the end of the degree program that might help the completion agenda
somewhat because students would stick around for it, but I don’t think it is in the student’s interest because they need those skills earlier in the program, plus it is more fun.

D4: I do think sometimes all faculty know their students need gen eds, but sometimes they have a hard time adjusting their curriculum to allow students time to take gen eds. So I have run into that, too, where the whole 7 a.m. to noon is your technical classes. Really? Then they have to take their gen eds after that? They need to go to work. So, that is a challenge and even restructuring when the classes are offered to allow slots. So that is hindering students from completing because then they just get their technical credits, they might get enough to be able to get a job, but then they leave without earning their degrees. Convincing them to come back to take math or English or to get their degree is a hard sell.

D10: I was pressured into approving a higher-level math than was previously used because it does support the transition to bachelor’s. So there was a little bit of a gap without doing it. But, unintentionally what it does is that more students have to have more math classes to get there, so it might leave people off that continuum, but that directly conflicts with the completion agenda, in some way, because we will see fewer students get on that pathway, but the ones who do get on the pathway we will see progression. That is one way that conflicts with the completion agenda.

The identification of any struggle the CTE deans face between supporting the completion agenda and the demands from student and employers to move the students as quickly as possible into the workforce was the intention behind research question three. The two categories that
arose from coding the transcribed dataset were Conflict Between Jobs and The Completion Agenda and Non-Completion Agenda Actions.

**Themes Identified**

**Research Question One.** Category I of the interview questions focused on the extent of the CTE dean’s supervisory responsibility, identification of which faculty and staff they are responsible for managing and hiring, the extent of their budgetary responsibility and level of financial decision-making, and the sharing of internal and external forces which impact the decisions they are required to make for the programs they administer. These questions served to provide a foundation for answering Research Question One: What internal and external forces do career and technical education decision-makers in five Washington State technical colleges perceive are impacting decisions they are required to make for the programs they administer?

Categories were created from the literal answers to the question of what internal and external forces impact their decision-making. Further analysis of the categories naturally inspired two themes for this study: limited control and dependency. The data collected demonstrated limited control of their internal decisions and a clear dependency on external influences in their decision-making.

**Limited Control**

After conducting 10 interviews the researcher observed that body language and changes in the volume of the CTE deans’ voices reflected the influence of internal factors such as budgets, faculty hiring, and financial decision-making, and expressed a sense of limited control. Through reading and re-reading the transcript data set, word choice, and recorded pauses and laughter (non-verbal behavior) reaffirmed this theme. The choice of limited control as a theme did not reflect any specific response or emotion from the CTE deans to not having significant control
over the supervised areas; rather it was simply life as a mid-level manager in a community college setting.

**Dependency**

Use of Resource Dependency Theory as the theoretical framework for this qualitative study assumes dependency as a natural theme. However, after listening to the tone of the responses to the interview questions and the CTE deans’ emphasis on their need to “follow the money,” dependency was clearly evidenced. Christiansen (1997) contended that as a result of resource dependency, leaders and decision-makers are powerless to have an impact on the organization because of their dependency on the demands of those who provide the funding. He stated that resource dependency theorists therefore conclude that the role of the leader who must adapt to the needs of those who support the organization financially is solely symbolic. Ultimately he agreed that successful organizations are those that realize the importance of the entity providing the funding over the executive decisions.

The responses to the interview questions in Category I illustrated a strong dependency on accreditation agencies, the advisory committees who provide guidance on curriculum development, on employer demands to produce trained workers, and on federal and state influences.

**Research Question Two.** Categories II and III of the interview questions focused on defining the completion agenda and the manifestation of the completion agenda at the CTE deans’ institution, and assessing the deans’ familiarity with the Student Achievement Initiative and any impact on their decision-making. The responses collected for the definition of the completion agenda, how it is manifested at their institution, the familiarity with and impact of the SAI, and decisions and actions which may not support the completion agenda were analyzed and resulted
in the theme of indifference.

**Indifference**

Review of the interview memos, assessment of the researcher’s reaction to the deans’ statements and their non-verbal behaviors reflected an indifference to both the completion agenda, and the SAI as a statewide example of a completion agenda. Most of the 10 deans knew what the completion agenda and the SAI were; they recognized its importance at the federal, state, and executive leadership level; however, there was no passion to share what was happening on their campuses nor energy for it as an influence on their behavior.

**Research Question Three.** The Category IV interview questions focused on business and industry influences on decision-making, the conflict between providing career training for students vs. meeting the needs of the completion agenda, and the impact on decision-making by the expectations of business and industry employers. The responses provided insight into the dual position the CTE deans hold; they understood the needs of community college students to move through their education quickly, move into the workforce, or have opportunity for promotion, and yet felt the pressure to uphold the completion agenda, especially earning SAI points and receiving funding for their institutions, which meant retaining the students through to degree completion.

**Cognitive Dissonance**

The responses to the last set of questions evidenced the strongest emotions from the CTE deans, and it demonstrated the cognitive dissonance existing between the known need and value of the completion agenda and the knowledge that for students and faculty the completion agenda is not always in their best interest. The deans repeatedly gave examples of students who faced challenges when required to take general education classes toward degrees and certificates, when
students wanted to spend their limited time and resources on professional-technical training and to gear up for the workforce. Many deans commented on the timing of class offerings, noting that students wanted to spend as little time at the college as possible and to move quickly to meeting their career goals. It was clear the CTE deans understood the value of earning a degree or certificate; however, their close relationships with the faculty and students in their programs created mixed emotions.

The four themes of limited control, dependency, indifference, and cognitive dissonance were determined from the coding and categories created after analysis of the interviews, post-transcribing memos, Resource Dependency Theory, and the transcribed data set. These four themes will be explored as a narrative response to the three research questions as they relate to Resource Dependency in Chapter Five of this study.

**Saturation**

Corbin and Strauss (2015) define saturation in qualitative research as the point when there are no additional concepts emerging. The idea of reaching saturation is part of theoretical sampling and is often associated with utilizing grounded theory as an analytical research process. The authors suggest that saturation is reached when all of the major categories show variation, are integrated, and are fully developed. Creswell (2012) suggested that saturation is reached when a researcher determines that new data will not provide any additional insights or information to support the development of categories.

As this qualitative study involved 10 subjects, there may be a question whether this provided the researcher with the ability to reach saturation on the data collected. When the Research Protocol was written to meet the requirements of the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher hoped to conduct a minimum of 10 interviews
at five technical colleges in Washington State, with a least two interviews per institution. The maximum number of deans to be interviewed was set at 50.

There are 34 community colleges in Washington State, with five specifically identified as technical colleges. Once permission was granted approval through the IRB, the researcher set out to find CTE deans meeting the criteria for the study:

In their capacity as Career and Technical Education deans they need to be supervisors of faculty and need to have been in their position as a CTE dean for a minimum of 12 months at the institution where they are currently employed.

After approaching potential CTE deans for the study, it was clear that the number of available individuals was limited, and that identifying ten presented a significant challenge. Due to organizational restructuring and movement of CTE deans between institutions, this proved challenging; however, ten were identified and interviewed successfully.

A secondary consideration for whether saturation was reached for this study was whether enough data was collected to represent a diversity of thought and ideas in order to answer the three research questions. After finishing the interviews, transcribing the data, conducting two distinct coding cycles, and analyzing the data sets for categories and themes, it was believed that saturation was reached with the ten study subjects. After two coding cycles for the ten interviews were reviewed the coding process slowed as the responses, concepts, and ideas presented by the subjects became similar and repetitive. While individual interviews reflected variations and experience and administration of different programs, the overarching concepts and ideas were similar across the ten subjects interviewed. Through the process of recording which deans mentioned each of the internal and external factors when creating Table 4.2 Internal and External Factors Influencing CTE Dean Decision-making at the end of this chapter, this visibly
demonstrated that saturation had been reached.

**Summary of Results**

The purpose of this chapter was to present the results of an analysis of the data collected through interviews with ten career and technical deans at Washington State technical colleges. The analysis was conducted in order to gain insight for and to assess what influence the completion agenda and its stated goals have on decision-making by community college deans, specifically deans overseeing faculty and staff in career and technical education programs.

This chapter reviewed the study’s theoretical framework of Resource Dependency Theory, the data collection sites, described the interviews, gave an overview of the analysis process, and presented examples from the interviews. Analysis of the transcribed data sets developed four themes: limited control, dependency, indifference, and cognitive dissonance. The four themes aligned with the three research questions: Limited control and dependency addressed question one, indifference addressed question two, and cognitive dissonance addressed question three.

The final chapter of the study, Chapter Five: Discussion, follows and presents the researcher’s interpretation of the results and its application for scholarly and practical significance.
Figure 4.1 Themes and Categories

Research Question 1

Limited Control (Internal Factors)

Dependency (External Factors)

Research Question 2

Indifference

Research Question 3

Cognitive Dissonance

Budget
Faculty
Limited Time
Curriculum Development
Institutional Culture
Enrollment/FTE
Student Needs
Executive Leadership

Accreditation
Advisory Committees
Employer Demands
Federal/State Influence

The Completion Agenda Defined
Influence of Completion Agenda
Institutional Influence
Student Achievement Initiative

Conflict between Jobs & Completion
Actions not in support of completion
Table 4.2 Internal and External Factors Influencing CTE Dean Decision-making

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Chapter Five: Discussion

The previous chapters outlined the focus, purpose, and significance of the study, and a literature review, which explored four satellite themes: the completion agenda and initiative examples, performance and outcome based funding, business and industry and the completion agenda, and college dean decision-making. The methodology used for the study and the analysis of 10 interviews with CTE deans at technical colleges in Washington State followed. Resource Dependency Theory served as the theoretical framework and guided the development of the interview questions as well as provided insight for data analyzed.

Chapter Five ties the findings to both the literature review and Resource Dependency Theory. Three key findings, surprises found in the analysis, conclusions around the implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks are presented.

Summary of the Study

Overview of the Problem. The concept of the completion agenda took its most recent form in the 2009 launch, by President Obama, of the American Graduation Initiative; challenging the United States to become the largest producer of college graduates in the world by 2020 with five million degrees and certificates (Obama, 2009). Though there is no single definition for the term “completion agenda,” O’Banion (2013) noted that the previous Student Success Agenda, which focused on access to higher education, and a particular focus on the community college sector, morphed into the completion agenda, now emphasizing student completion of degrees and certificates. Alongside champions from federal and state governments, private grant foundations such as the Lumina and the Gates Foundations, policy analysts, and higher education and business leaders focused on the completion agenda after the Great Recession of 2009.
Resource Dependency Theory, the theoretical framework for this study, examines external constraints on organizations and the resulting reactions from leaders and decision-makers to constraints. Leaders make a deliberate decision to accommodate the imposed constraints to survive or face extinction by failing to do so (Kenton et al., 2005). The theory’s relevance to the completion agenda is most apparent where states adopted performance based and outcomes based funding to higher education institutions. These methods of higher education funding apportioned some state monies to the institutions based on meeting performance indicators such as course completion, time to degree, transfer rates, the number of degrees awarded, or the number of low-income and minority graduates (Dougherty & Reddy, 2011).

**Purpose statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to assess and gain insight into the influence of the completion agenda and its goals on decision-making by community college deans, specifically those deans who oversee overseeing faculty and staff in career and technical education programs.

**Research Questions**

The research questions for this qualitative study were:

1) **What internal and external forces do career and technical education dean decision-makers in Washington State technical colleges perceive are impacting decisions they are required to make for the programs they administer?**

2) **What evidence exists to demonstrate the influence of the completion agenda on career and technical education dean decision-making?**

3) **Do career and technical education dean decision-makers perceive that there is a conflict between providing immediate career opportunities for the students they
Review of the Methodology

Narrative analysis was used to analyze the data collected from interviewing 10 career and technical education deans at seven Washington State Technical colleges. The philosophical approach was an interpretative/constructivist paradigm where the knowledge gained in the process of conducting the research documented the interaction of individuals as it was co-constructed (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). The researcher used a constructivist approach when analyzing the data assessed not only by evaluating the literal responses by the interviewees, but also by focusing on the experience of the interviewees when being interviewed and the reaction of the researcher as a participant in the experience (Creswell, 2012). The researcher acknowledged her role as a former student services dean, familiar with the experience of community college CTE deans in the State of Oregon, prior to 2016. Precautions were taken during the interviews to limit speaking beyond the 14 questions asked and assessing potential bias toward the outcomes prior to and during data analysis.

Member checking, researcher position or reflexivity, and peer review/examination were employed to ensure trustworthiness in the study. The study was limited by the number of technical colleges CTE deans available for conducting interviews in the Seattle/Tacoma area of Washington State. Washington State was chosen both for proximity to the researcher and because of the Student Achievement Initiative, Washington’s successful implementation of a completion agenda funding model.

Major Findings

This section outlines the findings for each of the three research questions using the framework of Resource Dependency Theory. An intentional, interpretive/constructivist
philosophical approach was used where the researcher created knowledge through the interactions with the CTE deans and assessed how personal beliefs and values influenced the meaning found in the data. Repeated reviews of the memos created immediately following each interview, the transcribed data sets, the post-transcription memos and the results from the first and second coding cycles developed categories into four themes. The four themes described within the framework of the three research questions are: limited control, dependency, indifference, and cognitive dissonance.

**Research question one.** The intent of research question one was the identification of internal and external forces that might impact decisions made by career and technical education deans for the programs they administer. Exploration and analysis of these factors tied the internal factors to the theme of limited control and the external factors to the theme of dependency.

**Limited control.**

Analysis of the transcribed data resulted in three major categories of internal factors cited by the CTE deans as influences on their decision-making: budgeting, faculty, and a combination of six additional internal influences referred to as potpourri. The data reviewed held phrases that defined this theme:

- It is not sustainable.
- Monitoring budgets to make sure we are in line with the plan.
- I’m not doing justice
- There are some unrealistic expectations on the faculty
- That isn’t something that I can change or have any influence about
- I have a small slush fund for emergency purchases
- Depending on the mood of the finance office and upper administration
• I can never figure out or understand exactly what type of rules someone is choosing to follow
• I just found out we will be getting two applied bachelor’s programs
• Nothing terribly significant or long lasting in my area
• Institutional culture says this is how we have always done it and that affects a lot of what we do
• We did not know until this week how much money we had to spend on part time faculty
• How was I supposed to know that?
• Hiring tenured faculty is above my pay grade (laughs)
• I can’t just say I’d like an academic program in “X”
• There are no easy answers
• I have to look around to find extra money for broken equipment
• We can’t react as quickly as we’d like to
• More students, less money is pressure

The researcher began the interviews with assumptions that CTE deans had authority to hire their faculty, control their budgets and spending, and to hold a position of strength in the activity of their academic units. Collectively, all ten CTE deans stated they had some control over internal factors; however, they felt it was not extensive. There were many non-verbal expressions, sighs, and looks downward when responding to the set of questions designed to answer research question one. The term “limited control” best expressed the CTE deans’ common response.
Dependency.

By the use of Resource Dependency Theory as the theoretical framework for the study it was logical that dependency would emerge as a theme. Four common categories were expressed as external factors influencing CTE dean decision-making: accreditation, advisory committees, employer demand, and federal/state influence. The researcher heard how strongly the CTE deans depend on these external factors for their program’s success and the significant influence these have on their decision-making.

Christensen (1997), when addressing the impact of resource dependency theory on leader decision-making, stated that it is those who provide the revenue or funding who call the shots. He stated that an organization’s “freedom of action is limited to satisfying the needs of those entities outside the firm that give it the resources it needs to survive” (p. 118). Woven throughout the responses that named external factors influencing decision-making were statements and expressions of Resource Dependency Theory:

- When employers demand that training happens in a certain way or that we need to teach a different tool or piece of equipment we need to be responsive to that otherwise our training programs are not going to be viable (laughs)
- The advisory boards intimately know the details of our programs and that is really critical to the survival of a professional-technical program
- The hallmark of a technical college is meeting the demands and expectations of business and industry, that is what we are all about, meeting their needs
- Accreditation and other outside agencies give approval for programs to continue. We have to adhere to the highest level of requirement
- We are very much tied into the local economy and the labor market
• I think a guided pathway is going to more deliberately help us to earn student achievement points, because we will get them through those steps in a more predictable way. More and more we can virtually guarantee that our system is going to increase the dollar percentage that the SAI represents as far as our total allocation.

Listening to the CTE deans talk about their dependency on these external factors, especially on advisory committees, which are state-mandated to determine curriculum and influence decision-making as it relates to providing workforce training in Washington, the deans expressed nervousness or behaved with a sense of urgency to follow the will of employers in their service districts. Their statements reflected a clear understanding that they needed to “follow the money” to survive as a technical college in particular with today’s economic environment.

**Key Finding #1**

There were a number of internal and external factors which influenced career and technical education dean decision-making; the two most prevalent were budgeting and the management of and interactions with their program faculty. The variance in the additional factors, which impact the decision-making resulted from the position of the particular dean at the college, their tenure in their position, their personal views and values, and what was uppermost on their mind at the time of the interview. The factors identified showed a strong connection to Resource Dependency Theory. Analysis made clear that CTE deans have limited control over that which impacts their decision-making and they are dependent on others, outside the institution, to perform their roles, especially the influences of funding and support from advisory committees and the requirements of employers.
Research Question Two. The intent of the second research question was what evidence demonstrated the influence of the completion agenda on the CTE deans’ decision-making. Analysis of the deans’ responses emerged as a theme labeled indifference.

Indifference.

“How would you define the completion agenda?” D1: “To check the box, (laughs!)”

This quote above all others signified the core message from the interviews: The CTE deans felt neither passion nor disdain for the completion agenda. The level of understanding of its value to their decision-making and to their institutions varied; any emotion or concern around the ultimate impact of the completion agenda upon their decision-making was not evidenced. To be clear, individual responses addressed the significance of the completion agenda, and the deans provided examples of its manifestation at their institutions and for their programs. However, the reactions to the completion agenda itself were neutral and not seen as threat nor an inspiration.

Many of the CTE deans acknowledged the impact of the Student Achievement Initiative (SAI) and spoke to the need to support the point gathering required by the mandated funding model, yet were not fazed by any connection to their budgeting, faculty, or management of their academic programs. Verbal and non-verbal clues from transcribed interview responses, which reflected the theme of indifference to the completion agenda and it manifestation on their campuses, were:

- We are trying to figure out what completion is and what, how it matters
- I think that in my role…there is a level influence that I could do to help to continue to show the importance of taking gen eds or at least getting students to a point at which it counts
- How would you define the completion agenda? Hah…(big sigh and then a big
guffaw/laugh).

- What would you consider to be a manifestation of the completion agenda at your institution? D3: “At our school? A manifestation of distress. (Laughter)”
- It’s (SAI) the wave that’s pushing us right now
- The completion agenda just gives another incentive for responding to retention issues by placing the emphasis on getting people to the end
- It (SAI) is another facet of the whole picture that we are looking at when we make those programmatic decisions
- How would you define the completion agenda? Oh my goodness. (Sighs). That’s a good one.
- Let’s say that it is the right thing to do (laughs)
- My work in that (SAI) has been to help gather the numbers forth that help support what we have. Not much more than that. (Big sigh).
- I really can’t say that any decision I’ve made it not about students completing.
- It (SAI) is a good thing because it refocused some of our efforts. When it (SAI funds) comes it kind of like goes into a black hole. (Laughs) It does, I am being brutally honest!

Discussion of the completion agenda and of the SAI as Washington State’s primary manifestation of the completion agenda and a form of performance based funding resulted in a wide spectrum of responses for its meaning, its purpose, and value. Overall, interview responses illustrated a mutual recognition and respect for what the completion agenda brought to the institution, the academic programs, and most importantly for the students. The CTE deans seemed indifferent toward about its influence on their decision-making. The deans knew the
completion agenda was real and present at different levels within their institutions, yet they exhibited no emotions as to its influence on their work as CTE deans.

**Key Finding #2**

The study revealed that CTE deans, for the most part, understood the meaning of the completion agenda and recognized its importance at both the federal and state level, and ultimately the deans did not have a negative or positive reaction and were indifferent in terms about its influence on their decision-making. Resource Dependency Theory was again referenced by the CTE deans with their mentioning of the value of earning points for funding through the Student Achievement Initiative. The completion agenda’s influence was not significant and the deans were neither threatened nor inspired by it.

**Research Question Three.** Research question three attempted to determine if a conflict existed for the CTE deans between providing immediate career opportunities for students and degree completion (meeting the needs of the completion agenda). Analysis of the responses to the questions from the CTE deans resulted in the theme of cognitive dissonance

**Cognitive Dissonance.**

Leon Festinger is often credited in the research literature with being the first to present a theory for cognitive dissonance; while dated, his definitions apply to the analysis of the CTE dean interviews. Festinger (1962) suggested that cognitive dissonance is recognizing that people have an internal need to be consistent with their behaviors and values in order to avoid disharmony, which is a condition people want to avoid. He stated that individuals strive to be consistent within themselves and that they will take actions to reduce the dissonance they feel. The author noted that cognitive dissonance refers to the different elements and their relationships to each other.
Analysis of the data to answer research question three revealed the competing elements for the CTE deans. Those elements were expressed as their thoughts for and between their interest in how their academic programs’ providing training allowed students to enter the workforce and to move toward financial gains and opposing thoughts and interests as college administrators to support their institutions’ progress towards completion agenda goals leading to increased funding.

Comments from the transcribed data set demonstrated the cognitive dissonance between competing elements of students entering the workforce with the professional-technical skill training gained and the value of meeting the completion agenda goals at an institution and statewide level.

- The completion agenda is different for us...because we are training folks to get right into the workforce, but sometimes they complete their training and skills they need before they complete their credentials for a degree. There are two goals we serve, one we want to train people, our mission is to get them the skills so they are employable, but two, at the same time the college receives a benefit when they actually complete all of their courses in their pathway.

- What industry wants to see may not be exactly what counts as completion. It is our mission in workforce development programs to train folks with the skillset so they are employable and hopefully in the industry they were trained in, right? Sometimes that is before they meet those credentials, the 45 credits, you know getting the degree. So, really capturing that as a success point (SAI) I think that is a point of conflict.

- We have set up certain programs with short term certificates and even though
there may be some bonus point for a student to earn certification where we know that they are just going to exit out of that, so they are not completing by the terms of the completion agenda. But we also feel that it might be in the best interest of the students to get out and get work.

- When you are operating under the something like the completion agenda we look every June at who has had enough credits to qualify for a certificate, whether they want the certificate or not…it is a metric worth knowing, but in other ways it is not because their goal is still down the road, but because we are asked to create and count our completers that is obviously what we are going to do.

- I think part of what the completion agenda does is say “oh yeah, there you go; you are job trained now.” We’ve ticked your tick mark, we’ve trained you for a career, and we have sent you out. And I think in the long term when we start looking at economic stats, we will not have increased employment or wages earned that much, if that all we do is pump people out with short term certificates

- I have a little bit of a hard time with the completion initiative sometimes when we don’t value the fact that a student has gotten exactly what they needed, and that is a good thing.

- Students can get gainfully employed without getting to completion. Completion for them means I was making $10 an hour over here, but now I am going out and make $18 and hour and I’m not going to stay and take that math or English class. Who cares? I’m gainfully employed, right? It is a double-edged sword depending on who you are talking with from whose lens.
Use of the term “double-edged sword” in this last quote provides a strong visual for the theme of cognitive dissonance. The CTE deans clearly understood the importance of the completion agenda and, more fervently, the economic benefits to their institution in earning as many SAI achievement points as possible. And they are cognizant and realistic in recognizing that many CTE students want to get in, learn skills in order to increase their income, and get out.

**Key Finding #3**

The CTE deans repeatedly alluded to their struggle between understanding and supporting their students’ interests in training and then moving to the workforce before completing their credentials toward earning an associate degree or certificate and the need to graduate more students in order to meet funding criteria associated with the Student Achievement Initiative. The data collected in this study evidences their conflict between providing immediate career opportunities and encouraging degree completion (meeting the needs of the completion agenda).

**Findings Related to the Literature**

Merriam (2009) stated that the completion of a literature review in a qualitative study provides a foundation by which the researcher can add to the knowledge of the topic in the research. A literature review can also illustrate how the findings from the study can refine, revise, or advance that which is already known.

The literature review presented in Chapter Two of this study presented four satellite themes: Theme #1: The Completion Agenda and Initiative Examples, Theme #2: Performance and Outcomes Based Funding, Theme #3: Business and Industry and the Completion Agenda, and Theme #4: Community College Dean Decision-making. Re-reading this study’s literature
review after analysis of the data set from the transcribed interviews identified support for what has been written previously in the literature.

**Literature review theme 1: The completion agenda and initiative examples.** Several references in the dataset alluded to the recent focus on the completion agenda at the national and state level. One quote in particular from a dean’s definition of the completion agenda highlighted this connection:

D3: I guess I would define it as the collection of polices and initiatives that take forward this country’s commitment to moving people through their educational processes into completion more quickly and efficiently. Everything from the White House on down…I guess there is a completion agenda document somewhere that encapsulates it, I don’t know what body actually holds that. But it manifests in everything you know Presidential speeches to the Washington State Workforce act that came out.

Several CTE deans mentioned their institution’s adoption of pathways in response to the completion agenda, which was referenced in the literature review. Terry O’Banion, president emeritus of the League for Innovation, proposed the creation of the “Student Success Pathway: A Model for Institutional and Student Planning (SSP)” (O’Banion, 2013, p. 10) to assign community college students with navigating enrollment processes and learning in order to raise the number of credentials evaluated. Quotes from the data set included:

D6: I think the major manifestation for us in pathways. There is statewide work around pathways and we started pathways out of basic skills about three years ago. Because basic skill students, one let’s say because it is the right thing to do (laughs) because two, those students get double student achievement points when they move from basic skills I into college-level work.
D10: …making sure that we are intentional about students being aware of their choices and once they decide they have a pathway to completion. So that if they want to be a doctor we want to make sure that we are very intentional about knowing how to engage them and how we can get them there, whether we have it or not.

One CTE dean specifically alluded to their institution’s work with Achieving the Dream (ATD), a completion agenda initiative referenced in the literature review:

D8: Certainly our work with the ATD helped support the completion agenda and that is really listening to students and finding out where their barriers are, as opposed to us from our middle class set trying to guess where someone’s barrier is to education. I think that has been really helpful.

This same dean provided evidence of their institution’s reaction to meeting the goals of the completion agenda by referring to initiatives suggested by Complete College America solution described in the literature review.

D8: The early alert, more intrusive advising model. We have changed our advising model to where we have advisors that are assigned to a specific program area so they actually go into the classrooms to meet with the student so the student have a face to talk to. So far we are starting to see some good results and very excited to see how that is going to continue. We’ve initiated mandatory early success courses either in the first or second quarter.

Finally, the Washington State Student Achievement Initiative was referenced in the data collected because it is an established example of a completion agenda initiative tied to a performance based funding model in the state where the study was connected and because it was mentioned in two of the interview questions.
Literature review theme 2: performance and outcomes based funding. Using Resource Dependency Theory as the theoretical framework coupled with the researcher assertion that the CTE deans would connect Washington State’s SAI, as a form of performance based funding, as an influence on their decision-making, it was surprising only one CTE dean’s mentioned performance based funding directly.

D7: SAI, I’ve been in the system for a while now in several different colleges and this is a version of performance based funding and that you can see all over the country. When I was in … some other states were really big into this in varying degrees. SAI is a kind of our performance based funding approach.

Though the terms performance or outcomes based funding were mentioned only in one interview; its influence was apparent in several responses:

D2: The State of Washington has taken an initiative in starting to push the colleges toward focusing their efforts to complete more students by dangling a financial carrot in front of them…we are increasingly putting more of your budget money into SAI points so that you have to show us some performance points that you are providing some opportunities for students to complete.

D3: I know the importance of them to the institution in terms of generating funding…

D8: My division is technical programs, right? So, we are more interested in quarter-to-quarter persistence and retention and completion than necessarily SAI points.

Literature review theme 3: business and industry and the completion agenda.

Shulock and Offenstein (2012) were included in this study’s literature review, stating that community colleges must partner with local business and industry to tailor their curriculum offerings to meet the demands of the labor market and to create programs that are valuable and
accessible to students with a wide variety of preparation and at different points in their careers. Quotes from all of the CTE deans in the study supported this assertion. The strongest message emerging from the analysis of the interview data set and one of the key findings for the study was the heavy dependence on the working relationship with business and industry within the deans’ service districts, mainly through Washington’s state-mandated advisory committees.

The CTE deans asserted that decision-making was influenced by the demands and expectations of business and industry employers above all other influences. The need to listen to the advice from advisory committees for developing new curriculum to keep training current, meet employer needs for a trained workforce, and to sunset those programs that were no longer relevant was abundantly clear in the responses to the interview questions. The CTE deans who administered workforce development and professional-technical programs understood that without employers to hire their students, partner to support the purchase of state-of-art equipment, and guide and inform curriculum development, programs would not and could not survive.

**Literature review theme 4: community college dean decision-making.** Robillard (2000) is referenced in the literature review by describing deans as mediators among students, administration, faculty, and staff, who at the community college level, are subject to internal program evaluation and review, and are accountable to external mandates. Robillard specifically identified the unique role of the community college dean over that of one at a university as having a greater variety and volume of activities to manage due to a consistent shortage of funding and deficient level of staffing.

The CTE deans’ response to the initial interview question supported this assertion as they described the extent of their supervisory responsibility at their institution and identified which CTE program’s faculty and staff they managed and hired:
D1: I supervise faculty and staff and classified staff and professional staff and various professional and technical areas. We have somewhere around the 65 range of faculty and staff and classified staff make it 85 folks in the division. It is not sustainable.

D2: I am responsible for hiring and managing faculty and staff for all of the seven programs. That may mean that the college wants to expand a program because of high enrollment and market conditions for the program itself, so that it means that it will go through that budget request piece and expand by hiring faculty.

D4: We have a very flat structure at my institution so I am the direct supervisor for all faculty, full time and part time. Yeah!

D7: I have a span of control that is probably about 130 people that is going to include a lot of individuals who are adjunct and part time.

D8: I would say about 39 full time faculty. Luckily for me they are all really good.

D10: I have total responsibility for every one of those instructional areas, including workforce education. I manage every aspect from top to bottom.

After analysis of the data set and review of the existing literature, the researcher believes the satellite topics were appropriate, relevant to the study’s findings, and supportive of the study’s theoretical framework of Resource Dependency Theory.

Surprises

Roberts (2010) suggested the insertion of a section on surprises in the final dissertation chapter, discussion of the study findings or results, and stated that unanticipated outcomes of the study are the surprises. These could occur within the study sample, such as with identifying the study subjects and when analyzing the study results. A university colleague recently pointed out to me that the true beauty of conducting doctoral research is in the surprises, and especially when
the research moves in a direction you did not expect. That was clearly the case with this study.

As the researcher, before making a decision to pursue a doctoral degree, I needed to be committed to my selected topic to sustain me through the coursework and dissertation process. In my role as a mid-level dean at a community college for 16 years and after observing and working closely with CTE deans as they made their decisions for their academic programs, I was convinced that the completion agenda would have a negative impact on their dean decision-making. My belief in this assertion was intense, strong, and pervasive throughout my coursework phase of my education and all the way through to the identification of the four themes for this study.

Even after conducting the interviews and the more than 60 hours of continuous review of the transcribed dataset, I was not cognizant of the surprise realization that the influence of the completion agenda on these ten CTE deans was not negative, but in reality more neutral. The four themes identified after the coding and category developmental process of limited control, dependency, indifference, and cognitive dissonance reaffirmed this. These themes helped me to see that my stalwart belief that the very mission of career and technical education as a mainstay for community colleges was at risk because of the completion agenda was misinformed. I believe after assessing the data that Resource Dependency Theory’s suggestion that decision-makers will “follow the money” to risk extinction is accurate, but that it is not because of the completion agenda; it is because of the need to listen to employers when developing curriculum, providing the right tools and technology for training, and knowing when to support moving students into the workforce versus the students waiting to complete their college credentials.

I had initially listed budget decisions, faculty hiring, and curriculum development as the key influencing factors for deans when making decisions for their programs and am pleased that
I was advised to not limit my study with these three factors. As I have identified in Chapter Four, these three factors do have an influence on CTE dean decision-making, but it is ultimately the needs of the employers, coming from the guidance and instruction of the advisory committees that have the greatest and most significant influence on the decision-making by the CTE deans.

Another significant surprise based on the results of this particular study was the lack of attention and mention of performance or outcomes based funding by the CTE deans. I had initially intended on focusing this dissertation, the problem statement, and the research questions exclusively on the influence of performance and outcomes based funding on CTE dean decision-making and I can see now that it would have been a failed research experience. While it is true that I did not address this in the interview questions, the fact that we were discussing the Student Achievement Initiative, an example of a performance based funding in Washington State, and that this form of funding has been in the media and discussed in higher education circles, I would have thought the subject would have been mentioned and referenced.

The step of assessing the surprises from this research study allowed me to see the value of this exercise as a university leader. It is vital that when we identify a problem based on our evaluation of circumstances, that we assess the facts related to the situation, collaborate with and check our assertions with those impacted, and arrive at a conclusion that has been researched and vetted.

Conclusions

Implications for Action

Chapter One of this study proposed the practical and scholarly significance this study would represent. It was noted that research on the completion agenda and related initiatives both historical and current was abundant; however attention to the influence of the completion agenda
on career and community college decision-making was scarce. The news media and private grant foundations such as the Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation continue to focus on the benefits and goals of the completion agenda, but the focus specifically on community college deans’ role in the completion agenda is not addressed. After completing the research for this qualitative study, further elaboration on the practical and scholarly significance of the findings can be presented.

**Practical implications.** The American Association of Community Colleges (2012) asserted, in relation to the United States’ fall from being the top producer of college degrees that:

> If community colleges are to contribute powerfully to meeting the needs of the 21\textsuperscript{st}-century students and the 21\textsuperscript{st}-century economy, educational leaders must reimagine what these institutions are-and are capable of becoming (p. vii).

The article affirmed that campus leaders know too many students are underprepared and need development coursework before moving into college-level courses. Leaders know that completion rates are low, the achievement gap is widening for first-generation and students of color, and that student and academic support services are inadequate. Campus leaders also know that reinventing the academy depends on investing in collaboration and partnership among institutions and with partners such as local employers, industry, the private sector, government, and philanthropic organizations.

O’Banion (2013) noted that the majority of community colleges agree that student success as evidenced by meeting the goals of the completion agenda is a commitment worth making. He believes that these same community college leaders must agree on the conditions that are reflective of their institution’s culture, values, and resources. O’Banion calls for leaders to be smarter with using institutional resources and to expand partnerships with business and
industry beyond the current and established academic programs and means of training delivery systems.

This study reinforced that Resource Dependency Theory is applicable to career and technical educational dean decision-making. The deans identified employer needs and demands as having the greatest influence on the actions they take and noted that their survival depends on these collaborative relationships and partnerships. Understanding how limited control, dependency, indifference, and cognitive dissonance describe the completion agenda’s influence on CTE dean decision-making may have practical significance if taken into consideration by legislative policy makers, private foundations focusing on completion initiatives, and even community college executive leadership.

Those in a position to move the completion agenda ahead could expand their focus beyond the changes to increase completion to be accomplished by advisors, faculty, student support administrators, and college executive leadership by considering the impact of the employer demands and the need for trained students workers out of CTE program resulting in an increase in students completing short-term certificates and associate degrees. Dean Five (D5) in this study suggested that the ideal completion initiative would allow students to gain the necessary training for employment or promotion from CTE programs, to launch into the workforce, and to partner with employers on programs that allow employees to finish their general education courses and earn associate degrees.

Shulock and Offenstein’s (2012) observation that while the completion agenda focuses both on institutions producing more bachelor’s degrees and associate degrees, the largest number of projected job openings require less than a bachelor’s degree to provide family-wage earnings. This is where community colleges can step in to offer an array of career-oriented certification
and CTE degrees and certificates. Community colleges must partner with local business and industry, through collaboration with advisory committees, to tailor their curriculum offerings to meet the demands of the labor market and create programs that are valuable and accessible to students, which have a variety of preparation levels and different entry points in their career progression.

While attending the 2016 American Associate of Collegiate Registrar and Admissions Officers Transfer and Technology Conference, I had the privilege of listening to the closing speaker, Dr. Stephen Handel, Associate Vice President – Undergraduate Admissions University of California, Office of the President. Dr. Handel presented on “Transition and Transformation – Reigniting the Promise of the Transfer Pathway.” He chose to focus his remarks on the transfer student experience and its importance to the University of California to an audience with far more four year public and private institutions, and higher education software designers, than community college leaders and attendees. In a conversation following the speech, and after sharing the title, topic, and reasons for this study, Dr. Handel commented that the specific focus on the role of the community college CTE deans was missing in discussions on moving the dial for completion and he imagined that my study could have practical significance on decisions related to supporting the transfer student experience.

In his speech Handel asserted:

Part of the problem is the way we fund community colleges in this country. Hobbled by insufficient support from state governments and humbled by its placement on the lowest rung of the higher education hierarchy, these colleges enroll nearly half of all undergraduates in America. Yet only a fraction of the students these institutions prepare for transfer end up on a four year campus. Alas, today, I fear that the transformative
momenum of transfer has stalled. States invest far less in higher education than ever before. The College Completion agenda seems to have hit some kind of ceiling. And the innovative essence, especially the triumphant spirit associated with America’s community colleges, seems to have faded as these institutions are called upon to educate students whose challenges often revolve around finding money for gas rather than making the dean’s list (Handel, 2016, p. 4).

The possibility exists that the findings from this study may provide new insight into the influential factors on CTE dean decision-making and how the factors relate to the completion agenda’s influence on these deans. This information could guide leaders like Dr. Handel and others from the community college sector, the federal government, state legislative policy makers, and private foundations to focus on the significant relationships between career and technical education programs and employers’ demands for a trained workforce.

Scholarly implications. The research literature documenting the goals and hopes for the completion agenda has been prolific since President Obama launched the American Graduation Initiative in 2009 and foundations such as the Lumina and Gates Foundations focused their activities toward increasing the number of students earning associate and bachelor’s degrees in the United States. During the literature review phase of this study, it became evident that there is a lack of research and literature on the specific influence of the completion agenda on the decisions made by community college career and technical education deans.

After conducting the interviews with 10 CTE deans, it was clear that they have responsibilities for a significant number of faculty, both full-time and part-time, and other staff. Deans are responsible for managing the budgeting, hiring and managerial duties as well as responding to student needs, marketing and recruiting for their programs, and collaborating with
state-mandated advisory committees to ascertain the demands and needs of local employers. The likelihood that actively employed CTE deans would be the ones to research this topic and publish in professional journals and add to the literature available on this topic is low.

The completion agenda and how to meet its goals is a national conversation, far from completion, and it is possible that future researchers would value the findings of this study. By adding to the paper-thin literature on dean decision-making, fresh insight could be noted on the factors which influence deans’ decision-making in general. The findings might inform community college leaders to influence behavior, governing boards to understand the importance of building and strengthening relationships with college district employers, and advisory committees, representing business and industry leaders, to support CTE deans and improve the training provided to their current and future employees.

**Limitations of the study.** While saturation was reached while researching this topic by interviewing the ten CTE deans from seven technical colleges, ten is a small sample to represent CTE deans throughout Washington and the nation. The number of technical colleges in Washington State is limited, but future research could extend well beyond the scope of this study.

The study was conducted in a state with a well-established performance based funding program, with the Student Achievement Initiative. The mandated SAI meant the CTE deans interviewed were more likely to be familiar with the completion agenda and its impact on their decision-making than interviews conducted in a state without an established performance based funding program.

**Recommendations for further research.** After discovery that the completion agenda seems to have a neutral impact on the decision-making of CTE deans, further research could begin with exploration more into the factors that do influence CTE dean decision-making:
advisory committee and employer demands, budgeting, and faculty management. A similar study could involve interviews with members of advisory committees to the same institutions as in this study to assess their understanding and insight into the factors influencing CTE deans. By better understanding the role of the CTE dean and gaining a more complete picture of the pressures they experience in their positions, advisory committees and local employers may be able to partner more effectively.

Another interesting research opportunity could look at CTE technical college programs that exemplify relationships among CTE deans and their advisory committees and employers and effectively address the struggle between students desiring short term training and joining the workforce quickly and the pressure on the institutions to award more degrees and certificates. Discovery and exploration of technical colleges with programs where students can move into the workforce after completing their technical training while having release time and financial support to return to complete general education and other requirements necessary to earn an associate degree or certificate could lead to improved completion rates.

**Concluding Remarks**

_D6:  Hmmm…so the completion agenda, I would define the completion agenda as just as this shift in focus from “butt in seats” to what those butts are actually doing in those seats._

This quote summarizes the findings from this study and supports the four themes identified: limited control, dependency, indifference, and cognitive dissonance. It recognizes an awareness of the goals of the completion agenda and with its simplicity and somewhat irreverent use of language, appropriately reflects the attitudes of those who participated in the study. In Washington State where the study was conducted, the Student Achievement Initiative is a
mandated performance based funding model designed to move the dial on increasing the number of degrees and certificates earned. It seems to be acknowledged by CTE deans, but not particularly revered.

Resource Dependency Theory was the theoretical framework for this study; was it appropriate? After pouring through the transcribed data set, it was apparent that the CTE deans knew the survival of their programs depended heavily on support from employers in the local district via the advice and influence of the state-mandated advisory committees. The CTE deans knew that the completion agenda and even the requirements of the SAI were important; however, their ultimate success depended on students finding work after training in their programs.

Aware that I held a definite opinion on this topic and I absolutely believed I would discover a negative impact from the completion agenda on decision-making by CTE deans, I was very surprised after developing four themes from the data that its impact was neutral. I learned to keep my bias hidden through the interview process, greatly assisted by the Institutional Research Board restrictions on adding to the interview questions as the interview unfolded or interacting with the deans as the interview progressed. I learned the value of and methodology for conducting research to write this dissertation, and what was learned in my doctoral courses and through my extensive internship hours had a positive impact on my leadership and success as a university administrator.

**Summary**

The findings from this study highlight the factors that influence CTE dean decision-making, including the significant focus on employer demands and meeting employer needs for the survival of the academic programs. The findings present a rich opportunity for practical application for both students and for proponents of the completion agenda.
Chapter One provided an overview of the focus and significance of the study by providing an overview of the nature of completion agenda and its call for more students in the United States to earn degrees and certificates. The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain insight into and to assess what influence the completion agenda and its stated goals have on decision-making by community college deans, specifically deans overseeing faculty and staff in career and technical education programs. The research questions for the study were: 1) What internal and external forces do career and technical education decision-makers in seven Washington State technical colleges perceive are impacting decisions they are required to make for the programs they administer? 2) What evidence exists to demonstrate the influence of the completion agenda on CTE dean decision-making? and 3) Do career and technical education dean decision-makers perceive that there is a conflict between providing immediate career opportunities for the students they serve, versus degree completion (meeting the needs of the completion agenda)? A theoretical framework using Resource Dependency Theory was outlined, the background of the problem further explored, definition for terms was provided, and the practical and scholarly significance of the study was explored.

Chapter Two provided a literature review for the study. Four themes for the literature review representing satellite topics related to the problem statement were presented and relevant research provided: Theme #1: The Completion Agenda and Initiative Examples, Theme #2: Performance and Outcome Based Funding, Theme #3: Business and Industry and the Completion Agenda, and Theme #4: Community College Dean and Decision-Making.

Chapter Three provided a map of the process used by the researcher to collect data in order to answer the three research questions. The researcher’s positionality/bias, philosophical approach, and guiding theoretical perspective were detailed and outlined. How Resource
Dependency Theory informed the research design was discussed. A sampling plan, data sources and description of data for the study, procedures used to ensure trustworthiness, and the strategies for the protection of human subjects were provided.

Chapter Four presented the findings from the transcribed data set of ten CTE deans interviews at seven technical colleges in Washington State. Information was provided on the interviews and the analysis process used to code the data, identify categories and develop four overarching themes: limited control, dependency, indifference, and cognitive dissonance.

Chapter Five tied the study’s findings to the literature review and Resource Dependency Theory as the study’s theoretical framework. Three key findings were presented. The first key finding noted a number of internal and external factors influencing CTE dean decision-making, with budgeting and faculty interactions being the most prominent. These factors showed a strong connection to Resource Dependency Theory and it became clear that the CTE deans have limited control over factors which impact their decision-making and they are dependent on external factors, others to perform their roles; especially the funding and support from advisory committees to meet employer demands. The second key finding noted that the completion agenda is not a strong influence on the decision-making by the CTE deans. The completion agenda was not a significant factor for decision-making, and the deans were neither threatened nor inspired by it. The third key finding presented evidence from the data of a conflict between providing immediate career opportunities for the students in their CTE programs they serve and degree completion (meeting the needs of the completion agenda). Surprises from the data analysis and the study’s conclusions with the implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks were presented.

The findings from this research revealed that the influence of the completion agenda does
not have a negative impact on decision-making by CTE deans. The study illustrated that deans have limited control and are dependent on a number of factors, especially their advisory committees and local and regional employers, when making decisions. These CTE deans were indifferent to the pressures of the completion agenda and experienced cognitive dissonance between a focus on the needs of their students wanting skill training and entry to the workforce and retaining students for taking additional classes in order to complete their associate degrees. The tenets of Resource Dependency Theory were evident by the deans’ acknowledgement that the survival of their academic CTE programs is dependent on their accommodating the needs and demands of business and industry as external entities overseeing the development of curriculum and the employment of students.
References


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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Letter for CTE Dean Study Participants

Dear Dean _____,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Oregon State University College of Education’s Community College Leadership Program and would like to interview you to conduct research for my qualitative dissertation. The principle investigator for the study is Dr. Shelley Dubkin-Lee, Oregon State University, College of Education.

The name of my dissertation/study is:

*The Influence of the Completion Agenda on Decision-making by Community College Career and Technical Education Program Deans*

I have identified you as a Career and Technical Education dean at a Washington State technical college. I am looking to interview deans who supervise faculty and have served as a CTE dean for a minimum of six (6) months at the institution where they are currently employed.

I will be interviewing a minimum of 10 Career and Technical Education Deans at five technical community colleges in the Seattle/Tacoma region. The study may include a maximum of 50 participants. Interviews will take between sixty (60) and ninety (90) minutes. The interviews would take place in a location of your choice at your institution.

I will ask the attached questions related to decision-making in the role of a CTE dean and be listening for responses as it relates to the possible influence of the completion agenda. Please do not respond to these at this time, as a consent form will need to be completed by you prior to the onset of my data collection.

Per IRB protocols in terms of confidentiality your participation will not be anonymous, since I will know you.

Your sensitive position as a CTE dean situated between the executive administration and the faculty and staff of your institution creates a need for confidentiality in this study. To help ensure confidentiality, the researcher will mask your identity and that of your institution when presenting the data and the findings in the dissertation study.

This will be done through a coding system known only to the researcher and the principal investigator. This coding system will be destroyed after successful defense of the dissertation.

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Federal regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Some of these records could contain information that personally
identifies you. There is a chance that we could accidentally disclose information that identifies you.

Only the researcher, to facilitate the completion of the dissertation study, will utilize tape recordings made during the course of the interview. Only the Principal Investigator and the student researcher will have access to the recordings.

If the results of this project are published or presented your identity will not be made public. The researcher intends to use direct quotes from the participants when presenting the study findings. The identity of the participants providing the quotes will be masked.

You will not be compensated for your participation in the study. If you participate and wish to have a copy of my dissertation, I will provide that to you after I have successful defended.

Please let me know if you would be willing to set up a brief phone introduction to learn more about my intended interview and research. Thank you for considering your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Helen B. Garrett
2001 E. Yesler Way, #32
Seattle, WA 98122
(541) 968-3417
garreth@oregonstate.edu

encl. Interview questions, consent form
CONSENT FORM

Project Title: The Influence of the Completion Agenda on Decision-making by Community College Career and Technical Education Program Deans

Principal Investigator: Dr. Shelley Dubkin-Lee

Student Researcher: Helen B. Garrett

Version Date: June 14, 2016

1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?
This form contains information you will need to help you decide whether to be in this research study or not. Please read the form carefully and ask the student researcher, Helen B. Garrett, questions about anything that is not clear.

2. WHY IS THIS RESEARCH STUDY BEING DONE?
The purpose of this research study is to provide data for a dissertation for Helen B. Garrett, for completion of an EdD in the Oregon State University College of Education Community College Leadership Program.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain insight and to assess what influence the completion agenda and its stated goals have on decision-making by community college deans; specifically deans overseeing faculty and staff in career and technical education programs.

Up to 50 Washington State technical community college career and technical education deans may be invited to take part in this study. The CTE deans must have served as a CTE dean at their current institution for a minimum of six (6) months and supervise faculty at the time that the consent form is signed.

3. WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
You have been identified by the researcher as a career and technical education dean for a Washington State technical college and are therefore being invited to take part in this study because your role as a CTE dean is the focus for the study. OSU IRB Study # 7468 Expiration Date: 05/31/2021
4. WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?
By participating in this study you facilitate the researcher’s ability to address the purpose of this study. The data collected from your interview will support the writing of the dissertation.
The study activities include an in-person interview at the location of your choosing with the researcher for sixty (60) to ninety (90) minutes. Your identity will be known to the researcher, but your identity and your institution’s identity will be masked in the dissertation study.
Study duration: The interviews will take between sixty (60) and ninety (90) minutes. You may be contacted after the interview to assist with member checking review of your interview.
Recordings: The interview will be recorded and the recording will be accessible and available only to the researcher. The recording will serve as a mechanism for the researcher to record the responses of the interview and to support the writing of the dissertation. You should not enroll if you do not wish to be recorded. The tapes from the study will be protected by the principal investigator.

I agree to be [audio recorded].

I do not agree to be [audio recorded].

Study Results: If you would like, the study results will be made available by the researcher to you as a copy of the dissertation after successful defense.

I would like a copy of the successfully defended dissertation sent to me
I would not like a copy of the successfully defended dissertation sent to me

5. WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND POSSIBLE DISCOMFORTS OF THIS STUDY?
The researcher anticipates that the risks or possible discomfort by participating in this study will be minimal, yet there is a possibility that the identities of the subjects could be revealed. All precautions will be taken to minimize risk by masking the name of the subjects and their institutions and will not be available to anyone, but the researcher.

6. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?
By participating in this project there will be no direct benefits to you, however, you might benefit by reviewing the findings of the study. OSU IRB Study # 7468 Expiration Date: 05/31/2021

7. WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?
You will not be paid for being in this research study.

8. WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?
Your sensitive position as a CTE dean situated between the executive administration and the faculty and staff of your institution creates a need for confidentiality in this study.
To help ensure confidentiality, the researcher will mask your identity and that of your institution when presenting the data and the findings in the dissertation study.
This will be done through a coding system known only to the researcher and the principal investigator. This coding system will be destroyed after successful defense of the dissertation.
The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Federal regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you. There is a chance that we could accidentally disclose information that identifies you.
Only the researcher, to facilitate the completion of the dissertation study, will utilize tape recordings made during the course of the interview. Only the Principal Investigator and the
student researcher will have access to the recordings. If the results of this project are published or presented your identity will not be made public. The researcher intends to use direct quotes from the participants when presenting the study findings. The identity of the participants providing the quotes will be masked.

9. WHAT OTHER CHOICES DO I HAVE IF I DO NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports.

10. WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
If you have any questions about this research project, please contact the Principal Investigator: Dr. Shelley Dubkin-Lee, Shelley.Dubkin-Lee@oregonstate.edu, 541-737-4733. OSU IRB Study # 7468 
Expiration Date: 05/31/2021 If you have questions about your rights or welfare as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu

11. WHAT DOES MY SIGNATURE ON THIS CONSENT FORM MEAN?
Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.
Participant’s Name (printed): ____________________________________________________________
(Signature of Participant) (Date)
________________________________________________________
(Signature of Person Obtaining Consent) (Date)
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions Sent to CTE Deans

Dubkin-Lee, P.I.

Interview Questions
5/24/16

These questions will be asked and only follow up questions to clarify a response will be asked.

Interview Questions

What is the extent of your supervisory responsibility at your institution?

Which career and technical education program faculty and staff are you responsible for managing and hiring?

What is your budgetary responsibility and level of financial decision making related to the faculty and staff in your division?

What internal and external forces influence the decisions you are required to make for the programs you administer?

How would you define the completion agenda?

What would you consider to be a manifestation of the completion agenda at your institution?

What is your familiarity with Washington State’s Student Achievement Initiative (SAI), which is an example of completion agenda implementation?

If you are familiar with the SAI, what impact has it had on the decisions you have made in regards to your division?

What factors inform your decision making as it relates to curriculum offerings?

What factors inform your decision making as it relates to faculty hiring?

Beyond pedagogy, what do you perceive to be any pressures faced by your CTE faculty?

What decisions have you made that may not comply or support the completion agenda?

What conflicts exist between providing immediate career training opportunities for the students in your CTE programs versus meeting the needs of the completion agenda with degree and certificates earned?

How is your decision making influenced by the demands and expectations of business and industry employers in your service area?