AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Debra S.E. Klimes for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education presented on April 29, 2008. Title: Legislators’ Perceptions about Community Colleges’ Use of Alternative Funding Sources to Solve Budget Shortfalls

Abstract approved:__________________________

George H. Copa

The purpose of this study was to discern the nature of legislators’ perceptions about community colleges’ abilities to generate revenues through alternative funding sources and the resultant effects on state allocations to these colleges. Selected community college-related staff members and legislative staff members in Idaho and Oregon were asked to independently name three to five Idaho and Oregon legislators whom they perceived as having the most influence on community college funding. Out of the sixteen legislators who were nominated, eight were selected to participate in the study.

The research identified: (a) important factors that influence legislative decision making which community colleges may affect, and (b) expectations of legislators about community colleges’ abilities to acquire alternative funding and the purposes for seeking alternative funds. The following were specific findings of the study:

Alternative Funding is a Given

The pressure to find alternative funding for community colleges is likely to continue. Seeking alternative funding will be expected in the future by legislators even in good financial times; community college administrators should plan to invest in this process for the long run.

Collegial Relationships Among Legislators

A significant implication for practice from this research was the impact various individual relationships had on legislators. Legislators in the study described how trusting relationships with key people were integral to the input they obtained and considered in
making funding decisions. These relationships included: (a) community college presidents and staff, (b) their colleagues, (c) legislative staff, and (d) agency staff.

**Community Colleges Must Let Legislators Know What They Want and Plan Ahead**

Legislators wanted community colleges to be forthcoming about what their long-term fiscal and legislative needs, and legislators wanted them presented in priority order. Knowing community colleges’ strategic goals and what their long-term plans were for at least five years could help legislators understand the larger fiscal picture and provide a better sense of where the future of community colleges was in their states. In turn, legislators could be watching for funding opportunities for community colleges, inform community colleges about consequences of plans they were making, and help community colleges do better problem-solving as issues occur.

**Educational Systems Need to Unify Toward the Common Goal**

Legislators were looking for funding solutions across the educational system. Legislators noted that they would have more confidence in the validity of the requests made of them if education entities -- K-12, community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities – showed the legislators that they were working together as a unified group. According to one legislator, educational institutions need to “marry” across systems so they’ll “gain political strength.” When systems plan strategically together, legislators are more likely to understand and plan for their needs.

The legislators in this study exhibited similar decision making styles, perceptions of community college funding, and expectations about community colleges’ responsibilities for acquiring alternative funding to make up for funding shortfalls.
Legislators’ Perceptions about Community Colleges’ Use of Alternative Funding Sources to Solve Budget Shortfalls

by
Debra S.E. Klimes

A DISSERTATION

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presented on April 29, 2008

APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Education

Dean of the College of Education

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

__________________________________________
Debra S.E. Klimes, Author
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I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. George Copa for his patience, kindness, and mentorship. He has shown me what a true professional is. I’d also like to thank the members of my committee, who have also shown a great deal of patience and support for me these last few years: Dr. Betty Duvall, Dr. Bill Becker, Dr. Ron Langrell, and Dr. Robert Sahr.

A special thanks goes to members of Cohort 9. They have become some of my dearest friends, and I’ll never forget our joyful times at that magical place called Silver Falls. I learned how to play again.

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Finally, I want to thank the legislators who participated in this study and Oregon State University for providing a full-time professional educator an opportunity to further her education.
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my beautiful sons Nick and Joel,
my parents, Carl and Wanda Engelbrecht,
and my sisters and brothers, Judy, Linda, Bud, and Jerry.
“We recommend that states not view the success of community colleges in competing for grants and contracts as an opportunity to reduce the level of core support. Basic access to quality community college services for all citizens in each state should not be contingent on the community colleges’ success in the marketplace for grants and contracts. Rather, the core support to provide this basic access should be seen as a continuing state responsibility.” (p. 7)

Merisotis & Wolanin (2000)

State legislators now have more impact on higher education funding decisions due to changes taking place in revenue streams nationwide. Local district tax limitation initiatives at the local government level led by voter propositions over the past 20 years (Phillippe & Patton, 2000) have shifted more responsibility for funding community colleges to state appropriations. This shift has also increased the competition for state funding among state programs such as K-12 schools, other colleges and universities, prisons, and health and welfare systems. Deciding how state money is spent sits squarely on the shoulders of legislators. Diminishing state appropriations from a slowing economy nationwide are also having an influence on community colleges; at the same time, colleges are scrambling to meet the needs of growing student enrollments, emerging technology, and employer requests to train a changing workforce.

Along with these many political, social, and economic changes, states are demanding more accountability from higher education. As the economy has declined, institutions of higher education are being more heavily scrutinized, particularly on how their programming contributes to local and state economies. Legislatures, agencies, and other organizations that provide funding to colleges are more interested, now than ever, about whether students are getting jobs or successfully transferring to four-year universities at the end of their college experience. Not only are legislators watching higher education budgets more closely to see what investment benefits result, they are literally making decisions about what line items they are willing to fund, such as the numbers of personnel hired and what programs will be implemented or continued at an institution (Idaho Legislative Services Office Budget, 2002).
To offset downturns in funding, most colleges are generating alternative resources other than the traditional option of increasing tuition and fees. The most common strategies are to:

- increase partnerships through contracts with private industries for training programs and research;
- seek contracts with other state and local agencies to provide services to their clients such as job readiness skills to welfare recipients;
- write proposals to the state and federal governments for grants;
- develop international programs and recruit international students;
- sell college-trademarked products and services;
- develop foundations where funds can be raised by the college and not be counted in the regular general fund category of the institution; and,
- sell properties (e.g., land, buildings) they already own.

Keener, Carrier, and Meaders (2002) report in their study of resource development in 373 community colleges in the United States and Guam, that grants and foundations in 1998-1999 generated over $1.5 billion for the institutions. Of this, nearly $1.2 billion was from grant revenues and over $310 million was from foundation revenues. Grants included federal workforce development grants, Carl Perkins Professional-technical program grants, and grants from federal agencies such as the Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, the Department of Education, the Department of Justice, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Overall, college grant revenues averaged over $4 million per institution. Community colleges, the largest sector of higher education, still only receive about 2 percent of all private financial support (e.g., through foundations and other donations) available (Keener, Carrier, & Meaders, 2002).

A great deal has been written about college funding trends and the results of college involvement in alternative funding strategies. However, there is no information on whether state legislators are now expecting community colleges to depend on these other sources to make up for losses--and whether they are aware of the actual rewards
and costs of their colleges’ involvements with alternative financial approaches. It is important for community college leaders to understand how legislators’ expectations are formed and how their experiences during the decision-making process affect their budget decisions. Having this knowledge and understanding should help colleges better anticipate legislators’ expectations and how to work with them more effectively.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of my study was to discern the nature of legislators’ perceptions about community colleges’ abilities to generate revenues through alternative funding sources and the resultant effects on state allocations to these colleges. Within this study, *perception* is used interchangeably with *belief or conception*. For the purpose of the study, perception is defined as: to apprehend with the mind, through the senses; to achieve understanding; to obtain knowledge and establish a belief based on that knowledge (Berube et al., 1983; O’Connor et al., 2001). In describing the potency that perceptions have over individuals, I refer to Perryman’s (1993) quote of Robert Bolton: “a belief [perception] is not merely an idea that the mind possesses; it is an idea that possesses the mind” (p. 26). *Alternative funding* as defined in this study refers to funding resources that community colleges procure outside the traditional means of funding support through tuition, local property taxes and state allocations. Alternative funding sources within this study specifically refer to three of the seven types of alternative funding strategies outlined above:

1. increasing partnerships through contracts with private industries for training programs and research,
2. seeking contracts with other state and local agencies to provide services to their clients, and
3. writing proposals to the state and federal governments for grants.

Alternative funding resources referred to in this study were used for both operations and capital expenses.
Given the above purpose, the more specific research questions that guided the study were:

1. *How do legislators form their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding?* This question is designed to elicit the ways legislators gain information about community college funding, how they use that information to make state appropriation funding decisions, and whether they consider alternative sources of funding as a regular part of their decision making process.

2. *What are legislators’ perceptions about the availability of alternative funding sources for community colleges?* This question explores legislators’ perceptions and expectations about community colleges’ roles and responsibilities in this regard. Determining whether legislators view alternative funding as a help or a hindrance to the overall operation of community colleges could influence their expectations about whether community colleges should seek alternative funding to replace lost state revenues.

3. *What are legislators’ perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges?* This question explores how legislators make decisions regarding funding, and what influences are at work as they make those decisions. The influences on their decision making may have an impact on their expectations about community colleges’ abilities to gain alternative funding.

4. *What is the relationship of legislators’ perceptions of alternative funding sources and their funding decisions (i.e., allocation of state resources) regarding community colleges?* This question explores whether legislators view alternative funding as a viable, ongoing, and stable resource to support community colleges into the future; and, therefore, an expected part of local community college budget planning process. This question also attempts to determine whether legislators consider their knowledge of and information about alternative funding sources when determining overall state allocations to community colleges.
My goals in exploring these questions were threefold: (a) to find out if legislators’ knowledge about alternative sources was considered by them, and if so, whether that knowledge influenced their community college funding decisions, (b) to provide information to community college administrators which would assist them in more effectively presenting their funding needs to legislators, and (c) to assist community college administrators to more strategically plan future budgets.

Personal Interest

“We will have to go after grants and contracts in order to make up the differences in our budget cuts.”

(President Gerald Meyerhoeffer at College of Southern Idaho State of the College Address, January 2002)

My interest in legislators’ perceptions of community college funding arose during the past several years of my participation in budget planning at the community college where I am employed and watching the budget process at the state level through my legislative internship with the Idaho Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee. I was fascinated with how those two activities coalesced. In addition, I was curious whether what I saw as a factor that no one talked about was being considered: alternative funding and the role it played in the local and state budget planning processes. Following is a more in-depth explanation of my interests surrounding this study.

My Local Budget Planning Experience

Frequently, program directors and department chairs in community colleges like myself, are being asked to seek alternative funding to augment the funding colleges already have. College administrators are seeking more funding to accommodate increases in enrollment. For example at the College of Southern Idaho where I work, full-time equivalent enrollments increased 21 percent between fiscal years 1998 through 2002 (College of Southern Idaho, 2002), yet overall Idaho yearly tax revenues did not rise in
comparison during that same time period—an average of approximately -7.8 percent (Idaho Division of Financial Management, 2007, p. 25).

Starting in August 2001, as Idaho began seeing even more significant decreases in tax revenues, the legislature implemented permanent tax cuts. These actions could not have come at a worse time. A national recession and events on September 11 contributed to the continuing downturns in state revenue. By December 2001, the state experienced an estimated minus 8.1 percent in revenues (Idaho Legislative Services Office Budget, 2002). In September 2001, Governor Dirk Kempthorne imposed a 2 percent holdback on state spending after Idaho’s community colleges received one of their largest increases in a decade (11 percent). Regular increases throughout the 1990's allowed the college to implement new programs and hire many additional employees. While a 2 percent holdback seemed small, it was an indication of leaner times to come. Another 1 percent holdback was instituted in December 2001 (Legislative Services Office Budget and Policy Analysis, 2002), causing college administrators great concern.

The fall 2001 holdbacks proved to be only token holdbacks. During the 2002 annual legislative session that convened in January 2002, Idaho community college funding took another 10.2 percent cut from the sum requested for FY 2003 (Legislative Services Office Budget and Policy Analysis, 2002, p. 24). Some proposed a solution to the problem: postpone the pending tax cuts legislated during the 2001 fiscal year. After heated debate in both the House and Senate, the legislature refused to postpone the tax cuts, maintaining their promise to Idahoans to reduce their taxes and balance the state budget (Idaho State Legislative Services Office Budget, 2002).

Although funding has stabilized somewhat since 2002, losses still have not been recovered, resulting in a net loss through 2006. After experiencing previous shortfalls, college administrators are still leery about depending on state and local tax revenues to be major sources of base funding for their ongoing increasing overhead costs.

These combined factors had a direct impact on programs for which I had administrative responsibility. For 10 years, the programs for which I was responsible sought and received yearly up to $400,000 in grants and contracts, commonly referred to as soft funding. Year by year, as my grant and contract revenues increased, my general
fund, or appropriated revenues (*hard* funding), were shifted away from the programs for which I was responsible and into new areas of priority within the institution and possibly narrowing the focus of my programs.

With the statewide cutbacks, the college arrived at a crossroads—whether to cut programs college-wide or come up with other solutions. Among the strategies being used to stretch limited budgets was to ask for the grant and contract revenues I brought to the institution to be used in other college areas. Another strategy used by my college was to seek more partnerships with business and industry to supplement tools and equipment inventories needed for use in technical programs—the most expensive programs in the college.

**My Experience with Building Industry Partnerships**

While moving grant funds to where the need is greatest and building new partnerships are legitimate solutions to a growing funding problem, one concern is that the day-to-day operations or maintenance of operations (M&O) are becoming more reliant on these alternative sources. Unfortunately, alternative sources may ebb and flow or dry up altogether, depending on the national and international business economy or on changes in federal priorities for funding.

In carrying out my responsibilities to fund programs, I sought partnerships with business and industry. I met frequently with specific industries to set up training for their incumbent employees and for students who would become a steady supply of future technicians for their companies. One company in particular who needed future technicians desired that the college would not only provide the training, but also market their product by having students wear their uniforms, by painting classrooms according to their business color code, and by posting banners and posters advertising their contributions to the program. In exchange, they would give the college curriculum, some equipment, free professional development (travel costs would be ours), and provide gifts at graduation for students who successfully completed their curriculum and for the students’ mentors.
Several complications emerged: how to deliver their curriculum the way they want it delivered, how to manage the program to meet their standards, how to schedule industry monitoring of the program to assure standards were being met, and whether the industry partner would keep their word regarding donations to ensure that the program would be able to maintain their industry standards and meet student needs. Another complication that industry had not anticipated was how they would adjust their needs to current college systems and school calendar. A question for me when entering this partnership was whether the industry’s mission and philosophy would align with or override the mission and philosophy (which includes academic freedom) of the college and meld into a viable program for both parties. On occasion, there were differences, but compromises were made.

My Legislative Internship Experience

My interest in finding out about legislators’ decision-making processes emerged during my internship at the Idaho Legislature with the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee (JFAC) in 2002. JFAC consists of 20 Representatives and 20 Senators who review all appropriations requests from state programs and is probably the most powerful committee at the legislature. They approve or disapprove budgets before they are brought before the House and Senate for final approval and signed by the governor. JFAC often has more power than the governor, since they can influence their colleagues to vote yea or nay on any given budget item, thus overriding the governor’s recommendation.

Having observed the process and listened to some of the discussions that took place at the statehouse during the 2002 session, I realized that legislators often only have information given to them by lobbyists, and through emotional, not necessarily factual, communiqués from around the state and nation. Decisions may be based on hearsay and limited perspectives, not facts. I wanted to know more about this process, exactly what types of information legislators do receive about funding, and what specific criterion they use for making their decisions regarding community college funding.
A Decision on the Dissertation Focus

The result of this combination of experiences led me to wonder about and focus on the “alternative funding” factor in community college budgets that no one seemed to discuss or even consider as having an impact on community colleges. I wanted to find out whether legislators expected community colleges to seek and obtain these “outside” resources to augment their budgets, and whether they were aware of the effects on the college of relying on outside funding. I wanted to know how they formed their perceptions and how their perceptions affected their decision-making processes.

I reviewed the literature hoping to find specific answers to my questions, but to no avail. What I found instead, was only contextual information from which I made assumptions about how legislators’ perceptions were formed, what their opinions about alternative funding were, and the impact those perceptions had on community college funding. I wanted more specific and reliable information that I thought could help me and other community college colleagues to more effectively work with legislators regarding our funding issues. Thus, the foundation for my study.

Significance of the Study

Community colleges today have moved beyond simply offering the first two years of a four-year degree. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), over 1,200 community colleges serve more than 11.6 million individuals each year from every socio-economic level and from nearly every demographic group (AACC, 2008). They now play significant roles in the educational, social, and economic development of their communities, the nation, and the world. They also play a significant role in influencing legislatures concerning higher education funding. Community colleges’ increasingly important role in the fabric of society necessitates that their funding be stable and sustainable.

It is more important now than ever before for community college administrators to understand the influences on legislators, the pressures legislators endure to fund competing critical needs, and the expectations legislators now have about community colleges’ responsibilities for their own funding. The significance of my study centers on
the following five realities faced by community colleges as regards funding: (a) tax reforms have shifted community college funding away from local funding, (b) state tax revenues do not necessarily provide stability in funding, (c) competition for funding with other state agencies has increased, (d) there is now more reliance on alternative funding resources, and (e) changes in community college missions may result.

**Tax Reforms Have Shifted Community College Funding Away from Local Funding**

As a result of tax reform measures, such as initiatives and referenda to limit personal income and local property taxes, community colleges are now relying more on state and alternative funding sources than in the past. Shifts toward state funding mean more legislative involvement in the day to day operations of community colleges (Idaho Legislative Services Office Budget, 2002). Nationwide, community college reliance on government grants and contracts for training and research and private gifts from individuals and corporations grew from 2 percent in 1980 to 20 percent in 1996 (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000, p. 1). At the same time, state and local appropriations fell and tuition and fees have increased (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000). Such shifts have a pervasive effect on day-to-day community college operations in that college administrators and their budget planning teams must focus on a number of additional ways to attain the funding they need, as well as put into operation additional ways to manage the funds that come to their campuses. Quash Coats (2002) reported that community college presidents in particular now must attend to numerous and varied “stakeholders” such as faculty, staff and students, legislators, business leaders, and trustees (pp. 2-3). She also reported that they are now called upon to work more closely than ever with legislators to develop budgets and statewide policies.

Since there is now less local control of funding for many community colleges, it is even more important that college administrators are visible and are actively involved with legislators to effectively assist them in their community college budget decision-making process.
State Tax Revenues Do Not Necessarily Provide Stability in Funding

Even though funding responsibilities have shifted to the state level, state tax revenues decreased as a result of changes in the state, national, and international economies. As a result, colleges are redoubling their efforts at seeking and incorporating alternative funds to help stabilize and meet their operational needs. Legislative budget decision-makers need to know what efforts colleges are making to stabilize their funding in order to make more informed decisions about community college appropriations.

Competition for Funding with Other State Agencies Has Increased

In the late 1970’s, taxpayers nationwide revolted against high personal income and property taxes, and at least half of the states enacted significant tax cuts. As a result, funding responsibility for community colleges moved to the state level and placed community colleges into a position of increased direct competition for funding with other programs in the state, such as K-12 schools, social service agencies, correctional institutions, and other colleges and universities. The economic downturns of the late 1990’s and early 2000’s also took their toll on state revenues, further squeezing allocations given to state programs and further increasing the competition for state funds for community colleges. All of these changes placed a greater responsibility for prioritizing distribution of state revenues among agencies directly onto legislators (Hovey, 1999).

There is Now More Reliance on Alternative Funding Resources

In 1980, community colleges received, on average, 70 percent of their funding from state and local resources, falling to 50 percent in 1996 (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000). To compensate for downward economic trends and fewer state revenues -- and thus appropriations, community colleges are now more dependent on alternative funding sources to supplement their maintenance of operation. Within the last 20 years, up to 20 percent of community college budgets nationwide were made up of funding from foundations and federal grants and private workforce training partnerships and contracts (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000; AACC, 2001; Phillipe & Patton, 2000). The shift toward
alternative funding sources necessitates colleges to operate differently, which may affect community college missions and infrastructure (Bailey, 2002).

**Changes in Community College Missions May Result**

More reliance on alternative funding may mean changes in the mission of community colleges. According to Bailey (2002), there is concern about whether community colleges’ reliance on outside funding, and thus an expansion or alteration of their missions, has created shifts in their programming, a move toward a cafeteria- or general-store style of offerings (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000). A concern is that community colleges are shifting away from what they have traditionally done:

...community colleges have responded to the challenges that they face by building out and by seeking new markets and functions, more than by focusing on the more intensive efforts to improve what they are already doing. The result is that most community colleges are now institutions with multiple missions directed at addressing the needs and interests of a wide variety of constituencies. (Bailey, 2002, p. 68)

Many viewpoints about mission expansion, some contradicting others, have emerged. Some are concerned about an increased “vocationalism” (Bailey, 2002, p. 68), discouraging students from transfer. Others say mission expansion detracts from “vocational education” (Bailey, 2002, p. 69). Expanding the mission of community colleges to generate revenues and increase “political clout” is a concern for those who say that “community colleges simply cannot do everything well, and must choose a more limited set of objectives on which to focus. ...can any college perform all of those functions with excellence—or even adequately in today’s climate of scarce resources and heavy competition for students?” (Bailey, 2002, p. 69).

Finding a balance between expanding the breadth and depth of programming, and at the same time attend to the political nature of budgeting and program offerings create ongoing challenges to college administrators.

**Summary**

As community colleges become more reliant on legislative decisions and alternative sources of revenue to make up for predicted ongoing funding shortfalls, it is
up to colleges to keep legislators informed about the impact of legislative decisions in a more personal way.

Community college administrators need to know what factors influence whether their colleges receive increased or decreased appropriated funding from the state. The purpose of this study was to help administrators by finding out what are legislators’ perceptions about community colleges’ abilities to generate revenues through alternative funding sources and the resultant effects on state allocations to these colleges. As previously outlined, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do legislators form their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding?
2. What are legislators’ perceptions about the availability of alternative funding sources for community colleges?
3. What are legislators’ perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges?
4. What is the relationship of legislators’ perceptions of alternative funding sources and their funding decisions (i.e., allocation of state resources) regarding community colleges?

Understanding how legislators’ perceptions, and thus expectations are formed and how those perceptions affect their budget decisions are important for community college administrators to know. With that knowledge they may be able to better anticipate those expectations and work more effectively with legislators. It is hoped that the information gathered through in-depth dialogues with selected legislators will be helpful for college presidents, boards of trustees, and college planning teams in working with and informing their legislators about community college funding issues.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

―…(Community college are) the most energetically committed continuing education institution in the country. Community colleges educate America as no other institution is inclined to do; and they educate for the next century, not the last.‖


The purpose of the literature review is to substantiate what is already known about the purpose and research questions for this study and to guide the study design. The central question guiding the literature review is: What does current literature indicate about the factors that affect legislators' budget decision making process?

To begin the literature review, I followed Tuckman’s “The Literature Review Process in Schematic” (1999). The first activity was to “identify relevant descriptors and key words” that related to my research questions (p. 69). Descriptors for which I searched were: legislator perceptions, alternative funding for colleges, higher education funding trends, legislator and college relationships, alternative funding of colleges and universities, and community college funding trends. From those descriptors came articles that led me to other descriptors such as political cultures, community college presidents, and legislator influence on higher education funding. Out of these came articles and information from journals, newspapers, dissertations, dissertation proposals, correspondence, books, speeches, brochures, news magazines, websites, and archived legislative information. From these sources, I chose only those articles and information that were most germane to my study. These provided a backdrop for how legislators gain information from which they make decisions, a look at trends in funding higher education, and opinions about and information on successes and failures related to community college ventures utilizing alternative funding sources.

However, I discovered a major gap in the literature: very little has been written about legislators’ perceptions and funding decisions for community colleges; I found only two research studies which were somewhat related to these two areas and a third that was more of a broad-based look at how political opinions are developed.
The first study explored how legislators’ perceptions about community college funding are affected by community college presidents. It did not focus on other ways legislators’ perceptions could be influence, nor did it give perspectives from the legislators themselves. The second study looked at how legislators’ demographics influenced their perceptions, but the study was geared toward their perceptions about overall funding of “higher education” (which included four-year colleges and universities) and not specific to community colleges.

The third study focused on the influence state political cultures have on political decision-making, and thus the perspectives legislators bring with them when making such decisions. Again, however, there was no information related to how legislators make funding decisions regarding community colleges.

Though sources specific to my research focus were lacking, the sources I did find provided a context for community college funding trends and possible influences on legislative perceptions. A goal of this study was to coalesce the broad information currently known about legislators’ perceptions and decision-making processes with legislators’ first-hand perceptions as expressed within their interviews in this study.

The literature review is organized into the following relevant topical areas which overlap among some research questions:

1. **Influential relationships and factors**—delves into the literature related to Research Question 1, “How do legislators form their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding?”, Research Question 3, “What are legislators’ perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges?”, and Research Question 4, “What is the relationship of legislators’ perceptions of alternative funding sources and their funding decisions regarding community colleges?” The section provides an overview of what and how relationships between college presidents, legislator backgrounds, and political cultures influence legislative funding decisions and college systems.

2. **Higher education funding trends**—explores the literature related to Research Question 2, “What are legislators’ perceptions about the availability of alternative funding sources for community colleges?” and Research Question 3, “What
are legislators’ perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges?" This portion of the review places national and state community college funding issues and trends within an historical and political context from which legislators make their decisions.

3. Alternative funding modes in community colleges—relates to research Question 4, “What is the relationship of legislators’ perceptions of alternative funding sources and their funding decisions regarding community colleges?” This topical area describes the strategies colleges have used to generate alternative funds, and the political nature of partnerships between colleges and alternative sources of funding.

Influential Relationships and Factors

In this section, I studied how personal and professional relationships, state history, and system processes are influential in how higher education is viewed by legislators. I found that relationships between college presidents and legislators, the backgrounds of legislators, and the relationships of legislators to their state’s history and systems have influence on their perspectives of higher education, and perhaps, their funding decisions.

The following section is divided into three areas: (a) College President Influence describes the how community college presidents influence legislators; (b) Legislator Characteristics describes how legislators’ backgrounds and experience with higher education influence their decision-making regarding higher education funding; and (c) State Political Cultures gives an account of how legislative decision making is influenced by the history of a state and the political cultures that developed as a result of that history.

College President Influence

College presidents have direct influence on legislators’ perceptions about community colleges and the funding decisions that may result, according to Quash Coats (2002). In her dissertation, The Essence of Influence: Community College Presidents’ Experiences with Washington State Legislators (2002), Quash Coats describes how community college
presidents must shape legislators’ perceptions in order to gain the funding needed by their institutions.

One aspect of the job, which contributes to its uniqueness, is the demand various stakeholders and constituent groups place on the college presidents’ time, energy, and attention. No other job in community college administration has such a diversity of constituents to serve. Both internal (faculty, staff, and students) and external constituents (legislators, business leaders, and trustees) have interests in the well-being of the college and hold community college presidents accountable for college operations… College presidents are faced with pressures from within the academic community and from state legislatures… Pressures exerted by external constituents consume[s] an increasing share of community college presidents’ time and attention. Their time is spent less on the day-to-day campus operations and more on issues and concerns beyond the campus community. (pp. 2-3)

The behaviors of presidents directly affect their institutions’ effectiveness. Presidents are called upon to work closely with legislators to develop budgets and policy that affect community colleges statewide. What one president does can affect, in essence, the perceptions of legislators about the entire community college system in a state. “Legislators have the power to influence the very existence of colleges” (Quash Coats, 2002, p. 8).

The focus of Quash Coats’s study was to gain insight into what “strategies and tactics [are] used by community and technical college presidents to influence state legislators” (p. 27). She utilized multiple techniques to perform her research: interviews with presidents regarding what they saw as strategies and tactics they used, observations of presidents as they worked with legislators, member checking with the presidents to clarify her interpretation of her gathered data, and document analysis in which she reviewed official documents for supportive data to the interviews.

According to Quash Coats’s study, the relationships presidents and legislators develop has influence on legislators and their perceptions of community colleges. Quash Coats’s study relates to my study by helping to provide information on how legislators’ perceptions may be influenced in regards to alternative sources for community college funding. However, Quash Coats’s study was not based from the perspective I was seeking—the legislator’s perspective. Her study’s viewpoint came from the presidents’ and
staff perspectives, and from resultant legislative action rather than from the legislators’ perspectives. I wanted to know how legislators themselves felt they were influenced, and how they developed their perceptions.

**Legislator Characteristics**

The only comprehensive research study of legislator perceptions of higher education funding I found was a survey conducted by Bruce Perryman in 1993. Among the findings was that characteristics of legislators and their experiences with higher education have an influence on their perceptions of colleges and universities. Perryman conducted a study of 100 state legislators in Colorado, regarding their perceptions of higher education funding, fifty-seven of whom returned usable surveys. He surveyed the group to gather data, such as demographics to form profiles of the group and whether they felt positively or negatively about higher education. He found that there was a relationship between legislators’ characteristics and the amount of legislative experience legislators had with higher education and their perceptions of higher education. The more personal experience and legislative experience legislators had having to do with higher education, the more positive their perceptions toward higher education. The following are some factors that Perryman (1993) found to have influence on legislators’ perceptions of higher education (pp. 220-227):

1. Legislators from more urban areas had a higher regard for higher education. Perryman believes that since most urban legislators had more experience in the state legislature, their levels of exposure to and personal and professional experiences with higher education may have been a “contributing factor” (p. iv).

2. Legislators’ longevity within the legislature tended to influence how positively or negatively their perceptions were toward higher education. The older and more experienced they were, the more positive their perceptions were; younger and less experienced legislators had less positive perceptions about higher education.
3. Legislators’ length of service, age, educational levels, and years of residence in their legislative districts had more influence on how positive their perceptions were of higher education and their view on funding of higher education, than on their funding decisions regarding higher education versus other state funding.

4. When asked their opinions regarding funding issues, legislators reported that tuition should be lower for community college students and that different funding strategies should be used to fund community colleges than those for four-year schools.

Perryman conducted a quantitative study. He looked for correlations between legislators’ demographics, in-office tenure, and self-reported knowledge about higher education of legislators with their perceptions of higher education. Their positive and negative perceptions about higher education policy were reported on a thirty-five item Likert scale. No interviews were performed to delve into why they felt the way they did or what processes took place for them to form their perceptions. Perryman realized the limitations in his study. He stated in his study’s conclusions, “The measures used to investigate perception in this study were not of a definitive nature; rather they yielded gross data which indicate the directions future research should follow” (p. 214).

Although Perryman’s study was limited regarding information on community college funding policy perceptions, it relates to my study by providing information on additional possible influences on legislators’ perceptions. More in-depth research conducted through personal interviews and observations on why legislators answered the way they did may more fully illuminate the multifaceted ways in which they are influenced as well as contributed to knowledge on legislators’ expectations of colleges.

State Political Cultures

The review of the literature on state political cultures disclosed that how states function historically also has an effect on how higher education is viewed, how it is funded, and how it is used. Layzell and Lyndon (1990) report that:
Values and preferences are at the heart of all state budget processes. Participants in a state’s budget process bring with them the values and policy preferences of their constituencies—state agencies, interest groups, and of course, private citizens—which are both conflicting and complementary, narrowly defined and wide ranging. In short, the spectrum of values and policy references represented in the state budget process mirrors that within the state’s citizenry.

...The current values and preferences in any state’s culture about areas of public policy, such as higher education, have not been generated within a vacuum. They are rather the result of deeply held historical traditions passed from generation to generation, which could be either beliefs or practices...these traditions may be nebulous, as in the case of myths and sagas (for example, the ongoing attempt by some to maintain Virginia military institute as an all-male institution)...these traditions frame the state’s higher education policy, budget process, and act as behavioral regulations for the participants...(p. 25)

Layzell and Lyddon (1990) go on to say that one dimension of these historical traditions is related to values that go beyond an individual’s philosophical value but is part of a “collective value historically accorded to education by the residents of the state and patterns of public spending for education...tend to be affected by a state’s historical traditions...” (p. 25).

Three very distinct viewpoints toward higher education emerged within Gittell and Kleiman’s (2000) study of California, Texas, and North Carolina higher education systems. Each viewpoint related directly to the context of each state’s history and specific cultures developed as a result. Gittel and Kleiman’s study provided me with a background on philosophical foundations from which political viewpoints are formed and an understanding for how legislators develop their political viewpoints from which they make their decisions.

California has developed a system from its more “populist” (p. 3) culture; a system of open access and “direct democracy” (p. 3) by the voters. Since 1911, the state constitutionally granted powers to voters to generate initiatives, referenda, and recall to shape their government and state goals. The will of the voters is reflected in the state’s Master Plan for higher education, promising access and affordability to all residents.

Texas, following its more “individualistic” (Gittell & Kleiman, 2000, p. 2) culture, has set up a system that is highly decentralized. It has 105 public colleges in six separate
systems, four freestanding universities and 50 college districts all with their own boards of regents and governing structures. All schools answer to locally elected officials who “view the individual colleges as public pork for their districts” (p. 3). There is a university in every state senatorial district, and where an institution or system does not exist, state legislators will often “fight vociferously to establish one” (p. 3).

North Carolina’s system was found to be a “progressive plutocracy” (p. 2) (ruled by the wealthy), with a combination of “modernist and traditionalist political leanings” (p. 2). Although both groups are pro-business, the differences in political leanings are distinct: “modernists” advocate for “highly skilled economic sectors of high technology and finance in the state’s urban regions, and a practice of racial tolerance.” “Traditionalists” (p. 2) defend the traditional economic sectors of manufacturing and rural county agriculture and harbor deep suspicions of racial integration” (pp. 2-3). Classic examples of plutocracy are former Governor James Hunt’s modernist promotion of microelectronics and “heavy investments in higher education” (p. 3), and traditionalist Senator Jesse Helms’ defense of “the entrenched tobacco industry and reactionary race politics” (p. 3).

The higher education system too, reflects the progressive plutocracy through its “highly segmented and elite system” (p. 3). The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is educational home to most of the emergent political and business leaders in the state—from the “old well network” (p. 3). Graduates from the 1930’s through the 1950’s have formed an ongoing power network that has infiltrated not only business, but also government. To maintain this stature and influence, there was little interest in making education more accessible to others in the state. As a result, North Carolina continues to experience “underfunded public schools, poor quality at traditionally Black colleges and nonflagship institutions, and a community college system that is focused almost exclusively on private sector interests” (p. 3).

Gittel and Kleiman’s study pointed out the influence of politics on higher education systems. Their conclusion is that “state politics always proved to have a significant impact on major [higher education] policy decisions” (p. 1). Politics and poor communication among higher education systems within a state can put institutions at risk
of having policies and decisions thrust upon them by politicians; thus, the importance of
institutions working more closely with their “constituencies of students, alumni,
taxpayers, and K-12 schools to build a successful coalition and political argument for
continued funding and public support” (p. 20).

Gittel and Klieman’s study was the only other study I found regarding a
connection between political perceptions and funding of colleges. While the study
provided information about political influences on funding of higher education overall,
the study did not provide information as to how or why legislators make their decisions
in general nor their decisions specifically about community college funding. As are most
of the studies I reviewed, this one concentrated on higher education, under which
community colleges were subsumed. I wanted to know more about the influences
political culture had on Oregon and Idaho legislators, and how those cultures influenced
their decision-making regarding community college funding.

Frequency of Legislative Sessions and Term Limits

The literature revealed that how frequently a legislature meets and length of
legislative terms can also affect college funding matters. Layzell and Lyddon (1990) say
that “The timing of the budget process presents numerous issues…” Most states have
shifted from biennial sessions to annual sessions and “legislatures meet with greater
frequency, economic conditions are shifting rapidly, and demands for state dollars have
increased in numbers and intensity” (p. v). Even those states whose legislatures have
“biennial budgets meet midterm to make alterations” (p. v).

Long-term planning by higher education has had to change to meet short-term
planning needs of legislatures, but not without conflicts along the way. Legislatures’
needs for quick planning and problem-solving do not align with higher education’s
tradition of having a longer timeframe for meeting objectives. “Tensions arise when
politicians want quick solutions to problems that require long-term commitments” (p. v).
Furthermore, in biennial legislative sessions, states must live with the budgets planned for
two years with little or no elasticity should the economy change. States that have annual
sessions and those that have full-time legislators are able to more rapidly respond to issues as they emerge (Hovey, 1999; Layzell & Lyddon, 1990; Melton, 2001).

Term limits also complicated and added to the budget planning process. States functioning under term limits discovered that when legislators were just beginning to work effectively through budget concerns, would-be successful legislators had to leave office. Biennial legislative sessions and term limits were associated with complications that curb short and long-term problem solving (Hovey, 1999; Layzell & Lyddon, 1990; Melton, 2001).

Summary

Education funding relies on the perceptions and viewpoints held by those who make funding decisions. Decision-makers are influenced by relationships they form, the backgrounds they hold, the political cultures from which they come, and the length of their legislative sessions and their terms in office. College presidents must have tremendous influence on legislators’ perceptions in order to gain the funding needed by their institutions. Presidents’ behaviors directly affect their institutions’ effectiveness because they are called upon to work closely with legislators to develop budgets and policy that affect constituents statewide. What one president does can affect an entire state.

Personal characteristics of legislators and their experiences with higher education were found to have an effect on legislators’ funding decisions. Characteristics such as age, residence, educational levels, and years of legislative experience influence how positively legislators perceive higher education, and thus, their funding considerations.

State political cultures were found to have a direct impact on higher education funding. Some research showed that a statewide philosophy toward education, social service, and business determined the approaches some legislators took toward higher education funding. Frequency of legislative sessions and term limits were also thought to have had an effect on how community college funding concerns were handled at the state level.
The influential relationships and factors reviewed in the literature provided me with some foundation for researching and observing legislative relationships and political cultures. In my research, I endeavored to further explore what influence community college presidents have had in working with legislators in Oregon and Idaho and what personal experiences and characteristics Oregon and Idaho legislators may have had that affect their community college funding decisions. I also wanted to get a sense of the states’ historical contexts—how this context affected the states’ political cultures and how those cultures may influence legislators’ community college funding decisions. This background information put into context for me the data I collected through my observations, personal experiences, and interviews with state legislators.

**Higher Education Funding Trends**

The review of literature revealed that changes are taking place in revenue streams at public community colleges nationwide. These institutions, traditionally reliant on federal, state, and local district appropriations, have scrambled to meet the needs of growing student enrollments, changing technology, and employer requests to train a changing workforce—while at the same time, coping with diminishing revenues because of tax cuts over the past 20 years (AACC, 2001; Burnett, 2001; Burstein, 1996; Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Hovey, 1999; Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000; Phillippe & Patton, 2000). The review of the literature centered on the development of community college funding issues nationwide, and on changes in appropriations from federal, state, and local taxes, and responses to the changes. The implications of the shift from federal, state, and local funding of community colleges to that of alternative funding through partnerships with business/industry and other organizations were also reviewed.

Literature from higher education professional organizations showed that higher education has been funded through a variety of sources, but state budgets typically bear the principle responsibility (ERIC, 1990; Layzell & Lyddon, 1990) and were projected to continue to bear the greatest increases from now on, as compared to other sources. According to the projections reported by AACC in 2001 (2006), tuition increases were expected to be the next highest source for revenues and local governments the third
highest expected resource for funding. In FY 1996-97, state governments bore the main responsibility for higher education funding, at nearly 37 percent and were expected to increase to 42 percent by FY 2000-01. Student tuition was expected to take more of the funding responsibility in the future--up from 19 percent in FY 1996-1997 to 23 percent in FY 2000-01. It was expected that the federal government would play a smaller role in the future, while local governments were expected to pick up more of the costs for public degree granting institutions in FY 2000-01. Table 1 describes how public degree-granting institutions were funded nationwide in 1996-97 (National Center for Education Statistics, [NCES], 2000) and estimates for FY 2000-2001 (AACC, 2001).

Table 1


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Funds</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
<th>Projections for FY 2000-01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Governments</td>
<td>$46,280,000,000.00</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition</td>
<td>$24,700,000,000.00</td>
<td>19.02%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and Services</td>
<td>$28,860,000,000.00</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Government</td>
<td>$14,300,000,000.00</td>
<td>11.01%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Sources</td>
<td>$5,590,000,000.00</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Governments</td>
<td>$5,070,000,000.00</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>$4,290,000,000.00</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endowment Income</td>
<td>$780,000,000.00</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$129,870,000,000.00</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout the 60’s, 70’s, 80’s and the latter part of the 90’s, higher education did “disproportionately well in times of good state budgets” (Hovey, 1999, p. iv). Higher education overall from 1985-2001 enjoyed spending increases of 167 percent, while federal appropriations during the same period of time increased by only 77 percent (current dollars) (NCES, 2000b). At the same time, enrollments were declining (NCES, 2000b). In fact, some community colleges were charging little or no tuition (Phillippe & Patton, 2000). According to Phillippe and Patton, historically, “where state funding is high, tuition is low” (p. 104). Even as budgets decreased and state revenues dwindled,
community colleges continued to be a great bargain for taxpayers and students; average tuition and fees were half the cost of public four-year colleges and one-tenth the cost of private four-year colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Hovey, 1999; Phillippe & Patton, 2000; NCES, 2000; NCES, 2000c).

In summary, community colleges have traditionally been reliant on federal, state, and local funding. During certain periods of time during the ‘60s, 70s, and 90s, many colleges actually had abundant funding because of low enrollments and strong state revenues. Some colleges did so well that they charged little or no tuition. Unless there is a complete change in how colleges and universities are funded, primary funding will continue to come from state budgets, and secondary and tertiary funding will continue to come from local governments and increases in tuition. Yet, dwindling revenues from those sources and increasing enrollments have caused and will continue to force community colleges to look elsewhere to augment their funding. The following sections further describe the causes for and results from these shifts.

Tax Revolts

By the late 1970’s, higher education enrollments (including community colleges) began to decline, and, at the same time, taxpayers nationwide started to revolt against high personal income and property taxes. From 1996 through 1998 record reductions in tax burdens were accomplished through “propositions” that demanded tax relief (MacNeil, 2000); Phillippe & Patton, 2000). At least half of the states enacted significant tax cuts, but were unaccompanied by budget cuts because of the increased enrollment revenues and a strong overall taxable economy. This period of events proved to be a boon to state elected officials running for office, as they were able to campaign for reelection on the basis of sponsorship of highly visible tax cuts, yet were not required to cut spending (Hovey, 1999).

The revolts at the local level had systemic consequences for community college funding; the responsibility of community college funding was pushed to the state level and in direct competition with other state-funded programs such as K-12 schools and
welfare programs. These actions also placed a greater responsibility for community college funding allocations onto legislative decision makers (Hovey, 1999).

To summarize, during the mid-to-late 90’s, taxpayers nationwide rose up against high personal income and property taxes by passing propositions and referenda to limit or reduce such taxes. As a result, community colleges suffered consequences—a sudden downturn in local financial support. Thus, more responsibility for funding shifted to state legislatures to fund the colleges—and in direct competition with other state-funded programs. The shift in funding to the state level places more responsibilities on community colleges to communicate clearly with state legislators about their funding needs.

Public Perceptions

Public perceptions of higher education have changed through the years. The public was becoming “increasingly distrustful of” higher education—what they perceived as a “sacred cow” (Perryman, 1993, pp. 69-70). According to Perryman (1992), many citizens were dissatisfied with the performance of state universities, and that students, particularly at the undergraduate level, have been sacrificed so that administrators and professors can meet their own priorities of graduate education and research. In studying funding approaches legislatures have used for dealing with fiscal deficits and at the same time attempting to avoid tax increases, Hovey (1999) and MacNeil (2000) predicted that projected shortfalls would lead to increased scrutiny of higher education—and to curtailed spending.

Public university administrative budgets increased nearly three times the amount that instructional budgets did during the early 1980’s, and critics decried the lack of initiative schools have taken to “eliminate or reduce low-quality or duplicative programs” and that they have not moved to prioritize budgets “despite shrinking resources” (Perryman, 1993, p. 70). Unfortunately, community colleges were affected by perceptions of higher education overall.

According to Gordon C. Winston, a professor of economics at Williams College and a member of the Williams Project on the Economics of Higher Education in 1992
(quoted in Perryman’s 1993 study) “There’s a lot of hostility out there toward U.S. higher education” (p. 78). While most hostility is focused on major research universities, some of it surrounds other concerns such as “opulent college building programs,” the drive toward “institutional excellence” which brings star faculty salaries into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, “the promotion of a blatantly professional athletic-entertainment industry under the fig leaf of scholar athletics,” and the “attendant self-promotion, big money scandals, and corruption” (Perryman, 1993, p. 79).

Managing public perceptions, and thus the perceptions of legislators, is an important responsibility of community college leaders. Overcoming negative stereotypes about higher education and adequately communicating what community colleges do are important factors in helping legislators make informed decisions about community college funding.

The Results of Tax Cuts

Permanent tax cuts during the recent past may have more severely affected higher education than other public services. Where states have supplied increased higher education funding in recent years, these cuts may have made it more difficult to maintain essential, core services for the future. Abrupt slowdowns in the growth of tax collections because of economic downturns, without a proportional slowdown in the growth of spending needs have created severe pressures on state budgets.

Hovey (1999) points out that elected officials assumed that the future would be like the good times of the immediate past. At the time of this study, states were experiencing a recession like one that occurred in the early 1990’s. Economic growth was slower than normal, and taxes were reduced. Enrollments nationally continued to increase: since 1985, community college enrollments grew by 34 percent (compared to all public institutions at 26 percent) according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2000). These “labor-intensive enterprises” (Phillippe & Patton, 2000; Hovey, 1999) required ongoing salary and benefits increases. Costs of updating technologies on campuses also stretched budgets to the breaking point (Cohen, 1995, Cohen, 1998;
Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Hovey, 1999; Phillippe & Patton, 2000; National Association of State Budget Officers [NASBO], 2000).

State spending outside of higher education continued to increase as well. “Overall costs of government are rising, federal assistance represents a declining percentage of state expenditures, and many states are under court orders to improve mental-health facilities, prisons, elementary and secondary schools and other services” (Perryman, 1993, p. 69; Henry, 2000). These changes left state higher education funding even more vulnerable.

With the costs of state government rising and the increasing needs of state agencies other than community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities, legislators on whose shoulders budget decision lay were pressed to prioritize the varying needs. As a result, community colleges and other aspects of higher education needed to continue to very clearly communicate their needs with legislators. At the same time, colleges needed to search for additional funding outside the regular streams of state and local revenues.

**Consequences of Funding Shifts**

Just to maintain current services, state spending for higher education had to increase faster than state spending in other areas “…or by about the same percentage as the increase in total personal income of all Americans” (Hovey, 1999, p. vi). Hovey (1999) estimated that while states needed to increase their funding for all services by five percent annually to maintain what they already had, state funding for higher education would need to increase by six percent because of increasing enrollments and increasing overhead costs (Hovey, 1999; Sbrega, 2001). “This means that even if states were not facing structural deficits in reaching the 5 percent annual growth in revenues, the percentage of state funding devoted to higher education will need to increase annually in order for higher education to just maintain current services” (Hovey, 1999, p. vii).

Faster state spending increases for higher education specifically represented a significant shift in state budget trends, since the percentage of state budgets dedicated to higher education actually declined over the past decade (Cohen, 1998; Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Hovey, 1999; Phillippe & Patton, 2000). Cohen (1995) says that it is unlikely that
states will increase appropriations by “more than a couple of percentage points a year” (p. 2). He states that community colleges will grow only to the extent their local leaders are creative about generating additional income.

Thinking about what college is and who educators are, is likely to change. One community college president, Stephen M. Curtis of the Community College of Philadelphia, says his mantra to his faculty is consistent:

  We must partner; we simply can’t do everything by ourselves. Partnerships are not just the common-sense idea they have always been, they permit us to accomplish goals for which we would otherwise have insufficient resources. Further, partnering has taken us in still other directions. It is more and more common to offer our degree paths for corporate entities, which furnish groups of students, instead of exclusively for the individual student that has characterized our enrollments for decades. Witness the national efforts of the UPS Earn and Learn Program for its employees, and McDonald’s College Degree Program for its managers. (Schmidt, p. 2)

The implications of these changes in funding and perceptions about higher education moving toward a more entrepreneurial approach are numerous. As a result, the nature of community colleges and their administrators have changed. Community colleges have had to develop a new and additional role, moving from being only providers of the first two years of a four-year degree and providers of professional-technical/short-term training to additionally become revenue generators designed to make up for losses in funding. This additional role has made such an impact that many institutions have higher enrollments of noncredit students taking contract training-type classes than students in traditional degree programs (Bailey, 2002).

Community college administrators’ roles have changed as well. They have had to become entrepreneurs, marketing their “wares” to entities outside the traditional funding streams and to new populations of potential students. They also had to become promulgators of the message to their faculty and staff that every employee at their colleges must be involved in seeking and garnering additional funds to keep their institution operating. Whether legislators understand these changes and the impact they have on community colleges was a focus of this study.
Summary

From 1965 to 1980, higher education was very well funded. In fact, some community colleges were charging little or no tuition. From 1985 through 2001, higher education enjoyed a 167 percent increase in spending while enrollments were declining. But as a result of several factors, higher education and community colleges have more recently experienced a downturn of financial support.

But, during the late 1970’s, taxpayers nationwide revolted against high personal income and property taxes, and significant tax cuts in at least half of the states were enacted. As local district funding was cut, the responsibility for funding community colleges was moved to the state level, and in direct competition with other state programs, such as K-12 schools, welfare programs, and corrections.

Public perceptions of higher education also eroded during those years, causing taxpayers to demand that colleges live within their means, just as taxpayers themselves must do. Taxpayers expressed frustration over: (a) administrative budgets rising without parallel increases in instructional funding, (b) the new emphasis on, and scandals within athletics, and (c) universities apparently favoring research and graduate education over undergraduate student needs. Higher education had left a poor impression on the public. The taxpaying public believed that the higher education “sacred cow” needs to be more closely scrutinized. As a result, community colleges have had to take a more capitalistic approach to gaining additional funds by marketing to additional audiences and seeking funds from alternative sources.

Colleges continue to have their work cut out for them. Repairing the damages done by their poor reputations as budgeters will take some time. It is now even more important than ever for colleges to work with state legislators to develop sound financial practices through effective state plans. College administrators must be pro-active to see that their interests are not lost in the milieu of other statewide needs. They must look to the legislature for tax support, but must bring with them local strategies as well (other than raising taxes), to make up for the predicted yearly deficits.

The literature review on community college funding trends gave me the background needed to better understand community college funding changes and
changes in community perceptions that are tied to the funding changes. My goal was to use this background information to evaluate what I saw at my research sites. It would enable me to use my findings regarding national trends to compare similarities and differences, and explore strategies other states have used to address funding needs.

**Alternative Funding Modes in Community Colleges**

The purpose of this section is to briefly describe how the need for alternative funding arose. It also provides an overview on how community colleges have addressed their funding shortfalls through alternative funding strategies both through national and international means.

**Who Pays?**

Changes in funding trends have had a great impact on “who pays for a community college education, how it is paid for, and what purpose it serves” (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000, p. 1). Government grants and contracts for training and research and private gifts from individuals and corporations have grown from two percent in 1980 to 20 percent in 1996 for community colleges (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000). Even though there is more reliance on state funding for community college operations, state and local appropriations also fell 20 percent between 1980 and 1996 for community colleges (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000). In 1980, community colleges received, on average, 70 percent of their funding from state and local resources, falling to 50 percent in 1996 (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000). At the same time tuition and fees have increased and colleges have endeavored to offset these increases by offering scholarships and fellowships from private resources. Scholarships and fellowships are the fastest growing community college expenditures along with student services and other institutional support (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000).

To make up for differences in revenues and expenditures, community colleges have secured more financial support from private workforce training avenues (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000). Community colleges are benefiting financially from a broadening of their focus to include worker training. Employers are increasingly reliant on community
colleges to provide them with skilled workers. “As the focus of community colleges has broadened to include more focused worker training, resources to pay for this training have increased substantially” (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000, p. 1). According to Merisotis and Wolanin (2000), community colleges are becoming more like “cafeterias or general stores” (p. 7) as demands from various constituencies grow. Like cafeterias and general stores, community colleges try to equip students with everything they need as soon as possible. Relationships between employers and community colleges are evolving to new levels nationally and internationally.

The Hudson Institute’s *Workforce 2020* report by Judy and D’Amico (1997) states that community colleges are on the cutting edge of providing education for a “new knowledge society which has put a premium on what Robert Reich (former U.S. Secretary of Labor) has called the Symbolic Analysts—workers who ‘solve, identify, and broker problems by manipulating symbols’ (words, computers code, etc.) – over the workers who perform manufacturing or production tasks” (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000, p. 3). The swift transformation of the workforce worldwide brings employers to community colleges—“essential centers for worker training” (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000, p. 3).

A premium on high and up-to-date skills needed by business and industry are predicted to require the assistance of community colleges to provide continuing training and retraining of their employees in increasingly sophisticated ways (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000). Global competition and the exchange of worldwide information, data, and analyses have brought community colleges to the fore as just-in-time international trainers/educators.

To summarize, even though community colleges have become more reliant on state funding, government grants and contracts have played a more significant role. In addition, quick responses by community colleges to private industry needs, and particularly their need for analytical workers, have given community colleges an edge over universities for providing worker training. Employers are also seeking community college assistance to help their employees stay abreast of changes in technology and the workplace. How legislators perceive this role for community colleges and whether they
expect community colleges to continue to pursue these avenues of funding were a focus of this study.

**National Opportunities**

A variety of partnerships that bring in additional revenues has been or is currently taking place at community colleges nationwide. They range in diversity from testing and assessment services to military education contracts, high-tech industry training, and social service programming.

The fastest growing areas of revenue at community colleges are government grants and contracts including federal, state, and local programs for training and research (AACC, 2001), and private gifts from corporations and individuals. These four categories’ percentage of contributions, according to AACC (2001), grew from two percent in 1980 to 20 percent by 1996. “At the same time, state and local appropriations for basic operations fell from 70 percent in 1980 to 50 percent in 1996” (AACC, p. 1).

A more “private workforce-oriented education model” (AACC, 2001, p. 3) has resulted in revenues paid for this training increasing considerably. The Hudson Institute’s *Workforce 2020* report (Judy & D’Amico, 1997) points out, “Because economic growth will depend on increased worker productivity, the educational attainments of today’s students raise an important concern for tomorrow’s workforce” (AACC, 2001, p. 3). The workforce and employers demand that training be “delivered efficiently, effectively, and over the course of several stages of an individual’s life” (AACC, 2001, p. 3).

The opportunities for community colleges to gain needed revenues are there. Jeanne Meister of Corporate University Xchange, a corporation that matches businesses with education, studied 100 of the most successful partnerships between colleges and business. They found that “92 percent of corporations outsource their education and training programs and 60 percent outsource some aspect of their course design. Sixteen percent of these are with traditional colleges and universities” (Meister, 2001, p. 1).

According to AACC (2006) and others, employers are turning more frequently to community colleges for their workers’ training. Phillippe and Patton (2000) report that 95 percent of employers recommend community colleges for education and training of
their employees. The top four reasons they utilized community college services are: (a) for improving employee performance, (b) for assisting employees to upgrade their skills, (c) for providing professional development and enrichment, and (d) for meeting required professional certifications.

In addition, establishing positive relationships with business and industry also gives community college students an inside-track to job opportunities upon graduation (Burnett, 2001; Perez, 2001). The community also views partnerships between colleges and business as lasting relationships that have a direct impact on investment for the future. As political outcomes affect college funding, the business community will be more likely to support the colleges “in times of economic drought” (Perez, p. 2).

Even AACC has been interested in developing partnerships to increase alternative income. The Community College Times (February 5, 2002) reported that AACC submitted a proposal to the Department of Transportation to train airport security personnel. The project was in response to the Aviation Transportation Security Act, which President George W. Bush signed after the tragedies of September 11, 2001. AACC’s plan was to collaborate with American College Testing, Inc., a non-profit assessment, research, and program management organization. While AACC would manage the project, member colleges would provide curriculum and training, and ACT would create and administer assessment tools and track students. The potential financial rewards for the partnership were not reported, nor how much each partner would receive. Although AACC was not awarded the contract, this effort is an example of new and innovative ways to get more funding to the community colleges through alternative means.

According to Sbrega (2001), these kinds of partnerships “will become even more important as a device to cope with budgeting imbalances” (p. 5) as colleges experience declining state support. Although some colleges have enjoyed increased funding, increases in expenses have outpaced moderate gains. Sbrega notes that demographic projections through 2005 showed that:

…more than 20 million students will reach high school and an additional 19.2 million will enter elementary schools. If the continuing growth of immigration is also taken into account, the world of education will be hard-pressed under current financial trends to meet these formidable challenges. (p. 5)
In summary, community colleges across the nation have sought alternative funding and built partnerships to fill the gaps in revenues. These activities included providing testing services, training for industry, and social service programming. Government grants and contracts and private gifts were the fastest growing areas of revenue for community colleges. Even AACC hoped to garner funding for community colleges by coordinating efforts to provide airport security personnel nationwide.

A concern is that although some colleges received such funding, expenses continued to outpace any gains. Whether legislators are planning ahead for such increases in enrollments in the face of continued downward spiraling of funding for years to come is a critical question. To help community college leaders better strategize solutions for ending budget shortfalls, it was helpful to investigate what legislators’ perceptions are about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges. It was also helpful to find out whether they now expect community colleges to seek additional alternative funding sources to supplement their budgets.

**International Opportunities**

Like many American enterprises, community colleges are on the fast track to providing services and education to the world whether overseas or domestically. These services and education are provided through ongoing programming, contract training, or through exchange programs (Greene, 1998). Methods of delivery are via the Internet, on campuses established in foreign countries, or by faculty teaching at overseas campuses (Greene, 1998).

Community colleges are finding they are rapidly becoming desirable globally in two ways. Corporations that do business worldwide need community college assistance overseas for training and retraining. They also need to provide education to an influx of international students into American schools. These are evidence of markets few colleges take into consideration in their recruiting efforts. Meeting both needs means increased revenues as well as costs. In 1997, education was the fifth largest American export, and it was reported that international students studying in America contributed more than $7 billion annually to the American economy (Frengel, 1998).
Community Colleges: Trends and Statistics (2000) reports that 79.4 percent of colleges who responded to its survey had some type of international curricula, 43 percent provided international activities, and 48.7 percent had study abroad/exchange programs (Phillippe & Patton, 2000; Gamble, 2002).

Coming to America

Students who come to America from overseas to study have proved to be a lucrative market. Approximately 67 percent of international students pay for their education on their own; the rest may receive minimal assistance through scholarships and special financial aid programs. It is also estimated that more than 100,000 full-and part-time jobs in state and local economies are made possible from foreign student spending while they are in the United States (Greene, 1998).

Many American colleges developed specific and very successful strategies to bring international students (and their money) to the United States. For example, Broward Community College (BCC) in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida has been conducting short-term study abroad programs for more than 20 years. Since 1974, BCC has carried out international programs in 50-plus countries (Greene, 1998). As BCC has been establishing links with colleges and centers outside the United States, it has adopted its first international affiliation agreements with colleges in Spain and Malaysia. Other agreements have been made with colleges or education centers in Singapore, United Arab Emirates, and Ecuador. Affiliation agreements include a commitment by the overseas school or center to provide the first two years of United States university parallel curriculum. Some offer English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and third- and fourth-year programs as well (Greene, 1998).

Miami-Dade Community College (MDCC) in Florida too, has been successful in operating internationally. MDCC is affiliated with the American International College of Mexico (AMERICOM), which operates in Mexico City and Queretato. As of fall 1998, the college had graduated more than 100 students, half of whom transferred to the United States and Canada to continue their educations. BCC and MDCC also assisted
other American colleges to affiliate with colleges in Argentina and elsewhere by providing consulting services to interested schools.

**Global Competence**

Community colleges also generate alternative resources in the international/global setting by assisting individuals to function competently in an increasingly diverse world. According to the American Council on International Intercultural Education (ACIIE) (1996), the need for “globally competent” (p. 2) students who will be involved in the internationalization of business is increasing day by day. “Global competence” is defined as existing “when a learner is able to understand the interconnectedness of peoples and systems, to have a general knowledge of history and world events, to accept and cope with the existence of different cultural values and attitudes and, indeed, to celebrate the richness and benefits of this diversity” (ACIIE, p. 2; Frengel, 1998).

Global competence will also help allay fears of Americans who are reluctant to move beyond the United States into worlds not well understood. It instills an interrelatedness and interdependence of all aspects of our world. Cultural relations, war, the economy, healthcare, and community development are all affected (Frengel, 1998). “Global education brings the world to our students—helping them understand in the general sense what makes the human race tick—so that places outside of the United States do not seem so ‘foreign’ anymore…. It does a lot for shedding egocentric and ethnocentric attitudes” (Frengel, 1998, p. 3).

Community colleges are entities that cannot only assist students to become globally competent in a short span of time, but also assist employers worldwide. Finally, community colleges in America serve as models for other countries that value “practical training to substitute for or supplement theoretical training” (Chase, 2002, p. 24, Frengel, 1998).

**Globalization Critics**

Community colleges’ outreach to international students in America and in their own countries offers expanded opportunities for generating additional revenues.
However, globalization of education is not without its critics. These outreach efforts, while appearing lucrative, may provide no more stable revenues than other alternative funding sources. Green and Baer (2002) caution colleges to “be clear about their purposes in engaging in international activities…to develop new markets of students or new sources of revenue…” (p. 40). They state that many colleges evaluate international outreach activities based on “inputs (courses offered with an international focus, language courses, grants for internationally focused projects) rather than outcomes (student learning and attitudes)” (p. 40).

Green and Baer (2002) worry that colleges are focusing discussions about the global dimensions of higher education on markets and not on learning. Their concern is that a new interest and urgency in focusing on international education as a result of September 11, is more an opportunity for colleges to sell their products rather than as avenues for students to expand their learning.

Further, Green and Baer (2002) state, “an entrepreneurial strategy does not necessarily translate into academic strategy” (p. 38). They wonder if globalization of an institution through exporting programming, expanding facilities outside the country, and contracting to train employees overseas can be offered “without substantially affecting the learning of its on-campus students” (p. 38). Often these collaborations involve only a few students. Green and Baer are concerned that colleges are now focusing on…

what the global economy can do for the institution rather than on what the institution…can do for its students…. Attracting international students, forming research collaborations, providing training courses in other countries or marketing distance education worldwide may contribute to the overall internationalization of the institution, but that contribution is often a byproduct of entrepreneurial activity, rather than the goal. (pp. 38-40)

Colleges need to not only look at revenue possibilities, but also the impact on faculty members and other facets of doing business (Green & Baer, 2002).

As stated by ACIE (1996), regardless of what opinions are of the globalization of colleges or how successful colleges are in gaining additional revenues through globalization, they must remain competitive in the marketplace of selling education worldwide. If community colleges do not engage in the education of people worldwide,
private corporations and public and private training organizations are ready to fill the gap, putting colleges at risk of closing their doors.

To summarize, engaging in international community college programming has become an important focus for many community colleges not only for its educational benefits, but for its revenue generating possibilities (Frengel, 1998). Bringing international students to American campuses generates additional revenue since they pay full tuition and spend their money in local economies. Community colleges have also found that they can offer programming internationally via the Internet or by establishing campuses in foreign countries. International corporations find American community colleges desirable trainers to help them keep their workforces globally competitive. In addition, partnerships throughout the world have proved beneficial for international and cultural exchange.

However, these outreach efforts provide no more stability than other alternative funding sources, and some wonder whether the outcomes of international programming translate to true academic learning. Again, finding out legislators’ perceptions about expected budget share from international alternative funding sources for community colleges and their beliefs about whether or not community colleges should be involved internationally help community college leaders better strategize solutions for ending budget shortfalls.

**Summary**

Over the past 20 years, decreases in state funding for community colleges has necessitated that institutions seek alternative sources of funding to maintain and enhance programming. As a result, government grants and contracts, increases in tuition and fees, partnerships with business and industry, and international outreach have increased dramatically.

Some critics are concerned that dollars, not education, are the focus of such ventures. At risk, they say, is the quality of the educational experience of on-campus students when large investments are made off-campus to develop partnerships in the community and internationally, and to serve small numbers of international students. At
the same time, projections show that tremendous numbers of students will be reaching college age within the next 10 years, and immigration continues to grow. All the while, state funding continues to dwindle.

Finding out whether and how legislators are prepared to address the projected increases in enrollments while funding levels diminish are important questions. Attendant to those questions is whether they now expect community colleges to seek alternative funds, as now seems the trend. Their answers give community college administrators clear guidance for developing strategies to meet future funding needs and legislator expectations.

**Summary of the Review of the Literature**

The literature provided a foundation for understanding how legislators’ perceptions about higher education may be formed, how legislators have influenced higher education funding, and what the expectations are for legislators’ roles in the future. Considerable information was available regarding higher education funding specifically. A very limited collection of information was found on perceptions of a variety of individuals and their impact on higher education, including community colleges. Numerous works have been written about the kinds of partnerships into which institutions of higher education and community colleges enter. Literature has been written on how to develop relationships with business and industry and how to write grants to improve financial situations. And other articles and studies clearly identify philosophical issues regarding alternative funding effects on the community college mission overall.

Some central concepts regarding the way legislators gain their information gleaned from the literature were:
Influential relationships and related factors can affect how legislators make their funding decisions. Key relationships between community college presidents and legislators can shape legislators perceptions, and may affect an entire community college system’s abilities to gain funding.
Legislator characteristics can affect their perceptions of higher education. These characteristics, such as their experience with higher education, whether their districts have colleges within them, and the quality of their relationships with college personnel and business and industry play a part in forming their perceptions about higher education. State political cultures affect how higher education is viewed, how it is funded, and how it is used. Higher education can be viewed as a way to equalize the masses by providing through a statewide system, education at little or no cost to all who want to participate. Some state cultures view higher education institutions as strictly district property, governed by locally elected officials who bring to their districts the economic benefits of state funding, student spending, and employment. Yet other state cultures consciously choose between giving higher education or business their funding assistance depending on the traditional leanings of politicians in the state. Politicians may also use higher education institutions in their state to maintain a political caste system of the elite and the commonalty.

Frequency of legislative sessions and term limits have been shown to affect legislative decision-making. Biennial sessions may hinder between-session decision-making, and term limits may interfere with the time legislators need to see major issues resolved.

State funding for community colleges is not likely to increase soon. State revenues have declined in recent years, competition for funding among state agencies has increased, and limits on personal and property taxes continue to limit how much state funding is available.

Community colleges will continue to seek entrepreneurial ways to supplement their state funding. Expanding missions that encompass new partnerships in the United States and throughout the world are favored by politicians and provide positive public images for community colleges.

Despite the amount of literature about higher education funding, there was a dearth of information relating specifically to this study’s four research questions. I was unable to find any information about legislator perceptions regarding community college funding specifically, how they develop their perceptions, or how their perceptions affect
their decision-making. There was no information regarding how legislators respond to community colleges’ ability to acquire other funding sources, and what are their expectations about the expected budget share of alternative funds for community colleges. There was no information on whether legislators’ perceptions of alternative funding sources affect their decision-making. And finally, there was no information on how legislators are working directly with community colleges to overcome the effects of dwindling resources, nor what they expect community colleges to do.

It was also unknown whether legislators understand the connection between their personal experiences with community colleges and their funding decisions. Insights into their inner processes while making difficult funding decisions have not been written about.

The goal of this study was to help fill in the gaps in the existing literature regarding legislators’ perceptions and community college funding. Chapter 3 describes how I proceeded to study legislators, their thinking processes, and the impact their perceptions have on their decision-making.
CHAPTER THREE
DESIGN OF STUDY

Chapters 1 and 2 introduced the issue of the increased influence state legislators now have on higher education funding decisions as a result of changes in revenue streams nationwide over the last 20 years. These chapters also provided an historical context for understanding higher education funding trends and alternative funding strategies colleges and universities are using to make up for diminishing revenues. Within these chapters the purpose of the study and questions to be explored were also identified.

Chapter 2 introduced concerns about the effects of colleges’ efforts at making up lost funding through alternative means. Although much has been written about legislative influences on higher education funding and political factors prompting their funding decisions, little has been written regarding legislators’ influences on community colleges in particular. And nowhere in the review of the literature is there information about whether legislators are aware of these concerns and whether they now expect colleges to rely on alternative strategies to make up for funding deficits.

Chapter 3, Design of Study, describes perspectives and methodological approaches to my study based on the purpose of the study and my personal philosophies and epistemology. The specific design of the study is then set forth.

Qualitative Methodology

I wanted to study legislators to gain an understanding of their interactions and internal processes, rather than prove or disprove a hypothesis. The former is a foundation of qualitative research, which comes from sociological and anthropological traditions. The qualitative approach to research also takes into account my philosophical and epistemological views. Qualitative research approaches were developed in reaction to positivist research, in which the researcher searched for one objective truth by being removed from the research participants. In the positivist tradition, the researcher objectively observes, measures, operationalizes definitions, establishes variables, tests hypotheses, and uses statistics to explain phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999 Pattnon, 2001; Tuckman, 1999). Qualitative
research filled a gap in research approaches by placing the researcher within the research itself, analyzing in-depth interactions of not only those observed, but of the researcher as well. Unlike positivist researchers who view themselves as entirely objective, qualitative researchers recognize that their mere presence has an effect on the research process.

Qualitative research is becoming more respected in the research field within the past four decades. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) state that qualitative research has come from the margins, and is now considered part of the mainstream. The American Educational Research Association has reported a dramatic increase in qualitative research. In the early 1970’s, qualitative research became a “crossover designation for field research for people not wedded to a particular discipline” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. ix).

Qualitative researchers study human interactions and meanings that individuals bring to their realities. The researchers holistically observe by engaging in the context where interactions occur, analyzing data to bring forth concepts, looking for ways the information can be used in other settings, and expecting that readers of their research will construct their own meaning of the findings (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). Exploring the essence (Gadamer, 2002; van Manen, 1990) of the experience of legislative decision-making is an aspect that I wanted to understand—to understand the inner experience of each legislator as they make difficult funding decisions.

Essence, as derived by the Greek (van Manen, 1990), means the “essential nature of a thing…what makes a thing what it is”(p. 177). Husserl spoke of essence as “whatness” or “thatness of a thing” (van Manen, 1990, p. 177). There are two kinds of essences according to some phenomenologists. Empirical essence includes actual characteristics of an individual (i.e., flaws, strengths, and specific abilities). Basic or fundamental essence is an ideal or model to which an individual aspires. According to Husserl, a basic essence can be accessed (p. 177) through intuiting a phenomenon. Paraphrasing van Manen’s (1990) example describing the two essences of teachers, I wanted to understand “…the empirical essence of actual [legislators] with all their inevitable peculiarities and inadequacies, and … the fundamental or ideal essence of the
Assumptions of Qualitative Research

According to Gall, Gall, and Borg, (1999) qualitative research carries with it the following assumptions:

1. Reality is constructed by individuals themselves, and social reality is constructed from the realities of the participants within it (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999). Reality is relative to the individual.

2. Reality is continually being constructed where and when it is happening (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999). Reality is not static, but ever emerging.

3. Truth is multiple, historical, contextual, contingent, political, and bound up in power relations (Patton, 2002, p. 579). There is no single truth.

4. Humans contribute to relationships through social transactions and interactions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999). Simply because most humans live among others, they always contribute something to their relationships or interactions with others.

5. “There is an essence or essences to shared experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 106). Commonly experienced phenomena have core meanings that are mutually understood among individuals, (i.e., “the essence of loneliness, [or] the essence of being a mother” (p. 106)).

6. “Truth is totally unique to each individual” (Patton, 2002, p. 106). A person’s personal experiences determine her or his behaviors, and thus are truth for that individual.

7. Meaning is the essence of human experience (Patton, 2002). Only individuals know what their experiences are and making meaning of their experiences is the focus of their living.

These assumptions are the philosophical foundation from which qualitative researchers launch their studies.
Criticisms of Qualitative Research

There are critics of qualitative, phenomenological research. Foucault, as quoted in Patton (2002) says he believes there cannot be more than one truth, or different ways to speak the truth. Positivists object to qualitative research’s refusal to accept one truth. For positivists, qualitative research seems too fuzzy and uninterpretable (Patton, 2002). Validity and contributions of qualitative research are often difficult to judge because there are typically no overall truths from “any one set of perspectives” (Patton, 2002, p. 135). A process that is “self-justifying” (p. 135) goes against positivistic processes that are quantifiable, testable, and replicable. Thus, qualitative research has only come into the forefront of research traditions within the past 60 years as compared to quantitative traditions, which have existed for more than 100 years (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999).

Another criticism is that qualitative research is seen as lacking generalizability to other settings, is not replicable, and the applicability of what is found is limited (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Patton, 2002). Whether another researcher studying the same subjects in the same setting arrives at the same findings causes concerns among positivists. Others worry about the researcher’s biases, prejudices, and opinions affecting the data, or “researcher’s effect” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Answers to Its Critics

Qualitative researchers address these concerns by their logical, practical approach. Qualitative research is research of everyday lives and situations, which change through time. Qualitative research requires the reader to decide whether the research is useful. The burden of meaningfulness is placed upon the reader. Since qualitative researchers are concerned with the effect their own opinions, presence, and biases have on the research, they disclose what those personal views are, and let the reader discern how these influences have affected the research’s outcomes. The researcher’s goal in qualitative research, “is to add knowledge, not to pass judgment on a setting. The worth of the study is the degree to which it generates theory, description, or understanding” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 34).
Qualitative, phenomenological researchers do have criteria for “truth claims” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999, p. 368). Trustworthiness of truth claims is examined by member-checking, or through validation of the researcher’s interpretation of interview answers and the concepts that emerge, with the interviewees (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999; Patton, 2002).

Qualitative researchers recognize that time and phenomena are always changing, so the reliability of the data collected is only reliable for that setting during that time period. My goal in conducting this study was to look specifically at legislator phenomena only, and by so doing, contribute to the larger body of knowledge and understanding regarding:

1. Community college funding;
2. Legislator decision making processes;
3. Legislator relationships with community colleges; and
4. Political implications of alternative funding strategies developed by community colleges.

“The unexamined life is not worth living. I would rather die having spoken after my manner, than speak in your manner and live…. The difficulty, my friends, is not to avoid death, but to avoid righteousness…. No evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death.”

Socrates
The Dialogues of Plato,
399 B.C.

Researcher’s Perspective

I have been involved in adult education for the past 20 years, as an adult learner and as an educator/counselor/administrator. My employment and education background includes professional-technical education (graphic arts and curriculum development), with an emphasis on trade and industrial education. In that arena, the method of teaching was primarily performance-based or behavioristic. Later, I re-entered school to become a counselor and came to subscribe to existential, humanistic philosophical traditions to
assist me in my life, and to assist others in theirs. The works of Carl Jung, Eric Fromm, Victor Frankl, Carl Rogers, Alfred Adler, Abraham Maslow, and Erik Erikson have had great impact on my life. From these perspectives come my natural affinity toward constructivist epistemology, and qualitative, phenomenological approaches toward research.

Existentialism

Existentialism is an orientation to life that engages individuals in the search for and finding of meaning in their lives. Existentialism is in response to dilemmas of contemporary life, such as isolation, alienation, and meaninglessness (Corey, 1977, p. 74). Philosophers and writers throughout the 19th and 20th centuries discussed existentialism in an effort to explain what it means to be a human being. These philosophers and writers include Dostoevski, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber. From these pioneers come counseling theories from which I have developed my professional counseling practice and personal approach to life. Corey (1977, pp. 78-83) provides an overview of existential concepts:

- **Individuals have a capacity for self-awareness.** The greater our self-awareness, the greater our possibilities for freedom. We have the potential to take action or not to act; inaction is a decision. We choose our actions, and therefore we can partially create our own destiny. As we increase our awareness of the choices available to us, we also increase our responsibility for the consequences of these choices.

- **Freedom and responsibility.** We must accept the responsibility for directing our lives, because we are essentially free. We must choose what kind of person we are becoming, which is a never-ending process. According to Sartre, “we are our choices” (p. 78). Along with freedom comes commitment and responsibility.

- **Striving for identity and relationship to others.** While we are concerned with remaining unique and centered, we want to relate to other humans and to nature. We are in search of who we are—to create a personal identity. At the
same time we want to relate or connect to others. In doing so, we must give
of ourselves and be concerned with others, yet not give up who we are in
order to be with or be accepted by others. Either way, we risk loneliness,
alienation, and rootlessness.

- *Life is the search for meaning.* We struggle to find our significance and purpose in
  life. Questioning our values and discovering what differences we make on
  this earth are an ongoing process. By creating new meaning and by
  challenging old beliefs to engage in life is a commitment to life—which can
  result in meaning.

- *Anxiety as a condition of living.* Anxiety is a potential source of growth, especially
  when we become increasingly aware of our freedom and the consequences of
  accepting or rejecting that freedom. By continually blunting anxiety, we
  constrict our lives and reduce our choices.

- *Awareness of death and nonbeing.* Death is not a negative, but natural part of our
  lives. Death gives significance to living—that the present moment is crucial.
  Our awareness of death gives us a passion for life. “Death and life are
  interdependent, and though physical death destroys us, the idea of death saves
  us” (p. 83). We only fear death when we have not lived.

**Humanism**

Humanism, unlike other philosophies, is not grounded in a certain age and
culture, nor is it seen as the “complete and final word in the nature of things” (Corliss,
1957, p. 3). This positive view of human nature proposes that each human’s experience
builds who he or she is; her or his experiences and the perceptions that result are that
person’s reality (Corey, 1977). Humanism considers that humans have the potential for
10-11) outlines ten central propositions of the humanist philosophy, which are
paraphrased below:
1. Nature is the totality of being and is a constantly changing system of matter and energy, which exists independently of any mind or consciousness; supernatural forms are myth.

2. Since humans are an evolutionary product and part of nature, they have no conscious survival after death.

3. Human beings possess the power or potentiality of solving their own problems through reliance on reason and knowledge applied with courage and vision.

4. There is no predestination or determinism. While humans are conditioned by the past, they possess freedom of choice and action; therefore, within some physical limits, humans are masters of their own destiny.

5. Ethics and morality of humanism grounds all humans as equals, regardless of nationality, race, or religion.

6. Individuals attain the good life by balancing self-needs with those of the larger community by continuous self-development and doing significant work that contributes to the welfare of the community.

7. Appreciation of aesthetic experiences of art and appreciation of nature’s beauty may become a pervasive reality in humans’ lives.

8. Reason and knowledge can be implemented through democratic methods. Full freedom of expression and civil liberties throughout all areas of economic, political, and cultural life should be guaranteed.

9. Democracy, peace, and a high standard of living should be provided through social responsibility.

10. Humanism believes in the unending questioning of basic assumptions and convictions, including its own. Humanism is a developing philosophy.

Constructivism

Since existentialism and humanism propose that life and reality are ever changing and emerging processes of personal human experiences, constructivist epistemology aligns well with these (my) philosophical approaches. Constructivists believe that
knowledge and reality are built upon lived experiences, and thus, constructed by individuals themselves. An individual’s reality may or may not be true for others, but real for themselves (Ertmer & Newby, 1993, von Glasersfeld, 1984). Constructivists see realities as alterable and that constructions are not more, or less true, but perhaps more or less informed (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 206). Constructivism equates learning with creating meaning from experience (Ertmer & Newby, 1993). Knowledge is gained from experience and reality is relative to what the individual experiences. von Glasersfeld (1984) describes knowledge as a process of assembling experiences upon experiences and comparing and adopting those experiences toward a personal reality; however, reality does not “match” (equal) knowledge (von Glasersfeld, 1984, p. 20).

Reality cannot be known, according to von Glasersfeld (1984); what appears to be reality is already changed by the accumulation of events that precede it, thus is not, nor ever can be known in its pure form. There is no “basis for conclusions concerning an ‘objective’ world, that is, a world as it might be prior to experience” (von Glasersfeld, 1984, p.23). For constructivists, there may be a real world, but what we know of the world stems from our own interpretations of our experiences. We “create meaning,” rather than “acquire” (Ertmer & Newby, 1993, p. 62) it. Knowledge about the world is gained through interaction with other people or the natural environment. Direct contact with the environment and with others is essential to creating meaning (Ertmer & Newby, 1993).

As a constructivist (although I pause when labeling myself as a “___ist,” as that would be to give up other possibilities that might be out there), I approach life and learning as full of possibilities, checking on my values and presumptions and adjusting or adapting along the way (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). My outlook on life is the way I facilitate learning in others--to make learning meaningful (Dewey, 1973). In my work and in my life, theory is very prescriptive (Ertmer & Newby, 1993) in that my theory has become my lifestyle.

I strongly believe that people are empowered through education and interaction with others. Like Dewey (1973) and Vygotsky (Hausfather, 1996), I see learning not as a result or development, but as a process that results in development. The result of this
self-empowerment benefits society at-large, when individuals remain or become productive, contributors to the greater good (Dewey, 1973).

The interactive aspect of doing qualitative research appeals to me as a constructivist, in that it seems a natural part of the way I live my life and do my work. As a constructivist researcher, I believe that I can only speculate about the realities of others, and attempt to gain a deeper understanding of them through interacting with them (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). To circumvent my own speculations and presumptions from affecting my research, is part of the process; I was required to bracket or “suspend” my own beliefs to study the “everyday realities” of legislators (Patton, 2002, p. 111; van Manen, 1990, p. 175). According to Heron and Reason (1997, p. 275), interacting with the environment and others...“is self-reflexive” (Heron & Reason, 1997, p.275) -- the mind understands its reality through its own paradigm, which it constructs (Ertmer & Newby, 1993). Reality is relative to the knower, and is open to reinterpretation at all times. Thus, it is important that I disclose to the reader my perceptions, and the influence these perceptions may have had on my interpretation of the research.

Qualitative, phenomenological inquiry supports my philosophical and epistemological constructivist beliefs that interactions and experiences with the environment and others are internalized and interpreted to form our worldviews. The participatory paradigm “asserts that we cannot have any final or absolute experiential knowing of what there is” (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 276). As such, we learn from one another; we are never finished products but ever-emerging human beings in an ever-emerging universe. The following are principles of the constructivist position (Ertmer & Newby, 1993, pp. 65-66):

- The context in which the experience occurs is most important; application of knowledge comes from meaningful contexts.
- The participants/interactors give meaning to their own experiences.
- Different conceptual perspectives and meanings can be gained by revisiting the experience in a variety of ways.
Phenomenology

The powerful expression of the subjective experience of being human has developed into a method of studying experience, which is called phenomenology. First brought to wide attention by German philosopher Edmund Husserl in 1913, the phenomenological method is used to study how people characterize things and “experience them through their senses” (Patton, 2002). But experience is not enough. Our understanding comes from our perceptions of experience--then describing it, explaining it in greater detail, and interpreting it. Out of this process researchers can make sense of the world of the phenomenon, and gain a better understanding and meaning from that experience.

Heidegger (1889-1996), another philosopher who was influential in the concept of phenomenological inquiry, described phenomenology as coming from the premise that we exist in the world, and not apart from it (Corey, 1977). Phenomenology searches for the very nature, essence, or experience of a person, group, language, and structure of communication. Essentially, phenomenological approaches focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience, and how they transform their experience into individual and shared meaning (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Phenomenology seeks to gain a deeper understanding of our everyday experiences.

According to Patton (2002), there are criteria for truth in a phenomenological study.

- The only truth is that which is within the reality of the participant being studied at any given moment (p. 106)
- We develop a worldview by putting together the phenomena we experience in such a way to make sense of the world (p. 106).
- There is no separate (or objective) reality for people. There is only what they know their experience is and means (p. 106).
- The focus on meaning making is the essence of human experience.
- What people experience and how they interpret the world is the subject matter, the focus of phenomenological inquiry (p. 106).
The only way for us to really know what another person experiences is to experience the phenomenon as directly as possible for ourselves (p. 106).

There is an assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience.

There is a commonality in human experiences.

To further explicate these truths, Gadamer (2002) and Patton (2002) state that phenomenology recognizes that individuals’ worldviews are ever-changing and very individual. “There is only what they know their experience is and means” (Patton, 2002, p. 106). However, the phenomenological approach assumes that the “essence[s] or essences to shared experience,” are commonly shared, and “mutually understood” (Patton, 2002, p. 106) experiences. Phenomena can only be known by discovering “aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is” (van Manen, p. 107).

In other words, in this study, legislators are human, and the rest of us are like them. “A phenomenologist assumes a commonality in those human experiences…” (Patton, 2002, pp. 106-107). My desire was to touch the essence of the phenomenon of legislators’ experiences, and to experience the process of deciding about community college funding.

The internal processing by legislators is a perspective not currently described in the literature. The personalizing of these experiences should give additional richness and depth to gaining insight into the world of legislators as fellow citizens, not just as automatons who formulate laws and pass bills.

Interviews with legislators worked particularly well for this study, as interviews have the potential to delve into the “historicity” (p. 243) of legislative funding decision-making. Historicity, as Gadamer (2002), a key spokesperson on phenomenology refers to it, is not only a description of timelines and events, but also a way of describing knowledge from past experience that affects knowledge, perceptions, and aesthetics now and in the future. The humanistic ideal, according to Gadamer (2002), is “universal” (p. 202), unshakable by other historical experiences, or other disturbances in the “transcience
of human beings,” and has meaning in itself (Gadamer, 2002, p. 202). Interviewing is commonly used in qualitative, phenomenological research to describe phenomena as people experience it, or to describe “a set of processes, events, [or] individuals” themselves (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999, p. 292). Phenomenological work has historicity of its own, a meaning of its own that does not owe its validity to previously discovered benchmarks.

Phenomenological research takes the researcher to a specific person, group, or situation to study that phenomenon. It encourages a questioning of reality, and a testing of that reality with experience, observation, critical inquiry, and the recycling of this testing to further illuminate otherwise uninterpretable meaning. In this way, “we invite others to inquire with us as to the validity of our perspective” (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 276). The experiential knowing, according to Heron and Reason (1997), is both subjective and objective. This subjective/objective, both/and approach forces knowers to be aware not only of their internal processes but also their effects on processes and how external processes affect them. As Carl Jung might explain, we are a microcosm within the macrocosm (Progoff, 1973).

Using interviews and the dialogue that results as a technique for gathering data, also fit in well with my constructivist paradigm. As a counselor, I have used open-ended inquiry for many years in my work with participants. I believe that the qualitative research process permitted me to articulate my participants’ worlds in four ways as illustrated by Heron and Reason (1997, pp. 280-281):

1. *Experiential knowing*—requires researchers to be participants in the research as well as their interviewees. Each encounter one another and experience the process, empathizing, but “attuned and distinct” (p. 281) from one another. As a result, researchers as well as those they are researching learn, and are enriched by the process.

2. *Presentational knowing*—is the *expression* of experiential knowing and is shared within the interview process through verbal exchange, use of symbols, metaphors, and artwork to describe other perceptions or experiences not easily described in day-to-day language.
3. Propositional knowing—allows researchers to express what they observe/experience in the research process through sharing. Propositional knowing gives description and life to the concepts and constructs the interviewees may be expressing. Propositional expression is used in clarifying and supporting expressions of the interviewees’ realities.

4. Practical knowing—is actually putting into practice, evaluating, revising, and implementing “purposeful deeds” (p. 281) whether they are the interviewee’s deeds, or the researcher’s deeds, or the deeds of the group being studied. Ultimately, qualitative research is based on accomplishing purposeful deeds to, and in the grand scheme of things, “improve the world” (p. 281).

According to Heron and Reason (1997), “Participatory outcomes include a desire to assist individuals within their communities and the world to achieve responsible balance between their needs and those of the cosmos we cohabit” (p. 292). My desire in using a qualitative, phenomenological approach was to explore and discover the worldviews legislators had, and how those fit into their decision-making roles concerning community college funding. By including legislators in phenomenological methodology and interpretation of results, my life and profession has been enhanced; but my greatest hope would be realized if the legislators’ life experiences were also enriched through the experience, and that they gain a new awareness of the effects their decision-making has on community college funding. By sharing conclusions of this study, perhaps a contribution will be made to educational and legislative knowledge.

**Design of Study**

The following section describes how participants were selected for the study, how the data was collected and analyzed, and the process by which the participants’ safety and confidentiality were protected. The study followed a four-step process: (a) identifying participants, (b) going into the field, (c) analyzing and evaluating the data collected, and (d) interpreting the results.
Selection of Study Participants and Sites

The participants selected for this study were state legislators in Idaho and Oregon between July 2003 and October 2005. Originally, I chose Oregon for the site of my study based on several considerations, one of which was my anonymity within the state. While Idaho legislators’ perceptions were of great interest to me, one of my concerns about interviewing them was that Idaho is a very small state in terms of population and networking; I personally knew many of the legislators. Since I planned to approach my study by interviewing legislators, watching them in action, and perhaps, collecting documentation of their processes, I wanted to be less intrusive (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000) by not being known. I wanted to be able to identify and understand “the social processes by which particular end results are created” (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000, p. 99). I believed that I could go in with less partiality by interviewing people I did not know. My coming from another state, I thought, would help everyone (including me) to feel less pressure while doing work that could bring forth potentially politically sensitive information. Other reasons for studying Oregon legislators were my easy access to the state, the organization of Oregon’s community college system, access to data and support people, and my interest in Oregon’s more diverse economy and labor structure.

However, I had difficulty meeting with what I found to be, very, very busy Oregon legislators. In addition, I found that commuting to Oregon was more limiting than I had expected. My scheduling and ready accessibility to the participants was made more difficult as a result. To resolve these two issues, the study was expanded to legislators in Idaho, where I expected to have additional accessibility to legislators and thus, more data from which to draw.

My concerns with anonymity in Idaho turned out to be less significant than I had originally thought since only one of the legislators I interviewed was familiar to me. During the interview process, “Legislator One” as I’ll call the legislator with whom I was acquainted, maintained an impersonal approach to me and my questions throughout the interview process.
Another reason for choosing Oregon rather than Idaho as the original focus of the study was that Idaho has only two community colleges; I was interested in a broader perspective, which I thought Oregon could provide through its 17-college system. This too, proved to be less of a concern than I’d originally thought. Idaho’s community colleges, although not part of a statewide “system,” function similarly to those in Oregon. Idaho’s two community colleges provide education and training to a broad-based constituency throughout the state as do Oregon community colleges. The two colleges partner with employers and provide education and other services to community members from very diverse sectors of the economy; they work with farmers, high technology firms, forest products companies, and manufacturers throughout the state to develop economic and employment stability. Community members who attend community colleges in Idaho are as diverse as those in Oregon: the incumbent workforce, college transfer students, professional-technical/short-term training students, community enrichment course-takers, and those seeking adult basic education and General Equivalency Diplomas (GED) (NIC and CSI websites http://www.nic.edu/customizedtraining/).

While I wondered whether Oregon’s more diverse economy and labor structure may have an influence on community college funding, and whether Oregon’s unions could also be an influence on partnerships with colleges and legislators’ perceptions, I found no direct connection within my interviews. I thought that Idaho’s right-to-work status would leave out unions’ possible direct effect on such considerations, but found no reference to this within legislators’ perceptions about community college funding.

Data Collection Process

To begin filling in gaps in the literature about legislators’ perceptions and influences specific to community college funding, I went into the field to conduct my research. The field was where the legislators were: in legislative session, at their offices, or other places where they conducted their legislative business. The primary data consisted of complete transcripts of one in-depth interview with each of the eight legislators. Interviews lasted anywhere from forty-five minutes to one and half hours.
Sixteen open-ended interview questions (see Appendix A) were developed to elicit from the legislators information about how their perceptions about community college funding are formed, and in particular about alternative funding as a possible solution to funding shortfalls. I drafted preliminary questions and my dissertation committee provided feedback and input into the further development and refinement of the questions.

In addition, I utilized reflective fieldnotes to supplement each interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998. p. 123). These notes provided me with reminders of the context of each interview: the sights, the sounds, the “tone” or feeling of the interviews within the political or personal surroundings where the interviews took place. I also used legislative documents and websites to provide information on legislation passed as well as personal information about each legislator.

Study Participants

The purpose of this section is to describe the process for selecting the participants, the interview process, the procedures for analyzing the data, and for protecting the participants as human subjects.

The Selection Process

To begin the selection process, a survey was developed with the following request: “Please name three to five [Oregon or Idaho] legislators whom you perceive as having the most influence on community college funding.” Then, packets consisting of a letter requesting their participation, an Institutional Research Board (IRB) Form of Consent (see Appendix C), and the survey (see Appendix D) were mailed to key staff members at the Oregon Community College Association (OCCA), the Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD), and the Idaho Division of Professional-Technical Education (IPTE). These packets were also mailed to Oregon and Idaho legislative support staff, and to Oregon and Idaho community college personnel, to assist me in identifying legislators for possible participation. The IRB forms, along with the surveys were returned to me by self-addressed, stamped envelopes.
Legislators were selected for invitation to participate in the study by a process of using “snowball or chain sampling” (Patton, 2002, p. 237) from the results of the returned surveys. As described by Patton, this form of sampling is achieved by asking a number of key people for leads on potential participants. As the number of leads on participants grows larger, the likelihood of repetition of names becomes more frequent. Those names mentioned again and again, converged into a list of key names (Patton, 2002). It is from that list that the participants for this study were selected.

The next step in the process was to invite the selected legislators to participate. Letters of invitation and consent forms were sent to Oregon legislators in May 2003, and letters to Idaho legislators were sent at the end of May, 2005 (see Appendices C and E). One complication arose as I tried to schedule interviews with legislators. I needed to speak with their legislative staff regarding the study and the purpose of my interviews. In order to assure that there would be no breach of confidentiality, I sent Institutional Research Board Consent forms to legislators once again to get their permission to speak with their legislative staff members (see Appendix C).

After being invited to participate in the study, four Oregon legislators agreed to set up appointments with me the summer of 2003, the longest legislative session in Oregon history: 227 days. Seven asked to wait to interview until after the close of that session, and one chose not to participate at all. Of the total ten original interviews planned, two interviews actually took place that summer, and three others were actually made through 2004, and finalized during the 2005 legislative session.

Six Idaho legislators were identified as potential participants in early May 2005, and were invited to participate at the end of that May. Four responded to the invitation, and three actually participated. Again, scheduling appointments with these extremely busy legislators, even between sessions, was a challenge. Out of the sixteen legislators identified from both states, three from Idaho and five from Oregon were eventually interviewed.

In addition to interviews, while in the field, I observed legislators in action, watching their processes, their behaviors, and interactions with others. I listened to and made notes on testimonies and presentations at committee hearings. I also collected
pertinent written materials such as budget information, presentation materials from hearings, and records that might indicate legislators’ opinions and observations and how and where they gather their information (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

The Interview Process

Sixteen open-ended interview questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999; Patton, 2002) were asked of all interviewees to begin rapport building and a momentum for the process (see Appendix A). The same questions were asked of all the interviewees, and they were free to talk as long as they desired on each topic. According to Tuckman (1999), this interview style assures that all topics are covered and the data are complete for each interviewee. Specific questions also helped organize the data so it could be more readily analyzed. Since using specific questions can cause the process to feel somewhat stilted and less than flexible, which can limit the responses (Tuckman, 1999), every effort was made to make the interviewees comfortable. Extra care was taken to be sensitive to the interviewees’ time constraints, levels of activities occurring at the time of the interviews, and other environmental factors.

Interviewing by using standardized questions, as mentioned before, may not be as flexible as a simple conversation. However, guidelines were used to make sure all interviewees answered the same questions in an effort to plan for thematization of common responses during analysis (Tuckman, 1999). Interviews gave me an opportunity to develop a more personal relationship with the legislators, and thus an opportunity to examine their lives and perspectives more in depth, and, perhaps, provide meaning for educators and others (Gadamer, 2002; van Manen, 1990).

Questions were not given to the interviewees in advance; the process allowed for “naturalistic” inquiry (Patton, 2002, p. 254)—the free discussion of ideas and influences. The data was collected and analyzed for patterns and themes that emerged.

I utilized the “Three E’s” framework described by Mills (2000, p. 66) to guide my thinking as I conducted my qualitative, phenomenological study. The “Three E’s are action research data collection techniques:
• *Experiencing* through observation of the legislators and as a participant, as a privileged, active observer and as a passive observer.

• *Enquiring* through asking. These included both informal and structured interviews.

• *Examining* records and my own field notes. I also examined archival documents, journals, audio and videotapes, and other artifacts.

Through these techniques I explored, analyzed, and described: (a) the perceptions of legislators regarding community college funding, (b) their perceptions about colleges’ abilities to generate revenues through alternative funding sources, and (c) whether any of their community college funding decisions were based upon their perceptions about the colleges’ abilities to garner alternative funding assistance to make up for shortfalls in state budgets. I wanted to get a deep understanding of their world, or develop *verstehen* (van Manen, 1990) for how their perceptions were formed and how they conducted legislative funding business. Patton (2002) describes *Verstehen*:

The *Verstehen* tradition stresses understanding that focuses on the meaning of human behavior, the context of social interaction and empathic understanding based on personal experience, and the connections between mental states and behavior. The tradition of *Verstehen* places emphasis on the human capacity to know and understand others through empathic introspection and reflection based on direct observation of and interaction with people. “*Verstehen* thus entails a kind of empathic connection with the actor. It is an act of psychological reenactment—getting inside the head of an actor to understand what he or she is up to in terms of motives, beliefs, desires, thoughts, and so on” (Schwandt, 1998: 192) (p. 52).

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was assured in several ways. Trustworthiness of the information was examined by member-checking, or through validation of my interpretation of interview answers and the concepts that emerged with the interviewees (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999; Patton, 2002). As the interviews progressed, I checked and double-checked to make sure my interpretation of what they said was correct. As a constructivist, I recognized that the realities of legislators’ perceptions belonged to them and what I brought to the process probably added new meaning or different meaning to the results.
(Gadamer, 2002, Patton, 2002). I wanted to confirm that I understood the interviewees’ realities as I interpreted them, in order to gain deeper understanding of their realities, in as objective a manner as possible (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Gadamer, 2002; Patton, 2002).

During fieldwork, my goal was to only describe in my fieldnotes what was occurring. I strove to leave the interpretation of what I collected until later reflective and inductive analysis to further assure integrity of the research data (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). Delaying interpretation of data until reflection and induction could take place helped me steer clear of my pre-understandings, suppositions, and presumptions (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000; van Manen, 1990) that could “predispose [me to] interpret the nature of the phenomenon before [I had] come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question” (van Manen, 1990, p. 46). By “hold[ing] at bay” (p. 47) my preconceived notions about legislators and funding issues, I truly had an opportunity for fuller *Verstehen* about the legislators, events, and activities.

As I took notes, I paralleled the interviewees’ responses with my own personal reactions and accounts of the process by taking a set of personal notes parallel to the fieldnotes. Taking these “reflective fieldnotes” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 123), I had an opportunity to be aware of my own “relationship to the setting” (p. 123) and was more exacting in documenting the process along the way. In doing so, I wanted to be reflexive; and continually checked into and was aware of my own paradigms about funding and legislation and legislators, and in order to be accountable to how my paradigms affected my interpretations (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000; Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990). Also, because of the political nature of the work, I wanted to rely on my personal notes about my reactions, should any ethical concerns arise. As the “inquirer,” I wanted to “grasp the whole…” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 193) which included my own experiences.

After gathering the data on-site, I began the process of analyzing what I’d collected. I triangulated the interviews with discussions with community college personnel regarding their observations, news articles, and my own observations. I clarified with legislators my understanding of the responses they gave me to the interview questions. I focused on what activities occurred and reflected on why they occurred, and
from there, their meanings. As a qualitative researcher, I was not setting out to prove or disprove hypotheses before entering my study. Instead, through the process of reflection and induction regarding the data, meaning surfaced and was built and self-organized as a result (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Data Analysis Procedures

After gathering my data from the field, I followed an eight-stage outline for analysis suggested by Turner (Tuckman, 1999, p. 417):

1. Review the data and develop category labels for classification.
2. Saturate each category by identifying enough examples of each category in the data, and clearly indicate how to classify future instances into the same categories.
3. Create an abstract definition of each category through criterion.
4. Apply the definitions as a guide to both data collection and theoretical reflection.
5. Identify additional categories.
6. Look for relationships between categories, and describe why there is a relationship.
7. Determine and specify the conditions under which relationships between categories occur.
8. Make connections between categorized data and previously articulated theories.

Following the framework assisted me to more systematically analyze the data, and develop themes as I proceeded. I chose not to pre-select codes or themes, as I did not want to influence the types of data I collected beforehand (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I wanted to allow themes to emerge.

Strategies for Protection of the Participants

The legislators shared their beliefs, opinions, values, and their personal life experiences. Confidentiality and anonymity was the priority in my research process, and
was protected whether the results were shared in written or oral communications. To further safeguard their privacy, I avoided asking unnecessary questions and avoided recording individual item responses (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Tuckman, 1999). In addition, some characteristics of individual legislators have been altered so that they cannot be identified. Participants entered the research voluntarily, and were given information on what their commitment would be, as well as the nature of the study.

The participants were treated with respect, and deference was paid to their time, energy, and situations. To ensure the protection of participants, I followed procedures outlined in the Oregon State University Human Subjects Handbook (2000) and adhered to the Code of Federal Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Tuckman, 1999). Before beginning the research process, each participant signed a consent agreement that stated the purpose of this educational research (see Appendix C).

**Summary**

This qualitative study was based on a phenomenological approach. It was designed to investigate selected Idaho and Oregon legislators’ perceptions regarding community college funding, their perceptions about colleges’ abilities to generate revenues through alternative funding sources, and whether any of their community college funding decisions were based upon their perceptions about the colleges’ abilities to garner alternative funding assistance to make up for shortfalls in state budgets.

Through the use of interviews, observations, and member checking, I gathered data to investigate the phenomenon of legislators’ decision-making processes in regard to community college funding, given factors and trends present during the time of the interviews.

I conducted interviews with each participant and when possible, observed them while they worked. Trustworthiness was incorporated into the data by validating the interpretation of interview answers and concepts through checking and double-checking to make sure the interpretation of what the legislators said was accurate as well as through multiple data sources.
The identities of the participants were protected by naming them Legislator One, Legislator Two, Legislator Three, etc., rather than use their actual names. The audio tapes used in the interviews, which may identify voices of the participants, will be erased after the study has been completed. All written supporting documents used to conduct this study will be kept in a secure place for three years after the study is completed and then destroyed.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

Overview of Findings

The focus of this study was to describe how Idaho and Oregon legislators’ perceptions affect their funding decisions regarding public community colleges. The study answered the following questions:

1. How do legislators form their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding?
2. What are legislators’ perceptions about the availability of alternative funding sources for community colleges?
3. What are legislators’ perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges?
4. What is the relationship of legislators’ perceptions of alternative funding sources and their funding decisions (i.e., allocation of state resources) regarding community colleges?

Chapters 1 and 2 provided a general outline of how community colleges are funded and how they function in the United States. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the significant role community colleges play in the economic development of local communities and their states, their role in meeting the training needs of a global workforce, and how colleges partner with legislators to realize these goals. In addition, the chapter looked at how colleges are meeting shortfalls in state funding through alternative means. Chapter 2 provided a review of the literature which covered how historical, economic, and political factors, as well as influential relationships can affect legislative decision making. Chapter Three described the basis for using a qualitative method of learning about this study’s phenomenon. The qualitative approach assumed that reality changes across time, and is ever emerging (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999). This approach took into account “multiple, historical, contextual, contingent, political, and … power relations (Patton, 2002, p. 579). And finally, the qualitative approach used in this study assumed that human interactions and social transactions had an influence on relationships, and thus legislative perceptions of public community college funding.
The intent of Chapter 4 is to put into context (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999; Patton, 2002) how Idaho’s and Oregon’s political cultures were formed, and thus perhaps their influence on legislative decision making in those states. I wanted to find out what factors were at work that “shaped” or “caused” their behaviors, and what intentions exerted influence on legislators’ decision making processes (Tuckman, 1999, pp. 400-401). The chapter is organized into three sections.

The first section, “Idaho and Oregon Landscapes,” includes brief economic and political profiles of the two states. These profiles describe their legislature types, geographic, social, economic, and political cultures (Layzell & Lyddon, 1990; Gittel & Kleiman, 2000) and how they compare to other states in the nation and with each other. In addition, it explores the development of community colleges in the states and their funding structures and enrollment trends.

The second section, “Descriptions of Study Participants,” depicts the participants and their perceptions which are presented through using direct quotations from the interviews. These two sections’ descriptions give a background from which to understand Idaho and Oregon legislators’ perspectives in respect to Research Question 1.

The third section provides the results of the data analysis process—a description and interpretation of major themes about legislative budget decision making that emerged in respect to Research Questions 2, 3, and 4.

**Idaho and Oregon Landscapes**

To provide a greater understanding of Idaho and Oregon features that influence lawmaking in these two states, this section provides a profile of types of legislatures throughout the nation, brief descriptions of Idaho’s and Oregon’s legislative types, and geographic, social, economic, and political contexts for each state. Following these contexts, are descriptions of how community colleges evolved in each state—how they were established, governed, and funded.
Types of Legislatures

This section provides a sense of the different types of state legislatures throughout the nation and how Idaho and Oregon compare to other states. Types of legislatures, because of their structures and support services to legislators, may have an affect on legislator’s perceptions and perhaps their decision making in each state.

This assessment of state legislatures drew on a comparison done by NCSL (2005) for the National Council of State Legislatures (NCSL), a bipartisan organization that serves legislators and their staff members nationwide. Founded in 1975, NCSL provides research, technical assistance, and forums for lawmakers and legislative staff members to exchange information and ideas.

According to NCSL (2005) and the states’ websites, the legislators in Idaho and Oregon were described as “citizen” or part-time legislators elected by their constituents. However, the expression “part-time” seemed to diminish the actual time and energy legislators spent doing their jobs. NCSL (2005) described their duties thus:

Being a legislator doesn't just mean attending legislative sessions and voting on proposed laws. State legislators also spend large amounts of time assisting constituents, studying state issues during the interim and campaigning for election. These activities go on throughout the year. Any assessment of the time requirements of the job should include all of these elements of legislative life. (¶ 2)

NCSL (2005) explained that legislatures vary as greatly from one another as the 50 states they represent. The organization not only looked beyond the amount of time legislators put into their work to describe their status, but also determined:

…the capacity of legislatures to function as independent branches of government, capable of balancing the power of the executive branch and having the information necessary to make independent, informed policy decisions. To measure the capacity of legislatures, it's important to consider the amount of time legislators spend on the job, the amount they are compensated and the size of the legislature's staff. (¶ 3)
Three Categories

NCSL (2005) grouped the 50 states into a system of three categories to more fully compare and contrast them: Red, White, or Blue, with White being a combination of Red and Blue categories. NCSL (2005) evaluated three areas when making their categorizations: (a) estimated proportion of a full-time job spent on legislative work including time in session, constituent service, interim committee work, and election campaigns; (b) estimated annual compensation of an average legislator including salary, per diem, and any other expense payments; and (c) ratio of total legislative staff to number of legislators.

According to NCSL (2005), legislatures in the Red category were more like the United States congress in that they required more time, due to their large populations’ issues in their states which caused lengthier sessions. According to NCSL (2005), legislators in the Red category often worked from 80 percent to full-time, got paid an average of $68,599 and had 8.9 staff persons per member. California’s, New York’s, and Pennsylvania’s legislatures were categorized as Red category legislatures. Legislators in these states usually earned enough salary to make a living at lawmaking.

Legislators in the White category, says NCSL (2005), are a composite of Red- and Blue-type legislatures, typically worked more than 70 to 75 percent of a full-time job, and earned on average $35,326, although most still relied on outside income. These legislatures had moderate-sized support staff of 3.1 per legislator, functioned in states in the middle of the population range, and were represented in the west by Oregon, Washington, and Colorado.

Blue category legislatures were typically within the least populated and rural states. These were typified by more traditional or “citizen” legislatures, meaning that lawmaking in these states was not the legislators’ main occupations. Legislators in citizen legislatures spent an average of “half of a full-time job doing legislative work” (§ 7) and typically had a small staff. They received low pay -- approximately $15,984, thus most required outside sources of income. They had on average, 1.2 staff per member. Western states that fell into this category were Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Utah. However, Oregon’s official website claims that its legislature was a “citizen” legislature as well (Oregon State
Legislature, 2008). Since Oregon’s legislature does not fall into Kurtz’s and Rose’s Blue category, one can only presume that “citizen legislature” in this case, relates to the fact that the legislators in Oregon are fully employed outside their responsibilities as legislators -- that they are not professional, full-time, legislators.

Summary

Types of legislatures may have an effect on legislators’ perceptions, and thus, their decisions. Kurtz’s and Rose’s (2005) definition of three types describes the variances across the nation. For “Red” category states with larger populations such as California, New York, and Pennsylvania, the more likely the legislator will work full-time as a professional legislator. They will also more likely have a larger, full-time support staff to assist them in their work. “White” category states, such as Oregon, Washington, and Colorado, have mid-sized populations. Their legislators are more likely to work more than two-thirds time, and with fewer staff than Red states. They rely more on outside sources to help them gather pertinent information on legislation they must address. Finally, “Blue” category states, such as Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Utah, have the lowest populations. Their half-time “citizen legislators” have a short amount of time in which to do their official legislative work, and have few support staff to help them gather information. They are more likely to rely heavily on outside resources such as constituents, agency heads, and lobbyists to help them with information they need for decision making.

The Idaho Landscape

This section provides a description of how Idaho’s geographic, social, economic, and political histories were formed, and the foundations for legislative decision-making in the state. A brief description about the formation of community colleges in the state is also included.
Overview of Idaho’s Geographic, Social, Economic, and Political Context

Idaho, the Gem State, lies east of Oregon and Washington, covers two time zones, and runs north to south from Canada to Nevada. The state includes the western slope of the Rocky Mountains, rivers, deserts, and farmland which dominate the state’s landscape. Idaho contains some of the most rugged landscapes in the United States, with 80 recognized mountain ranges, and, according to the US Census Bureau (2004), 50.2 percent of the state is federally owned land (Mapes, Pulaski, & Hill, 2003). National forests cover 40 percent of the state and it holds “the second largest single wilderness area in the lower 48 states,” the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness (Stapilus & Weatherby, 2005, p. 13).

Idaho’s regions have distinct economic bases and cultures: From north to south, seven geographic regions are recognized: (1) the Northern panhandle and (2) North Central Idaho, plentiful with rolling, fertile hills of prairie called the Palouse, mountains full of timber, and myriad lakes; (3) Southwestern Idaho containing canyons, high deserts, and irrigated farm land, as well as the majority of the population. The Snake River Plain of South Central (4), Southeastern (5), and Eastern Idaho border the Grand Tetons to the east and north (6), have many lakes and rivers as natural resources where agriculture is the primary source of income for local economies. Central Idaho (7) is home to the highest peaks in the state where tourism, mining, and logging have been economic mainstays (Idaho Blue Book, 2006). Figure 1 depicts the socioeconomic regions in Idaho.
While Idaho is the 13th largest state with 83,557 square miles (Idaho Blue Book, 2006), it is one of the least populated states. In 2005, it had an estimated 1,429,096 people (US Census Bureau, 2007). Between 2004 and 2005, Idaho was also the third fastest growing state in the nation due to the in-migration of people. Between 2000 and 2005, Idaho added 75,795 new residents (Idaho Department of Commerce and Labor, 2006b). In 2006, personal income taxes ranged from 1.6 to 7.8 percent, and property taxes were the basis for tax revenues for the state. Tax credits for those who paid taxes to others states, and homeowners’ exemptions were available for those who applied (Wikimedia, Inc., 2006; Idaho Blue Book, 2006).

Although it has become more diversified in recent years, Idaho’s economy continues to be dependent on agriculture. It’s most important agricultural products are lentils, beans, sugar beets, cattle, dairy products barley, and wheat. Idaho also produces nearly one third of the potatoes in the nation. Industries that emerged as a result of agriculture are food processing, machinery, and chemical products. Idaho also remains a top producer of silver and lead, although its dependence on these industries decreased through the years. Tourism and the Idaho National Laboratory, a nuclear research facility
in eastern Idaho, are also major contributors to Idaho’s economy (Wikimedia, Inc., 2006; Idaho Blue Book, 2006).

A more recent addition to Idaho’s economy helped its continued growth: high-technology production and services. Boise became a center for semiconductor manufacturing where Micron Technology, Inc., produces “the only US manufacturer of dynamic random access (DRAM) chips” (Wikimedia, Inc., 2006, ¶ 29). Boise was also home to Hewlett-Packard laser printer production, and Twin Falls was the site of a key customer support call center for Dell, Inc. (Wikimedia, Inc., 2006, ¶ 29).

In contrast to the much of the nation, Idaho’s economy remained stable during economic downturns of the late 1990’s and early 2000’s and the annual unemployment rate was well below the national level. However, a large number of layoffs began in early 2001. The economic recession and jobs exported to Canada and overseas began to harm Idaho’s economic health. Between 2000 and 2004, the electronics manufacturing industry lost over 3,000 jobs—the majority in 2002. According to the Idaho Department of Commerce & Labor (2006), that year the unemployment rate rose to 5.4 percent. By 2003, the economy began to rebound and the unemployment rate lowered to 5.3 percent, then further declined to 4.7 percent in 2004.

Idaho had low employment costs and was touted as a good value to prospective out-of-state employers. The per capita income of Idahoans in 2003 was $25,911, compared to $32,632 for the nation, and Idaho was ranked 45th compared to other states (US Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2004). The state had a state sales tax of 5 percent, although in 2003 to help balance the state’s budget, that tax was temporarily raised to 6 percent for two years. The temporary increase was sunsetted July 1, 2005.

Idaho’s Political Structure

The purpose of the next two sections is to describe how Idaho’s political structure operates and its historical roots. The influences of the past have had a direct affect on the way Idaho legislators and its citizens lead their government.
Idaho’s citizen legislature is comprised of 35 senators and 75 representatives representing 35 legislative districts among 44 counties. Senators and Representatives are elected for two years and elections occur every even-numbered year. As reported on the Idaho legislative website, recognizing that they can not be authorities on every issue, legislators function among 24 committees that align with their interests and knowledge. Because they are part-time, or Blue legislators with few personal support staff, they rely on their constituents, lobbyists, and legislative staff for information on which to base their decisions.

The Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee (JFAC) has been considered the most powerful committee at the legislature. The Committee is made up of members of the Senate Finance Committee and the House Appropriations Committee. This body meets daily during the session and reviews the executive budget, holds hearings on proposed agency budgets, and capital and construction improvements. Then the committee recommends a final budget to the full legislature for passage. Rarely does this recommendation get voted down.

Until 1969, the legislature met every two years. Since then, legislative sessions have been convened yearly in mid-January and usually conclude by the end of March. The 2003 session was the longest in the state’s history at 118 days, and closed at 6:00 p.m., on Saturday, May 3, 2003. That was the same year that the temporary 6 percent sales tax was implemented to generate emergency revenues for the state. Idaho’s legislators serve on interim committees between sessions to deal with emerging issues (Idaho Blue Book, 2006).

**Idaho’s Politics**

Idaho has a distinctly independent way of approaching politics and has not been easily described or predictable. In 1980 for instance, Idaho overwhelmingly voted for Republican Ronald Reagan for President and at the same time, overwhelmingly voted for Democrat Frank Church for the US Senate. The reasons for this dichotomy are many (Idaho State Historical Society, 2006).
Idaho was settled in a different manner than most of the western frontier states. Rather than being settled by pioneers moving from the eastern United States to the west coast states, Idaho was created by settlers who moved eastward from Oregon and Washington, and northward from California. Idaho’s politics have also been influenced by where it lies geographically. While it has much in common geographically with eastern Oregon and Washington, it politically and culturally diverges from those states because it lies between, and has been influenced by, two tremendously different areas in the country: the Great Plains and basin cultures of Montana, Utah, and Wyoming, and the Columbia plateau cultures north and west. As a result, “Idaho has developed transitional patterns that exhibit traits from both of those regions, and from its settlers. Ethnologists and sociologists often find that Idaho is different [from surrounding states] as a result of that situation” (State Historical Society, 2006, p. 2). “Idaho has emerged as an individualist group of communities that overcame geographical and social obstacles to create a commonwealth of their own” (Idaho State Historical Society, 2006, p. 1). If Idaho were to be grouped with other states politically and culturally, those states would be Utah and Montana (Idaho State Historical Society, 2006).

**Three Political Cultures**

Stapilus and Weatherby (2005) give a more complete description of how Idaho political cultures formed. They refer to the works of Daniel Elazar, a noted authority on political culture who describes three subcultures in American politics: traditionalistic, individualistic, and moralistic.

The “traditionalistic” subculture was born of the southern plantation economy…where well-defined social, political and economic elites predominated. This subculture places little emphasis on public participation; competition within society is among the elite rather than among the public in general. Government preserves the status quo, including perpetuation of the governing elite. (Stapilus & Weatherby, 2005, p. 5)

Idaho was affected only slightly by traditionalist politics in its early settlement when southern confederate Democrats immigrated to the territory during and after the Civil War. However, this orientation “clashed with the individualism and equality of the
frontier; so it never really took hold in Idaho” (Stapilus & Weatherby, 2005, p. 5). Because if its roots, there is little influence in Idaho from the traditionalistic political subculture.

The “individualistic” subculture is described by Elazar, as basing their politics “on the ‘marketplace’ model of politics where government is seen as promoting the interests of individuals rather than the common good” or “general concerns of the community” (Stapilus & Weatherby, 2005, p. 5). In fact, government involvement is “viewed as threat to economic progress, and should allow individuals to freely pursue economic gains” (p. 5). This approach to politics came with European immigrants who moved to the mid-Atlantic states during the 19th century, and from there, to the lumber and mining areas in northern Idaho.

The “moralistic” subculture which originated with the Puritans, Scandinavians, and Germans who moved westward, is sharply different than that of the individualistic viewpoint. This political culture emphasizes the importance of the common and general interests of the entire community. Moralistic views hold that the government’s role is that of protector and promoter of the public interest, and that the individual’s role is to participate in furthering the public interest. “Government or community action is a positive force in society and can be used for social and economic regulatory purposes” (Stapilus & Weatherby, 2005, p. 6).

Elazar did not see Idaho as any one pure political subculture. He considers Idaho “a mixed moralistic and individualistic state” (p. 5) “based upon the fact that no one subculture has completely dominated another” (p. 6). Idaho was similar to its surrounding states, except Oregon which Elazar described as being dominated by the moralistic subculture. The individualistic approach became more influential in northern Idaho where miners and loggers valued a hands-off approach to governance. The moralistic approach became more influential in southern Idaho where Midwestern farmers and Mormons felt that the needs of the community were more important than those of the individual, particularly when building and negotiating irrigation systems in southern Idaho. Although these subcultures were still strong in the state, they have
become less distinct because of the advent of mass communication and the mobility of Idaho’s residents.

**Other Attendant Political Associations**

Idaho’s political cultures are affiliated with and influenced by other and associated kinds of viewpoints: (a) conservatism, (b) regionalism, and (c) the two-party system.

**Conservatism**

Idaho’s overall conservative political outlook developed a somewhat anti-government cynicism. Government was expected to support economic development, but not interfere or intrude in individuals’ businesses—financial or personal. Social welfare programs have not fared well in Idaho as a result. The state ranks close to the bottom on a per capita or income basis in many public spending categories (Stapilus & Weatherby, 2005, p. 8). One legislator who was interviewed for the purpose of my study voiced the overriding belief that Idahoans “can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps” if they are provided with a stable economy within which to do so. “If business is supported, then there will be enough money for people to earn and support themselves.” (Legislator #1)

More recent migration of the population has also had an impact on Idaho politics, strengthening its already conservative stature. New residents coming from California, Washington, and Oregon have settled in northern and southwestern Idaho. Most have come in order to find refuge from the larger cities, or to find others like themselves—more conservative thinkers than those in the states from which they moved. As a result, the state has become more conservative and more Republican.

**Regionalism**

Regionalism has also had a strong effect on Idaho political history. Two years after Idaho was declared a territory, fights over the location of the capitol broke out. Boise interests literally stole from Lewiston, the state seal and official papers making Lewiston the territorial capitol. In 1884, legislators from Boise and northern Idaho voted officially to prohibit Mormons, or anyone accepting key tenets of that church from
holding political office. In the mid 1990’s, rapid growth and high property taxes in northern Idaho brought about the development of the failed “one-percent initiative” to set property tax limitations. Southern Idahoans were less supportive, as their tax bases remained largely unchanged.

Even today these two major regions in the state have shown their differences in their individualistic and moralistic viewpoints: Northern Idaho or “North Idaho,” as its citizens prefer to call it, is more likely to support property tax cuts and impact fees; where southern Idahoans are more likely to oppose them. North Idaho is more likely to support term limits on state and local government officials, whereas southeastern Idahoans are generally opposed.

Boise, the third largest city in the Northwest and the state’s capitol, is located in the southwestern region and was perceived by some Idahoans, as being too far removed from the northern and eastern parts of the state to understand those areas’ unique strengths and needs. On occasion, anti-Boise sentiments arose as a result (Stapilus & Weatherby, 2005). I have often heard some more cynical Idahoans from outside Ada County where Boise is located, refer to the seat of government as “the Great State of Ada.”

**Republicans and Democrats**

Idaho has been a solid Republican state since statehood, with the Legislature controlled by the Republican Party since the late 1950’s. According to Stapilus and Weatherby (2005), although Idaho is much more conservative than its neighbors Oregon and Washington, it is not a reactionary state. In 1994, Idaho’s legislative and executive branches became unified under the Republican Party. “Despite this unification, the next several sessions of ‘veto-proof’ legislatures failed to result in major changes.” (p. 7) Tax policies and other initiatives developed in the preceding two Democratic administrations were not tampered with. Also, the Republican legislature did not cut taxes or budgets, or “pass major conservative legislation” (p. 7) as expected.

Idaho legislators, as has been their electorate, are slow to change the status quo. Idaho’s respect for political custom is a tempering, or even a restraining force. Once
adopted, existing policies and institutions are highly revered. Legislators and Idahoans are reluctant to abandon them once they are in place, regardless of what party instituted them. The Gem State is among the states that adopted Progressive Era reforms of initiative and referendum, but unlike its neighbors California, Washington, and Oregon, Idaho has seldom used those tools. Even two reactionary property tax initiatives and proposed legislation that would have discriminated against gays have been defeated. According to Stapilus and Weatherby (2005), it was expected that the use of these strategies “may happen less often in the future. Idahoans remain skeptical of radical change, despite their populist inclinations” (p. 8).

Although Idaho has been represented and led predominantly by Republicans throughout its history, Idaho Democrats have held prominent positions in the last 35 years. Democrats held the Governorship for 14 of those 35 years: Cecil Andrus was elected Governor in 1970 and reelected in 1974. During his second term, he was appointed US Secretary of the Interior by President Jimmy Carter. After succeeding Governor Andrus when Andrus was appointed Interior Secretary, John Evans was elected Governor for two terms in 1978 and 1982. Andrus was elected to two more terms as governor after Evans, in 1986 and 1990. Frank Church was the last Idaho Democrat to win a seat in the US Senate in 1974, and Larry LaRocco was the last Democrat to be elected to a seat in the US House of Representatives, in 1992 (Idaho Blue Book, 2006). In 2003, the Idaho Legislature’s political party breakdown was thus: Senate: 28 Republicans, 7 Democrats; House of Representatives: 27 Republicans, 9 Democrats (Idaho Legislative Services Office, 2003).

**Idaho's Community College System Structure**

The purpose of this section is to describe the development of the community college system in Idaho. Within this description is how community colleges were established and how they came to be governed and funded.

At the time of the study, only two community colleges served Idaho: North Idaho College (NIC) in Coeur D’Alene and the College of Southern Idaho (CSI) in Twin Falls. Idaho had four other public institutions of higher education and one public

The legal framework, including the formation of college districts, trustee oversight, and funding came about by the passage of House Bill 363, in 1963. However, the precedent for two-year college development in the state had already been set by the establishment of junior colleges many years before. According to Barton (1997), “The historical development of community colleges…involved both secular and parochial initiatives” (p. 1).

The earliest institution, Ricks College, was founded in Rexburg in 1888 by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons), Boise Junior College, the second two-year institution established in the state, was “founded in 1932 by the Right Reverend John Barnwell, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Idaho” (Barton, 1997, p. 1). Ricks College was renamed Brigham Young University of Idaho (BYU-Idaho) in 2001, and its status changed from a two-year junior college to a four-year institution (Brigham Young University, 2006). It continued to be privately supported by its Church members and student tuition. Boise Junior College eventually evolved into Boise State University, a public institution that offered degrees through the doctoral level.

North Idaho College, the first public community college in Idaho, was founded in 1933 as a private institution, but became a junior college with the passage of the Idaho Junior College Act in 1939. The College of Southern Idaho was established in 1964 after passage of HB 363 which also divided the state into six community college districts. At the time of this study, NIC, locally supported by Kootenai County, and CSI, locally supported by Jerome and Twin Falls Counties, were the only public community colleges established in accordance with the bill (Barton, 1997).

The two-college system is funded principally by the colleges’ two local community college districts, and each college is overseen by locally elected boards of trustees. These local boards share oversight responsibilities with the State Board of Education. The “system” is funded partially by state funding and by local tax districts. It has no formal lobbying organization, nor intricate infrastructure tying it with state or legislative
initiatives. The colleges report to their local boards of trustees on an ongoing basis, and in a collaborative mode, to the State Board of Education where they coordinate course articulation with high schools and colleges across the state. Community colleges receive no funding from the State Board of Education, but receive direct appropriations from the legislature, their local tax districts, and the State Department of Professional-Technical Education.

With recommendations by the colleges’ presidents, the State Board approves the college curricula as well as carries forward the colleges’ budgets for legislative approval. Figure 2 depicts the organizational structure for community colleges in Idaho.

Figure 2. Idaho community college system.

In addition to local property taxes, county tuition reimbursements for out-of-district students within the colleges’ service areas, and tuition and fees, community college budgets are funded at the state level by state property tax revenues and the state liquor fund. Figure 3 portrays the percentage breakdown of funding sources for community colleges in Idaho from 2001 through 2006 (Idaho Legislative Services Office Budget, 2007, p. 57).
State community college funding was allocated so that half went to North Idaho College and the other half went to the College of Southern Idaho (Idaho Legislative Services Office Budget, 2005). Since the local districts were formed, there have been detractors in the counties who help fund the community colleges. They called for a lowering or eliminating of the local property taxes that helped fund the colleges. They requested of legislators that the state cover more of the colleges’ costs, since, they argued, students from all over the state attended the colleges. The legislature responded in 2002. In their appropriation for community colleges that year, they included fund shift of $3.2 million to relieve taxpayers in the counties with community colleges. Although this shift was a 9.7 percent increase over the previous year’s appropriation, it did not increase the total amount of funding that the community colleges received. It simply “replaced ‘on a dollar-for-dollar basis’ $3.2 million in local property taxes that they would have received” (Idaho Legislative Services Office Budget, 2001, p. 23). The Idaho code for community college funding is included in Appendix F.

The trend in community college funding followed the conservative spending philosophy of the Idaho legislature. From 2001 through 2006, state funding remained relatively flat and the actual percentage of state funding compared to other sources
decreased slightly. Colleges became more dependent on increased student enrollments and increased tuition and fees as revenue for their institutions. Figure 4 shows state funding in comparison to community college enrollments for FY 2001-2006.

![Figure 4. State percentage of funding and enrollments 2001-2006.](image)

In the early part of the 2000’s employers came to realize that there was a shortage of qualified workers in Idaho, and found that the two community colleges were not only a bargain, but provided the just-in-time training needed to recruit employers to the state. However, the two community colleges were unable to meet the needs for the entire state due to funding and distances. Throughout the years, several studies have been made to examine the feasibility of expanding the number of community colleges in the state. In the summer of 2006, an interim committee was appointed by the governor to further study this issue, and to make recommendations to the 2007 legislature.

**Summary**

Idaho is a state whose geography influenced the types of individuals that settled the state, and thus their outlook on how the state should be operated. The conservative nature of its legislature is a result of regional differences and political cultures that formed in the state. Rugged northern Idaho individualists who were miners and loggers wanted little government interference in their lives. In contrast, southern Idahoans’ religious backgrounds were more socialistic, and their livelihoods were dependent on agriculture
where they had to rely on one another to share natural resources. Thus, they developed a more moralistic bent toward political decisions.

Idaho’s sparse and mostly rural population is represented by part-time citizen legislators—relying on legislative staff, lobbyists, their colleagues, and constituents for their expertise on specific issues. Its legislature is heavily Republican whose outlook is to first and foremost keep taxes low and commerce strong. This philosophy supports a fundamental value that Idaho citizens, if they have employment opportunities, should be able to find work and support themselves and their families without state intervention.

Independence prevailed in the development of community colleges in Idaho as well. Junior colleges developed from private, non-state-funded parochial institutions. Only one of the two-year colleges, North Idaho College, evolved into a community college and is primarily supported by a local community college tax district of Kootenai County. The other college, College of Southern Idaho, was formed by a local community college tax district voted in by citizens of Jerome and Twin Falls counties.

Although the pioneer moralistic political culture of southern Idaho tempered the individualistic desires of North Idaho at the beginning of statehood, Idaho remains primarily a conservative state—a state where incomes are low, where property and income revenues to the state are lean, and legislators are hesitant to tap into limited family and business fiscal resources. Legislative decisions about community college funding are based on a conservative philosophy—to not increase taxes. This philosophy has had an affect on community college funding—the percentage of state support declined from 2002-2005. Community colleges in Idaho continues to rely on local funds from community college tax districts and tuition and fees for nearly half of their funding.

The Oregon Landscape

This section provides a description of how Oregon’s geographic, social, economic, and political histories were formed, and the foundations for legislative decision-making in the state. A brief description about the formation of community colleges in the state is also included.
Overview of Oregon’s Geographic, Social, Economic, and Political Context

Oregon, the Beaver state, is described as one of the most geographically diverse states in the country. It includes deserts, a seacoast, valleys, and mountains and 53.1 percent of the state is federally owned (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

Oregon is commonly divided into seven distinct regions: (1) the Coast, (2) Portland (the largest metropolitan area in the state), (3) Mt. Hood/Columbia River Gorge to the north and east of Portland, (4) the Willamette Valley west of the Cascade Mountain Range and midway between Portland and Medford, (5) Southern Oregon, (6) Central Oregon in the middle of the state on the east side of the Cascades, and (7) Eastern Oregon, next to the Idaho border (Travel Oregon, 2006). Figure 5 depicts the socioeconomic regions in Oregon.

Figure 5. Oregon’s designated socioeconomic regions.
Each of these regions not only has its own distinctive geography, according to the Oregon Bluebook of Facts (2006) it also has its own culture—a way of life developed from its historical foundations (Oregon State Archives, 2006).

Oregon is the ninth largest state in the nation with 98,386 square miles, and an estimated population of 3,641,050 (US Census Bureau, 2007). There is no state sales tax. Personal income taxes, corporate income taxes, property taxes (limited to 3 percent increase a year), and gasoline taxes are collected to supply state revenues. In 2006, nearly 70 percent of taxpayers were in the top tax bracket. Corporate income tax was 6.6 percent of taxable income, and the minimum corporate tax was ten dollars. Oregon’s support of economic development and corporate investment in the state was evident in that 65 percent of Oregon corporations that paid state and federal income taxes paid the ten-dollar minimum (Oregon State Archives, 2008).

Oregon’s economy has had significant ups and downs in recent years. During the 1980’s, Oregon was hit hard financially due to the downturn in returns on its traditional resources of timber, fishing, and agriculture. For the past two decades, Oregon has attempted to diversify its economy to withstand the effect of losses from those traditional resources. Great efforts have been made to move “to a more mixed manufacturing and marketing economy” (Oregon State Archives, 2008, p. 1), and to develop the state’s high-technology sector which created a boom of economic success. However, this developing sector is centered in the metropolitan areas of Portland, leaving rural areas of Oregon out of the new economy. When the 1990’s economic boom collapsed, Oregon suffered “high unemployment, widespread hunger, and a diminishing safety net of social services” (Oregon State Archives, 2007, p. 1). In addition, Oregon lost employment from competing imports coming from Asia, South America, and Canada, and found its production plants moving to Mexico and Canada (Oregon State Archives, 2007; Mapes, Pulaski, & Hill, 2003).

Like Idaho, Oregon’s regions have distinct economic bases but communities across the state were very financially similar, from Bend to Burns and Grants Pass to Coos Bay. Not so long ago, Oregon’s citizens lived near the products they produced and sold, and “Cities processed, brokered, lawyered, and distributed the wheat, lumber, fruit
and other products” (Mapes, Pulaski, & Hill, 2003). In the 1980’s when the traditional revenues from timber, fishing, agriculture hit bottom, and environmental restrictions added economic pressure, formerly thriving communities were crushed economically. The state split in two: the high technology center of Portland, and the rest of the state. “Rural politicians angrily blame[d] Portland environmentalists for shutting down logging. Voters in Portland complain[ed] that they [were] helping subsidize schools around the state” (Mapes, Pulaski, & Hill, 2003).

However, with the boom and bust of its technological economic base in the late 1990’s, Portland joined the rest of the state in the state’s economic successes and failures. According to the Oregonian newspaper (Sunday, November 2, 2003), Oregon was no longer segmented along East and West, and rural and urban areas, with Portland being the primary economic driver of the state. Oregon became segmented into “nine distinct regions, each with its own values, economic approach and political outlook” (Mapes, Pulaski, & Hill, 2003).

As Portland dealt with its own economic downturn, the rest of the state continued to compete with other rival states and a global market—some areas with success and others without success. Bend became a resort community that competed with Aspen, Sun Valley, and Palm Springs for tourist dollars. Southern Oregon became a strong influence in the health care fields, having expanded a hospital that served both Oregonians and Californians. Large dairies moved into the northeastern part of the state, producing milk for Tillamook cheese, turning it into a national brand (Mapes, Pulaski, & Hill, 2003).

There were still areas of economic struggle and there was still anger over the loss of jobs in the areas where the timber industry faltered. The high desert ranching and farming economy of Eastern Oregon had still not recovered. Coastal communities were seeing a mixture of tourism and retirees, but not a resurgence of its timber, logging, and fishing roots.

Regional differences made agreement in Salem, the home of the state legislature, very difficult. During the 2003 legislative session, Governor Ted Kulongoski stated when looking at a map of Oregon
It’s not a map, it’s a tapestry. I’m trying to figure out what is the common thread that runs through these communities. There’s not this reliance that we’ve had on each other to form this idea that we’re all in this together…What’s happened is, it’s been very easy to polarize the debate.

Toward the end of his two terms in office, Governor John Kitzhaber (the governor who preceded Kulongoski) declared the state “‘ungovernable’ [and] said he thought many of the difficulties were cultural” (Mapes, Pulaski, & Hill, 2003).

Although Oregon’s economy still had not fully recovered from the recession of 2001, by September 2004, Oregon had the second-fastest growing manufacturing sector in the nation which continued to grow during 2005 (Oregon State Archives, 2006). Transportation equipment manufacturing, primary metals manufacturing, and high-tech manufacturing also continued to grow. Other significant players in Oregon’s economy were agriculture (which included cattle, vegetables, nursery stock, fruits and nuts, dairy products, and wheat) and lumber and wood products, tourism, food processing, paper products, machinery, and scientific instruments. As of 2006, call centers, retail trade, and employment services played a significant role in the professional and business services sector, which accounted for more than 10 percent of the jobs in the state.

Although Oregon’s economic stability continued to be a challenge, its Economic and Community Development Department reported that “Oregon has some of the most competitive labor costs in the western United States” (Oregon State Archives, 2008, p. 1). At the same time, it ranked 27th in the nation in the percentage of its citizens living in poverty. In 2003, Oregon’s per capita income was $29,340, compared to $31,632 for the nation and ranked 29th compared to other states (US Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2004). “Until 2004, Oregon had the unenviable distinction of leading all other states in percentage of hungry citizens despite its reputation for production of food” (Oregon State Archives, 2008, p. 2). The unemployment rate declined from 8.2 percent in 2003, to 7.1 percent in 2004 (Oregon State Archives, 2008). Like Idaho, Oregon was also touted as good value to prospective out-of-state employers.
Oregon’s Political Structure

Oregon’s 36 counties are represented by 30 senators and 60 representatives. Senators are elected to four-year terms and Representatives are elected to two-year terms. Oregon’s is one of a few states whose legislature is biennial. It convenes every two years on the second Monday in January during odd-numbered years. There are no limitations on session length, however most sessions conclude in June. Like Idaho, between sessions, legislators serve on interim committees and task forces that study issues to be dealt with during the next legislative session (Oregon State Archives, 2004).

The Joint Ways and Means Committee is a key part of the legislative leadership. This Committee is comprised of members from both the House and the Senate, and has co-chairs, one from each house. The Committee puts together the state’s budget for the legislature which is compared with the governor’s recommended budget. From these budget recommendations come compromises between the executive and the legislative branches to result in the final state budget.

More recently, Oregon assemblies are routinely called into special or “emergency” sessions between regularly scheduled sessions to deal with state funding crises. Because Oregon’s budget is written in two-year allotments, and with no sales tax and unpredictable income tax revenues, the state has had to confront over- and under-budgeting issues on a regular basis outside of session. These issues have caused Oregonians to consider changing from a biennial to annual legislature off and on through the years. However, voters have resisted that move because of concerns that the Oregon legislature would change from a “citizen” legislature to a “professional” legislature (Wikimedia, Inc., 2007).

Oregon’s Politics

Like Idaho’s, Oregon’s politics were built from extremely dichotomous viewpoints. According to Clucas, Henkels, and Steel (2005):

…politics in the Beaver State is schizophrenic. The state is driven by two different visions of government and politics. Many state residents desire an active government that rationally seeks to solve societal problems; other residents want a smaller government that keeps taxes low, produces few regulations, and protects
traditional social values. Sometimes Oregonians are proud of their state’s innovative and pragmatic government policies; at other times, voters want to tear down those policies. The divide between these two visions permeates the state’s political landscape, from small local debates over development issues to high-profile battles over statewide ballot initiatives. (p. 1)

*Two Political Cultures*

Clucas, Henkels, and Steel (2005) further stated that these viewpoints were rooted in Oregon’s “progressive heritage” and “conservative populist” cultures. These movements, which evolved more than one hundred years ago, continued to influence ideological divisions among Oregonians.

The “progressive” movement which emerged in 1890 and continued until 1920, subscribed to “often conflicting goals” (Clucas, Henkels, & Steel, 2005, p. 2). At the time, there was a desire to reduce economic and political power of corporate interests. The leaders of this movement developed and championed the use of initiatives and referenda “to wrest power from the dominant influence of business and corrupt politicians and return it to the people” (p. 2). At the same time, progressives “believed that government should be a positive force in society—to further the common good…to use its power to solve societal ills” (p. 2). They advocated for expert officials to control government policies. They believed that an “open, activist, and practical government could lead to a better, more modern society” (p. 2).

Modern “populism” which also developed at the turn of the century, was based on the conviction that the common citizenry was prevented by the rich and powerful “from acquiring what was rightfully theirs” (p. 2). Populism began in agricultural areas where farmers and others felt controlled and taken advantage of by the corporate elite such as railroads and banks. Modern populists could be divided into two groups: liberal populists and conservative populists. These two groups often held different and conflicting goals. Although they both believed that the “elite must be fought to promote…the true will of the people. Yet they focus[ed] on different elites, public values, and issues” (p. 3).

Liberal populists (also referred to as “progressive populists”) saw the will of the people as being denied by the influence of large corporations and a wealthy elite.
Conservative populists targeted government agencies, politicians, and an elitist media as being the greatest problems of modern politics. “They feared that these groups hindered private economic choice, the effectiveness of the market, and the public’s ability to promote broadly shared conservative social values” (p. 3). They desired limited government and more support of the free market. However, one area in which they promoted more governmental regulation was on “family values” or regulations on “appropriate personal behavior.” This group advocated for “government intervention” in regards to “traditional family values” and inhibiting such activities as abortion and homosexuality (p. 3).

Early on, the progressive movement was aligned with populism; they both sought government policies that supported the interests of the people over controlling, big business interests, and sought more direct power for citizens. Although both Progressivism and Populism, as formal movements, mostly disappeared by the 1920’s, their core beliefs remained important influences on modern Oregon politics.

**Complex Movements and Sets of Values**

Clucas, Henkels, and Steel (2005) stated that in most other studies, these two groups were described simply as “liberals” and “conservatives.” But in Oregon, there were markedly different groups making up these two categories. Thus, they have chosen to use the terms “progressives” and “conservative populists” to more clearly describe Oregon’s politics. Oregon still had strong ties to the progressive movement’s support for government by experts, rational problem solving, and innovation. The term “liberalism” does not adequately describe that particular tie.

Clucas, Henkels, and Steel (2005) utilize the term “conservative populism” rather than “conservative” because “conservative” misses the significance of the anti-elitist nature of this movement: a strong concern for protecting the rights, interests, and values of the people from an overly intrusive government and a morally divergent intellectual and media elite.

Even so, Clucas, Henkels, and Steel (2005) state that the terms “progressive” and “conservative populist” still do not adequately describe the “complex movements and sets of values” within Oregon’s politics (p. 4).
Not all liberals in the state are progressives. Not all conservatives are populists. Not all conflict is between progressives and conservative populists...Oregon has initiative activists and opponents to free trade who champion liberal populist values. There are also traditional conservatives who value a healthy economic environment more than a conservative social climate. Yet much of Oregon’s political conflict reflects the collision of progressives’ strong support for an active government and the conservative populists’ general desire to limit government...in Oregon it is so prominent that we argue that it is the defining characteristic of the state’s politics today.

A Leader in the Country

“Progressive” Oregon has been a leader in the country, promoting the initiative and referendum processes of democracy, the recall of public officials, the direct primary, and women’s suffrage. It created strict land-use laws, and declared public control over ocean beaches. It developed universal health care coverage (the Oregon Health Plan), developed Vote by Mail, and now requires a deposit on beverage containers. A benchmark system was created to measure Oregon’s social conditions to determine whether the state government was meeting its goals. The physician-assisted suicide law gained national attention when adopted by voters in 1994 (Clucas, Henkels, & Steel, 2005).

“Conservative populist” Oregon also shaped the state’s politics significantly and most visibly through the initiative process. Measures 5 and 47 reduced taxes. Measure 7 was an attempt to control government taking of private property for public use. Measure 11 stiffened penalties on criminals, and Measure 3 implemented legislative term limits—which was rescinded by the Oregon Supreme Court as unconstitutional in 2002 (Clucas, Henkels, & Steel, 2005).

Continuing Splits

Not surprisingly, progressives and conservative populists are frequently in conflict with one another, and are influenced by the issues presenting themselves from the economic, geographic, and historical backgrounds of their constituents. Urban residents of the Willamette valley, which include technology-based Portland and government-based Salem, are most supportive of progressive ideals. Rural residents, whose narrow
economic base depend on agriculture and forest products and industries, tend to support conservative populism. According to Clucas, Henkels, and Steel (2005):

There has always been a tension between the Portland area and the rural areas of the state. Until the 1930's Portland was strongly Republican, and the rural areas supported Democrats, a situation now reversed. The distribution of votes in the 2000 presidential election makes it clear that important differences between urban and rural, and east and west remain….the urban areas of Willamette Valley strongly supported Democrat Al Gore; the more rural areas of the state supported Republican George W. Bush. (p. 9)

Given these influential groups, Oregon has developed its own patterns of voting. From 1998 on, Oregon voted primarily for the Democratic Party in national elections, and was known in political circles as a moderate Democratic state. In 2003, the Oregon Legislature's political party breakdown was thus: Senate: 15 Republicans, 15 Democrats; House of Representatives: 35 Republicans, 25 Democrats (Oregon State Archives, 2003). In 2002, voters narrowly elected Democratic Governor, Theodore Kulongoski.

**Oregon's Community College System Structure**

The purpose of this section is to describe the development of the community college system in Oregon. Within this description is how these colleges were established and how they came to be governed and funded.

Seventeen public community colleges and seven public universities serve the state. The first community colleges were established by state law in 1961. Local districts were formed and locally elected boards oversaw the development of comprehensive colleges to serve their communities. All seventeen colleges and their outreach sites form a recognized system within the state.

Community colleges in Oregon function not only under the direction of their local school boards, but are also regulated by the State Board of Education. The State Board of Education was established in 1951 by the Oregon Legislature to oversee the state’s schools and community colleges. The Board is comprised of seven members appointed by the Governor and is confirmed by the State Senate. Five members represent Oregon’s five congressional districts, and two members represent the state at large. The board sets educational policies and standards for Oregon's 198 public school
districts, 17 community college districts, and 20 educational service districts. All of these agencies have separate governing bodies responsible for transacting business within their jurisdiction. “Prior to 1987, the responsibility of community college and workforce development oversight was placed with the Oregon Department of Education, the Oregon State Board of Education, and the Oregon Economic Development Department” (Oregon Secretary of State, March 2001). In 1987, Oregon law established the Office of Community College Services (OCCS), reassigning oversight of the office from the “Superintendent of Public Instruction to the Commissioner for Community College Services” (Oregon Secretary of State, March 2001).

In 1999, the Oregon Legislature renamed the OCCS the Department of Community College and Workforce Development (CCWD). At the same time, CCWD was moved “under the direction and control of the State Board of Education. That action effectively removed the department from the auspices of the Oregon Department of Education (1999 Oregon Law, Chapter 39) and established the stand-alone agency” (Oregon Secretary of State, March 2001). The CCWD Commissioner is appointed by the Board. Figure 6 depicts the current system.
According to the CCWD, the roles of the State Board and CCWD are to “approve new programs and courses, distribute state aid to community colleges, adopt rules for the general governance of community colleges; and, on behalf of the Governor, implement and oversee state implementation of Title IB of the Workforce Investment Act” (Oregon.gov, 2007, p. 1).

State Board of Education assigns the Commissioner of CCWD the responsibility for bringing community college interests before the Governor, the legislature, state agencies, and others. Also, the Commissioner is responsible for submitting community college budget requests and budget reports for the CCWD to the legislature (Oregon Legislative Assembly, 2001). All entities consult with the Governor’s education policy adviser. The roles and relationships among the State Board, State Department of Education, and CCWD could be challenging. According to one staff member (personal communication, December 20, 2006), at the Oregon State Board of Education:
Statutorily, the roles of the Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (who oversees the Department of Education), the Commissioner of Community Colleges, and, to some degree, the governor, is laid out in Oregon Revised Statutes chapter 326…

The governance structure is very cumbersome, and guarantees conflicts. My guess is that it just sort of evolved. The authority of the superintendent and the board is especially in question. We operate under the idea that the board sets policy and the superintendent implements that policy through her staff at the department, but because she is an elected official, she develops policy proposals of her own and the electorate expects her to keep those promises once elected.

The board hires the community college commissioner and has, I would argue, more of a governance board role (while K-12 would be more of a policy board role).

All work with the governor’s education policy advisor. Because it is in everyone’s best interest to work together, folks do that as much as possible. Should the governor (and hence, the board) be a different political party than the superintendent, the potential for clashes increases.

Another organization that plays a key role in the function of community colleges is the Oregon Community College Association (OCCA), a lobbying organization. Founded in 1962, their stated purpose is to provide support of the colleges “before policy-makers and partners whose actions affect the well-being of community colleges across the state” (OCCA, 2007a, p. 1). The OCCA is comprised of 34 members: the president from each of the 17 community colleges, plus one board member from each college.

Several funding successes coming from the collaboration of OCCA and the Office of Community College Services (precursor to CCWD) led the two organizations to develop joint legislative agendas for community college support beginning in 1999. Another milestone change in community college funding requests came as a result from a need for OCCA and CCWD to solve a growing problem. During the 1999 legislative session, requests for community college support came from multiple community colleges for their special projects and in competition with one another. As a result, the $2 million targeted to meet enrollment growth across the state, was divided up for special college projects and distance learning programs. In 2001, community colleges, collaborating
through OCCA and CCWD signed a “unity pledge” giving assurance to “…the governor and legislators that the colleges will advocate with one voice, for one statewide goal” (¶ 89).

Funding for community colleges in Oregon has evolved in a number of ways through the years. Throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s campuses were developed through the support of local property taxes and private actions, such as collaborations with local school districts and universities and land donations from their local communities. As a result, “[E]ach college … developed distinguishing characteristics widely recognized and appreciated” (Kreider, 1997, ¶ 1). The 1961 legislation forming community colleges in Oregon called for two-thirds of community college funding to come from the state. That goal was only reached during the 1961-1963 biennium. Through succeeding years, community colleges’ percentage of state funding declined, so that by 2003, the percentage of state funding was down to 44.5 percent. By that time, tuition and fees provided 28 percent of college revenues, property taxes 21 percent, and other revenues made up the rest (OCCA, 2006). From 2001 – 2005, state support for community college funding decreased by $51.3 million. Figure 7 shows in graphic form the community college funding trends in Oregon from 1999 through 2005.

![Figure 7](image_url)

Figure 7. Oregon community college state funding trends 1999-2005.
As a result, tuition and fees increased steadily; at the same time, enrollments began a steady decline. According to the CCWD pamphlet, *Oregon Community Colleges Budget Picture 2005-2007* (2007).

Community college enrollments both in terms of headcount and full-time equivalent students have dropped significantly as Oregon’s colleges have cut their budgets in response to reductions in state appropriations. This decrease in enrollment can be attributed to a number of factors including decreased course availability and tuition increases of 12-25 percent per year. Between 2002-2003, community college tuition rose an average of 20 percent. (p. 1)

By fiscal year 2003-2004, 88,837 FTE (1 FTE equals 510 student contact hours), or a total of 330,595 students were served (OCCA, 2004). Figure 8 shows the decrease in headcount at Oregon Community Colleges from 2000-2004.

![Figure 8. Oregon community college headcounts 2001-2004.](image)

Like Idaho, the trend in community college funding followed a conservative spending philosophy in order to meet funding deficits. Figure 9 depicts the comparison of enrollments to tuition costs from 1992-2002 (OCCA, 2004).
In summary, Oregon is a state whose economic and political nature has been greatly influenced by its geography and its inhabitants. The citizenry who have settled in Oregon reflect the resources that they have utilized and relied on. Its legislature reflects regional differences and political cultures that formed in the state. There is a decided split between Western Oregon, where the high technology industries in Portland and the seat of government in Salem resides, and “the rest of the state,” (author’s quotes) where logging and agriculture met with low economic return and global competition in the 1990’s. By the early 2000’s, “the rest of the state” had still not recovered from the economic difficulties. While Oregon had a larger progressive political culture, particularly in the more populous western part of the state, conservative populist voters and legislators from “the rest of the state” created divergent political decisions. At times, Oregon’s politics has reflected extremes—those of conservatives and liberals—which has caused unpredictability. One former governor exclaimed that Oregon was “ungovernable.”

The differing approach to governance of the state is greatly influenced by the available income of its constituents in the state. Citizens in the western part of the state where incomes are higher, tend to vote more favorably toward state support for agencies
and education. “The rest of the state’s” communities tend to vote more conservatively. In addition, Oregon’s legendary use of initiatives and referenda sustains an environment that has placed limits on taxation and spending.

Oregon’s part-time citizen legislators meet biennially and, like Idaho, rely on legislative staff, lobbyists, their colleagues, and constituents for their expertise on specific issues. Unlike Idaho’s, Oregon’s legislature is more balanced between Republicans and Democrats. Because of the lack of state revenues in recent years, the legislature has continued to allocate funding based on keeping taxes low and commerce strong. This more conservative approach had an impact on community college funding: community college funding lost more than $51.3 million between 2002 and 2003, tuition increased an average of 20 percent, and between 2001 and 2004 enrollments declined by nearly 19 percent.

**Summary**

Idaho’s and Oregon’s legislative structures and histories have had a significant impact on their politics, and thus their legislators’ actions. Because Idaho’s and Oregon’s legislators are part-time citizen legislators, they rely on support staff, lobbyists, and constituents to help keep them informed. Legislators’ relationships with others, within and outside the legislatures, are essential to their attaining information and making decisions. State resources and geography have influenced the types of individuals attracted to these states. Fishing, mining, and logging within the two states attracted individualistic/populists who wanted little government interference in their lives and livelihoods. Urban businesses and agriculture attracted moralistic/progressives who relied on one another to share valuable natural resources to survive. They sought more government protection from exploitative private interests as well as assistance to equalize resources among citizens.

Like other states (Gittel & Kleiman, 2000; Layzell & Lyddon, 1990), Idaho and Oregon have grown strong political cultures of their own. Out of these political cultures arose strong party affiliations: Republicans tended to be more individualistic/populists and Democrats tended to be more moralistic/progressives. Idaho is a strongly
Republican state, and Oregon has had a more prominent Democratic presence. Although Oregon has had more moralistic/progressive tendencies, its use of initiatives and referenda have held liberal state spending in check, as has its economic downturns in the late 1990's.

Table 2 provides a comparison of the political cultures in Idaho and Oregon as described from the viewpoints of Elazar (Stapilus & Weatherby, 2005) and Clucas, Henkels, and Steel (2005). The political cultures in Idaho and Oregon are cross-referenced in the table using the two models and depicting similarities between the two models. The table also shows where Idaho’s and Oregon’s dominant political cultures lie by regions.
Table 2

An Overview of Political Cultures in Idaho and Oregon by Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLITICAL CULTURES</th>
<th>Conservative Populists: control government agencies, politicians and elitist media</th>
<th>Clucas and Henkels (2005) Continuum: may share characteristics at times</th>
<th>Progressivism: government should reduce economic &amp; political power of corporate interests &amp; corrupt politicians to promote equality among people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X=Similarities across cultural descriptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualistic: government should promote individual interests and not interfere in private lives of the people</td>
<td>Idaho Regions 1,2</td>
<td>Idaho Regions 1, 2</td>
<td>Oregon Regions 1, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moralistic: government should promote common and general interests of entire community</td>
<td>Idaho Regions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7</td>
<td>Oregon Regions 5, 6, 7</td>
<td>Oregon All Regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalistic: government well-defined; political elites predominate</td>
<td>Not a significant political culture in Idaho and Oregon</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oregon Regions 1, 2, 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Initiative/referenda used to control government
All of these factors influenced legislators’ perceptions and decision making processes in some way, and thus, how legislators viewed community colleges, how they viewed their roles in making budget decisions, and their expectations of community colleges. The context for my interpretation of the data in my study was based upon these factors.

**Description of Study Participants**

This section provides a description of the legislators who participated in the study as well as the environments in which the interviews took place. This description is used to portray the environments in which the legislators functioned during this study and my perceptions and interpretations of their experiences. I wanted to more fully understand what a legislator’s experience was and what might have led them to their decisions regarding community college funding (Patton, 2002; Tuckman, 1999).

The pool of participating legislators was comprised of three women and five men, and their ages ranged from late 40’s to early 70’s. Their terms of legislative service ranged from 1 to 18 years, with some having served in both the House and Senate in their states. Two of the legislators were Democrats, and the rest were Republicans. The legislators in this study lived in and represented rural and suburban legislative districts. No urban districts were represented.

All of the legislators interviewed said their lives had been touched in some way by community colleges. Two graduated from community colleges and the remainder had taken classes at community colleges. Six who took classes but did not graduate from a community college, took courses for adult enrichment (hobby or personal improvement) or to gain additional job related skills. One stated that she took classes to gain skills that she did not receive from her four-year degree, but needed in her line of work.

Three of the legislators had taught at community colleges, and one had a spouse that worked in a community college system. One legislator served on a community college local board for 10 years. One had a child who attended a community college, and another said he and his children had used the athletic facilities at a local community college extensively through the years.
Two of the legislators expressed a feeling of close personal connection with community colleges through their legislative work of meeting with college administrators, attending political events and speaking engagements, and participating in community seminars on community college campuses. One felt a kinship with a local community college as a community member who was involved in participating in charitable events held at the local community college. One expressed his deep appreciation for a local community college’s helping his nephew turn his life around when the nephew gained valuable work, and perhaps, lifesaving personal skills.

The legislators came from varied employment and educational backgrounds. One was a medical professional and one was a homemaker who also did volunteer work in her community. Three were self-employed business owners (two of whom were retired), one was a higher education administrator, and two were ranchers. Their educational backgrounds were thus: two had professional degrees (doctorates or terminal professional), five had bachelors’ degrees and one had an associate’s degree. Table 3 (next page) is a brief summary of the participants’ characteristics.

**The Interview Process**

Questions were not given to the interviewees in advance in order to allow for “naturalistic” inquiry (Patton, 2002, p. 254). “Naturalistic” means “planning for certain broad contingencies without…indicating exactly what will be done in relation to each…” (p. 254). In other words, the design needs to be “flexible” and to allow “the phenomenon under study” to provide for “emergent” information “even after data collection begins” (p. 255). As expected, a free discussion of ideas and influences ensued. I observed legislators in action, watching their processes, their behaviors, and interactions with others. Open-ended interview questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999; Patton, 2002) were asked of all interviewees to begin rapport building and creating a momentum for the process. Interviewees were free to talk as long as they desired on each topic. Sixteen specific questions were used to help guide the data interview process (see Appendix A).

The data was collected and analyzed for patterns and themes that emerged. Interviews took place in a variety of settings and a variety of ways. The following section
describes the settings for the interviews and how the interviews transpired. I became acquainted with the Oregon legislative process in spring 2003 and began interviews there that summer. Idaho interviews commenced the summer of 2005. The description follows a somewhat chronological order.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislator &amp; State</th>
<th>Personal Community College Experience</th>
<th>Time in Legislature</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Ed. Level</th>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L1 Idaho</td>
<td>Took classes</td>
<td>18 Years</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Assoc.</td>
<td>Rep.</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2 Idaho</td>
<td>Nephew attended</td>
<td>20 Years</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Bach.</td>
<td>Rep.</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3 Idaho</td>
<td>Took work related classes</td>
<td>2 Terms</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Bach.</td>
<td>Rep.</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L4 Oregon</td>
<td>Took one class; involved as community member</td>
<td>22 Years</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>Prof.</td>
<td>Dem.</td>
<td>Sub-urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L5 Oregon</td>
<td>Attended 2 years; served on school board</td>
<td>6 Years</td>
<td>Self-Employed</td>
<td>Prof.</td>
<td>Dem.</td>
<td>Sub-urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L6 Oregon</td>
<td>Graduated; taught; child attended</td>
<td>6 Years</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Assoc.</td>
<td>Rep.</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L7 Oregon</td>
<td>Took classes for skills upgrade; spouse CC professional</td>
<td>1 Term</td>
<td>Retired Business Owner</td>
<td>Bach.</td>
<td>Rep.</td>
<td>Sub-urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L8 Oregon</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>14 Years</td>
<td>Retired Business Owner</td>
<td>Bach.</td>
<td>Rep.</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Oregon Interviews

I learned to find my way around the Oregon capitol in the spring of 2003 during the 72nd Assembly, as I shadowed OCCA staff members one day. Andrea Henderson, a classmate of mine in my doctoral program and Executive Director of the OCCA, invited me to join her and her staff while they met with legislators to request support for the Community College Support Fund funding request from the CCWD. She knew of my interest in legislative work because of my legislative internship with the Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee in Idaho.

As we approached Capitol complex, I was particularly interested in the strong influence Oregon’s pioneer history and natural resources had on the design of the Capitol Building and its grounds. Murals, sculptures, and reliefs capture the depth to which Oregonians value their heritage. Even the Capitol dome is decorated by “The Oregon Pioneer” statue. According to the Oregon Bluebook, this is “…an heroic figure represent[ing] the spirit of Oregon's early settlers” (Oregon State Archives, 2008a). Marble sculptures at the main entrance, a covered wagon on the west, and Lewis and Clark led by Sacajawea on the east continued the pioneer theme.

Inside the capitol building, the mix of textures, light, and colors, lent a feel of airiness and yet warmth. The rotunda, the halls, and the lobby areas were lined with polished rose-colored travertine, and the floor and staircases of the rotunda were made of grey marble with borders of black marble. The walls in the hallway outside the first-floor hearing rooms were covered with smooth honey-colored wood. Window seats with cushions, strategically anchored the entire windowed wall across from the hearing rooms where visitors, lobbyists, and staff members awaited and met with legislators.

It was in these hallways that I shadowed the OCCA staff. After arriving, we immediately walked through the rotunda, and proceeded to the back of the building, near hearing rooms where staffers hoped to catch legislators between meetings and hearings. Later we moved upstairs and waited in lobby areas outside the legislative chambers on either end of the building. The OCCA staff sent notes in with legislative interns and staff members to notify legislators that they wanted a few moments of their time. As I shadowed OCCA, I was amazed at their patience and enthusiasm for their work, as well
as their amazing stamina, going up and down stairs, patiently waiting for their “targets.” Between their brief conversations with legislators, they huddled to share information, strategize, and predict what the legislators they visited with would do. Several times, the OCCA staff members were able to connect with legislators briefly to try and persuade them to support the bill. All the while, I continued to get a feel for the environment surrounding this frenetic population of lobbyists and legislators. While the bill was philosophically supported by the legislators, as expected, it was not funded at the level that was hoped for.

My first two interviews were made at the capitol five months later, the last week of that session, in July 2003. As was mentioned earlier, this was the longest session in Oregon history and legislators were weary of the session. Tensions were high, and the two legislators I interviewed at that time expressed extreme exhaustion and deep frustration with the lack of resolution on budgets. One legislator mentioned that tempers were short. Indeed, I observed high emotions during one debate on the Senate floor the morning before interviews at the Capitol.

I arrived a day early to spend time to once again orient myself to the location of offices and to remember how to access the legislative chambers. I also wanted to observe the business of the day, so I dropped in on the House proceedings. As had happened when visiting in the spring, I was struck once again by the décor of the legislative chambers. I was used to the Idaho Legislative Chambers, decorated in deep gold, blue, and red velvet which reminded me of what English Parliament chambers must look like. Each of Oregon’s chambers however, continued the pioneer and northwest theme and in colors reflective of nature.

According to the Oregon State Archives (2008a), the “the Senate chambers’ carpeting, where alternating designs of wheat and salmon were woven, symbolized Oregon’s agricultural and fishing industries. The mural behind the Senate President’s desk …[showed] a street scene in Salem when news of Oregon’s admission to the Union was received in 1859” (p. 1).

The décor of the House Chambers, where I observed proceedings, was similar, reflecting other aspects of Oregon’s history. The furniture and paneling in the House
was “golden oak…Symbolic of Oregon's important wood products industry [was] the specially designed carpet featuring the Douglas-fir, Oregon's state tree. Behind the desk of the Speaker of the House [was] a … mural showing the historic meeting of Oregon pioneers at Champoeg in 1843, when the provisional government was established” (p. 2).

The debate I observed had to do with adding a temporary surcharge on property taxes to create a source of revenue to maintain the levels of service in elementary and secondary school public education, senior services, and public safety. Arguments had to do with the proposed legislation being only a temporary fix to the lack of funding, and that the issue would need to be addressed again in the coming year. There was lengthy debate back and forth regarding the bill. Several senators used quotes from famous individuals to drive home their philosophical stances. Words from Churchill, Roosevelt, Henry Clay, Lincoln, Shakespeare, and even the bible were used. Finally, one senator expressed his exasperation by quoting The Grateful Dead with “What a long, strange trip it's been.” Much of the frustration came out of a concern for the need for more funding during some of the worst economic times—yet a time when essential services were needed most.

Another frustration during the lengthy legislative session was that the same overall budget requests for education had been debated during the previous biennium and had not been resolved at that time either. Although this request was several million dollars less than the previous request, there was still no resolution on how to fund it.

The rest of my re-orientation to the capitol included observing visiting constituents and tourists and lobbyists who lingered in the hallways and lounges outside legislative chambers. I observed them discussing the hope of catching legislators between meetings, hearings, and floor proceedings. Televisions were strategically located in lounge areas outside chambers for visitors to watch proceedings without entering the assembly. Lobbyists, staff, and legislators stood or sat, discussing legislative actions or other items.

Inside chambers, and during floor proceedings, legislators left and came back in frequently, and for a variety of reasons. Some were in caucuses, or were testifying for their own bills before Senate or House committees. Others were meeting with other
legislators, with lobbyists, or constituents or groups from their home districts. Having been delivered notes by pages, legislators would leave proceedings to visit with staff members or lobbyists. One legislative staff member explained that the act of a legislator leaving proceedings for any reason could make a political statement itself—especially if an issue came up for vote that the legislator did not want to be on record as being “for” or “against.”

Another detail of interest to me was the diversity of attire among the Oregon legislators. I was used to the more formal attire of Idaho legislators that I had seen during my internship and at other events that I had attended at the Idaho capitol throughout the years--everyone wore suits and business wear. Oregon legislators’ attire varied greatly. Some were dressed in “Friday casual”—many of the women wore pantsuits, and the men wore khaki slacks with sports coats. Others were dressed in shirtsleeves and sweaters without ties. Others were dressed in suits and more formal attire. Staff members were all dressed in suits or dress pants, and male interns wore ties. I attributed some of the casualness of what some legislators wore to the time I visited them during the session. But, I found out as I visited again at mid-session two years later, that legislators, like their constituents, dressed according to their own, independent styles. I also wondered if the variance in dress had anything to do with Oregon’s political cultures of progressivism and populism.

The capitol’s legislative offices where the interviews were to take place lined the building wings that flanked opposite ends of the capitol building. One had to walk through the galleries of the Senate and House chambers to reach them—even when there were proceedings taking place on the floor. There was often a steady stream of traffic on the mezzanines above the lawmaking taking place below.

Upon entering each office complex, I was faced with a maze of what seemed a sea of cubicles. These lime green (House) or pumpkin orange (Senate) cubicles housed from two to four staff members outside each legislator’s office. Posters and banners from colleges and universities within the legislators’ districts, and other political pronouncements decorated every inch of the cubicle walls and doors of the legislators’ offices. I found the legislators’ offices by reading nameplates near their office doors,
behind their office staff members’ cramped quarters within the cubicles. I was greeted by legislative interns who were busy fielding phone calls, other visitors, and legislative colleagues.

After my re-orientation, I was finally ready and anxious to meet “my” first two legislators the next day. My anticipation was great. After numerous letters, phone calls, revisions to agreements, and faxes to the legislators and their staff, finding one hour to do an interview and actually connecting with these tremendously busy individuals felt like I’d come to the end of a long journey. I felt victorious. In many ways I was fortunate that I was able to connect. According to Clucas, Henkels, and Steel (2005), it may take weeks for lobbyists to get an appointment with a legislator.

The next day, I arrived early for my first two interviews and was shown to a nearby small waiting area for visitors that lay within the maze of cubicles. Others who were waiting, most of whom were dressed in suits or office attire, sat in waiting areas lining the windowed walls just outside the elevator areas and outside of the cubicle maze.

The area where I was seated was composed of upholstered chairs and small sofas where the day’s newspapers and miscellaneous flyers rested on coffee tables available for waiting visitors’ reading. Tucked in-between offices and next to my waiting area was a staff work room where copiers, coffee pots, and water coolers were placed—open to the view and within earshot of visitors waiting just outside.

My third interview was scheduled a year later, and the same procedure occurred.

Each legislator’s office had a window view to the outside and was decorated with personal effects that included sports memorabilia, family, and community photos. In each case, I was invited in graciously by staff members and then the legislators themselves. The legislators closed the door behind us. I sat across the desk from each of them where I could look out the windows behind them. I placed my tape recorder on their desks and proceeded with the interviews. Surprisingly, we were not interrupted, and each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

My fourth and fifth interviews were decidedly different than the first three. Interview number four, which took place during the 73rd Assembly in spring 2005, started out in the legislator’s office. Soon after I sat down, he was unexpectedly called to a
hearing to testify. He asked if we could continue the interview as we hurried to the
hearing rooms down on the first floor. When we arrived, we sat on the padded window
seats outside the row of hearing rooms for a few moments until he was called by a staffer
to enter. While he was in the hearing, I composed more of my interview questions, made
field notes, and people-watched. The hallway was filled with individuals either waiting to
visit with legislators or to testify in hearings. Within the half-hour, he reappeared and sat
down with me again in the very busy hallway where we proceeded with the interview. All
the while, his assistant hovered nearby monitoring the time, posted to alert him of the
next hearing, and to report any updates she received on her cell phone.

Even though the legislators were friendly, the first four interviews were quite
formal. I felt some pressure to be as brief as possible, and at times did not feel I was as
thorough in my questioning as I would like to have been. I left feeling somewhat
unsatisfied with the depth of the information I gathered.

My fifth and last Oregon interview took place between sessions in the fall of
2005. I met this legislator at his place of employment. He set aside time to visit with me
outside his office in a hallway. It was late afternoon and we found our interview spot to
be quiet and without interruption. I wondered how I would feel in his presence. As I
observed him within his legislative milieu and performing his leadership duties, this well-
respected and articulate individual appeared to be somewhat intimidating. He had a
commanding voice and demeanor when on the chambers floor. When he spoke, he had
peoples’ attention. What I found in my interview though, was a warm and welcoming
demeanor; a personable individual with great interest in my research, my employment,
and my family. Our interview lasted the longest—about 60 minutes.

Idaho Interviews

Idaho interviews took place in summer and fall 2005, between the annual
legislative sessions. The first Idaho interview was accomplished in July that summer at
the legislator’s home. I made a late morning appoint to travel to Legislator 1’s (L1) farm
home. I arrived on time, and her husband greeted me at the door as he was leaving to do
some business in town. Unlike a stereotypical 1900’s farm home, this legislator’s home
was a new home with a paved driveway. The architecture was ranch style with cathedral ceilings and windows. The view from the front entryway extended to the south, showcasing several hundred miles of farms, desert, and glimpses of a city.

L1 showed me to her very comfortable family room where she offered me iced tea. I sat on the sofa and placed my tape player on the long coffee table in front of me. L1 took a seat in “her” easy chair, mentioning that the other chair was her husband’s. After a few minutes of small talk about the weather, and a few questions about my personal goals and achievements, we proceeded with the interview which lasted about an hour and a half.

The next Idaho interview was via the phone while Legislator 2 (L2) was traveling on the interstate on his way to interim committee meetings in Boise. I did not know L2 personally. I had tried several times to contact this legislator, but was unable to reach him. He called me instead, and we talked nearly an hour. A few times I lost telephone transmission with him, but not so critically that there were significant gaps in what he communicated. L2 seemed very interested in the study and provided a great deal of insight into his work as a legislator working with community colleges.

The final Idaho interview was again, via phone. Legislator 3 (L3) called me from his ranch many miles away. He wanted to save me a trip to his rural ranch so called one morning before he left to feed his cattle and cut hay. He explained that once he left the house, it would be 10 to 12 hours before he would “get back to the house and near the phone.” I did not know L3, yet his demeanor was friendly and unhurried. Not only did he spend time answering my questions, he asked me my opinion regarding community college funding in Idaho.

All Idaho interviews took anywhere from 45 minutes to one and a half hours.

**Summary**

Perryman (2003) found that legislators’ perceptions were influenced by their personal education backgrounds and experiences with higher education. Those with more experience with higher education and the longer they served in the legislature had
more positive attitudes toward higher education. He also found that urban legislators were likely to have more positive attitudes toward higher education.

The Idaho and Oregon legislators who participated in this study came from varied backgrounds and had a variety of experiences concerning community colleges. Although one was new to the legislature, she had already gained a strong reputation as having influence on community college funding. Other legislators had served many terms in the legislature—up to 22 years—and had established longstanding relationships with community colleges and their leaders.

The legislators in this study had varied educations themselves—all had earned a degree—from Associates to Professional. All but two had attended community colleges, and all but one had had personal experience with community colleges—through taking classes themselves, through family members who had taken classes, or through participating in community activities associated with a community college in their district.

Five of the eight legislators came from rural districts with sparse populations. The other three were from suburban areas of their states. Unfortunately, no legislators from urban districts were able to participate.

**Findings in Response to the Research Questions**

Initially, four research questions were formulated to help me begin filling in the gaps in the literature about legislators’ perceptions and influences specific to community college funding. From the four research questions, 17 additional and clarifying questions were developed (see Appendix A), and from those, 38 data categories were formed (see Appendix B). As I analyzed the data for this study, I searched for meaning in the information I collected—to identify similar lived experiences and perceptions of the legislators I interviewed (van Manen, 1990, p. 79). Frequent and similar “core” responses to the interview questions (Patton, 2002, p. 453) fell into seven manageable units or themes that were correlated to the four research questions:

**Research Question 1: How do legislators form their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding?**
• Theme: Opinions about community colleges by legislators and their constituents. **Focus of theme** — legislators’ and their constituents’ reported personal views about community colleges based on their observations, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings.

• Theme: How legislators view their responsibilities regarding funding in general. **Focus of theme** — legislators’ perceptions about their roles as guardians and allocators of public funds.

• Theme: Legislators’ views on local and state control of funding for community colleges. **Focus of theme** — how legislators viewed the differences between local and state control of funding and who should control community college funding in the state.

• Theme: Legislators’ opinions regarding possible changes in state community college systems and funding structures. **Focus of theme** — at the time of the study, Idaho and Oregon were considering changes in their community college systems. Due to population growth in the state and demands by employers for a skilled workforce, Idaho was exploring the addition of more community colleges to its system. Oregon community college districts with the largest populations received a larger proportion of state funding than smaller district. Oregon’s legislature was sued by smaller community college districts to reformulate the community college funding distribution to equalize funding among colleges across the state.

**Research Question 2:** What are legislators’ perceptions about the availability of alternative funding sources for community colleges?

• Theme: Legislators’ perceptions of and expectations about community colleges’ roles and responsibilities. **Focus of theme** — legislators’ expectations of what community colleges were doing and should be doing for their students, their communities, and their states.

**Research Question 3:** What are legislators’ perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges?
Research Question 1: How do legislators form their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding?

This section presents findings in response to Research Question 1, *How do legislators form their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding?* Four themes regarding this question emerged during the data analysis: (a) opinions about community colleges by legislators and their constituents, (b) how legislators view their responsibilities regarding funding in general, (c) legislators’ views on local and state control of funding for community colleges, and (d) legislators’ opinions regarding possible changes in state community college systems and funding structures.

**Opinions about Community Colleges by Legislators and Their Constituents.**

Legislators discussed their and their constituents’ personal views about community colleges, based on their observations, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. As they did so, it became clear that college presidents and constituents were integral sources from which legislators developed their perceptions.

According to the legislators, they had good working relationships with local community college leaders and felt positive about those leaders’ abilities to understand and work with the financial constraints faced by legislatures. One legislator talked about one president he worked with and felt that president really understood those constraints. He said that president understood the fiscal constraints legislators faced, and that the
president never complained. Legislators in this study also recognized what good partners community colleges were in helping to develop their states.

...[Community colleges are] probably the linchpin or key educational component... The one that will allow us to deal—whether it’s the economy [or other event]...[with] a community crisis...The retraining and the development of the economy—it’s just amazing what [community colleges] do...(L3)

On the other side of the coin, legislators also heard from constituents wanting their tax burdens lessened—at a cost to community colleges. L1 empathized:

[There are a] lot of day laborers -- a lot of people who are maybe underemployed. People who work for places perhaps where they have no health insurance. So you just look at the demographics of the county and taxes. Nobody likes property taxes to begin with. So their tax burden is always a burden to them.

And a vocal minority of citizens in L1’s community college district were “aggravated” (L1) that they weren’t able to pass a bond issue to improve local K-12 schools in their district and blamed the community college tax assessment. L1 went on to say:

...they’re a minority but they appear to not see any value to a community college. And that’s disturbing to me, it’s distressing, so during the time I’ve been in Boise, there was one time I managed to get a couple of million dollars toward that assessment directly. But I’ve never been able to do anything about the fact that only three counties chose to be in a college district and pay. It’s an issue—it’s a big issue in the state. And it’s an emerging issue for me.

Community colleges were highly respected by the legislators in this study and by their constituents as reported to the legislators. I sensed a true camaraderie that legislators felt toward community college presidents because of the empathy the presidents had for legislators and the difficult issues legislators faced. I also sensed frustration the legislators had when constituents did not seem to grasp the valuable roles legislators perceived that community colleges had. Trying to balance, empathize with, and attend to the funding needs of community colleges and yet not financially over-burden citizens was an ongoing tension for legislators in this study. In that regard, any alternative funding that community colleges could garner would seem to alleviate some of the tax burden constituents had and possibly lessen tensions between legislators and taxpayers.
Mutual Respect

Legislators held tremendous respect for community colleges, their leaders, and what they did for their states and communities. First and foremost, they appreciated the ability of community colleges to do still more with less during times of low state support. They appreciated when community colleges did not “ask [them] to go places that [they] can’t go…there’s no crying wolf…” (L3). Some legislators in this study reported that one college president was especially appreciated for his ability to empathize with legislators and had a “can do” (L3) attitude with the funds the college already had. While that president pointed out inequities in funding across colleges and universities in the state and could show why it should be some other way, he still had a positive, willing attitude.

Again, I got the impression that legislators in this study had trusting and respectful relationships with community college presidents. Legislators knew that community colleges were cautious when requesting additional funding, and were impressed that the colleges did not pressure them unnecessarily. The expectation that community colleges do more with less seemed to have become a standard for budget planning.

The Future and Expanding Needs

At the time of the interview, new activity was underway in Idaho to explore the addition of a new community college in western Idaho. L1 saw the possible development of an additional community college in Idaho as complicating the state funding issue for community colleges in the state. She was concerned about the addition of another community college in the state that would also need some state funding when the funding was already tight. At the same time, constituents were crying out for her to find a way out of their paying for the local taxing district. “They assume that I can get them out. There’s no way.”

L7, from Oregon, echoed opinions from her constituents about community colleges when they were compared to the K-12 system and universities.

…K-12 takes huge hits because a lot of the students and the activities are forced by outside influences. And higher ed. is sort of a separate, not necessarily community-based sort of old, old model. And community colleges…were modeled around what the communities wanted and so
communities owned them and I hope they always serve this “education on the ground, in your community” role. They have high credibility because of it. That’s what they do...they have the same local component of the local schools -- local boards, local control.

Community colleges continued to try and meet the expanding needs of their local communities and states, yet legislators were at a loss as to how to fund those needs and appease over-burdened taxpayers when state revenues were dwindling. L3 said in response to how he would solve this dilemma, “I just do not know, Debra.” I had the perception that while legislators felt pride in the impact community colleges had in their states, there was still tentativeness about how much they could financially support the colleges at the state level.

Part of Peoples’ Lives

Legislators shared a perception that community colleges were a part of peoples’ lives within each state. They gave their thoughts about what affect community colleges had on their constituents. L4 summed up what the majority of legislators had to say about the reputations of community colleges in Idaho and Oregon:

...[they] enjoy the greatest acceptance, and have the greatest credibility of any local or any governing body in the state. They’ve done the polls. The acceptance of community colleges, the influence of community colleges is 80 percent or more... [Compared with] cities, counties, state legislatures, we do not have anywhere near that kind of popularity or public acceptance or approval rating. Community colleges are just highly respected. [Their] approval rating is tremendous in [Oregon]. And there is support I think, in terms of the public’s not being ‘anti’-- because the public’s ‘anti’ about everything—but community colleges get excepted from that. [They have] this very, very positive, credible image.

L7 said that community colleges are such an integral part of the Oregon landscape that its citizens assume that everyone has one in their area.

I was shocked when you told me that Idaho only has two [community colleges]. Because community colleges in Oregon are so ingrained into our culture, every community of any size has a community college. And they own them in the sense that when you talk to folks in the community and you say What’s your community college?’ they know because most of them have taken a class there, gotten some service there, know somebody who’s been helped there. They are sort of that place where people go when they realize they need this resource.

L4 went on to say how he appreciated community colleges’ affordability and how he tried to restore cuts in an effort to keep them affordable to the public. Similar to
Gianini (1997), who wrote that community colleges would “reshape and restore the American dream” (p. 18), L4 saw community colleges as a source of hope:

“I’m a great believer of community colleges because I am a great believer in education. And I know that cost is very prohibitive. I admire what community colleges have done. They’re everywhere. And they do everything, and they reach out to so many people and create so many opportunities that wouldn’t be there. And I’m very grateful. I just think it’s a great source of information and education and a source of hope. It isn’t just a source of information; it’s a source of hope. You always know that Well, I can get to that community college. It isn’t that far away. I can afford it. And I’m just trying to sharpen my skills—trying to get know some new skills whether or not. Pick up the classes here so I can transfer them so I can get my shot.’ It’s all there. That’s just the feeling I have. So, I have attempted more than once to try and restore the cuts that have been made. Sometimes I’ve been successful and sometimes I haven’t.

Legislators in this study appreciated the respect community colleges in their states had earned. I became aware from my conversations with legislators that legislators’ perceptions of community colleges’ outreach and the varied roles they have taken on have helped community colleges be seen as an integral part of their constituents’ lives.

Effectiveness

A comparison of effectiveness among community colleges and universities was on the mind of one legislator. L2, from Idaho, felt that in many ways, community colleges fulfilled their service area needs more effectively than four-year institutions in the state. (The names of the individuals, colleges and locations have been changed to protect their anonymity.)

Since James Jones became president of Northwest Community College [NCC], I’ve always had interest in NCC…I’ve been very impressed with how James and the staff have made the college really pertinent to the communities surrounding [its district], and all the surrounding areas; and how the great help [has been] with job development as far as training folks for various companies that want to come in here.

I think that [community colleges] made themselves, in my view, I think that NCC is probably more important, much more important to the welfare of the [service district] than any of the four-year schools. And I think, knowing that they’ve been actively involved in the high school in [local town] toward technology development and how they have the outreach…My experience with the local community college as well as in [another local community], has been really good because they’ve helped people who do not have any…skills and maybe have graduated from high school, and [the community colleges provide]…business skills, welding skills and occupational training…nurses, [and] any number of occupations and professions that [community members]
so choose, which I think is greatly more important...from the...point of view than the four-year institutions...a holistic point of view. Community colleges give you the skills that you can use for the rest of your life to better yourself...

Legislators’ seemed to be aware of what community colleges do, and the breadth and depth of their contacts with the communities they serve. The approachability and usefulness of their programs, services, and activities made community college seem more effective than universities in meeting their community’s needs.

**Disgruntlement**

If there was any disgruntlement about community colleges, it came in the form of the desire for lower taxes supporting the colleges. In Idaho, only two tax districts supported the community colleges, and some taxpayers from those districts voiced their objections to paying for institutions that served students statewide. They wanted the state legislature to provide funding as it did for the state universities. One legislator reported that she got calls from constituents in her district to “Do something about this!” She said:

> I have not yet found a way to find the money it would take to backfill for that tax base and to find the law that can be changed to dissolve it. On the other hand, ...it involves two community colleges—NIC and CSI...[some] are aggravated about the assessment and blame our lack of better schools on that assessment and the fact that they didn’t get a campus... It [also] seems we have a real problem passing a bond issue, but it’s so narrow-minded to assume that one assessment on your taxes is a reason why people will not pass a bond issue. They never assume that maybe the bond issue is a little bit too full-blown. Maybe not well thought-out.

Although some of the legislators’ constituents were unhappy with the taxing responsibilities they had in support for their local community college districts, legislators seemed to recognize the benefits that those disgruntled citizens reaped from community colleges. However, legislators continued to look for ways to lessen the tax burden on their constituents and made their budget decisions with that goal in mind.

**Expensive Programming**

One legislator had concerns about community colleges’ expenses in regards to some programming as well as about the colleges’ lack of efforts at providing local funding
support to faculty and students. L6, from Oregon, was guarded about her opinions regarding community colleges. She had thought that expensive programs at community colleges, especially in rural areas where economies were depressed, were discouraging people from the possibility of wanting to make an investment in their own futures. She said that universities had “done an outstanding job of being entrepreneurs and going out into the private sector and endowing professorships and endowing scholarship programs for students. The community college system hasn’t gone in that direction at all.” She went on to say that [at the time of the interview] it was not a good time to raise taxes, and hoped that local communities would be willing to “step in and deal with the capital construction issues…” at community colleges. This legislator seemed to like the university model of providing additional support to their faculty members and students. I came to the conclusion that the sources of funding she described would come from local fundraising efforts through community college foundations. It seemed clear that she believed it was time that community colleges seek more local funding support to meet some of their needs.

In summary, legislators generally held community colleges in high esteem, as did their constituents. They felt legislators had strong working relationships with community college administrators and appreciated their “can do” attitudes during times of dwindling resources. As compared to all state agencies, most legislators that I interviewed felt that community colleges had greater credibility and respect because they were the most efficient education bodies in their states because they responded to local needs. They also saw community colleges as an integral part of the communities they serve and that they were a source of hope to “the masses.” Legislators felt strongly that although they wanted to help community college funding woes, they worried that more state funding intervention could undermine responsiveness to local needs and local control.

The only complaints legislators (in Idaho) heard were from constituents who felt that local community college district taxes were an unfair burden, when so many others outside their districts benefited from community college offerings. Other complaints to legislators were from community colleges themselves, who thought their share of state funding was inequitable. One legislator had some concern about duplication of expensive professional-technical programming across the state.
Overall though, legislators felt very positive about community colleges and seemed proud of what the colleges were doing and felt fortunate to be part of the educational process in their states. As a result, they said they would do what they could to equalize or even increase funding for community colleges.

How Legislators View Their Responsibilities Regarding Funding

Legislators shared the perceptions about their roles as guardians and allocators of public funds. Again and again, legislators referred to “their responsibilities” toward funding. These responsibilities fell into three areas: (a) a sensitivity to peoples’ needs, (b) balancing competing needs, and (c) meeting the constitutional requirements of the state.

Sensitivity to Peoples’ Needs

I was sometimes stunned about how forthcoming some of the legislators were with their perspectives on the peoples’ lives that their decisions affected. And they wanted to affect the greatest numbers of people in a positive way. They shared the following perspectives regarding people and legislation.

L1, in our conversation, time and again seemed to truly want to understand and be sensitive, especially to her low income constituents. A difficult area as she made decisions about budgets was taking into account the “people” factor, reflecting a somewhat moralistic point of view. She said “It’s really difficult when you look at numbers, and numbers, and numbers. I try to remember that there are people there, there are employees, that there are people being served.” L3 said that for him to prioritize, he first looked at what was “for the good of the state in the aggregate.” He said that when he compared two proposals, those that had a narrow focus and had an impact on a narrow population would be given less priority when compared to a proposal for the same money that could be spent to benefit more individuals.

As they made their funding decisions, legislators took into account the influence their decisions made on people. Remembering that the numbers they saw in budgets actually were people, weighed on one legislator’s mind. Another legislator, when making
his budget decisions, whenever possible, wanted to make sure that funding he approved would benefit the most people, rather than a select few.

**Balancing Competing Needs**

Legislators were continually faced with competing needs for funding and described those needs and how they viewed their roles in endeavoring to meet competing needs. For example, corrections (prison systems) was a growing competitor for education funds in both states, and legislators were keenly aware of the risks of not funding that sector. When broaching this topic, L4 reported that he had recently given a speech on corrections in the state of Oregon in which he said, “…we have 10 state prisons…[and] I think 10 Oregon youth authority facilities…we’re going to build four more state prisons.” His report on the growing headcount was obviously troubling to him. “We’re at 13,000-plus and we’ll be at 17,000-plus in, I do not how many years. That’s just adults. …in the state of Oregon [there are prisons] in almost every corner of our state.” He had grave concerns about the legislated local funding cap for community colleges, the divisiveness that was created among programs and agencies in the state, and the dependence community colleges had on state funding as a result.

…back in the early 90’s…ballot Measure 5,…just totally took the property tax as we knew it as a primary source of funding for education, chew[ed] it way down, and capped it on the basis of ‘well, they do not need this money and they are just wasteful on everything.’ But it has led to catastrophic results in terms forcing all of it to come from state government which has only one source of funding. …we only have one. And that’s the income tax. We do not have a sales tax. And so all of a sudden, that income tax…pool is being forced to look at higher ed. and community colleges and K-12 and say ‘We’ve got to give more of this to them,’ and of course the human resources areas, [and] the corrections areas are screaming bloody murder because they have tremendous needs. I mean their needs have not gone away and it’s also forced…K-18 not to be a block. They devour each other. They cannibalize each other. Community colleges will attack higher ed. or K-12 and say ‘we need it more than them.’ Or they won’t join with them. They’ve got to go on their own because they’ve got to survive. And so you’ve created a real division situation with K-18, and you’ve created a real threat sometimes in human resource programs…and to corrections.

In Idaho, then recent murders in the northern part of the state (Broadwater, 2005) was clearly on the mind of L1 as she expressed a concern for assuring solid funding for corrections in Idaho.
...prisons...are only 8.9 percent of the total budget. But after that thing in North Idaho, do you want that type of person out? The thing of it is, those folks that are in prison have done something two or three or four times. Eighty-two, eighty-five percent of them are addicted to some substance...or alcohol. Many, many of them are pedophiles. ...let's look at citizens; you can go up and down the streets in Twin Falls, and many of those people do not ask for a thing but to be safe. They're older people. Maybe they've raised their children. Maybe they're young people with little children. They just ask to be safe! And for 8.9 percent of the budget--it is a sharp spike--but frankly, until we can figure a way to spend twice that much, and rehabilitate, which is the way we're trying to go and get them put [away] safely, you do not have much choice, because, for some reason or another, crime has been on the increase in this state for quite some time.

When asked whether she thought the rise in crime was associated with the economy, she said “It is, and ...I do not like spending that kind of money, but until we find a way to gradually change those people...and there are some of them that probably won’t [change]...” She thought the legislature would continue to spend more and more in correctional areas.

The public school (K-12) system was another competing force for limited dollars. L6 felt that community colleges, while valuable, may have merited lower priority on the list than public schools. She said that “in K-12, you kind of have a captive audience there. People show up until they get to about the 10th grade anyway. Community colleges are elective. You would choose to go there because you were wanting to make an investment in your future for whatever way.”

Human services and welfare of the communities in each state was a third area legislators felt was in competition with community colleges for limited funds. L2 felt most supportive of community colleges because they have become important to the welfare of the people in their communities. He went on to say that with health and welfare programs, it is was very difficult to make sure that people actually qualified for those programs, and that the programs could show what differences they made in participants’ lives. He had serious concerns about two trends he was observing: recipients’ growing dependency on health and welfare programs and thus more funding for those programs, and lessening of funds for higher education.

When facing competing needs, legislators were disappointed at some of the divisiveness that developed particularly in Oregon after ballot Measure 5 passed in 1990. Community colleges came to the legislators requesting funding support as competitors, and not as a united front. In both Idaho and Oregon, K-12 schools and health and
welfare programming competed with community colleges for funding. However, one need also in competition for funding seemed to trump all others in priority for increases: the need to protect citizens from crime. The tremendous increase in crime in recent years had legislators particularly troubled, and they felt compelled to fund corrections programs, perhaps at higher rates than they would have liked. Even with this in mind, most of the legislators in this study did perceive that community colleges changed peoples’ lives for the better, and that community colleges merited more funding than legislators were able to give them.

Meeting the Constitutional Requirements of the State

According to legislators, balancing people needs and the constitutional obligation (in Idaho) to a balanced budget were particularly challenging; there was never enough funding to meet all the needs. Their obligations to meet the constitutional requirements of their states were also connected to their personal values and policies that were set forth.

Legislators’ own values regarding money entered into budgetary decision making. When looking at budgets across the board, L1 said:

“…you just see what you have to do to balance constitutionally—we have to balance the budget. And it’s not my money. It is not my money…” But, she went on to say “…if there is anything I can find that will make it a little more palatable, I have that opportunity, and I have that responsibility.”

L3 said, “I try not to waste any money; of course, waste is a personally defined term.”

“Tell us the thing that’ll help you the very most” is what L1 wanted to know. She said she always discussed budget requests with agency heads to get the most information that would help her make her decisions. L7’s feelings about her decisions were grounded in policy.

…[when] the policy decisions have to be made, you’ve gathered your information and you say ‘This is how I feel in the policy sense.’ And that’s what our job is—to make the policy decisions that go here … that’s our job, and I’m comfortable with that. Get the information, then make the policy decision you are right with…”
Although the review of the literature reported that other higher education systems were in direct competition with community college funding nationwide, Idaho and Oregon legislators did not mention four-year colleges and universities as priority competitors for community college funding.

Legislators’ obligation to constitutional requirements and public policy regarding state budgeting were aligned with their personal values systems. They also seemed to find law and public policy helpful foundations from which they made their sometimes conflicted decisions. They were elected to not only apportion funding, but be ever aware of the responsibilities they had to their states to be good stewards of the state’s funding.

To summarize, I sensed that legislators felt great tensions to fund competing needs within their states. One legislator expressed her ongoing struggle to watch the dollars and numbers, and still remain sensitive to the “people” who were represented by those dollars and numbers. A top concern tended to be the need to fund a growing corrections industry and keep people in their states safe. When asked whether they thought that sluggish economies had a bearing on rising crime rates, they said yes. And they thought that community colleges held part of the solution—training and retraining people so they could earn higher wages. Legislators did not think that health and welfare programs merited as much funding as education, although such programs were a necessity. Participants’ success rates were much too difficult to track within the health and welfare system, they said. All felt that if people could be “taught to fish” rather than “be given fish” they would be much better off, and education was a way to accomplish that. One legislator said that competition for dollars affected the K-12 systems as well—and since some secondary education is compulsory and community colleges are elective, the dollars for community colleges needed to be a lower priority.

Finally, legislators were pressed by their constitutional obligation to balance the budgets within their states. I sensed a great deal of frustration at their trying to satisfy competing needs, and yet stay as unemotional about their decisions as possible.
Legislators’ Views on Local and State Control of Funding for Community Colleges

Legislators were clear about how they viewed the differences between local and state control of funding, and who should control community college funding in the state. They felt strongly about communities maintaining local control of community colleges. Because community colleges in Idaho and Oregon developed as a result of local needs, legislators vigorously upheld the missions of community colleges as being tied to, and governed closely by, their communities. L7 was concerned that if community colleges ever came under state control only, their functions would transform into more like four-year college or university models—“sort of a separate, not necessarily community-based sort of old, old model.” She felt that the local community control should remain in place, which added to the colleges’ high regard within the state.

She went on to say that the more state funding community colleges received, the more additional responsibilities they would gain to account for that funding. At the same time, local communities would have less control.

You talk about ‘community college system.’ I think we need to be real careful because community colleges’ great strength is that local reaction. In other words that sense that ‘this is our community college and it responds to what we want, not dictates from Salem about what a community college should do as a policy thing.’

So it’s always this tension between these two factors. ‘We want more money from Salem, but we do not want the strings that come with it.’ And I would encourage them to look hard at [where] the money [comes from] because there will always be strings that go with money…and [they need to] be sure the trade off makes sense, because if community colleges cease to be owned—if local communities cease to have ownership in community colleges—then they won’t be community colleges any more, as we have had them in Oregon.

L7 feared that the trade off would be that community colleges would “cease to be owned” by their local communities—thus no longer being community colleges. L7 went on to say that she warned other legislators against property tax limitations that would force community colleges to become more dependent on state funding. She had grave concerns that communities would lose “all of our control to guide our own fate. That everything will be coming out of Salem, and if the money doesn’t come with it, we’ll still get [to do] whatever they want us to do.”
L1 was concerned for her constituents in Idaho—some of the poorest in the state and whose property taxes relative to income, were some of the highest in the state. As mentioned earlier, she continually heard from local residents who blamed community colleges for a tax burden they could not afford.

But, she also saw the benefits of supporting community colleges locally. Community colleges "have some very community-based activities, like bringing in businesses that chances are, they wouldn't do otherwise." Bringing in more businesses not only brought in more jobs, but brought in more tax revenues from the income taxes of the companies themselves and from the income taxes of those companies' employees. L1 said she had researched the community college funding responsibility for her local county tax district to see its impact, and felt there could be solutions in the future.

…the average funding for anybody in this county…isn't prohibitive unless you simply are already feeling the burden of property taxes and some other burdens in your economic lives…I think there could be some way that community colleges could still have some local governance, and yet have more state funding. [But] I've not found that yet.

L1 suggested that there could be a link between relieving the local tax burden on community college districts in Idaho, and a possible change in state community college systems and funding structures. "That's what I want the state board of education to come up with—to say, 'Let's put a system in place where we take this property tax burden down some.'"

Funding concerns often led Idaho and Oregon legislators and community members to engage in ongoing dialog about the structure of community college systems and how they should be funded. Much of the same language that L1 often used to describe her concerns, such as "tax burden," "priorities," and "legislative responsibility," were echoed in testimony and discussions that took place over the years.

To summarize, legislators felt strongly that community colleges needed to maintain local control by being funded more at the local level. They saw a great strength in community colleges as their being modeled around what their communities need. A major concern was that the more state funding community colleges received the less sensitivity the colleges are to local needs. One legislator said that those in the legislature cannot know what is needed at the local level; those needs should be determined at the
local level. She also expressed a concern that along with more state funding, the more responsibility community colleges would have toward the state, which may have nothing to do with local needs. Another legislator continued her pursuit to find ways to relieve the local tax burden through state funding and at the same time let communities maintain local control of their community colleges. Oregon legislators’ perceptions supporting local control began to indicate a contradiction in their expectations about community college funding and state policy (passed by the legislature).

Legislators’ Opinions Regarding Possible Changes in State Community College Systems And Funding Structures

At the time of the interviews with legislators, Idaho and Oregon were considering changes in their community college systems. Due to population growth in the state and demands by employers for a skilled workforce, Idaho was exploring the addition of community colleges to its system. At the time of the study, Oregon community college districts with the largest populations received a larger proportion of state funding than smaller districts. Oregon’s legislature was sued by a smaller community college district to reformulate the community college funding distribution to equalize funding among colleges across the state.

Changes in Idaho’s and Oregon’s community college systems and funding structures surfaced among the legislators. Ways to increase funding to the colleges, and at the same time, reduce the tax “burden” -- a term used again and again by legislators -- on local districts were of prime concern. For many years, Idahoans examined ways to increase funding for community colleges to provide at least 50 percent of their operating budgets from the state’s general account, to relieve local districts from the responsibility of funding the colleges, and to prevent local districts from carrying the tax load for future community colleges that might be developed in the state. Central Oregon Community College in Bend, Oregon, actually brought a lawsuit against the state in 2003, in order to “force a re-examination of how dollars [were] distributed to all of 17 of Oregon’s community colleges” (Community College Week, 2003, ¶ 1).
Idaho’s Community College System and Funding Changes

Barton (1997) reported on three proposed remedies for Idaho’s funding dilemmas. One that was suggested was to expand the tax bases for the existing colleges to all the counties within their service areas. North Idaho College’s tax base could be expanded from its one-county tax base to five counties, and College of Southern Idaho’s tax base could be expanded from its two-county base to the eight counties within its service area.

A second remedy proposed by some was to leave from their community college district altogether. One vocal community member who was a promotor of this solution was Rob Williams, a prominent local attorney who lived within the College of Southern Idaho community college tax district. Williams testified at a subcommittee hearing on the Governance of Higher Education in December 1995 (Committee on Governance of Higher Education, 1995). He spoke of locally supported community college funding as a burden—particularly for Jerome County where he lived. A portion of the meeting’s minutes expressed his concerns (¶ 17):

Rob Williams, Jerome County resident, stated he wants to share his personal views and the views that represent a large portion of the residents of Jerome County. His personal concerns about this issue grew out of the unique needs and characteristics of their county. Their concern really translates into a request for fairness in equity in property taxation as it relates to community colleges. Jerome County is unique among the three counties that are paying these property taxes, their demographics are much different. Per capita income, [and] per capita levels of education, Jerome County is significantly lower than Kootenai County or Twin Falls County. Jerome County is the only county paying these property taxes that does not have a junior or community college within its boundaries.

Williams went on to tell the committee that paying for the community college took away dollars from the community that were needed to meet local demands. Funding was needed to address the problems of a high school that enrolled “925 students [but was] designed for 600,” a jail that was overcrowded, and a “city water system that [was] at its capacity.” He also objected to the amount of taxes paid by the three counties, when those outside of the district paid much less. Williams went on to demonstrate that Jerome County could not only save a significant amount of money by leaving the community college district, but could still financially help those from the county who
wanted to attend college to do so. He had the College of Southern Idaho prepare
information that showed what Jerome County would have paid for students who enrolled
in ten or more credit hours of classes “compared to what they would have paid in
property taxes” (¶ 18).

...a county that does not pay property taxes to a junior college district has to pay a per capita fee
for students that enrolled for more than ten hours per semester, which is $500 per semester...In
fiscal 1994, Jerome County paid $760,000 to the College of Southern Idaho. If they would
have been paying the per capitation fee they would have paid $291,000. The spread and deficit
keeps rising. This great inequity has reached a point that many of the citizens feel that
something must be done.

A petition that was signed by 519 individuals and presented to the committee
stated (¶ 19)

We believe the junior college district property tax being paid by Jerome County property owners is
a subsidy of the rest of the state, is not just and should be eliminated. We support legislation
seeking an alternate method of financing junior colleges. Should these efforts fail, we request the
adoption of enabling legislation which would allow the residents of Jerome County to petition and
vote on the questions of whether Jerome County should remain within the College of Southern
Idaho Taxing district.

When asked by Co-chair Senator John Hansen about the ramifications of Jerome
County’s withdrawal from the taxing district, Williams stated that, approximately
$500,000 would have to be covered in some other way.

A third idea that was explored to expand sources for funding, according to Barton
(1997), was the implementation of a statewide property tax to develop and support a
“totally state-funded” (p. 4, ¶ 6) community college system. Questions about governance
of colleges within such a system were of significant concern.

None of the ideas came to fruition, although they continued to be discussed at
the time of this writing. Discussions on forming additional community colleges to meet
the needs of a growing populace in Idaho continued through the years. Most specifically,
Eastern Idaho Technical College (EITC) in Idaho Falls and Boise State University (BSU)
in Boise desired community college development in their areas of the state. EITC was
established in 1969 to provide technical programs to enhance training opportunities for
eastern Idaho and was funded exclusively through the State Division of Professional
Technical Education, which is funded partially by the state. It unsuccessfully sought direct legislative support to become a full-fledged community college in order to expand its operations. BSU supported the development of a community college to serve Treasure Valley, the region where BSU is located. BSU President Robert Kustra at his State of the University Address in January, 2004, said it was time to support the development of a community college for Treasure Valley at its off-campus site in Nampa, Idaho. The area covers Ada and Canyon counties, Kustra said, to his knowledge, is the largest metropolitan area in the United States without a community college (Kustra, 2004).

In the meantime, to meet the local needs in that part of the state, Treasure Valley Community College (TVCC) from Ontario, Oregon, crossed the states’ borders and began offering limited programming in Caldwell, Idaho, a city just west of Nampa. According to the Legislative Council Interim Committee Community Colleges Minutes of June 19, 2006, TVCC was invited to provide courses by the Idaho Migrant Council (IMC) “which was concerned about the lack of access to higher education in the Canyon County area.” TVCC and IMC partnered to train para-educators in response to the federal No Child Left Behind Act and began offering classes in Caldwell in April, 2003 (p. 23). According to its website, by “Fall 2006, more than 500 students were enrolled in TVCC’s Caldwell Center (Treasure Valley Community College, n.d.). But TVCC did not offer the range of professional-technical programs and courses offered at its main campus in Ontario.

BSU wanted to move its professional-technical programs from its Boise campus to its western off-campus center in Nampa where a fully developed community college could be formed. The Albertson Foundation offered to provide $500,000 as seed money to the state to fund such a venture. But full development and sustainability would eventually fall on the shoulders of the state legislature.

Other studies on the expansion of community colleges did not produce results. The most recent was in 2006, when the Idaho Legislator appointed another committee to explore the possibilities of expanding community colleges and the possible development of a statewide system. The committee was charged with traveling the state, taking public
testimony regarding the issue of increasing community college presence in the state, and bringing back to the legislature its recommendations in the 2007 session. How to fund community colleges more fully and how to expand the system of colleges were already clearly on Idaho legislators’ minds when I interviewed them in 2003-2005. L1 was concerned about the affect a new college might have on the existing colleges—whether new community colleges would draw funding away from those institutions. She stated that such a change:

...involves two community colleges—NIC and CSI. So now we have the issue of all this activity building in Nampa. And if that isn’t a community college, I don’t know what it is. Now the governor’s (Kempthorne) talking about maybe closing EITC (Eastern Idaho Technical College, in Idaho Falls)—and EITC is fully funded [by the state] and that is a [more or less] a community college. BSU West [the Nampa-based off-campus center] is a community college.

L3 felt strongly that whatever community college growth took place, that the additions would follow the existing funding model. He also affirmed his belief that the state could not fund anything new without a local tax component to assist.

...it wouldn’t be fair to have, to create a new community college without a property tax component in it. But from a budget perspective, the state general fund is probably not in a position to pickup the slack if we expand the community college system and we do away with the property tax support. And I’m talking just from a budget perspective—that the state’s general fund is probably not in a position to do all that as the revenues are presently constituted.

But he felt that the system could be expanded if developed “cautiously.” He had high regard for the impact of community colleges on the citizens of the state and on the economy.

I think that it’s a good investment in our state. I think it makes our state more attractive for businesses to come and locate here. ...if no other business ever moved into the state of Idaho, I think our quality of life would be enhanced by our citizens being able to go and access a community college.

He then described his own positive experience in education as influencing his support of community college expansion, and the importance of having realistic expectations for such development.

...that’s maybe the bias I bring to life...that I enjoy learning and would love to be able to take college classes in the evenings if I had time. ...I feel strongly that we have [a good model]—a die is cast in ... that our two community colleges are a reflection of the communities from whence
they come. And I feel strongly that that needs to be maintained, and that local control comes
from local folks putting up the money. ... I think that the Treasure Valley, ... if they think
they can replicate [a local community college’s] success, by just building buildings and just saying
‘OK we have a TVCC [Treasure Valley Community College]’ (and I think Oregon already
has one of them, by the way)—but whatever the title will be, and expect that to have all the good
things we have here, I think they’ll be sadly disappointed.

L1 further emphasized that local ownership, rather than total state funding
responsibility of new community college development in Idaho was essential to the
successful system of community colleges in the state. She thought that local citizens, not
educators or legislators, were the ones to sell one another on community college
expansion in the state. She emphasized her thoughts by saying,

Dr. Kustra is a very strong advocate of community colleges. He would be delighted to have that
on that tax base and have it considered a community college. But as he has said, and he’s right,
I’m not the one who has to go out and sell a community college to the voters in Canyon County.
That’s not my job.’ And it isn’t his job.

And I think as wealthy as that area has become and the tremendous growth that they’ve had, if
they were to choose to vote them[elves] into a community college district, it would be very
minimal on their tax base. It would help us with their growth, because it would be extremely
hard for us to continue to pour money into that campus, when we have, again, the three counties
who support the other two community colleges, where basically, that’s what that is. So it’s going
to be an issue.

I’ve been quite a few years, trying to assure the state board of education that it is an issue they
really need to address. And now they’re talking about doing something with EITC and
combining it with University Place. See, those people at one time I understand, in Idaho Falls,
voted several times ‘Do you want a community college?’ and they said ‘No, we do not want to.’
So we continue to pay for that and they do not help. And that is another very affluent area.

The easiest thing for me to do would be to simply dissolve the tax burden, find another $11
million dollars—but that’s not going to happen. That isn’t going to happen.

In summary, Idaho faced major challenges with trying to meet the needs of its
growing populations by possibly funding an additional community college and yet keep
costs down. At the time of interviews for this study, Idaho legislators felt that the
funding issues could be worked out, but apart from state funding. Alternate sources of
funding would need to be utilized for the state to realize its plans for community college
expansion.
Oregon’s Community College System and Funding Changes

Oregon legislators and state officials faced a challenge to the state’s funding formula for community colleges in 2003, and ongoing requests by community colleges to increase state funding in order to meet growing student population needs and to decrease the tax burden of local taxpayers.

Central Oregon Community College (COCC) in Bend filed a lawsuit against the state board of education and the state commissioner of community colleges to “force a re-examination of how dollars [were] distributed to all” the community colleges in Oregon (Community College Week, 2003, p. 1). At the same time, House Majority Leader, Tim Knopp from Bend, introduced legislation to change the funding formula. COCC felt that because their local taxpayers agreed to pay more to support the college, the state provided less funding—$2 million less. COCC contended that other colleges benefited at their expense and that the state should not consider local funding in the state funding formula for community colleges. According to the Community College Week article, COCC President Bob Barber said, “‘The current formula is based solely on the politics of community colleges.’” In essence, the state “unfairly factored in the amount of local property tax support each college [had] when it [appropriated] out per-student funding for the 17 campuses” (¶ 6). Barber went on to say, “My hope is that the lawsuit will force the state board of education to come up with a stronger and better formula.” The same article stated that Lane Community College in Eugene and Portland area colleges, Mt. Hood and Portland Community College, did not collect enough local funds to put “a dent in their funding from the state” (¶ 7). Like COCC, Southwestern Community College in Coos Bay, Rogue Community College in Grants Pass, Clatsop Community College in Astoria, and Clackamas Community College in Oregon City were other colleges that would see a benefit had the lawsuit and legislation proved fruitful.

The article went on to explain that “state officials” said that, “the current system is intended to ensure some level of equity in per-student funding. Their principle is that students at all community colleges should be funded at similar levels, regardless of the wealth or poverty of surrounding taxpayers” (¶ 9).
L5 recognized that the system as it was currently setup, was unfair, and thought there needed to be change.

Some local communities can not afford as much as others who can. Which is difficult. I think the state though, could make a decision about how much they fund different areas. And I think we have to recognize, that in...low income and rural areas, we have an obligation to fund those at a higher level with general fund money than we do in other areas. So we have to equalize it from that level as we do with K12. I think that's the best approach to take to it.

L5 did not perceive that community colleges in the Portland area were receiving higher state benefits than those in other parts of the state, but he did appreciate the inequities that rural areas faced. He also believed that those inequities were an outcome of the funding process at the state level.

There is not an equalization formula for community colleges. Some community colleges, such as the ones in Portland/Clackamas, have a very rich base for them. I mean the number of households, the value of those properties, and the incomes of those people who live in those homes is much higher than those of rural Oregon, and so they have, by their nature, a higher inflow of local funds. Bend is in the same position...a lot of very high end people living there now. The place is growing rapidly, [and has] very expensive homes. So they're in that position.

But if you go into Klamath Falls, [or] you go down the Oregon coast, the income base isn't there. And so, the question was whether or not we could find a formula that people will be comfortable with that would fit all their needs. Bend Community College brought a lawsuit against us to basically ...[state that] 'We're [COCC] funding other schools, and we're not going to do that any more.' And there is this outflow of money from Bend to do this. I am aware of that. I am sympathetic to Bend's position, and, unfortunately feel that those kinds of inequities just are going to have to exist.

L7 reiterated her concerns regarding Oregon community colleges’ desired shift toward more state funding. These concerns again contradicted Oregon’s expectations about local control with policies limiting local community college taxation adopted in that state. First, she felt that legislators were not as sensitive as they should be to local needs; and second, that colleges depending on more state funding would lose local ownership:

There’s this clear disconnect still going on all these years later between the policy makers on the ground in the districts and the funders up here in the legislature. ...I would hate to see the community colleges go too far [toward state funding]. But there’s plenty of pressure that way...community colleges’ great strength is that local reaction. In other words, that sense is that ‘this is our community college and it responds to what we want, not the dictates from Salem’--about what a community college should do as a policy thing.
L8 felt strongly that the funding formula needed to be revised from the current equalization process. He said, “You see, that’s not fair—that’s absolutely not fair. And we think we’re going to get some resolution to it.” At the time of the interview, L8 reported that the legislature had held back $10.7 million toward remedying the dilemma. They were just waiting for the State Board of Education to make a determination on the formula:

I do not know whether you are aware of the situation where our Department of Community Colleges has equalized the property taxes. And I just gave up crazy over that. …their argument is that it’s the same as K-12. And I said ‘you can’t make that comparison because the curriculum at the community college is not mandated by state law. Attendance is not mandated by state law. So you can’t make the connection that it should be funded equally as is K-12. Particularly when we have communities like mine on the coast who recognize because they do not have a university in their community or within a daily driving distance, that they realize the importance of the community college so they fund it very well. Particularly when you look at the economy that they have in those communities.

In summary, legislators discussed what their perceptions were about possible changes to community college systems in Idaho and Oregon to address solutions for dwindling funds for community colleges and while at the same time meet increasing demands for community college education and training. The continuing question has been “Who should pay for community colleges?” In Idaho, legislators looked at expanding local tax districts to cover expenses, heard constituents’ wishes for their local communities to pull out of tax districts altogether, and heard a suggestion to develop a statewide property tax to cover community colleges. Idaho legislators also looked at the development of a statewide system, which would hopefully allocate increased state funding to the community colleges, but could also necessitate more state oversight and thus, loss of local control. Finally, the proposed addition of a third community college caused concern about taking funds from the already-existing community colleges.

Although Idaho legislators were supportive of these suggestions and to the growing need for an additional community college for Idaho, they could not see a way to generate any more funding. Again and again, I heard frustration from legislators about limitations, but also some pride that they were watching over Idaho’s financial resources. In the end, legislators wanted to see local taxing districts continue to provide the basis for community colleges in Idaho. Even new ones.
Some community colleges sued Oregon to change its existing system of fund distribution. They complained that because they received more local funds because of their high economic stability, they should not get “penalized” by receiving fewer state dollars. While that effort proved unsuccessful, the 17 community colleges agreed to work together to present a united front to the legislature when requesting funding. Legislators’ largest complaint in general, was that community colleges did not present themselves as a united group, but seemed divisive in their competitive efforts to gain additional funding.

Overall, legislators saw the need for additional state funding to go to community colleges but did not seem to express a great deal of concern to change the current systems. They felt strongly that local control was of utmost importance and that somehow there would be resolution eventually, although they had no clear answers.

**Summary for Research Question 1**

In this section, findings were presented and discussed in response to Research Question 1. Findings were outlined in the form of four themes that described how legislators formed their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding: (a) opinions about community colleges by legislators and their constituents, (b) how legislators view their responsibilities regarding funding in general, (c) legislators’ views on local and state control of funding for community colleges, and (d) legislators’ opinions regarding possible changes in state community college systems and funding structures.

Legislators formed their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding by taking into consideration their own observations and the opinions of their constituents. Legislator opinions of community colleges were very high, and legislators reported that their constituents felt the same way. They counted on community colleges to be part of the overall fabric of communities providing cost-effective education programming. Realizing that the need for expansion of educational offerings of community colleges and the need for equalizing allocations among community colleges would continue, legislators worked with their constituents and the colleges themselves to endeavor to find funding solutions. At the same time, legislators
felt pressure to meet the funding needs of other agencies as well. They wanted to “get the most bang for the buck,” putting the dollars that were available into agencies that would affect the most people. How to deal with competing entities for state funding was difficult for legislators. Some key factors regarding how they formed their perceptions about alternative funding for community colleges are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

Key Factors Forming Legislators’ Perceptions about Alternative Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Key Factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legislator Opinions</td>
<td>• Legislators and constituents had extremely high opinions of community colleges</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community colleges are efficient</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community colleges are part of the fabric of and pertinent to the state</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Too high state and local taxes for community colleges are still of concern</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legislator Responsibilities</td>
<td>• Be gatekeepers of funds—we are the experts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Focus dollars where they’ll help the most people</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Balance competing needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Follow policy and state constitution</td>
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<tr>
<td>State versus Local Funding</td>
<td>• Maintain local control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• State support for community colleges in part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in State Community College Systems</td>
<td>• For now, keep as is</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Continue to seek solutions to their funding shortfalls</td>
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</table>

These key factors tie into the overall formation of legislative perceptions regarding their funding decisions, and thus alternative funding decisions about community colleges. Although many ideas for funding solutions emerged and were discussed, legislators typically fell back to local funding modes as the answer to community college funding shortfalls. It was not clear whether legislators took into consideration local community college districts and community colleges’ abilities to meet their own funding needs when making legislative funding decisions.

The findings in Research Questions 2, 3, and 4 are interrelated with the findings of Research Question 1 and will be expanded upon in the following sections.
Research Question 2: What are legislators’ perceptions about the availability of alternative funding sources for community colleges?

This section presents findings in response to Research Question 2, What are legislators’ perceptions about the availability of alternative funding sources for community colleges? One specific theme emerged during the data analysis: legislators’ perceptions of and expectations about community colleges’ roles and responsibilities.

Legislators’ Perceptions of and Expectations About Community Colleges’ Roles and Responsibilities

Within their interviews, legislators’ shared their knowledge of what they believed community colleges were doing and their expectations for what community colleges should be doing for their students, their communities, and their states.

I had a sense that all of the legislators that I interviewed had strong ideas about what the function and roles of community colleges were—and what they should be. All tied community college roles and responsibilities to rural issues of economic development of financially depressed areas and the provision of accessible cultural, educational, and training opportunities to all locales in their states. The five functions legislators believed that community colleges served were to:

1. Prepare students for transfer to four-year colleges.
2. Provide professional-technical, short-term training, and retraining.
3. Assist in community and socio-economic development, and business recruitment for their communities and the state.
4. Be a source for those not prepared for or desiring a university-level education.
5. Contribute to cultural enrichment opportunities for their communities.

The following sections describe in more detail what legislators understand about each of these roles and responsibilities of community colleges.
Prepare Students for Transfer to Four-Year Colleges

All of the legislators stated that community colleges served the purpose of being transfer institutions to four-year colleges and universities, and that they should continue to do so. Affordability and accessibility of community colleges were critical factors that legislators reported again and again as facilitating the transfer process. Two of the legislators believed that community colleges provided a way, especially for middle and low-income students, to obtain the first two years of higher education. Legislator One (L1) also saw community colleges as preparatory for students to enter the higher education system:

I wish there were more [community colleges]. As far as I’m concerned, they’re the feeder system. That’s where the kids learn to study, learn the difference between being on their own and being out in the real world and getting a big taste of higher education. Higher education’s gotten extremely expensive. So they’re [community colleges] very economical and it’s kind of the training wheels, I think.

Legislator Seven (L7) felt that community colleges provided an important link to higher education for students from various locales. “In the rural areas where I come from, it is, I think, the most common portal for high school students to enter into the four-year system.” Legislator Four (L4) saw one role that community colleges needed to maintain, was that of increasing access to higher education. He thought that they should “…make sure people have access; that they can afford, and also be able to work their way all through a bachelor’s degree and beyond.” He reported that the university where he worked got “tremendous numbers of transfers from community colleges” as a result of the colleges’ approachable, user-friendly system of transfer.

Although community colleges were perceived as doing a good job at serving the transfer function in Oregon, Legislator Five (L5) suggested that they needed to expand that role by making students’ transitions from public schools, to community colleges, and on to four-year institutions more seamless and more affordable.

…the need to expand …in this state as the pre-higher ed. program. That’s something that California has done extremely well, and here in Oregon, we haven’t been that successful with. We can get more students through the first two years quicker, faster, and cheaper that way. And we’re working now to make that seamless…There’s been some real difficulty in getting the
higher ed. institutions to accept those credits, but they are not going to get their funding if they do not accept it. So I expect to see an expansion in that area as we’d hoped to.

Legislators felt one essential function of community colleges was to provide transfer opportunities for students who wanted to continue to a four-year degree at another college or university. An area where one legislator thought community college costs could be reduced would be to partner more closely with high schools to provide more dual enrollment opportunities for students to get through college more quickly. At least one legislator saw dual enrollment as helping high schools and colleges to share overhead costs of facilities and staffing as well.

**Provide Professional-Technical, Short-Term Training, and Retraining**

Another role legislators perceived as important for community colleges was their provision of professional-technical, short-term training, and retraining. L5 stated that community colleges have “vocational programs that higher education does not produce. They do a good job in that—a lot of trade schools, vocational stuff, electrical contracting and electrical programs and [programs of] that nature.” Several mentioned the importance of community college professional-technical and short-term training for people with different needs and across the lifespan:

…when plants shut down, and you gotta retrain, and the forest area shut[s] down, you have to retrain. It’s all done there. I know for a fact you can go to [a local community college] for two years, get good grades and transfer them to [a nearby four-year school] and it’ll be less expensive than going four-years [at that college]. But it’s also people who have jobs and other things in their life, [who attend] the community colleges [that] offer a variety of classes at night and at other times that many four-your institutions do not. (L4)

There was also a perception that without community colleges, economic crises would be more challenging.

The other thing that’s become so big is … retraining. All of the changes that people are going through in the economy now. The retraining and the development of the economy—it’s just amazing what [community colleges] do…there’s no way you can expect your universities and colleges to do that. (L1)

Legislators in this study saw community colleges as important partners in ongoing economic development through the training and retraining of quality workers in a short period through professional technical offerings.
Legislators saw that community colleges had a direct effect on socio-economic well-being of the communities they served, if not the entire states of Idaho and Oregon. L4 went so far as to say that [a community college] is “the key to the economy. It’s the key to retraining, it’s the key to community...” L8 said “I do very strongly believe that community colleges are key to our economic recovery.” A local community college was able to train workers for a “call company” free of charge for one year, putting people to work right away and meeting the needs of the company.

Business Recruitment

The legislators stated their perceptions that business recruitment, community, and economic development was the purpose of community colleges and that they were responsive to the economic needs of their communities. L3 felt that community colleges provided more flexibility and just-in-time training for new companies coming into their communities:

…they are able to react to the needs of the community and the economic development…So they are able to react and fill voids and take up the slack, if you will, and offer to do things that I assume a college could do…or a university could do it as well; but community colleges seem to be more flexible and seem to be a better fit in doing that.

In fact, L3 pointed out that the community college within his legislative district was instrumental in recruiting a major computer technical assistance center to the state. The college guaranteed the company a continuing supply of technologically-savvy employees and ongoing training for its incumbent workers. Two classrooms at the institution were set-aside specifically for that company’s training needs.

Legislators were very proud of the active involvement of community colleges with business partnerships and business recruitment in their states. A more healthy economy meant more tax revenues and thus more opportunity for state funding of community colleges.
Community and Socio-Economic Development

L4 also counted on community colleges to be stable, reliable, and supportive economy-builders and key educational entities in their communities. Partially quoted earlier, L4’s full comment was:

... it is probably the linchpin or key educational component...it’s always there. When it’s all said and done, there’s also 17 [in Oregon] so they’re everywhere in the state, which is great. It is probably the part of education, K through 18, that is the most interesting and most fascinating in a way. The one that will allow us to deal—whether it’s the economy [or other event]... [with] a community crisis. It probably performs the community’s greatest role... if we’re gonna do more, better, faster on the higher education scale.... It reaches out to all ages of the populace... nontraditional students are increasingly going to four-year institutions, but if you get the connection to community colleges, there is all ages out there. All different backgrounds out there.... [Community members] always known they can go there to get retrained or get reeducated, or continue their education.

L5 felt that community colleges were particularly important to rural communities, as they tended to be low-income and economically depressed. In his opinion, people in rural areas in particular needed affordable, accessible education to improve their lives. The socio-economic impact of a community college education was something he had observed many times through the years:

If you haven’t got people well-educated, they’re going to over utilize health facilities and lead to bad health habits. I have seen young women taken out of poverty into productive lives. And do it in three years. That’s a pretty impressive thing to see. Someone go from welfare with two kids, do her prerequisites, do two years at a community college, come out and within two years after getting out, buy her first home. Have a good living wage and become a respected part of the community. And what it does for her, her self esteem and what it does to her kids’ impression of her as a mother is amazing. And that raises the whole family’s self-esteem. The kids start functioning better in school...I’ve seen this in individual cases and seen kids be affected by how their mothers’ [are] being so much more successful.

L4 went on to share how important he thought community colleges were to the Oregon economy.

...of all the schools in Oregon, K through 12 ... and higher education—[community colleges are] probably the ... ultimate one[s] that deal with our being able to adjust to economic downturns [in the] economy and also [are] probably the one[s] that will make it possible for most of Oregonians to take that next academic step in life. ...it allow[s] them to put themselves in a better job situation ... that relates to our economy. I’ve said that probably...[community colleges were] the key to revival of the Oregon economy.
L7 had personal experience regarding community colleges’ expanding roles through the years—that they have become integral influences within the community colleges’ communities. In the 1970’s when she became involved in community colleges through her husband’s work as a community college professional, L7 reported that:

…community colleges were just making the transformation from being little technical schools into this comprehensive concept of being the college for the community…The two-year trades and continuing ed.—Put the two together and [they] make a comprehensive system that is affordable and local and all the things that make a community college different from what it was in the past. In the sense of community and the resources that communities depend on to solve problems.

This legislator also stated that she felt that community colleges increased individuals’ sense of economic stability—including her own. She attended a community college after achieving a bachelor’s degree in order to gain business skills she did not get in her previous degree program. She started her own business and felt that she lacked the necessary skills to run her business. She chose community college classes because:

I was over-trained in social services and I really needed to be in the business world…[I thought] Gee, I never learned that. I can’t go back and get a business degree, but I sure can get a whole year of managerial accounting and learn the skill set that I’m looking for affordably, in my own timeframe.

Several legislators recognized the role community colleges would have in addressing nursing shortages. L4 liked the ability for individuals to attend community colleges to become practical nurses that earned a good living, and without having to attain a bachelor’s degree. The turnaround time for training and employment was in his eyes, a tremendous advantage, as it got people into the job market quickly.

In summary, legislators saw community colleges as key to their states’ socio-economic development and business recruitment. Community colleges’ responsiveness to any given situation, whether it was affordable training during economic crises or developing programming to meet specific industry needs, were impressive to legislators. For example, legislators appreciated the ability of community colleges to address the shortage of health care professionals by offering short-term, affordable training to those who needed to get out into the workforce quickly. Legislators for this study seemed to
depend on community colleges to foster healthy social and economic environments for their states -- at affordable prices.

A Source for Those Not Prepared for or Desiring a University-Level Education

Several legislators acknowledged the role community colleges played in giving individuals an opportunity to make changes in their lives through, what L1 said, “having a second chance” to gain their educations. They recognized an important asset of community colleges was Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs that prepared individuals for the General Educational Development (GED) test and provided a welcoming environment for those who had been out of school for years. L4 thought that because ABE/GED programs were operated within community colleges, individuals’ transition to higher education was made easier because those students’ GED’s were in relationship to their community colleges. L5 saw a direct correlation between enrichment courses and college credits or degrees. L3 said he appreciated how community colleges welcomed those who could not pursue a college degree full-time because of their other obligations.

The number two role [of the community college is] for the nontraditional student -- the older student. Ones that are already married, that have a job...have a life they can’t just set aside while they pursue a college degree. I think that’s very important.

L1 appreciated the comfortable community college environment for adults who needed a second chance:

...when I see the GED graduation, I think that’s a tremendous asset for the community. For that opportunity for people, who for some reason or another or a hundred different reasons, chose not to finish high school, and they have that second chance. I think that’s tremendous...I am really grateful for GED. For adult basic education, I do not know who else would do adult basic ed. So let’s say adult basic education is a challenge for community colleges, but they’re the best equipped. Closest to the neighborhoods, and they’re not so threatening. I was always very comfortable and it’s been years since I went over to [the community college in her district]. But I was very comfortable because I came home and would run the tractor during the day, and get the kids off to school and would go over there a take a class. I never felt uncomfortable.

L4 went on to say that community members “always know they can go there to get retrained or get re-educated, or continue their education.” He reported that the community college in his district was continually opening up branch campuses “which allowed the public to have much more access.”
Lack of student academic preparation did trouble at least one legislator (L1), although she did not have ready answers to the problem:

…it troubles me a lot…the burden of having to take care of students who come to [community colleges] and they’re not prepared at all. They go into those classes to begin again with math and science—that they should have known all along. I think that’s a burden. And I think it’s an expense to our higher education system.

One additional role that legislators felt community colleges served well was that of an alternative setting for those either not ready for, or not able to gain entrance into, a college or university through traditional processes. Often community colleges allowed individuals to gain access to higher education institutions by their proving their academic abilities at the community-college level. They “proved themselves” by earning high grades that may not be have been demonstrated in traditional college and university entrance testing, such as through ACT or SAT scores.

In summary, legislators saw community colleges as filling a critical gap for individuals who were not academically prepared to take college-level courses. Community colleges’ remedial education programs such as Adult Basic Education and the General Education Development were seem as offering valued community members another opportunity to sharpen their skills to prepare them for more rigorous coursework. They also saw community colleges as a welcoming institution for non-traditional aged students who wanted to train or retrain for occupations. Overall, legislators seemed to value community colleges’ abilities to provide offerings for diverse populations.

Contribute to Cultural Enrichment Opportunities for Their Communities

Legislator 6 (L6) recognized that community colleges had an impact on local communities through their ability to reach out to and unite their communities.

“Enrichment classes [at community colleges] also provide a way to kind of bind the communities together…” Political and speaking events, community seminars, and community use of their athletic facilities also tied the colleges to their communities as well as helped tie their communities together according to L4. Sponsorship of the American Cancer Society’s
“Walk for Life” by the local community college was also valued by L4 who said he had participated in that event for several years.

The availability of meeting rooms, fine arts facilities, rodeo arenas, and museums were additional assets legislators reported as valuable enrichments to the communities they served. “Just think how big a hole there would be in the [local] community without having those facilities to go to for example,” stated one legislator. In essence, legislators valued the cultural opportunities they provided their often rural and isolated communities. They provided a venue for gathering community members and creating environments of community support and generativity.

In summary, legislators seemed well-informed about what community colleges do and also what the function and roles of community colleges should be. According to the legislators in this study, the following were expected community college functions: (a) providing transfer coursework, (b) providing short-term technical training, (c) assisting in the socio-economic development and health of their communities and the state, (d) providing remedial coursework, and (d) contributing to cultural enrichment for their communities. All of these activities needed to be provided in affordable and accessible ways.

Summary for Research Question 2

In this section, findings were presented and discussed in response to Research Question 2. Findings were given in the form of one particular theme that described legislators’ perceptions about the roles and responsibilities of community colleges. Legislators definitely had knowledge about and expectations for community colleges and their roles within their communities and their states. They outlined community college functions, most of which could garner additional funding for those institutions.

Legislators saw how community colleges, as providers of professional-technical and short-term training and retraining, capitalized on close working relationships with business and industry for contract training. In addition, there was an expectation that they should work more closely with the K-12 system to not only serve students ready for college-level work but also with adults and other individuals who were not prepared for
college-level work. Finally, they saw a strong connection between community colleges and a role they filled as cultural centers for their communities--where additional funds could augment day-to-day operations.

Although legislators did not overtly pronounce these as activities that could generate alternative funding revenues, they seemed to feel strongly about their roles in having these connections.

Research Question 3: What are legislators’ perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges?

This section presents findings in response to Research Question 3, *What are legislators’ perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges?* One specific theme for this question that emerged during the data analysis was how legislators made decisions regarding funding, including what influenced their decision making processes.

Legislators were very forthcoming about their how they make their budget making decisions overall. They spoke about five influences on their decision making process: (a) assessment of priorities; (b) personal beliefs, party affiliation, and legislative workgroups; (c) access to critical information; (d) relationships with community colleges; and (e) respectful interactions. Finally, two legislators provide other insights not categorized.

Assessment of Priorities

Legislators described common areas of priority when they considered where to allocate funds. These areas were: (a) how the budget would affect constituents, (b) public safety, and (c) balancing health and welfare programming with education needs. This section describes how legislators place priority on funding needs and the struggles they faced when determining priorities.
Constituents

Legislators’ constituents had some influence on their perspectives. L3 said he had to keep in mind that he was elected by his legislative district which he was required to "look out for" and balance that "against the needs of the whole state."

He went on to describe how he prioritized budget needs:

... if you have two proposals, one that focuses — has a very narrow focus, and has an impact on a narrow population of Idaho and if you had that same money that could be spent to benefit more. And of course that is a criterion in my book. But by the same token, I’m elected by my legislative district and so it’s my job to look out for my part of the state as well. So you balance that against the needs of the whole state. Of course public schools and the education side of the budget are the most important one[s]. So when you look at a budget request in those eyes, what as an investment, what can do the most good down the road, certainly K-12 and colleges and universities always fare pretty well there.

L3 considered how to get the greatest good out of the funding that was available — how to affect the greatest numbers of people for the future. His perception was that education was a good “investment” for those reasons.

Public Safety

Public safety emerged as a priority, once again in the minds of legislators. L3 and L6 pointed out that funding those areas that would affect the most people would be a high priority. L3 considered together three areas of priority as they concerned public safety: (a) law enforcement, (b) the criminal justice system, and (c) corrections. L6 thought that public safety and human services gained priority over education because a community college education, in her mind, was elective:

It’s an issue of balancing priorities across all of the policy levels. I mean there’s huge issues in the education funding arena and nobody would deny that. But there’s also huge issues in human services and in public safety—the courts and the prisons. And in Oregon, in those three categories, that’s over 90 percent of the tax dollars—the general fund dollars are there. So it’s a question of balancing all of the priorities.

Legislators clearly had public safety on their minds when considering budgets. Public safety was not seen as a discretionary part of the budget, but a necessary portion.
Health and Welfare Programs vs. Education

Legislators held the perception that funding education was a better investment of taxpayer dollars than funding health and welfare programs in several ways. L3 struggled with prioritizing funding for agencies that had little accountability and that showed few results. He thought that community colleges were a much better use of funds than health and welfare programs, even though there were federal mandates to fund health and welfare programs:

First of all, I’m a real strong supporter of higher education. More particularly community colleges….Because they … have made themselves more pertinent….to the welfare of the people which they serve. …With that being said, …I’ve set out for the last few years to, in the finance/appropriations committee [to enhance community college funding, more so than] health and welfare because I knew they had control policy …[health and welfare have] very little criteria…to make sure that… people qualify for the program, especially if someone says “I qualify”…

This legislator felt that funding higher education and particularly community colleges was a better expenditure of public funds than on welfare programs because he said that continuing to give more money to welfare programs was:

… counterproductive because all you do is set yourself up for more recipients of Medicaid because they haven’t had the opportunity to be educated at the college…resources are finite—you only have so much money. …In my view, community college is a much, much better place to spend money than health and welfare.

L6 felt that in times of tight state funding, it was up to local communities to make their community colleges a priority. She thought that local districts should support their colleges and guide what those colleges should offer—even in hard times:

I think that the more expensive the programs become, especially in the rural areas where the economies are much more depressed, the more you just cut people out of the possibility of [education]. …this is really not a good time to try to raise tax bases [at the local level]. …[it is important for] a local community’s willingness to step in and deal with the capital construction issues and that kind of stuff.

In summary, a major influence in legislators’ decision making process was to prioritize the states’ greatest needs for funding. Legislators reported that, within their prioritization, they always wanted to maintain sensitivity for the people who would be
affected by their decisions, first and foremost. Along with that consideration, came a need to make sure that the public safety and health and welfare of their constituents were attended to. On the same scale of importance, though, came education. They felt that without education, individuals would wind up back in the health and welfare system or even in prison. Although legislators felt that these areas were of the highest priority, at least one legislature felt that, in times of tight funding, community college funding should be a priority of the local communities the college served – the communities “should step in” (L6) to help cover the gaps.

**Personal Beliefs, Party Affiliation, and Legislative Workgroups**

Legislators in this study talked about how their personal beliefs surrounded their work as legislators. Their personal values dovetailed with political party affiliation and resultant legislative workgroups and leadership to influence legislative decision-making. This section describes the various ways these factors influenced legislators in their ways of working and thus their decision making.

**Personal Beliefs**

L3 felt that his personal belief system and values were first in influencing his decision-making and his party affiliation, second. In fact, he believed that all legislators’ decisions are based within the context and biases of their own experiences.

…as your biases fit or clash with other legislators, then it becomes a compromise effort again to do the most good for the most efficient use of the dollar. That certainly drives me…my personal belief system seems to best coincide with my party, so therefore, I am a Republican not because the Republican platform [made me a Republican]…I had my belief system before I was a Republican…

Personal belief systems were the foundation of this legislator’s perceptions about his budgeting decisions as well as his political party affiliation. How to budget money was developed well before this individual became a legislator. And, his party affiliation came from his beliefs; his political beliefs did not come from his party affiliation.
Party Affiliation

Legislators varied in their reports on how party affiliation influenced their decision making. The following is a description of party affiliation influences. L3 said that, when he went in as a freshman legislator, he had expected that his party would have been a greater influence than it actually was:

...one of my... perceptions that was most out of whack, or that I was the farthest off base on, was the party caucus or the caucus meetings. I assumed that there would be way more pressure put on caucus members...that there would be lock-down on certain issues and that we would have no flexibility and that we would...make party-line votes and that there would be caucus arm-twisting and caucus pressure, if you will. And that has not happened at all, in my opinion. ...the smoke-filled rooms, quote, have not been part of my legislative experience. ...there's been very little [pressure], even when we've had some pretty...fairly serious issues come before the legislature. ...we've taken some straw polls to kind of get a feel for the caucus...and then the response was molded against the straw poll. ...the outcome was [not] already determined ahead of time by the quote, powers that be, and then the caucus was whipped into line.

But L1, also a Republican from Idaho, felt that the party’s platform was the guide from which to base legislative decisions:

...each party has a platform. The planks in the platform—and of course mine is 'fiscally responsible, and more private enterprise, and let people take care of themselves where they can, and government should not be big brother, mother, or father.'

The other party seems to go, 'there is a place where government should take care of people. And that there are people who should have that right—the old, the sick, the lame, the children. They have that right.' And there is kind of a dividing line there that we both bump up against. So I know that I have to be fiscally conservative to the point that I do not spend what I do not have. Because that’s my party’s philosophy; but it’s a personal philosophy for me too.

She had strong emotions about colleagues from across the aisle who voted to fund activities and programs, although she thought there was no budget left to the cover requests:

If I were the other party, it’s awfully easy to stand up and debate against a budget and vote against it when you know your vote is not going to win...they know darned well that they know as well as I do that the money isn’t there. I can remember, I loved Rep. _______. A fine, fine gentleman. Every budget, he would get out on the floor and he would debate ‘there IS more money. The money will be there. We’re hurting, we’re hurting.’ And on and on, and on. Especially in education. And sit down and then he’d vote against the budget and we’d come home and the money wasn’t—was never more than what we bad. I often thought, ‘If you ever
really got your wish,’ you know that old thing, ‘be careful what you wish for?’ And of course, when we’ve had plenty of money, we’ve spent it. We’ve played catch up to—you try to do what you weren’t able to—that’s just human nature, too.

L2, also a Republican from Idaho, said that “very few issues in the legislature are determined by party affiliation in Idaho.” He expressed that a national bent toward “partisanship” was troublesome to him and “we’ve got to figure out a way to be on the…level.”

As a legislator in a leadership position, he shared a broad perspective. “I can tell you that the House side works very well together. So for the most part, both Houses are...so I’m pleased with the fact that we do not play partisan politics.”

L4, a Democrat from Oregon, echoed Idaho’s L2’s and L3’s thinking that the party and caucus had little effect on legislative decision making, particularly when it came to education and community colleges:

“I do not see this as a DR thing. I am a Democrat and have been a Democratic leader. Democrats will spin it that Republicans do not like education. Republicans will spin it that they do not care. I just do not see it. So I do not think my caucus or my party has anything to do with how I feel about community colleges. It’s just not a factor.

L5, from Oregon and a Democrat, thought that the party of a legislator did affect decision making:

But generally speaking, Democrats and the Democratic caucus are much more supportive of public higher education be it a community college or higher ed. I would say overall, Democrats are a little more supportive but there are exceptions. On the other hand, especially amongst rural Republicans, I see a huge strength for cc’s for them. Those are often the only higher educational institute they have in rural areas. They are very supportive of those programs.

I think there is a subtle and general difference between the parties on this issue. Having said that, the exceptions may prove the rule. There are many Republicans who are very supportive of community colleges. And just as or more supportive than Democrats.

However, he said that he did see strong support for community colleges in rural areas even though they were typically more conservative and more Republican.

L6, a Republican from Oregon, felt that legislative decisions were based on “efficiencies, rather than a party line.” But, at the same time, she went on to say:
I think that my caucus comes more from trying to look for efficiencies in the delivery system and ways to redesign the system to make it more efficient and more effective. And that the orientation in the Democratic caucus is to try to find more money to increase the size of the programs.

Doing more with less by revamping the system’s use of funds is “the vision.” But, she said that “The reality is often quite different than that.”

Legislators were fairly consistent about their perceptions regarding the influence of political parties in their states. While one legislator clearly used the party platform as a foundation for decision making, the others said they were less swayed by party line. The legislators in this study saw the foundation of their decision making as the prioritization of needs, and not the directives of their political parties.

Leadership and Committees

Legislators in this study reported that legislative leadership and committee work were influential factors on decision making. This section describes those influences.

L3 described his perception of the party in the state of Idaho, the role of House leadership, and assigned committees as follows:

*The Republican [camp]…you might say, is quite large, and so that allows for quite a bit of diversity within the Republican caucus. …there’s all shades of Republicans in our caucus. And I know that there are some within the caucus that feel that we ought to do more…lock-downs, you know ‘you’re a Republican so therefore, you’re going to vote like a Republican as defined by House leadership.’ And that might be a leadership style thing too. I’ve only served under one Speaker, so I do not know how it’s been in the past.*

In addition to the possible influences of caucuses on their perceptions, legislators described other areas of influence on legislative decision making. L3 felt that the Speaker of the House (also a Republican), as an individual, had the most influence on legislative decision making in his view. He also brought in the topic of legislative committees where discussions among colleagues and a support system of sorts developed:

*The Speaker has an enormous amount of power in the caucus, [and] in the Legislative process. …it’s a real position of power because all of the committee assignments are all made by the leadership. And so, they try to balance, so everything that comes out of every committee of course, comes out on a vote. And so they could load a committee, or not load a committee, as to their view of the world, you see. …they know that certain committees will have tough issues and so they put people that view the world--in my mind--they put people that view the world as they do on those committees so that they can predict the outcome better. …they have a pretty good*
understanding and knowledge of how people will react to certain issues. And, so within those parameters, you are given committee assignments, or not. ...leadership has an enormous amount of power that they do not have...to exercise in the caucus room in an overt way.

*The Legislative process is one of nuance.*

L4 and L5 both served on the Ways and Means Committee in the Oregon Legislature, which developed the budget and submitted it to the Governor for his approval and then on to the legislative body for approval. Ways and Means was comparable to the Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee in Idaho. L4 described his experience on the Ways and Means Committee when competing budget requests appeared:

> You sit down in Ways and Means. We see what the demand and request is. The governor has his budget—they announce that in December. You have the [governor] put in so much for community colleges, and community colleges have what they say they need. Then you get it into the process where it’s being compared to all the other demands. Since there’s not enough money to go around. And then if you are a champion—there are champions of certain things. You just know and they just keep pushing. And they’re players and it works its way through and that’s how the decision is made.

L5 also served on the Health and Human Services Committee. Budget requests within the Health and Human Services agencies were often in direct competition with education funding. L5 felt there was a direct link, though, between education and Health and Human Services, so weighed both in his mind when he was making budget decisions:

> You have to balance some very difficult, not clearly comparable issues. For instance, I spent a lot of time in Health and Human Services [committee] and need to fund that to the point that people are capable of going into any educational learning. On the other hand, if you haven’t got people well-educated, they’re going to over-utilize health facilities and lead to bad health habits.

L7 also expressed the importance of committee work in legislative decision making. She served on the Revenue Committee and reported that hearing testimony in committees is “the first line as any legislator...Because we as a state make decisions in the committee environment just because of the process. It’s really important when a bill comes or a proposal comes.”

Legislators in this study referred extensively to the influence legislative leadership and committee work had on their decision making process. Leaders had the power to place legislators on certain committees in order to better predict or control the outcomes.
The kinds of committees also affected how knowledgeable legislators became about certain issues. My sense was that the more informed they were, the more confident they felt about their decisions.

**Nuances and Trusting Relationships**

Legislators shared that their perceptions were influenced by subtleties within the legislative process, and how their legislative working relationships affected their perceptions. The following is a discussion of those factors.

L3 described the “nuances” to and the trusting relationships that were built when he became a legislator:

> You know, …everything seems to be going along very well; I mean…we’re high on following the rules and maintaining decorum, and treating everyone with the utmost respect, etc. And just under the surface of that, is a lot of divergent currents (chuckles). And if you’ve ever, figuratively, stuck your hand under the surface, you can feel the currents going a lot of different ways. But on the outside, it looks like everything is very calm, peaceful, deliberative. You know, cautious. But it’s a very dynamic situation and …personalities are everything…it is completely fascinating to serve in the legislature because of all of that.

He reported that keeping up with what was going on “under the surface” as well as keeping up with the hundreds of bills that came before him and other legislators could be overwhelming. To handle the tremendous volume of information legislators developed a trusting support system to help one another keep abreast of what they reviewed and voted upon. The very nature of this support system had the potential to influence legislative decision making:

> …you are each given committee assignments and, so Debra, let’s say that …your committee assignments are different than mine. The stock in trade at the legislature is integrity. Ok, and, predictability. …[Let’s say] I serve on committees A, B, and C, and you serve on committees X, Y, and Z. …everything that comes through A, B, and C, you will have to vote on, on the floor. And everything that comes through X, Y, and Z, I will have to vote on the floor. …with the way there’s 500 or 600 to 800 bills come through the legislature each year in approximately 90 days there’s no way that I can be a complete expert on all the bills that come through. But I am expected to be an expert on the ones that come through my committee, and you’re expected to be an expert on the ones that come through your committee.

L3 went on further to explain how the close proximity legislators had to one another and the amount of time they spent together helped legislators develop more than
simply dutiful associations with one another.

...through our--I won't use the word alliances--but through our friendships and though our relationships...I may call you up and or approach you and ask you about, 'So where are we?'

And this legislative process of locking in the House example, 70 people up in pretty close quarters, where we're all in a fishbowl together, and in the pressure cooker that the issues force upon us, we become known quantities to each other. We form friends and relationships there.

Deepening camaraderie and a sense of loyalty and trust were often a result of the dynamics within which legislators worked. Given the quick-paced environment of information gathering, contemplation about the information, and sometimes rapid decision making, legislators came to rely on one another to help keep each other better informed and gather more perspectives on issues. As such, legislators depended on one another to be honest with and loyal to one another, regardless of their personal philosophies:

And so you, you know, if I ask you where we are on a certain bill, our politics might not be exactly alike, but I would expect you to give me an honest answer, and not mislead me in any way. And your answer may be 'well I am going to vote yes.' You may not be completely comfortable with this and here's why. And you'd point out--because you'd know me well enough, that you would know the things that I would be hesitant about and you'd point those out to me.

And vice versa, when you ask me for advice. I mean I wouldn’t try to get your vote to mirror mine exactly. I would want you to make an informed vote. And so, I would tell you 'I'm voting this way and I think you/we could be comfortable voting that same way. And with the possible exception... And then I would point out the things you might have a problem with because we're talked, and I know that you might be a little left of me, or a little right of me, or you have strong opinions on certain subjects.

I sensed an underlying philosophy among the legislators in this study: regardless of their personal views, they seemed to endeavor to maintain a level of respect and dignity among themselves whose foundation was based on loyalty and trust.

An additional influence on their working relationships and perhaps their perceptions was the sheer amount of time legislators spent together. L3 describes the long-standing influence legislators had on one another over time.

And so the legislative process of being around the...core of nearly the same people each year for four or five years, plus all the meetings that we go to together, and all the bus rides. We have a chance to get to know each other.
So that’s how the legislative process works, is through the committees. So you expect me to hold up my end of the log, but in order to move the log, you gotta hold up your end.

Legislators in this study described how the close relationships they formed and the time they spent with one another influenced their perspectives. The tremendous amount of time they spent together, often over a period of years, helped them to understand nuances within the decision making process and to develop loyalty and trust to form alliances among their peers.

To summarize, personal beliefs, party affiliation, and legislator workgroups had a tremendous affect on legislators’ decision making processes. Although they downplayed the influence of their political parties, political party affiliations continued to be strong threads within the fabric of their thinking. Several adhered to their party platforms during their decision making processes. One Democrat who was interviewed stated that in general Democrats were more supportive of higher education and community colleges overall, than Republicans. However he did soften the statement by saying that Republicans in rural areas tended to be more supportive than in other areas of the state because of their rural economic barriers. House leadership and committee work seemed to be of the greatest party-line influence. The amount of time legislators spent in caucuses and in tight-knit workgroups and committees where deep discussions and long hours were spent, created “alliances,” “trust,” and “loyalty” among legislators.

Access To Critical Information

Referring again to Perryman (1993) and Quash Coats (2002), legislators and higher education employ more than a funder-recipient relationship in today’s environment. Government has become a full-fledged “partner” (Perryman, 1993, p. 57) when deciding key policy issues, because of the tie-in of education and economic development. In order to better understand the roles of community colleges and the tie-in to economic and social forces in their states, more and more, legislators are developing closer relationships with a variety of community college contacts who influence their decision making: (a) lobbyists and state organizations or agencies associated with community colleges, (b) legislative staff, (c) students, and (d) community college
The purpose of this section is to describe how legislators get their information to make their budget decisions regarding community colleges.

**Lobbyists and State Organizations**

When asked about their relationships with lobbyists and state organizations that supported community colleges, there was a difference between Idaho and Oregon legislators. There are no community college lobbies in Idaho, nor are there state agencies or organizations designed to bolster community college interests specifically. L1 simply stated that she listens to lobbyists, but seemed cautious. “I watch to hear what they are saying—to try and see what’s under what they’re saying.”

Oregon has two highly visible groups that promote community colleges, both politically and financially: the Community Colleges and Workforce Development Department (CCWD) in Salem—the agency that distributes state funds to the community college system in the state, and the Oregon Community College Association (OCCA), a lobbying organization consisting of each of the community college presidents, executive director, and staff. Oregon legislators, thus, have more contact with these two types of support organizations. L5 was clear about his contacts with these groups: “Obviously, I listen to the lobbyists.”

L6 felt like she had had in-depth experience with colleges, the CCWD, and OCCA:

I chaired the funding committee for education in the last legislative session. And so I’ve worked a lot with the community college presidents and the lady that runs the program within the department of education, and then the people who do the policy work for the community college association. …they’re all very helpful. I’ve worked with those folks [OCCA and CCWD] a lot. They’re very good and they’ve been pretty high profile in this session, and they were throughout the last session too. So, they’ve done a good job.

L7 felt like having these two groups available and accessible were extremely helpful to her. She wanted to know how policy decisions would be affected by requests coming from community colleges and she felt she could rely on CCWD and OCCA to help her understand across-agency influences of funding decisions:

If I have questions or problems or do not understand something, boy you pick up the phone and you say ‘what does this mean?’ And occasionally you run across something for instance in an
OEDD, which is the Oregon Economic Development Department. They’re working a bill that
is about them, but it interfaces with Workforce and Community Colleges. So you know, if you
do not understand the testimony or there are further questions, you can call them up and say
‘now wait a minute, how does this interact?’

When overwhelmed with information, she relied on CCWD and OCCA to help
her filter through and boil it down to come up with what she called “touchpoints” or,
“decisionpoints” on which she could base her decisions:

…There have been times when it’s—you’re at too much information. I have asked folks who
have brought me this information to come back to me on occasion with ‘in all this stuff we’ve
talked about—where are the policy decisions that will drive this?’ In other words, ‘come back to
me and say ‘this policy decision will move us this way. This is the touchpoint in all this
information’ ‘And this is another touchpoint that’s gonna drive this or that. …

She freely admitted that at times, she was “lost and confused” with all the
information “somebody is feeding me.” Adding that the agencies’ help along with:
work[ing] with my colleagues on the committee, I can say, ‘here is the decisionpoint.’ The
information and the decisionpoint get connected. Then you can talk about the implications of
your decisions. Until you can do that, all the information in the world is just that—it’s just
information. It isn’t a policy decisionpoint.

…community colleges is the least of it—the things I have to have a working understanding of in
this job. I walked in here knowing a lot about community colleges. But oh my goodness!
Revenue options, and revenue and how we function! Taxation, education, corrections and courts,
and laws! I mean (sigh), it’s overwhelming what you do not know! So you are constantly being
fed, and that’s information to make a decision? You can’t know it all. You can’t! So you have
to say Where is the decisionpoint? Where does this information connect?’ And generally, folks
that are professionals, either in the agencies or in the lobby or in our own staff, understand that
dynamic and move us as quickly as possible to ‘here’s the decisionpoint’ and then, ‘Here’s the
baseline information—and what other information do you need, or want?’

Legislators in this study had, for the most part, positive perceptions of lobbyists.
Idaho had no official lobbyists for community colleges, and thus, the perception of one
legislator was about lobbyists in general -- and that was to listen, but be cautious. The
Oregon legislators who participated in this study had positive perceptions about the
community college official lobbying organization, the Oregon Community College
Association (OCCA). Legislators perceived a strong coordination between OCCA with
the state agency, Community Colleges and Workforce Development Department
(CCWD) and that both organizations were there to help legislators as well as community colleges. OCCA and CCWD provided information to legislators on an ongoing basis and helped legislators understand the effect of funding decisions, as well as interactions among and across agencies. Legislators in this study valued their input regarding community college concerns. These two organizations were highly visible, were greatly respected organizations, and seemed to be seen by legislators almost as one entity.

Legislative Staff

Legislators reported that legislative staff (i.e., staff that supported the legislators throughout the year) were key purveyors of legislative information and knowledge to legislators. The following is a brief discussion of about the functions of legislative budget staff in Idaho and Oregon, and how legislators consulted with these staff members.

In Idaho, legislative budget support staff was non partisan and functioned under the Director of Legislative Services. Functions of the Legislative Services Office included:

- **Budget and Policy Analysis:** assists legislators with the state's budget making process and provides policy advice to individual legislators and legislative committees.
- **Legislative Audits:** conducts financial post-audits of state agencies -- an effort to ensure state and local government agencies spend funds properly and in accordance with government accounting standards.
- **Research and Legislation:** conducts research for legislators, drafts legislation, staffs legislative study committees, reviews administrative agency rules, and provides information on the legislative process and legislative history to the public and other state agencies.
- **Information Technology:** maintains the Legislature's comprehensive computer network, which links all legislative and staff offices, and supports other legislative technology initiatives (Idaho Legislative Services Office, 2008).

Legislators in Idaho worked most closely with the Budget and Policy Analysis staff. According to its website, this office:

provides independent, non-partisan analytical support to the Joint Finance Appropriations Committee in setting the state budget each year. They coordinate hearings, compile budget information and work closely with Legislators in analyzing budget requests and agency performance, and developing funding options for each agency and institution. (Idaho Legislative Services Office, 2008).
L1, as a member of the Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee (JFAC), expressed great appreciation for the expertise the Budget and Policy Analysis staff displayed. Co-chairs of the Committee and this group of staff members were officed within the same quarters during the legislative session. In addition, the staff offices surrounded the JFAC hearing room (the former Idaho Supreme Courtroom) and were within a few seconds of being reached during and outside of hearings. During the session, coffee and snacks were shared by legislators and staff in a conference room off the hearing room where informal discussions took place. L1 said about the support she and her colleagues received by the Budget and Policy Analysis staff:

...we have tremendous help. We have the best budget system of any of the states I've ever talked to. The Governor has a stack of budget people who study the different agencies all year long and meet with them. The legislature has a staff, and the Governor has a couple of economists. Then there are some people who come from the banking and private industry and visit with the committee. Then that committee gives my committee a report. We have all the information in our hands. When it comes right down to it, it's still a best guess a lot of times.

In Oregon, a similar group of support staff provided legislators with information and services. The Legislative Administrator, who is appointed by the Legislative Administration Committee, oversaw the activities of a number of divisions within the Legislative Administration. A Legislative Administration Committee oversaw the Legislative Administration offices and was comprised of “the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, three senators appointed by the President and four representatives appointed by the Speaker” (Oregon State Legislature, 2008, p. 1).

The Administrator's office coordinated and supervised “the operation of the following administrative units: Employee Services; Facility Services; Information Systems; Financial Services; and Committee Services” (Oregon State Legislature, 2008, p. 1). The functions of these services are:

- **Employee Services**: provides human resource administration and information on legislative employment opportunities. The unit also provides payroll, benefits, Public Employees Retirement System (PERS), workers' compensation, and other general human resource information related to legislators and staff.
- **Facility Services**: Facility Services provides building and visitor services, key control, purchasing, and contract management. In addition, Facility Services provides oversight of security and food service, risk management, and historic
preservation, and is responsible for all major building construction projects. Services are provided through the offices of Legislative Property & Supply Services; and Operations and Maintenance.

- **Financial Services**: Financial Services provides budgeting, accounting, and financial reporting services for the Legislative Assembly, Legislative Administration, and the Commission on Indian Services. Accounting Services are provided for the Legislative Fiscal and Revenue Offices.

- **Information Systems/Computer and Media Technologies**: Information Systems provides audio, video, Internet, computer, and print technologies to the legislative community. The unit also offers customer service, support, and job-related education for access to all legislative information.

- **Committee Services**: The Committee Services office supports the Legislative Assembly by providing professional services to legislative committees, legislators, legislative offices and staff, government agencies, and the public. These include organizing and administering committee meetings, researching current issues and requested topics, and reviewing implementation of legislation. Committee Services is also responsible for the Legislative Library, and provides copies of minutes from legislative committee proceedings.

Oregon legislators reported they most closely worked with Financial Services and with Committee Services within the Administrative Services group. L5 said he trusted the Financial Services staff most:

> Probably the people I listen to the most though are legislative financial analysts. These people are fairly neutral and they look at the entire budget with us and give me data and information that I really rely on to make those decisions. Based on past history, outcome, and performances by community colleges—graduation rates, for example, transfers to higher ed. You know, how many people go through a program end up at work right afterwards, and things of that nature. So they are probably the people I get the most information from that I really trust.

Legislators relied heavily on their non-partisan legislative budget staff to have current and accurate information. They expected the staff to give them backgrounds on budgets and other data to help them make their funding decisions. This unbiased information and feedback given to legislators seemed to add a balanced perspective among the requests from stakeholders who may have competing needs.

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*Students*

At least one legislator expressly appreciated what students had to say, as well as how education affected their lives. The following is his perception about what influence students had on his funding decisions. L5 said:
I listen to students. Their information of course to a certain degree and naturally so, shows bias and should be biased. Students are reporting to me ‘I want as much education as I can get as cheap as I can.’ They’d better feel that way, anyway.

I have to admit that occasionally I’m moved by personal stories.

Referring once again to successful nursing students and the changes education made in their lives, this legislator said that “you can’t help but be moved by them.” Although other legislators did not mention directly about the influence of students on their decision making processes, having seen students working closely with legislators as pages and interns and seeing them presenting to legislators at statehouses in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington led me to wonder if they had more impact on legislative decision making than was expressed in this study.

Relationships with Community Colleges

When asked how they gained information, many legislators said that another major source was community college presidents and key community college staff members were critical contacts for them. There was also an expectation that legislators would hear from those constituents as part of the process.

L2 said he relied on colleges to contact him more than his contacting them. Like L4, he appreciated the college president whose college was within the legislators’ home districts; that this president in particular, “recognized the fiscal strain on resources,” and “…he was never a whiner.” L2, who held the same House leadership position for four years said, that of all the presidents (including university presidents) he talked to, this president “was very available.” This president was upfront and “couched” what he needed “in real terms.” L2 went on to say that this president, because of his approach with the legislators, “was very persuasive…nobody pushed him aside.”

L3 said that sometimes information he received was overwhelming, but was integral in his role as a member of the Education Committee to gather information, and not be afraid to pick up the phone to contact someone at a community college. Most legislators were on a first name basis with those contacts:
Well if you do not do anything, the community colleges will contact you. ...you’ll get a lot of stuff in the mail. You’ll get approached by everybody from the college president on down, as to their issues. I mean, you can go out and inform yourself, but there is an information apparatus at each of the colleges that is certainly alive and well. ...informing you on their issues. ... it's not necessarily lobbying in a pejorative sense, it’s more of an education process. The average new legislator does not understand the intricacies of college funding, ....

L3 explained further the ease of working directly with community college presidents. He felt encouraged by the presidents to contact them and that they would do everything possible to be available. The following is how he approached presidents when he had questions:

And so, my approach is to make phone calls and say, ‘here’s something that I picked up in this meeting I do not understand. Could you please walk me through it?’ And my best contact has been [the presidents at the two community colleges]. So I call them first. And I’ve had a good very good, open relationship with ______ [president at a local community college]. ... he’s [first name] in my mind. He’s not, you know, Dr. _______ or President _______. And I assume that I can cultivate a similar relationship with [that president’s incoming replacement]. But anyway, that’s been my approach. But if you do not do anything, they’ll approach you. (Laughs) Particularly if you’re in a position where your vote matters to them. Either policy or budget wise.

Most shared a tendency to favor the community colleges within their districts. When asked whether L3 had closer contact with one college over the other, he said that most of his involvement was with the college closest to where he lives. Only during the legislative session was he in contact with the other college:

I think – I feel really biased toward [my local community college], so you’ll have to forgive me for that, but I think that [the college] has really become an important part for everybody in our whole community because that gives everybody an opportunity to pay or have the financial ability to go to a four-year institution, to get their feet under them, learn a skill/occupation, professional skill or if they so choose to get the first two years of a—get their associates degree, and go on to four-year institutions... I think and agree that they’re also providing an opportunity to get a four-year degree in specific areas.

L4 relied on the community college closest to where he lived as well. He said he appreciated the president of the local community college in helping him with information about community colleges in Oregon. He also relied more on the community college representatives more than lobbyists:
...[the president] gives me little notes. [Others] are there. They see me. Their lobbyists come and see me. But basically it's the community college-types that come see me. I'm given a speech. They're one ones that assist me. They are the ones that really tell me really what's going on.

The legislators who participated in this study found community college presidents to be one of their most valued resources when considering community college funding issues. They relied on presidents to educate them about their needs and help them understand community college concerns. The working relationships they had with their local community college presidents seemed to have been more meaningful than the relationships these other educational institutions were at a distance.

Community Colleges as Colleagues

Legislators worked closely with community colleges to solve how to cover projected shortfalls. Sometimes there were simple phone calls for more information. Other times, legislators sat down with college presidents and staff members to come up with solutions:

In the last budget-setting process, [the other finance committee co-chair] and I both called the presidents and said 'There's this, and this, and this: Tell us the thing that'll help you the very most.' And so then, that's exactly the budget that we did. And that's the best we can do. We're also—I think we're heading down the road to where there'll be a more equitable division in the money between NIC and CSI. We've been pushing that with the State Board [of Education]...and that's a little difficult because we have committee members who represent NIC, but fair is fair.

Through close working relationships built over a number of years, legislators came to trust college presidents and their boards. I3 came to respect college personnel for not asking for more than was reasonable:

They do not ask for things that they do not absolutely need to have, and when they do ask for things, and I'm assuming that is has passed an internal review and that it meets a standard, and that if they didn't absolutely need to have it, they wouldn't ask.

And that becomes good enough for me, and then I go to work to try and get that for them. Whether it is a policy change, [or] whether it's funding for a specific program, or facility. You know, that is what I do is I try to have a close relationship and be available to them to go to work on those things that are their priorities.
You know, … [director of Budget and Policy Analysis] can call me, [two community college presidents] always. …that’s my approach. I do not do a lot of research. I call. I go directly to…the person. And I assume that…they’re honest with me—

L4 said that he assumed his relationships with community colleges were the same as he expected with his legislative colleagues. He said about one college in particular, “They do not ask me to go places that I can’t go, and yet they come clean with me on things that they need us to do. …there’s no crying wolf, so to speak.”

L4 expected that there would be open and honest dialog between himself and the presidents of the colleges, and that the presidents would “trust [him] to do the best” he could. If the results did not turn out as expected, at least with the open and honest discussions beforehand, he felt the presidents knew that he “gave it the college try.” L4 also hoped that if he had to tell the colleges “this can’t be done,” that the colleges would realize that this “perspective” came from “70 colleagues, and the ones in the Senate, and the Governor, and what is politically doable. So, I defer to their expertise and expect that to be reciprocated.”

Legislators in this study appreciated the collegiality of the community college and presidents with whom they worked. Legislators and community college presidents worked in concert with state resource staff in trying to meet the funding needs of community colleges. What they described seemed to me more like teamwork than a hierarchical relationship where legislators were at the top of the organization chain. Again, these close working relationships were certain to have an influence on legislative funding perceptions.

Integrity and Trust

As was mentioned previously, within the environs of legislative work, integrity and trust are essential in the gathering of sound information from which legislators make their budget decisions. And from which they develop a point of view. L4 stated very clearly that if there were any hints or suspicion of “game playing,” those would destroy any sense of trust—and within the entire legislative body:

…but you know, everyone is going to be very polite to these folks that game the system, but the word gets out. I mean, we are a tight knit group and…the word gets out in a hurry.
So, if a representative for a college or university or state agency or whatever it happens to be—or a private sector lobbyist—if they ever fall out of graces, they can’t get back in it. … and it has quite a bit of finality to it...

…so again, the stock in trade at the legislative level is integrity or trust. And, in the old definitions of those words…. So if you ever mislead me in any way--everyone is allowed to make some freshman or some inexperienced type mistakes--but once you give your word, then you’re expected to stay there. And if you ever change your mind, you’re expected to let everybody that has any interest in that know. Otherwise, you get a reputation for being squishy, or a bunch of the different terms that people use. And so that process there is, in my mind and my experience, … how the legislature works. And then you run different issues through that process, and it makes for very interesting times. And completely fascinating. If you’re a student of human behavior, the legislature is a place where you can really watch it.

Another aspect of honesty and integrity in the legislative process was that it took up too much time to figure out whether or not people were being honest. L4 said legislators simply did not have time to deal with “game playing:”

Because we are [in session] only 90 days… you can’t spend time on figuring ulterior motives and…worrying about if people are playing ‘hide the ball’ with you, or playing ‘gotcha’ or that type of stuff. … you only get to do that once.

Legislators depended on their working relationships to be based on integrity and trust. Those were the foundations from which their relationships with others were built, the accuracy of the information they received was formed, and the way the legislative process was carried out. If they had a sense that someone, whether they were constituents, colleagues, or even community college representatives, purposely compromised this “code of honor,” their reputations would be damaged -- and probably irreparably -- among the entire legislative body. There would be no second opportunities to undo what had been done.

**Partnerships with Community Members**

Partnerships with community members to assist community colleges were activities some legislators valued. L5, from Oregon, said that he worked to partner with specific people in his community itself to assist community colleges. His helping to develop nursing programs at the community college in his district and leveraging his expertise as a medical professional with that as a legislator to help those programs, was a
testament to his close working relationship with that college. In addition, he was instrumental in getting other support in different ways outside his role as a legislator. This legislator was actively involved in seeking additional funding to assist the community college to be responsive to local needs. “We have worked locally to pass a bond a couple of years ago. I was on the [community college] school board to put funding in the community colleges, and to increase their campus in [local city].”

Finally, L5 expected community college leaders and lobbyists to ask for as much as they could for their programs. He said if they do not “then they shouldn’t come up here, because they’re fighting against other people to get those things.”

L6’s direct support and connection with community colleges, like the other legislators interviewed, had to do with the community college within her district. She provided support in the way of mentorship about funding issues and legislative processes for the several new presidents the college recently experienced. She was also friends with employees at the college:

…”[a local community college] has had a series of like, four presidents over the last three years or so. Big turnover; …so I’ve worked with all of them on different issues. And the one that is there now has only been there a couple of months, and I haven’t had an opportunity to really sit down and talk with him yet. But I do hope to. …it’s kind of a small rural setting down there so a lot of my friends are people that work at the college in different capacities. So I have a fairly good understanding of how it’s working.

Some legislators within this study made it a point to become actively involved with community colleges within their districts. They mentored the colleges in developing and gaining support – including financial support -- for new programs and to help colleges learn more about the legislative budgeting process. My impression was that they wanted to be considered as colleagues and peers by helping out the community colleges. The relationships they built within their communities toward community college support were meant to influence their family members and acquaintances toward that support.

Respectful Interactions

Notwithstanding honesty and integrity, professional courtesy (the respect constituents showed to legislators) was an important factor in how legislators made
decisions. Their perspectives were clearly influenced by how they perceived peoples’ attitudes toward them and legislation.

L1 said that one thing in particular that was unhelpful, as well as distracting, were individual groups of staff at colleges, more so from universities than community colleges, that came to meet with legislators, perhaps without their administration know about it. Along with such visits often came letter-writing campaigns. “…they get pretty far out—how bad we have treated them, and how hard it is to be doing what they’re doing. Frankly, that doesn’t help me at all…” L1 went on to say that these tactics left her with feeling a negative impression about the request.

L4 shared examples where negative attitudes backfired on some individuals. Although they were not community college-related, he felt it important to share with me to illustrate a point:

…it happened in the context of [a] statewide committee during the legislative session. One of the things that was passed, was funding for an interim study committee on property tax. And that property tax committee was charged with going around the state and having a series of a dozen meetings all around the state. …[to inform] themselves on the property tax issues, …all over the state—not just their home districts.

So we’re up in [a local community] at a meeting there, and the committee, like I say-- these [legislators] are very polite—these are gentlemen and ladies. And pretty practiced at being poker faced. When someone gets up to espouse a view, they are given four or five minutes to …present to the committee. …when they stand up and give the first 3½ minutes of their 5-minute talk, [and are] criticizing the actions, you know, and everybody sits there and smiles;… you know, no reaction.

But then to come back and ask those same people for help after they’ve been criticized,… you just do not treat people that way. And even though [legislators] seem to be different than others, they’re just regular folks who put their pants on exactly the same way everyone else does.

…this is a lesson that the teacher’s union has never understood. …bashing the legislature is a varsity sport there, and then they are always unsuccessful. I mean they have limited success…So that’s how it works.

L3 described such actions as “biting the hand that feeds you.”

Literally, and they resent the fact that they’ve gotta come to that hand for food, but that’s the way it is. And you know, so, you know, it boils down to human relationships and how to treat people. And no one reacts well to being harshly criticized, ever. I haven’t met that person yet.
Even if legislators “are people with bigger than average egos who are always running for re-election of for higher office” (Quash Coats, 2002, p. 140), they want to be treated like other people. The legislators in this study and in Quash Coats’s study expressed the same frustrations about the treatment they sometimes received. Quash Coats conveyed the message, “Remember, legislators are people too. They expect to be treated in a human fashion. Politicians come to public office with the intention to do good for their constituents” (p. 117). Legislators see themselves as public servants and community members. They have feelings, hopes, and goals like their neighbors. Along with integrity and trust, they value respect. They report that they try to be respectful even when they disagree with one another or with other individuals outside the legislature. When they are treated with disrespect, their feelings get hurt and just as others’ feelings get hurt. Legislators do not understand why someone would treat them poorly when they were being asked for support. All told, legislators probably deal with disrespectful people and as others would. Disrespectful people are probably either ignored or discounted.

To summarize, the citizen legislators of Idaho and Oregon, because they did not have full-time staff assistance, relied on their relationships and connections with others for the information they needed to make funding decisions. They relied on community colleges first and foremost for input into the legislative decision making process regarding community college issues. Legislators spoke of community college administrators almost as colleagues in the community college funding process. And, some admitted to being biased towards the community colleges in their districts. Legislators also implied that their colleagues had tremendous influence as well. Within these close relationships, legislators were well-informed about community college roles, activities, and functions. They knew about and were often involved in community college interactions with business recruitment, contracted programming, and federal grants and contracts. Community colleges had an opportunity on a fairly regular basis to communicate with legislators about their activities.

Second in line of influence was legislative staff who could give legislators historical and trend information regarding enrollments and past funding. Part of this trend information included the amounts of alternative sources of funding community
colleges include in their overall budgets. In that way legislators get a snapshot of the overall budget picture for community colleges. Although lobbyists, students, and community members played a part in informing legislators, by far the greatest sources of information were community colleges.

Legislators in this study echoed the importance of relationships with community colleges (and community members) built on integrity and trust -- with the additional characteristic of “respect.” Should anyone breach any of these qualities, legislators said that those individuals no longer had credibility and probably could not gain their credibility back.

Informal or Inadvertent Ways of Gaining Information

Other ways legislators gained information from which to make their community college budget decisions were not planned and came in more informal ways. One way included a legislator discussing issues with her spouse who was a community college administrator at one time. Others asked for help and information from former legislators. Most found that while attending meetings during the session or out in the community they often caught snippets of information in casual conversations. By making such connections within fortunate timing, issues that may have otherwise seemed benign, synchronistically developed into opportunities for solutions and positive change. L1 described one such incident in which she was able to make a decision to facilitate a funding solution. She began her story by talking about how she relied on others for critical information, and in the process she happened to “fall into” a situation about which she wanted to learn more. When I asked her how she got her information to make decisions when she was so busy, the following is her description of what happened:

It isn’t that I’m so busy, it’s that I’m not that knowledgeable. I do not have all the facts and figures. …I’m of very ordinary intelligence, and I need all the help I can get. So, you spend an inordinate amount of time out of session, and sometimes during session listening to people. Luncheon meetings, chamber meetings, meetings with the colleges. Whomever asks you to meet with them. They’ll come this way. I’ll meet most any place. And then you hear, you get a little piece of something or a little picture of something, you didn’t have a clue was there.

I can remember some years ago [a former Representative] was chairman of [the] Judiciary and Rules [Committee]. And she and I got together one day and had a Coke with Captain
______ [of a local Idaho State Police Department office]. He said ‘Come and look at my State Police Headquarters. You really just need to come and look at it.’ We did.

I was appalled. I was totally appalled. We had them out by the sugar company in a double-wide. You could have gone to their front desk with a shotgun. I was appalled. It just happened that the time came and the money came and the opportunity came that we were able to move them into a safe and adequate headquarters. But it was timing. He, and then she, and then I— we had the opportunity. Now had the timing not happened just then, they would probably still be there no matter how bad it was. But I would not have known about that had she worked with him from her committee; she and I were good friends and he was willing enough to come to us and say ‘come look at what my people are in and how worried I am about it.’

Sometimes the emergence of legislators’ perceptions is unintentional. Legislators may gain new insights from events, interactions with others outside their regular milieu, and through observations. Like the event just described, providing legislators with opportunities to gain new insights by inviting them to tour, or see activities and events seemed to assist them to get to know more about the workings of community colleges, and thus alter their perceptions.

**Other Insights on the Decision Making Process**

The legislators’ decision making processes previously described all had to do with their decisions depending on connections to and about people, and the influences they experienced from others. However, some of legislators within this study described processes they sometimes used in making funding decisions which were not necessarily dependent on their relationships to others, nor were they easily categorized. The following insights about how legislators made decisions stood apart from the influences and connections they directly had with others. What they describe in this section is more about their internal process for decision making.

**Make Decisions Based on the Information You Have**

Several legislators exercised the premise “You make the best decision you can with the information you have available to you” (L5). L1 explained that some of her decision making process was based over a long period of time—and years of experience in the legislature:

…my personal funding decision making process comes from—I’m watching—we’re 18 months out, so we have the past history and what’s happening now, we have those economic indicators
[for the] nation—we [the State of Idaho] always lag behind when we go into a recession, we lag behind coming out. You know all of those things—you HAVE to know all of those things. So that’s always right in front of me. That’s the big picture. Then I take that big picture and I try to break the state down into the kind of, wedges of a pie. And then you have to look and see long-range plans—what problems are the growth is. It’s really complicated, in many ways. And you never get it right. Totally right. You just do the best you can with what you think you know. And, of course, we’ve been caught several times...

Although this method of decision making did not seem totally satisfying, I got the sense that sometimes legislators just needed to make a decision. Oftentimes there were no good solutions, but a decision had to be made and the legislators saw it as their duty to make such decisions. And then move on to the next issue.

**Gut Feelings**

Sometimes legislators followed an inner voice to guide them, when the answer did not become clear. L6 explained that sometimes his decisions were made based on his “gut feeling:"

...some of the decisions I make along with my fellow colleagues, are made sometimes, in the end...with a gut feeling; you have to decide which program will get the money. There’s no clear reason one should and one shouldn’t. They both have needs and they’re both good programs. And you make the best decision you can with the information you have available to you. Which does not mean that it’s always the best decision.

L6, not unlike L1 and L5, following his “gut feeling” was not wholly satisfying or an indicator of sound decision making, but again felt he needed to make a decision based on the information he had. Legislators like most people at one time or another make decisions based on intuition.

**Sometimes it is a Learning Process...**

L7 described the feeling of not having enough information either, but knew that she would learn how to make better decisions as time went along. She shared how she made decisions and what she thought about how she made those decisions. Like others, she reported that she tried to make the best decision she could with the information she had. Going into the session as a freshman legislator, she said
…90 percent of what goes on here is partly an educational process. ‘Do I understand it and do all the parties understand it? And are we in agreement that this is the way we should be going?’ …and off we go. It’s not that hard in terms of policy decisions. Then there are the critical ones where there isn’t agreement. And as a policy maker I have to say, ‘Well, based on the information that I have…I think that we should be looking this way.’

…I knew that it would be a brutal and difficult time because the economic picture is bleak for this state. I tend to be the kind of decision-maker who listens, and weighs the options, casts my vote. And move[s] on. I do not then go to bed at night say ‘Oh did I do that right?’ Or, ‘I did that wrong.’ It isn’t that I won’t change my mind, given more information or different information. You know, I would revisit something if asked—if the information were compelling enough. But I am not the kind of decision maker that goes around and says ‘(Gasp) I made a mistake. I didn’t do that right.’ All of us make decisions based on the best available information at the time. And I try and be consistent in my philosophical grounding on all issues. As consistent as you can be, because everything is sort of situational. And then go on.

At times, legislators needed to take a philosophical view about their decisions. Knowing that not all decisions can be the best or even good, seemed to go with the territory of being a legislator. And, that decision making was a learning process from which lessons could be learned.

In summary, legislators often referred to their decision making process as making the best decision they could with the information they had. They sometimes felt that what they decided wasn’t totally rewarding. They relied on past experience as part of the process and sometimes admitted to going with their ‘gut feeling’ (L3) and sometimes it was a process of ‘learning as you go’ (L7). For the most part, legislators did not seem agonize about their decisions, but made a decision and then went on to the next issue at hand.

Summary for Research Question 3

In this section, findings were presented and discussed in response to Research Question 3. Findings were given in the form of what influences legislators’ perceptions, and perhaps their expectations about the appropriate share of alternative funding sources for community colleges. The theme encompassed how legislators made decisions and what influenced their decision making processes.
An overriding influence seemed to be the relationships legislators had with people. They valued mostly highly and counted on their relationships with colleagues, legislative staff members, and community college administrations to help them with community college funding decisions. Most were actively involved with their local community colleges in ways that exposed them to the roles and functions of the colleges. These activities included working with the colleges to raise funds to start new programs, be involved in economic development activities such as business recruitment, and to have knowledge about government grants and other contracts.

Party affiliation and caucuses, committee work, legislative leadership, lobbyists, and students also played a role. They relied on honesty, integrity, and mutual respect when dealing with individuals who were asking for their support on any given issue. If anyone were to compromise or appear to compromise any of those attributes, legislators said their trust of that individual was gone and unlikely to be reestablished.

Legislators also relied on party platform to help guide their decision making, but also took into consideration the needs of the greater populations. Although they tended to favor education as a remedy to societal ills, I got the impression that funding for public safety and health and welfare programs for their constituents were necessities and simply had to be funded. Finally, legislators said again and again that they did the best they could with the information they had. Sometimes they went with their “gut feelings” and sometimes it was a learning process. Just through practice over time they became better aware of what information to gather and how to make decisions. Their knowledge and decision making about funding came from the culmination of information from trusted sources, “gut feeling,” and long-term experience.

Research Question 4: What is the relationship of legislators’ perceptions of alternative funding sources and their funding decisions (i.e., allocation of state resources) regarding community colleges?

This section presents findings in response to Research Question 4, What is the relationship of legislators’ perceptions of alternative funding sources and their funding decisions (i.e., allocation of state resources) regarding community colleges? A recurring theme for this question
emerged during the data analysis: legislators’ perceptions of funding solutions that would solve funding shortfalls.

**Legislators’ Perceptions of Funding Solutions that Would Solve Funding Shortfalls**

The following were areas of possible solutions that legislators in this study felt that could address funding shortfalls: (a) common solutions, (b) alternative funding solutions, and (c) overall thoughts regarding solutions. In conclusion, legislators provided suggestions for community colleges so they could help legislators with their funding decisions.

**Common Solutions**

Legislators were asked for the ways they thought the issue of lack of adequate resources for community college funding solutions could be resolved. They discussed ways including raising tuition and ending open enrollment, cutting back on services they provide, and charging fees to the communities they served. In addition, they discussed their perceptions about using alternative funding sources as solutions to shortfalls. Finally they expressed some overall thoughts on the lack of funding for community colleges.

**Increase Tuition**

One area legislators thought that could help make up for shortfalls would be for the colleges to raise tuition. All were concerned that doing so would decrease accessibility for student populations most in need of financial assistance. L3 stated, “The beauty and the strength of community colleges has been their open enrollment,” but he felt that open enrollments could be putting a strain on resources. He thought that a “casualty” of having open enrollments would be to increase student fees. He had strong concerns about increasing tuition though, and said, “From my perspective, if they ever go down those roads, then they will have defeated their purpose.”

L4, from Oregon, referred to the cuts that community colleges there had recently taken, and how the colleges had already increased tuition to help assuage the situation.
He had tremendous concerns about their continuing to raise tuition and hoped colleges would be more vocal with the legislature about their needs:

They’re all getting hit. I just think that we’ve substantially hit community colleges. And they’ve had a substantial increase in tuition—huge! And so they’re getting nailed. They are being forced to increasingly go to tuition, which is counterproductive. They’re not accessible anymore---they are physically, but they’re not accessible financially. So, I think they have a lot to lose in this if they can’t really get to enough of us to be championing them in the legislative halls.

L4 went on to say that communities would need to start helping their colleges financially in other ways:

We’re increasingly going to a pay as you go system. Those who use it pay for it. But that breaks down after awhile because it’s like a public bus system. [If] you or I [got] on the bus and actually paid the fee that we should pay to make that bus self supporting, we wouldn’t get on the bus because it would be astronomically higher than it is. So there’s got to be a subsidy. Increasingly, we’re forcing community colleges [into the same position]. Those who use [a community college] should pay for it. And you’re going see that continue. Same way in higher ed. But as I say, then you get to a point where your tuition is so high, the cost of having people rent rooms [at the colleges]. ...they have a beautiful [facilities] layout here in West Salem. They got some land and they’ve got this conference center. It’s a nice deal. But you know, they charge us for it. ...sooner or later, do these rates become so high people just stop using them? And tuitions are so high that people find themselves taking less credit? Taking longer to get out? You know, they are in a bind because they’ve got to go to these sources. But much of these sources, are from user fees. And I think that’s what’s coming.

L4 thought increases in tuition were still going to play a big role in making up funding shortfalls, but that “other sources of revenue are going to have to come into play,” because the Oregon legislature was not “going to be able to bail [community colleges] out anywhere near the point they need.” He went on to say, “Tax revolution people have attacked the property tax.” The efforts to supply community colleges with “more income tax money” got defeated. He said, “So they have no choice. They have to continue to go after these other areas and try to really build up.” When asked whether he thought Oregon would ever pass a sales tax in Oregon that could help their funding crises, he said decidedly, “No.”

L6, also from Oregon, already suspected there had been an impact on students and colleges from their increases in tuition:

Well the enrollments are actually, I think, falling victim to the tuition hikes. And you’re starting to see in a number of colleges particularly the ones that aren’t in urban areas where you have a good market base there, that they are falling off because people just can’t afford it any
more. Clearly, something has to happen here…. There’s just a lot of issues and I think that the solution to it is going to come from a lot of different directions.

She said that besides declining enrollments, other consequences would be paid due to lack of funding:

There are only so many cutbacks you can do. Then you get below the staffing level and you can’t offer the number of classes that you need to satisfy the demand. And you can’t offer the breadth of classes that you need to satisfy the demand. So you just limit the growth of the system essentially. [College becomes] too expensive, too inconvenient. People can’t get what they need out of it, and I think we’re kind of to that place right now.

L8’s concerns were with the declining resources for higher education overall in Oregon. The rises in tuition at the universities would “push a lot of these students to community colleges” His conclusion was that all colleges were being “punished” by lack of funding.

Legislators did not see raising tuition as a good solution to make up for funding shortfalls. They worried about students’ inability to pay, and thus lowering enrollments and risking lower state allocations. A fee for services system, which would change community colleges into self-supporting entities, did not seem a viable solution either, because the actual fees they would have to charge to provide courses and services would be too high for most students to pay. Alternative sources of funding seemed to be a more realistic choice for increasing funding to community colleges.

Cut Services

Another suggestion for dealing with funding cuts was for community colleges to cut down on services provided and limiting activities. L2 said, “I think you reach a breaking point where you have to start turning people away at some point—and Lord knows you do not what to do that.” When capping enrollments was mentioned as a solution that some community colleges in Washington had turned to, he said “[that’s] not a good way to run a ship.”

Although capping enrollments was another suggestion, it too had its problems. By capping enrollments, community colleges would limit their ability to recruit more students to generate additional revenues. Again, alternative funding may be a better solution to make up for funding shortfalls.
**Raise More Revenue**

Another way to increase community college funding would be to raise taxes to increase revenue to the state. However, L3 spoke about the challenges of simply gaining support for any funding request, let alone raising taxes:

*You have a finite amount of dollars and a bunch of places to put them. And I might be the most gung-ho pro community college legislator in Idaho, but I can’t do anything unless I have another 35 votes with me, and then I have to get 18 in the Senate and then the Governor’s got to sign it. …just the sheer numbers there, of making that happen…to get those kinds of votes from all around the state [is a challenge].*

*You know, the good ideas seem to rise to the top. …[at times, the funding decisions] turn out to be a hard thing for specific state agencies, but it truly ends up being the best that we could do with what we have to work with. I’m not trying to make excuses, but unless and until you want to raise more revenue, and that means raise taxes, in a state like Idaho where raising taxes is a hard thing here, and in my mind, rightly so, then we’re always faced with doing things a little differently, trying to find better, more efficient ways to do it.*

Legislatures struggled with funding all the needs with a finite amount of revenues. One way of increasing revenues would be to raise taxes. In both Idaho and Oregon, that option was highly unlikely to be used.

**Do More with Less**

Some legislators suggested that community colleges were doing a good job with less funding support. L3 once again stated his appreciation for the community college that served his district with the way they managed to do more with less state funding:

*And [a local community college], in my mind, has been exemplary. I mean their enrollment has increased, their per-student state funding has gone down, and yet I do not think the quality of their product has gone down. You know, from my perspective.*

L1, like the other legislators from that same local community college’s district, praised the president for his attitude and the way he worked with the legislature. She felt that he represented both community colleges in Idaho in doing more with less money. L2 said about the same president, “*he has the greatest voice…and my admiration…because I know very few people in any business that could do as much with less resources than [president’s name]…*” According to L1, the respect that this particular president showed for legislators and his ability to work with them as a team member to deal with difficult
funding issues was appreciated by her fellow legislators. She felt that he really 
empathized with legislators regarding the difficult decisions they faced when dealing with 
community college funding shortfalls:

[The president] is respected and loved by my budgeting group. He is their special person—and 
they, most of them have visited [his college] three or four times. And we've visited [the other 
community college]. And I think we all realize the value, and we also all realize that they kind 
of are on the back burner a little bit because we've not found a way to free-up the money from 
some other great budgets to flow to them. So you know that, when you can, that's where it will 
go.

To summarize, legislators came up with some traditional or already-used solution 
ideas for funding shortfalls. One was to increase tuition, but Oregon legislators had 
already seen the damage done to enrollments in their state as a result of tuition increases. 
Declining enrollments also would cause colleges to cut back on course offerings, further 
lowering enrollments. Another idea was to increase “pay as you go” services provided by 
colleges. LA felt that those who use the college should pay additional fees for using the 
facilities—at a market rate. Again, he had a concern that overcharging could keep people 
from paying too. Cutting services and turning people away by capping enrollments was 
another thought, but would have the same consequences as cutting back offerings--lower 
enrollments and lower revenues. Raising taxes was mentioned as an option, but that was 
not likely to happen according to the legislator who brought the topic up. Finally, there 
was an expectation that colleges would simply have to continue to carry out more 
activities with less funding.

Alternative Funding as a Solution to Funding Shortfalls

Legislators shared a variety of responses to questions regarding alternative 
funding solutions to budget shortfalls for community colleges. Several felt there could be 
some positive aspects to colleges receiving funding from federal resources, private 
foundations, and contracts with private industry. Legislators also recognized some 
downsides to alternative funding assistance, as well.
Positive Aspects to Alternative Funding

For the most part, legislators in this study saw alternative means of funding community colleges as a positive development. They saw alternative funding helping to stabilize funding ups and downs, helping the economy by providing funding to train a new workforce, and helping to increase innovation and efficiencies at community colleges.

L1 felt that alternative funding sources could lend stability to colleges “when state funding bounces up and down.” L2 thought that college involvement with outside sources of funding would only increase. He saw potential for colleges to partner with corporations all over the country:

“...as society evolves and the economy evolves, big companies like Dell and Microsoft, all these folks [like] Bill and Melinda Gates [with] 29 billion dollars to give away, ... are really sold on community colleges. I think that you’re going to see the emphasis from those larger companies because they need trained staff. Micron [a microchip company headquartered in Boise] is the same way. The community colleges are going to become more important to their success of their training of their labor force over the long term.

L2 also thought that federal grant funding would increase over time as well because of the successes community colleges achieved at providing training for the labor force, thereby, helping the economy. He stated that:

“...what community colleges do for the labor force for large companies is actually more significant than what four-year institutions do. Basically if you get a bachelor’s [degree] any more, it’s not worth much more than [a high school diploma] but if you come out of a community college well-trained, you’re going to know your skills are in demand.

Alternative funding sources were clearly important revenue streams as far as L6 was concerned. In fact, she stated that they not only would be critical for the future of community colleges, but also ensured needed innovation and efficiencies in community colleges:

"Oh they’re going to be really important—they are right now. Not only as funding sources, but as funding sources that you can count on. I mean that all those programs are good, and I think that one of the great things that has happened over the last three years with the funding falling off, is that it’s forced people to become more creative in how they use the funds to cut down on the management side of the programs and push more of the money down into services."
I think we’re going to ask them probably to do that for another couple of bienniums so that the local property taxes which are...actually a bright spot because the value of properties are increasing. That’s gradually increasing the revenue stream that’s very stable. The federal funds, if they can maintain stability will be really good, because that’s workforce development type stuff and job training stuff, which is important too. So those are all going to continue to be important sources.

Legislators’ positive perceptions about alternative funding for community colleges included the thoughts that those dollars could actually stabilize unpredictable state funding, could help support the development of a new workforce and therefore a stronger economy, and promote innovation and efficiencies within the colleges. They seemed to believe that there were ample opportunities for community colleges to utilize alternative funds for their ongoing operations.

**It’s a Responsibility**

Community colleges need to seek alternative funds. First, to fulfill their missions and second, to recruit and partner with the private sector to training qualified workers. L7 thought that grants and contracts could be a real plus in helping colleges get the funding support they needed. Her perception was that community colleges served a purpose, and if they needed assistance to fulfill that purpose, it was their responsibility to seek outside assistance to do so:

"They have a mission to fulfill, and limited resources. So you look wherever you can to fulfill your mission and find the resources you feel are essential."

L7 expected business and industry to come forward to assist. She thought full partnerships with community colleges would provide business and industry the qualified workers they needed now and for the future. But the private sector needed to do their part—even if some believed that colleges were “selling out” to that sector:

"...the private piece? I’m all for that. I do not have a problem. Business—that’s one of the joys of community colleges is that connection to the workforce issues. Business needs workers and they need training."

Community colleges are filling those roles in huge ways. Business...kind of come[5] together over a task. And then move[5] on. ...there are people who see philosophically ‘Well, it’s a sellout. This is public education.’ But in the community colleges—and actually and uniquely there—we’re talking about jobs. And jobs are business, and business are jobs. And so the connection
has to be there, and has to stay there. They have to come and say 'We want workers trained in our industry. So we have to be there working with you'.

...I mean you're just touched—one of the golden things about community colleges is this connection. And strengthen it. Because it isn't them buying anything, except a qualified workforce. Which we all want. We mean everybody!

So, yeah, business should be at the table. They should be helping to fund whatever. If hospitals aren't helping with nursing programs, where are they going to get nurses? If—you [have to] make this connection—hallelujah. Hallelujah. The more the merrier. 'Come in and tell us what your needs are,' because it's a key connection.

With the needs for qualified workers expanding and community college funding decreasing, partnerships between the colleges and business and industry served two purposes: (a) community colleges would receive needed funding, and (b) business and industry would receive qualified workers they need for developing a healthy economy.

More Accountability and Responsiveness

Another perspective on how alternative funds would be positive for community colleges was that alternative funding sources such as grants and contracts would force community colleges to be more responsive to the needs of their communities and their state. L3 said:

They can't stagnate. If Health and Welfare's needs are change and retraining, and if it's DELL this decade, or some other company in five years, or next month or whatever,...I think that forces them to...change with it. And they're trying to meet the educational needs of a changing community.

He said he had seen that responsiveness happen at the community college within his district, and that it added to that college's successes:

And that's again, the strength of [the local community college]. ...they've had -- I do not know how it's happened -- but they've had their finger pretty well on the pulse of the [region] and they've been able to perceive the needs and in their capacity, fill those needs. And I think that's why they've been successful. And I think their ability to be successful in the future will depend on their ability to assess the community needs into the future and address them.

Alternate sources of funding were perceived by one legislator in the study as requiring community colleges to be more responsive to their communities' needs. I
interpreted his perception as being that the more successes community colleges
experienced by being responsive to their communities’ needs, the higher their reputations
and the more likely additional alternative, and not state funding would be forthcoming.

**Negative Aspects to Alternative Funding**

Legislators did see some downsides to community colleges utilizing outside
sources of funding. The downsides are: (a) there may be a narrowing of program focus
and exclusions, (b) grant writing and reporting, (c) grants and contracts are an unreliable
source and some programs lack continuity and, (d) community colleges may give up
control of essential elements of programming.

**Narrowing of Program Focus and Exclusion of Some Programs**

Two areas of concern regarding the use of alternative funding shared by
legislators in this study were: a narrowing of program focus and the exclusion of some
programs. A narrowing of focus to meet the needs of the funding source and possibly
neglecting the larger needs was one concern about alternative funding. L2’s concerns had
to do with narrowing the focus of programming to fit the requirements of the outside
funders.

*I think one thing you need to watch out for is getting so narrow in your education [and to focus
on a] particular professional skill. My brother is a medical doctor, and where I have liberal arts
education. He went Stanford, and I went to the University of Oregon…..my older brother
probably never read a book until after he got out of college because he was always interested in
the medical part of it. …….one of my hobbies is reading, so … I like to think that has helped
me in life to be open-minded, and to be constantly learning. I think you want people to broaden
their horizons and make sure that they are learning a skill for a profession, but do not become so
narrow that they [limit their options]…*

L7 had some concern that with the rapid changes within the business sector,
some programming that they funded would fall out of favor within shorter periods of
time. She did not believe that contracts with the private sector were reliable sources for
the long term, nor should they be thought of as being so. As a businesswoman herself,
she talked about the limitations of partnering with businesses:

*Business tends to be pretty strategic in what they’re going to give. And when you [as a
community college] have this big sinking—you might prop up [with business’s help], but [state
funding for community colleges] continues to sink, and that’s the trouble with business being the prop. It’s strategic—it’ll help maybe one program but it won’t [help all programs]. You’re going to have one program moving along and the [rest of the] community college sinking for lack of overall funding. And you can’t ask business to [pick up the rest of the cost]. …The hospitals might come in and help the nursing program, but they aren’t going to do a darn thing to help…forestry….

Some legislators in this study had concerns about a narrowing of program focus at the expense of other programming. They also saw a risk of imbalance of support across programming because some programs would receive much higher funding than others. L7 definitely felt that community colleges need to be in touch with and develop relationships with many funders instead of just one.

Grant Writing and Reporting

Legislators in this study saw another downside to receiving alternative funding as a requirement for writing proposals and do ongoing reporting. The amount of time managing alternative funding resources is in addition to the services or programming contracted for was noted by L7:

Well, if you’re going to live on grants, you’re going to have some pretty astute grant writers. That’s a competitive process, so that’s a role. I think that the colleges then need to be in an outreach mode as well. They’ve got to be able to have success stories so they’ve got to be able to articulate those success stories to their alternative sources of money. …those sources of that money want to know that their money was spent wisely. So they want to hear about success stories, so success stories will breed additional funding.

So I think that’s a role and a cost to communicate back. But I think there needs to be a circle of communication. You applied for the grant, or you applied for the alternative funding whether it’s with DELL or Health and Welfare or whatever, then you’ve got to show that the money was well spent and that it worked. And that assures that the funding source will come the next trip, I think.

L7 was aware of the infrastructure colleges needed to operate on competitive funds as well as encouraged community colleges to market their successes so that other funders will also want to contract for services.
Unreliable Source and Lack of Continuity

Legislators shared the perception that alternative funding was not a reliable source and thus put programs at risk of lacking continuity. L4’s described specifics about her perceptions about the unreliability of grant funding, how it could affect colleges, and why state support continued to be important:

They’re unreliable and I think it means that you’re going to lose programs, and you can’t afford to keep them. I mean, you get a grant, you start a program and the grant isn’t renewed, or you can’t get another one and then you’ve got to drop the program or try to keep it going with funds from other sources. So, I’m hoping we’ll continue good local support. I think the local support is adequate. It’s the support from the state that I’m concerned about, and that’s where we have to move things up.

L4 also felt that relying too much on “soft monies,” or grants, could be risky for community colleges because of the ebb and flow of funding from those sources as well:

…the same with grants and all that soft money, if you will, that can’t be counted on from biennium to biennium…that’s why, of course, community colleges come down here and say ‘you’ve got to give us a certain amount, and it’s got to be dependable, and we’ve got to know it’s going to be there.’ … that’s the same thing that’s happened to every agency that’s funded out of this building. So I hear them…they’re high on my list. I love community colleges. But every agency in the state has been hit.

The unreliability of funding from alternative resources could result in a lack of continuity of programming. Lack of continuity of programming could result in the loss of students, loss of personnel, and a loss of credibility of and trust for the community colleges’ abilities to deliver programming.

Giving Up Control

Another perception of legislators in this study was that by catering to the alternative funding sources, community colleges risked giving up local control of their programming. L7’s concern regarding loss of control to federal grants in particular was that there was no guarantee of continued support. She saw that public policy had been affected by too much reliance on federal support:

The tradeoff is that you pay for those resources with outside control. And it’s a tradeoff that drives a lot of public policy. Every time I go to the feds, because I want federal money, what comes back? Not necessarily [just] the money comes—[but also] the strings that come with it. Do I like them? Not at all. And that translates right on through our system. I would hope
that community colleges, individually, would keep a balance here. And make sure that just more money -- at some point just more money -- they will lose their community base. And then their mission changes. Then they become an extension of state government, not a locally-based educational institution. K-12 is about there now. I just hope community colleges do not get there.

Another perception about the downsides of alternative funding was that community colleges would lose local control by depending too much on sources other than local and state funding. The concern was that once community colleges become more reliant on grants and contracts and in particular, federal funding, they would risk losing their community-based focus as well.

In summary, legislators expected community colleges to seek out and utilize alternative funding sources. In fact, they felt it was a critical responsibility of community colleges to do so. They saw many positive aspects to colleges utilizing alternative sources, besides injecting needed revenues into their budgets. They felt that joining with corporations such as Dell and Microsoft, more qualified workers would be trained and increased employment opportunities would be generated as a result. They also felt that bringing in federal grant dollars to the colleges would boost the local economy. Some thought that seeking out and utilizing alternative funds would not only solve revenue shortfalls, such resources demanded increased innovation, responsiveness to community and state needs, and accountability. As a result, they felt that community colleges would become more efficient. Further, legislators thought it was time for the private sector to do its part by supporting education, which in turn, supplies it with qualified workers.

Legislators also reported and were sensitive to some downsides to alternative funding: (a) the risk of narrowing program focus to meet the funders’ needs, (b) the time consumed to report accountability, (c) the unreliability and lack of continuity of such funding, and (d) the risk of giving up management control to the funding entities. Although these were of some concern, the overall message to me was that alternative funding at community colleges was “here to stay.”
Other Thoughts on Solutions to Funding Shortfalls

In the previous section, legislators shared their perceptions about funding solutions that would solve funding shortfalls, including the use of alternative funding. The next section describes their perspectives on some additional community college funding solutions that were not easily categorized. In the section, legislators also describe what their perceptions were about the future of community college funding. Some ideas were tied to enrollments; others included local business and industry involvement and closer ties with the K-12 system as possible solutions.

Tie Funding to Enrollments

Tying funding to enrollment levels was a way one legislator thought could distribute funding more fairly for community colleges in his state. L2 had observed changes among enrollments across the state and at [a local community college] in particular, but that state funding did not necessarily follow enrollment trends:

...you've got to look at the enrollment growth at [that college], and it's hard to justify more money for four-year institutions and not the equivalent or more for [the college]. Because the fact is, is that [the college] is continuously meeting more people's needs for education than any of your four-year institutions. You know, [a university in the state] is on a decline, of course [another university in the state] is growing rapidly, and [a third university in the state] bad kind of moved into the professional categories, and are still alive. ...there's got to be some way to figure out how to get the student population and the funding...ratio [better aligned].

A partial solution to funding shortfalls would be to allocate funding according to enrollment numbers in order to assure the per-student allocations were equal. While this could seem fair, the costs to educate students are not equal across regions of a state because of differences in costs of living and other region-specific factors. The overhead costs and costs of living (for faculty and administrators) factor into the real costs of education. Colleges in more expensive regions of a state but with lower enrollments could suffer even greater net losses than just the losses from reduced funding.
Partner with the K12 System

One legislator’s perception was that community colleges could partner more closely with K-12 schools to save money. L6 thought that closer coordination across systems would increase efficiency for all entities, and thus reduce costs.

The silver bullet solution would be to just dump a bunch more money into it, but that isn’t a real solution. So [the Oregon legislature] has asked [education] to work on something we’ve called ‘more, better, faster.’ And that’s working with 11th and 12th grades in the K-12 system, and the college transfer piece and the technical training piece in the community college system, and the first two years of the four-year college system. ...to have them figure out ways to make the system work more efficiently to move students through.

An example is in the rural areas of the state, it is very common for kids to get into the 11th and 12th grades and have run out the other end of the all electives in the advanced classes that are available to them in their high schools. And there are some great pilot projects on the ground where those kids are moved into the community college system and so you have the potential to come out of the high school with the first two years of college already done.

So, the thought is to just try to refine that process more to look for more ways to push all the systems together so that by the time you come out of high school, you could be well on your well to a technical degree or you could be on your well to fulfilling your survey-level requirements in the 4 year system. I know as a parent, I would be real happy to not have to pay two years of college. That would put those kids out into the workforce with a good degree at training that much sooner would save a lot all the way through.

L6’s perception was that community colleges and education systems throughout the state could create more efficiencies by partnering. Shortening students’ time to completion and thus having them employable sooner and sharing facilities and resources would save funding all around.

Use “Out of the Box” Ideas

Helping part-time students with financial aid was another idea to generate more revenues for community colleges. L6 went on to say that legislators and community college administrators alike needed to come up with new ways of helping out students and colleges. She suggested that part-time students, a growing population of community college students, could use financial assistance like full-time students. That in turn, could help funding shortfalls.
… it’s in those kinds of ‘out of the box’ type solutions that are going to help us through. We’ve looked at one of things about community colleges that the student-base is really changing. And you now have a high percentage of people in the system that are part-time students. The financial aid isn’t real kind to people that aren’t taking a full load. So we’re looking at modifying that part of the system to help those part-timers with some financial aid.

Assisting part-time community college students who do not currently qualify for financial aid to get some help financing their educations would provide a new source of revenue for community colleges. According to one legislator, most community colleges have foundations that could do fundraising and provide financial aid for qualifying students.

*It Could be a Short-Term Problem*

At least one legislators hoped that funding shortfalls were going be a short-term problem. L5 shared his perspectives on the future of state funding for community colleges in Oregon. He was banking on an upturn in the economy so that community colleges would not have to use outside sources.

*I’m hopeful that state and local funds will rise to the point, that while those grants are important, we want the community [colleges] to get them, [I hope] that they are not as dependent on them[in the future] as they are now because those are not solid revenue streams. Those can come and go. And it puts the programs at risk.*

He felt that state funding support would increase in the near future, since the state was coming out of “the worst recession it’s had since the great depression in the 1930’s…” He went on to say,

…I believe that once we come out of this, that we will not look at dwindling resources, but we will actually see money poured back into it. Oregon has had a history of good support for higher education and community colleges but has been hurt badly …People in this building understand that we have to re-fund [community colleges].

L7 saw local and state funding as still being the critical base of support to shore up the foundation of community college funding:

*[with outside resources]…you have to have lots of little connections instead of one big one. And the one big one is the sort of basic support whether it be local or state, that keeps the whole ship afloat. They are part of the answer—they aren’t the whole answer.*
Some legislative perceptions were that state funding was an important foundation for community college funding and that the funding shortfalls were a temporary problem. Should the economy improve and state revenues begin to move upward, it would take some time for community colleges to make up for losses as well as reach the levels at which they were formerly funded.

_Didn’t Know_

While some legislators had other opinions about solving funding shortfalls, they came up with no hard and fast solutions. L3 said he knew what he could do as a farmer and rancher if he were in a shortfall situation, but he seemed confounded by thinking of solutions for community college funding shortfalls:

> I know what I have to do in my business,…could do in my business…I could give you a whole list of things that I could do as a farmer and a rancher when revenues are down. And those are completely different…than…what [the local community college president] and the executive board there had to do when…the state support went down. So specifically, I do not know what all they can do. Although I do know that [the need for funding] was very apparent, and he stood out amongst his peers, with a can do attitude.

> …bad state revenues continued to be stagnant, what I would have suggested that community colleges do, I do not know, and I’m glad this wasn’t a bridge we had to cross. But you know, that’s a bad answer…that’s another way to say “I just do not know, Debra.”

L3 seemed to truly be in a quandary about solutions. I sensed some frustration in his search for answers to funding shortfalls. While he fully supported community colleges and wanted to fund their needs, he simply could not find the funding to do so, given the additional funding needs in the state.

To summarize, legislators had a variety of other thoughts on alternative funding solutions. One saw that because enrollments were not tied to funding, some colleges were actually getting short-changed. He thought it was time to review the formula for funding so that there would be a better alignment. Another legislator thought community colleges should partner more closely with the K-12 system to create more efficiency by moving students through college faster, and prevent duplication of programming. Financial aid for the growing populations of part-time students was another idea that could bring in more revenue to colleges. How to build such a system wasn’t suggested,
however. Another legislator believed that the future of state funding for community colleges was going to make a turnaround—that this was only a short-term problem. He actually thought that as the economy turned around, money would actually be “pour[ing]” back into the state. He also hoped that community colleges would not be as dependent on outside sources as they are now. L7 still saw state funding as the foundation of community college funding, and that it should always be. Finally, one legislator said he simply did not know what the solutions could be.

**Summary for Research Question 4**

Overall, legislators expected community colleges to continue to plan on carrying out more activities with fewer dollars and to seek alternative funding in the process. They had some ideas on traditional solutions to help community colleges with their funding woes such as raising tuition and fees, cutting back on programs and services, and possibly raising taxes. However, they saw the negative consequences that Oregon community colleges experienced when they raised their tuition rates: a lowering of enrollments and thus even less revenue. Another solution was for community colleges to continue to garner funding through alternative sources. They felt that community colleges had a responsibility to seek such funding for a variety of reasons: (a) to make up for funding shortfalls, (b) to assist business and industry in building the socio-economic stability of their communities and states, (c) to generate innovation and creativity in programming, and (d) to create more efficiencies and accountability in education systems in their states. Although they saw some consequences of alternative funding: (a) risking a narrowing of program focus to meet the needs of funding entities, (b) large amounts of time to manage grants (i.e., writing and reporting) and, (c) and the unreliability of funding which affects continuity of programming. One legislator thought that funding should follow enrollments. Another felt that shortfalls in funding are only temporary and that state funding would again build and flow to the community colleges in the near future. Finally, one legislator said he did not have any solutions.
But, legislator did have some thoughts on how community colleges could help them with their funding decision making regarding community colleges. The following are their final thoughts.

**What Legislators Want from Community Colleges**

Legislators appreciated and wanted assistance from community colleges to keep them informed as to the colleges’ needs. They appreciated being contacted by the colleges and had some suggestions for community college leaders to follow when seeking funding assistance from legislators: (a) to be vocal about their needs, (b) make and prioritize a list of needs, and (c) develop “comrades in arms.”

**Be Vocal**

One suggestion for community colleges to help legislators in their funding decisions was to make sure legislators are regularly aware of their need. L1 wanted community colleges to be vocal in asking for what they needed. She wanted to know about their enrollment increases and what additional things they were doing with less money. She said:

*They can’t be quiet. They’ve got to continue to say ‘look, this is what we’re expected to do. This is what we’re asked to do. This is our enrollment.’ We [legislators] can see those things. And we might not be able to address them immediately, but [the needs will still] be there when we can do something...then I’ll say ‘whoa, we’ve put them on the back burner for a long time. Now we need to look at that.’ ...I think they have an obligation to let us know, and then go on and do the very best they can with what they get. Which is what they do.*

Although legislators may appreciate community colleges’ empathy towards legislators’ funding dilemmas, it is important that community colleges continue to let legislators know what their needs are. If community colleges are not forthright about their requests, they may be overlooked, given multiple competing needs of other organizations.

**Make and Prioritize a List of Needs**

As community colleges vocalize their requests, legislators said it is very helpful if they prioritize their requests by setting them within a five-year goal plan. L2 said he
would like help in the form of a priority list from the colleges. He especially wanted such a list having to do with buildings. For each item on the list, he would like some narrative saying, “This is what we need, and when you have the money, this is what we’d like to do. This is our number one priority, number two, [and] number three.” L2 also wanted to see five-year goals along with the list because:

“…unless you can set your goals out there a ways then it becomes a reaction…There ought to be a vision to set forth so that legislators keep that in mind. As time goes on so that when there is some money available…”

Prioritizing goals and setting them to timelines for legislators would assist legislators to not only plan for upcoming costs, they may also see the vision community colleges have for their operations and where funding might fall short. In envisioning the future of community colleges, legislators may feel more a part of the community college planning process and thereby better strategically prepare for possible funding.

Develop Comrades in Arms

When asked how he thought community colleges should address their dwindling state funding resources, L4 said that what colleges can do to help legislators is:

“They need to gain a comrade in arms…I think if they get together with higher ed., in some equal way, and can make a joint appearance as opposed to a separate appearance that’ll really help. I think they need to marry K-12 in someway or other. [They would be] so close they [would] get the benefits [like] K-12 and all their image-making, and they have incredible, powerful lobbyists. Because the lobbyists are not that powerful at community colleges as I recall, as opposed to OEA,…and the Oregon School Boards.

There’s four major areas, that have big lobbyists in K-12. Community colleges instead, want it, you know. So to the extent they can marry K-12 then they can book up with higher institutions of higher learning, [and] four-year schools. I think that’s one of the ways that they can perhaps gain some political strength. Even when there is a shortage of funds,…they could get increases over what it’s been. I do not think they can go it alone because they just do not have that kind of lobby and somehow or other the message just isn’t coming across the way I’d like to see it coming across. I think that coalition would help community colleges the most.

Another area L4 thought community colleges could improve their funding acquisition chances was to address their needs as a unit. Given the controversy
surrounding possible changes in the funding formula for community colleges in Oregon, he was distressed to see the colleges competing with one another:

I think anything that involves, that they do like that, they better be careful. They do not want to be divided when they come to the legislature. They need to be together all 17 of them, and that their message needs to be 'our message.' And if Eastern Oregon or Central Oregon is going for a formula, or however you want to call it, that is controversial and is dividing them, then that’s a very, very bad approach. And they need to be together, and so that’s all I’m going to say about that.

L6 mentioned a similar concern. She said:

…we worked very hard over the interim with community college presidents and the four-year college system to have those schools work together and decide what their priorities were within those two systems and then have all of the members of the two systems hold together behind those priorities throughout the whole legislative session. So we’re interested to see if that actually works this time. I think that will help get the true priorities in the system successfully through and help kind of alleviate some of the stress and the weirdness that happened at the end of last session.

One is that it has been very controversial and the community colleges, the 17 of them, they’ve been split in this legislative session, which is not good. I mean when they’re fighting with each other that does not help their situation at all.

According to legislators in this study, community colleges must join together with higher education and the K-12 system to show a united front when requesting funding. That will in turn, give them a more powerful voice and more likely chance that legislators will hear them. Legislators are looking for funding solutions throughout the educational system and by showing that education is working together as a unified group that plans strategically, legislators are more likely to understand and plan for those upcoming needs.

To summarize, legislators felt a strong kinship with community colleges and wanted to do everything they could to help the colleges with their funding needs. I observed the overriding respect and admiration legislators had for community colleges, and sensed that they were in tune with the challenges community colleges face. As a result, their suggestions for community colleges to be vocal about their needs, to prioritize their needs along a five-year plan, and to present as a unified team of educators and educational systems would give legislators even more confidence in the colleges and in their own abilities to make informed decisions about community college funding.
Summary of Findings

This chapter presented an overview of the results and findings as they related to the four research questions: (a) How do legislators form their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding?, (b) What are legislators’ perceptions about the availability of alternative funding sources for community colleges?, (c) What are legislators’ perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges?, and (d) What is the relationship of legislators’ perceptions of alternative funding sources and their funding decisions (i.e., allocation of state resources) regarding community colleges?

In keeping with a phenomenological study, data analyzed included interview transcripts, newspaper articles, dissertations and proposals, speeches, books, meeting minutes, brochures, news magazines, websites, and archived legislative information. Eight interviews with legislators from Idaho and Oregon were conducted between 2003 and 2005.

The first section of this chapter “Idaho and Oregon Landscapes” provided a foundation and context for interpreting how data on legislative decision making can be affected. Profiles of the two states covered their economic and political foundations and how they compared to other states and with each other. Also included in the section was a description of how community colleges, their systems, funding structures, and enrollment trends developed in each state. The second section described the participants and their perceptions which were then presented by using direct quotations from the interviews in relation to responses to each research question. The findings associated with Research Question 1 were described by four themes: (a) opinions about community colleges by legislators and their constituents, (b) how legislators view their responsibilities regarding funding in general, (c) legislators’ views on local and state control of funding for community colleges, and (d) legislators’ opinions regarding possible changes in state community college systems and funding structures.

Overall, community colleges have exemplary reputations with legislators and constituents alike. The only concern shared was with the continuing tax “burden” on local tax districts and legislators were looking at ways to remedy that concern. Legislators
felt that community colleges served a wide range of constituents very well, and probably better than universities since they were locally controlled and developed programming based on communities’ needs. They saw community colleges as serving the needs of those seeking transfer to four-year colleges, those who needed short-term training, those who were not ready for college-level work, and those who needed employment skills upgrades. They also saw community colleges as important in the recruitment of business and industry to communities and contributing to the social and economic growth of the entire state.

Legislators felt pride in being gatekeepers of budgets in the state and wanted to make sure that they put funds into activities that benefited the most people. Prisons and health and welfare programs were of most importance to legislators, although they felt that funding education was a better use of taxpayer dollars. They saw education as a way for individuals who were struggling socially and economically to remedy some of the problems states faced. They also felt a strong need to follow state policy and their charge as legislators to meet the constitutional requirements of state law. Along those lines, Idaho legislators especially sought to keep state spending at a minimum and balance the state’s budget accordingly. Their views on local and state control of funding for community colleges were consistent regardless of their political leanings: they felt that funding responsibilities and control should remain at the local level, but that the state should help when needed. For Oregon legislators, the local control view contradicted legislation that passed in their state limiting local taxation to fund community colleges.

Legislators discussed a variety of activities in their states that could affect community college systems and funding. Two ongoing issues were at the center of Idaho’s future. Legislators continually heard from constituents in the two community college districts that they wanted the burden of community college funding removed. The second issue was whether to expand the community college system in the state by adding community colleges to serve the expanding populace and needs for training, particularly in the Boise area. Legislators were actively involved in both issues and hoped to find tax relief for the community college districts, but were struggling with ways to do so. The addition of new community colleges to the system in Idaho would add a new
challenge to legislators—how to expand with no additional revenues to do so. At the
time of the interviews, legislators wanted to accommodate these needs, but felt their
responsibility to not increase taxes and balance the budget took precedence. They were
hoping for better economic times to remedy these two situations.

State history, political cultures, trends, and changes in community college systems
all had influence on the formation of legislators’ perceptions regarding community college
funding, and thus their perceptions about alternative sources for community college
funding. Each of these factors had a common thread throughout the responses
legislators gave during the interviews: community colleges need to maintain funding
autonomy in order to sustain and remain responsive to their local communities’ needs.

To further describe how Idaho and Oregon legislators’ perceptions affect their
funding decisions regarding public community colleges, the study answered four research
questions. The following is a brief description of the findings.

Research Question 1 focused on how legislators formed their perceptions about
alternative sources for community college funding. The findings were outlined in the
form of four themes: (a) opinions about community colleges by legislators and their
constituents, (b) how legislators view their responsibilities regarding funding in general,
(c) legislators’ views on local and state control of funding for community colleges, and (d)
legislators’ opinions regarding possible changes in state community college systems and
funding structures.

Legislators formed opinions about community colleges based on their own
beliefs, thoughts, and feelings and as well as their constituents’ experiences with
community colleges. Legislators had tremendous respect for community colleges. They
perceived that community colleges were a vital part of the states’ economies and felt
community colleges were efficient and used their funds wisely to assist local communities
and their states to meet their educational, social, and economic needs. Legislators
perceived their responsibilities as expert gatekeepers of state funds and endeavored to
focus dollars where they would help the most people. At the same time, they faced the
requirement to balance competing needs through prioritization of those needs and
following policy and state law. Legislators in this study felt that community college
funding should remain primarily at the local level, with state funding as a foundation to provide stability. This perception was in contrast with legislation passed limiting local taxation for community colleges. At the time of the study, legislators in Idaho were facing the possible founding of additional community colleges and considering ways to fund them and possibly a statewide system. Legislators’ leanings were toward encouraging communities that wanted additional community colleges to continue to acquire funding at the local level through taxing districts, and thus, maintain local control. Also at the time of the study, Oregon community colleges had pledged to unify and work together to seek solutions rather than to compete for funding. Legislators perceptions were that these efforts were a positive move forward and would help them in their decision making process.

Research Question 2 focused on what legislators’ perceptions were about the availability of alternative funding sources for community colleges. The theme that emerged within this question was legislators’ perceptions of and expectations about community colleges’ roles and responsibilities. Legislators had a wealth of knowledge about and expectations for community colleges. They saw community colleges as providers of transfer education and of professional-technical and short-term training and retraining. They expected community colleges to be collaborators with business and industry for training, business recruitment, and economic development of their communities and their states. They also had expectations that community colleges would provide an avenue for those not prepared for college-level coursework to succeed. Further, they expected community colleges to be present as cultural centers for their communities. Many of these activities had potential for generating additional revenues through contracts, additional enrollments, and fees.

Research Question 3 asked what legislators’ perceptions were about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges. The theme that emerged through analysis of the data related to this question focused on how legislators’ made their decisions regarding funding, including what influenced their decision making processes. Their processes included several factors: (a) assessment of priorities; (b) their personal beliefs, party affiliation, and work in legislative committees; (c) access to critical
information; (d) relationships with community colleges; and (e) respectful interactions. The overriding influence on legislative decision making was the relationships they developed with colleagues, legislative staff members, community colleges, and community members. Trusting relationships built with individuals they worked with on a day to day basis built of mutual respect gave legislators a sense that they were getting accurate and trustworthy information. If they felt that the information they were getting was accurate, it made their decision making easier. They sometimes relied on “gut feelings” and used their past experience to guide them. All of these processes combined to help legislators make funding decisions about community colleges.

Research Question 4 focused on what the relationship is of legislators’ perceptions of alternative funding sources and their funding decisions (i.e., allocation of state resources) regarding community colleges. During analysis of the data, the recurring theme that emerged from this question was legislators’ perceptions of funding solutions that would solve funding shortfalls. They did not seem to believe that there would be an influx of new revenues to their states, and thus, state funding would pretty much remain the same. They expected community colleges to continue doing “more with less” state funding. However, they did suggest a variety of solutions such as increasing tuition and fees, cutting back on programs and services, and possibly raising taxes -- all of which had negative consequences. Another major solution was for community colleges to seek alternative funding to cover funding shortfalls. In fact, they expected community colleges to do so. They thought that besides covering expenses at the colleges, there would be other benefits as well: (a) colleges would assist business and industry in building the socio-economic stability of their communities and states, (b) alternative funds would cause colleges to generate innovation and creativity in programming, and (c) the reliance on alternative funds and collaborations would create more efficiencies and accountability in education systems in their states overall. Although legislators saw some negative consequences of using alternative funding, such as instability in funding, a risk of narrowing program focus, and the amount of extra time to manage these sources of funding, they saw on the whole, the positives as outweighing the negatives. I interpreted
their perceptions as strongly encouraging community colleges to continue to seek alternative funding to make up for their budget shortfalls.

Idaho and Oregon legislators were actively involved in funding community colleges in their states. They built strong relationships with colleagues and others to gain pertinent information to determine funding allocations for community colleges. They jugged the needs of competing agencies, followed party platforms, and personal philosophies to come up with workable budgets. They felt there would be no immediate solutions to funding shortfalls in Idaho and Oregon, and expected community colleges to do what they could to generate additional revenues, be it through contracts, grants, or collaborations with other educational entities.

The perceptions of legislators regarding alternative funding for community colleges identified in this study have implications for community colleges and their leaders. These implications and their relationship to practice, as well as recommendations for future research are discussed and explored in greater detail in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to discern the nature of legislators’ perceptions about community colleges’ abilities to generate revenues through alternative funding sources and the resultant effects on state allocations to community colleges in Idaho and Oregon. This chapter summarizes the findings of my study, provides a discussion of the findings in relation to the related literature, and implications for practice and further research.

The significance of the study relates to the impact that community colleges now have in American society. According to AACC (2008), they are serving more than 11.6 million individuals each year from every socio-economic level and from every demographic group. They have become significant purveyors of training for an expanding and global workforce and for employers needing skilled workers. They are also centers of cultural, social, and economic development for their communities, the nation, and the world. Community colleges’ increasingly important role within the fabric of society necessitates that their funding be stable and sustainable. Yet, with changes in tax structures and downturns in the economy in recent years, revenues that community colleges formerly relied on have dwindled. As a result, they have been forced to find other sources of funding to help maintain current operations (Hovey, 1999).

Even into 2007, Idaho and Oregon struggled to meet the budget needs of community colleges. A current review of the budget scene in the states revealed that the budget picture for both states has not changed since the inception of the study which began in 2002. The amount of state support for community colleges in Idaho hovered around 35 percent (excluding Professional Technical Funding) for the fiscal years 2006–2008 (Idaho Legislative Budget Book, 2008). According to OCCA (Idaho Legislative Services Office, 2008) while Oregon Community Colleges received the largest appropriation ever, given the need for skilled workers projected by the state and the increase in student enrollments after a four-year dip, it still “fell short” (p. 3) of what was requested by $21 million (Oregon Community College Association [OCCA], 2007a; OCCA, 2007b).
In Chapter 2 of this study, several other studies were reviewed and factors relating to legislators and their opinions about higher education, their political and cultural influences, and funding trends regarding community colleges were examined. However, no research was found regarding legislators’ perceptions of community colleges specifically and how those perceptions influence their decision making regarding community college funding.

This study endeavored to identify and better understand the perceptions legislators held about community colleges that, in turn, influenced their decisions regarding community colleges, including whether or not legislators now expect community colleges to seek other sources to make up for funding shortfalls. In the process, the study described possible influences on legislators’ perceptions, such as the social, economic, geographic, and political cultures from which they came. It is hoped that this research will assist us in better understanding: (a) the influences on legislative decision making regarding community college funding, (b) the pressures legislators face to fund competing critical needs, (c) the expectations legislators have about community colleges’ responsibilities for their own funding, and (d) in what ways community colleges can assist legislators with their funding decision making processes.

Research Soundness and Quality

In a phenomenological study, the interpretation and usefulness of results is determined by the reader; however it is the researcher’s responsibility to convey as closely as possible to the reader the experiences and worlds of those being studied so there is a deeper understanding of their “behaviors, the context of their social interactions and connections between mental states and behavior” (Patton 2002, p. 52; also see Miles & Huberman, 1993; van Manen, 1990). In order to achieve my goal of conveying the experiences of legislators’ decision making processes and how they consider alternative funding sources when budgeting for community colleges, I wanted to make sure that what I observed, read about, and heard in interviews and observed conveyed legislators’ perceptions as accurately as possible. The following is a description of the strategies I used to ensure the soundness and quality of my data.
Going into the research, I reflected on my own perceptions about legislators and how they made decisions. I wondered how their backgrounds affected their worldviews. I also thought about my own political beliefs about and my expectations of legislators whom I believed would have similar and dissimilar beliefs than mine about community colleges and alternative funding. In the process, I recalled my observations of legislators in Idaho while working during my legislative internship and in Oregon as I “tagged along” with OCCA staff as they followed legislators to discuss an upcoming bill. I observed those I planned to interview on the House and Senate floors debating bills. I saw the participants in this study leading legislative committees where they seemed very powerful. I realized how busy – and important -- they were and wondered if I would actually get quality time with them. In some cases I felt a bit intimidated before meeting with them. Nevertheless, I did meet with them.

As I went into each interview, I disclosed my background and the purpose for the study. Being conscious of my own perceptions, I endeavored not to ask leading questions. As I tape-recorded the interviews, I paralleled the interviewees’ responses with my own personal reactions and accounts of the process by taking a set of personal notes. This helped me to be reflexive, checking into and being aware of my own perceptions about funding legislation and legislators. These notes helped hold me accountable to how my perceptions affected my interpretations. The interview process allowed legislators to talk, and use as much time as they needed. If I did not understand their answer, I asked them again, then shared my interpretation of what I heard. I received full confirmation of my understanding of their answers before moving on to the next question.

I took the interviews home and transcribed them myself. I was able to listen once again to the legislators’ voices and recall the settings in which the interviews were held. At the same time, I followed my notes and was able to use the collected information to inductively analyze the data. If, during the writing of my findings, I was confused by the transcribed quotes, I listened to the tape-recording once again; sometimes simply hearing the inflection of the voice helped clarify the meaning.
For further analysis, I used multiple types of additional data from a variety of sources to triangulate with the interviews. In addition to my own observations, these sources included discussions with community college presidents and personnel regarding their observations and my analysis of the literature. They also shared their views of legislators. If there were discrepancies in information, I contacted legislators or personnel to clarify the meanings.

Finally, I interpreted the data gathered through thematic analysis by which information from the interviews, my reflexive notes, and the literature were coalesced into smaller pieces of data and then categorized into themes. From the themes came the descriptions of the research findings.

**Summary and Discussion**

This section summarizes the findings to the four research questions and describes the findings in relation to the related literature reviewed in Chapter 2 as well as additional research that seems relevant based on the findings. The four research questions of my study were:

1. *How do legislators form their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding?*
2. *What are legislators’ perceptions about the availability of alternative funding sources for community colleges?*
3. *What are legislators’ perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges?*
4. *What is the relationship of legislators’ perceptions of alternative funding sources and their funding decisions (i.e., allocation of state resources) regarding community colleges?*

The findings both supported and differed to some extent from the summary to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The study was a qualitative, phenomenological study of eight legislators and their experiences making budget decisions relating to community college funding between 2003 and 2005. The data collected and analyzed included interviews with the legislators, articles and information from journals, newspapers,
dissertations, dissertation proposals, correspondence, books, speeches, brochures, news magazines, websites, and archived legislative information. The following is a summary and discussion of the findings with regard to the four research questions.

**Research Question 1: How do legislators form their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding?**

This section summarizes the findings of my study regarding how legislators formed their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding and then discusses the findings in relation to the related literature. It provides an overview of results in relation to the themes that emerged: (a) legislators’ views of community colleges by legislators and their constituents, (b) how legislators’ views of their responsibilities regarding funding in general, and (c) legislators’ views on local and state control of funding for community colleges.

Perryman reported that the public was increasingly distrustful of higher education because of the misuse of flowing funds (1993). Hovey (1999) and MacNeil (2000) predicted that because of projected funding shortfalls, higher education (including four-year and community colleges) would face increased scrutiny and curtailed spending. Legislators who participated in this study did not fit these profiles—they had extremely positive perceptions of community colleges and trusted community college leaders to bring them good information and spend funding wisely. They felt strong connections with the community colleges near where they lived, and often either utilized services, participated in activities, or had family members who attended community colleges. In fact, one legislator said that he was a stronger supporter of community colleges than other higher education entities because they are more relevant to the wellbeing of their communities and individuals within those communities.

All felt that spending public funds on community colleges was a good investment because community colleges made significant positive changes in peoples’ lives. One of the legislators held the perception that continuing to give more money to welfare programs was “counterproductive” and that dollars should go where the money could do the most good. The greatest concern about community colleges for legislators was the view
of some vocal constituents about reducing the tax burden the local community college taxing district placed on them. In one case, the actions taken by constituents with the perception of too high a tax burden reminded me of earlier tax revolts in Oregon -- in an individualist effort, these constituents tried to separate their area from their tax district through legislative action. Although Oregon tax initiatives were not directed at community colleges, their effects impacted community colleges in Oregon by greatly reducing their funding. They were unsuccessful; however, it was clear that that action still weighed heavily on one legislator’s mind and she continued years later to seek a remedy to that specific concern. She was extremely sensitive to the ongoing tax burden for local funding of the community college carried by the socio-economically strapped constituents in her district.

As described by Perryman (1993) and Henry (2000), funding competing needs presents an ongoing challenge for legislators. I believe the legislators in my study saw themselves as “gatekeepers” of funding decisions for their states and felt they had the experience and understood the big picture in order to watch over and make the best use of state coffers. In some ways, I felt like I was talking to parents who are taking care of their children in a very beneficent way. Several expressed sincere anguish when discussing their task of deciding between and among competing needs. They wanted to remain sensitive, yet expressed an allegiance to do what they were charged with: making the funding do the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people.

They seemed sensitive to the safety of the citizens in their states. The growing methamphetamine problems were on the minds of legislators. They felt compelled to provide for the safety of people in their states. And, they knew there was a link between the rising crime rates and the downward spiral of the economy. One notion that arose as I listened to legislators reminded me of the Chinese Proverb, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” That is to say, it was the legislators’ perception that if states could create jobs and stabilize the economy, people would be better able to take care of themselves in the future.

I found that legislators across political parties formed their perceptions in similar ways. They shared only subtly different perceptions about funding community colleges.
As described in the literature (Clucas, Henkels, & Steel, 2005; Stapilus & Weatherby, 2005), rural Idaho and Oregon legislators, like their rural constituents, tended to be more conservative than legislators in more suburban areas. Unlike Perryman’s study (1993) where he saw differences in legislators’ perceptions of higher education in correlation with their personal characteristics, I did not detect differing views on community college funding based on their: (a) urban, suburban, or rural residences/constituencies (I did not have any urban legislators in my sample), (b) age and longevity in the legislature, or (c) length of public service and educational levels. Perhaps these similarities were because of the small number of legislators interviewed for this study and because they were a fairly homogeneous group. This will be discussed further in the recommendations for further research.

The literature review revealed that frequency of legislative sessions and term limits affected the funding process. Layzell and Lyddon (1990) stated that legislatures that convened more frequently met with fewer tensions because they were able to respond more quickly to rapidly changing economic conditions. Legislators in states that convened more frequently were also more able to live within the budgets they set because they were set one year at a time rather than the two years set by the biennial legislatures (Hovey, 1999; Layzell & Lyddon, 1990; Melton, 2001). The literature also reported that term limits caused seasoned legislators to leave before they could acclimate to the legislative environment and carry out their agendas. My study gave no indication that either of these factors had an impact on legislative decision making. In fact, neither factor was mentioned at all.

An area that was not covered in the literature that came out in my study in regards to Research Question 1 was the perceptions legislators had about community college fiscal and statutory control. Legislators within this study felt strongly that although state funding should assure stability, community colleges should maintain local control through local governance and financing. They cautioned community colleges not to rely increasingly on state funding. One legislator had a concern that under state control, community colleges would change in operating more like four-year colleges or universities -- distancing themselves from and desensitizing themselves to the
communities that developed the colleges. Legislators perceived that the community basis of control allowed the colleges to be more responsive to local needs, would allow them to seek whatever alternative funds they needed to operate, and to develop stronger relationships with the communities they served.

These perceptions were evident in legislators’ responses to the possible addition of a community college in Idaho and efforts to equalize funding among community colleges in Oregon. Legislators in both cases continued to emphasize the importance of local communities carrying the primary responsibility for the development and maintenance of their community colleges.

Oregon legislators’ opinions that community colleges should maintain local fiscal control seemed to contradict the laws that Oregonians passed limiting local property taxes--taxes which could give community colleges more local funding and thus, more local control. Legislators who held this opinion did not seem to recognize the inconsistencies in their statements. In hindsight, I wondered how they reconciled these seemingly opposing opinions.

Idaho legislators I interviewed recognized some positive aspects to providing community colleges with a greater share of state funding. Such a change could relieve local community college tax district patrons of some of their tax burden and would equalize costs for funding community colleges across the state to cover the statewide usage of community colleges. However, such changes were unlikely to happen according to legislators involved in my study.

This section described the findings of this study in relation to the literature regarding how legislators form their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding. The discussion formed around the themes that emerged within the data analysis concerning legislators perceptions about community colleges, the roles community colleges have, what governance and funding should control community colleges, and how possible changes in community colleges systems should be conducted.
Research Question 2: What are legislators’ perceptions about the availability of alternative funding sources for community colleges?

This section describes how legislators perceive the availability of alternative funding sources for community college related to their perceptions of and expectations about what community colleges do. These findings are discussed in relation to the prior literature on this question.

Legislators had perceptions and expectations about community colleges and their roles within their communities and states. Although legislators did not explicitly express these roles as a way to generate alternative funding revenues, they clearly felt strongly about community colleges having connections that could generate additional funding. Legislators perceived that community colleges, while providing professional-technical and short-term training and retraining, could benefit from close working relationships with business and industry for contract training. In addition, there was an expectation that they could work in collaboration with the K-12 system to better insure that future college students were ready for college-level work but also could assist individuals who were not prepared for college-level work. Finally, they saw a strong connection between community colleges and a role they filled as cultural centers for their communities--where additional funds could augment day-to-day operations.

Legislators saw community colleges as continuing a traditional junior college role by providing the lower-division programs needed for a baccalaureate degree. In addition, they agreed with Cohen’s assessment (1995) that community colleges go beyond—and must continue to go beyond—the role of providing two-year academics in order to meet the needs of their communities. Legislators’ expectations about community colleges making up for differences in revenues and expenditures through alternative sources of funding concur with Merisotis and Wolanin (2000). They expect community colleges to expand their focus and “become more like general stores” (Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000), providing a variety of services and training to meet their community’s needs. Legislators expected community colleges to continue to provide short-term technical education; provide skills upgrades for the incumbent workforce; and be economic, social, educational, and cultural centers for their communities.
For example, legislators saw community colleges as key players in helping meet the needs of a burgeoning nursing shortage. They were proud that community colleges provided economic stimuli by either helping to recruit employers to their areas and/or by providing training to business and industry. Legislators felt that community colleges played an important role especially in economically depressed and isolated rural areas where they were often the only higher educational institutions and so were the only institutions of choice. The connection of these activities to the acquisition of alternative funding will be further described in answer to Research Question 4.

This section described how legislators perceive the availability of alternative funding sources for community colleges in relation to their perceptions of and expectations about what community colleges do. Besides the transfer function, a primary role they saw community colleges as having was to provide training and retraining to new and incumbent workers to meet business and industry needs on an ongoing basis. These additional activities beyond the transfer function were seen as having the potential to bring alternative funds to community colleges.

Research Question 3: What are legislators’ perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges?

In this section, legislators in this study share the variety of factors that had influences on their decision making processes and how these relate to their perceptions of the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges. In addition, the section describes legislators’ decision making processes regarding funding.

Legislators’ decision making processes were similar to one another’s. First, they placed priorities based on where the greatest needs were and where the funding could affect the greatest numbers of people. They consulted with a variety of stakeholders and support staff. They also looked at their legislative district constituents’ needs, since those were the ones who elected the legislators, and finally, they “made the best decision they could with the information they had.” Legislators’ priorities were also influenced by their personal beliefs, their legislative workgroups, and legislative colleagues. Sometimes when the answer wasn’t clear, at least one legislator said he decided on his “gut feeling.”
Another legislator said that sometimes it was a learning process; perhaps she did not or could not make the most satisfying decision at the time, but would take what she learned from the results into consideration in her future decision making.

The political cultures from which this study’s legislators’ came seemed to have some influence on their perceptions, but no one came out as having extreme viewpoints or approaches to their legislative decision making. Although coming mostly from historically conservative/populist/individualistic backgrounds (Clucas & Henkels, 2005; Layzell & Lyddon, 1990; Gittel & Kleiman, 2000) these legislators seemed to be more moralistic in their thinking (Stapilus & Weatherby, 2005). They professed a moral or helping role as they performed as legislators to “take care of” the citizens in their states. The traditionalist political culture (Gittel & Kleiman, 2000) did not seem to play a major role in the funding decision making process of the legislators that were included in this study. The legislators who participated seemed to genuinely believe that education should be open to everyone -- not just the elite -- and was the way to change peoples’ lives which would, in turn, build a strong economy.

In alignment with Layzell and Lyddon (1990), this study’s legislators’ “values and preferences” (p. 25) were based on their state’s history and traditions, as well as their personal values; thus, their choice of political party. Although most of the legislators, Democrats and Republicans alike, denied that their political party was much of an influence, one legislator did say that the platform did act as a guide. One Democrat did note that he thought that Democrats in general, were more supportive of higher education, except in rural areas where community colleges had an especially important presence.

As was consistent with the literature regarding part-time citizen legislatures (Kurtz & Rose, 2006), the citizen, part-time legislators in this study had part-time staff. Because of the short amount of time they had to research issues, they relied on others a great deal to become informed about the issues at hand. They relied on a variety of sources to get them up-to-speed on issues, to help them clarify confusing and overwhelming information at times, and to discuss possible effects their decisions may have on community college funding. The findings of this study indicate that influential
relationships legislators reported having were with: (a) community college presidents and staff, (b) legislative staff, (c) legislative colleagues, (d) lobbyists and state agencies, (e) community college students, and (f) the public at-large. The following describes how those relationships influenced their community college funding decisions and thus, their outlook on alternative sources of community college funding.

Community College Presidents and Staff

A factor in legislative decision making that emerged in this study aligns with what Quash Coats (2002) found. Community college presidents were probably the most important contacts legislators had when needing information to make decisions about community college funding. Also in agreement with Quash Coats’s study, legislators commonly consulted with community college presidents and had a great deal of trust in them--that they considered them almost as colleagues. They described their positive relationships with community college presidents and staff members as being, nearly to the letter, Quash Coats’s strategies and supporting tactics presidents used to influence state legislators. These strategies as reported by presidents in Quash Coats’s study were:

1) Build and maintain relationships with legislators.
   a) Cultivate the relationship.
   b) Make the interactions with legislators worthwhile.
   c) Make personal contact.
   d) Invite legislators to campus.
2) Know the players and the process.
   a) Make contact with legislative staff.
   b) Know the legislative structure and protocol.
   c) Know the legislators’ issues.
3) Become a resource for legislators.
   a) Be factual and knowledgeable.
   b) Have interests broader than those associated with the college.
   c) Be an advisor.
   d) Be accessible.
4) Broaden your “sphere of influence.”
   a) Use community and staff members to assist in efforts.
   b) Work with legislators outside of the college’s district.
   c) Be bipartisan.
5) Communication and framing the issues.
   a) Use State Board staff expertise.
   b) Ask legislators for their support.
c) Make the message meaningful.
d) Testify at public hearings. (pp. 132-133)

Legislators in my study liked that community college presidents reached out and made personal contact with the legislators and they appreciated the presidents’ availability to help them. Several mentioned that when the amount and complexity of information they received was overwhelming, it was helpful to be able to pick up the phone and ask for clarification and help in understanding the issues. They tended to favor the community colleges in their districts since they had closer contact with those colleges than others located farther away. They appreciated most those presidents who had a “can do” attitude and did not ask the legislators for unrealistic funding support. In fact, they were more apt to throw more support behind those who had the “can do” attitude than their competitors. Just like the legislators’ interactions with their legislative colleagues, the legislators relied on relationships built of trust and integrity to help them make their funding decisions regarding community colleges.

Legislative Staff

Idaho’s and Oregon’s legislators’ reliance on legislative staff concurred with NCSL’s (2005) description of part-time citizen legislators. The study participants relied as much on legislative budget staff as they did community college presidents. In fact, one legislator said he most trusted the financial services staff. He felt that these support staff were “fairly neutral” and they look at the entire budget to give the legislator the bigger picture. These staff members were also able to give legislators data on community college performance such as graduation rates, transfers to colleges and universities, and employment rates of those who “go through [a technical] program.” As I heard legislators talk about their interactions with legislative staff, it reminded me of how my community college administration has developed a network of support at the state education agency level. These inner workings began to come together in my mind as a tremendously powerful behind-the-scenes network of information and support.
**Legislative Colleagues**

It appeared that legislators’ affiliation with their colleagues influenced their decision making to quite an extent. Following recommendations of legislative leadership, participating in political caucuses, and serving on committees within the tight knit workgroup activities during and outside legislative sessions created influential interactions among legislators. Through these interactions, often years-long, legislators built deep and lasting friendships which incorporated an interchange of ideas, information, and support. One legislator indicated that there are unspoken actions, movement, and processes that take place in the legislature that an outsider would never pick up on. These behaviors may be what Quash Coats (2006) referred to as “protocols” and “behavior norms” of the legislative process (p. 131). After meeting with legislators, I sensed a tremendous amount of loyalty, admiration, and respect legislators had for one another. In observing their behaviors during my internship, I saw tempers flare but even in the most intense moments, legislators treated one another with almost a regal demeanor. With this intense loyalty, I perceived that should one legislator be attacked in any way, other legislators would come to their fierce defense.

**Lobbyists and State Agencies**

Although “interest groups and their lobbyists are often viewed as having self-serving special interests and disregard for the public interest” (Quash Coats, p. 33), OCCA and CCWD (even though CCWD is not a lobbying agency) were not viewed that way by legislators. In fact, both organizations were highly respected by the legislators in this study. They said that they do listen to OCCA and CCWD. In fact, they will contact the OCCA and the CCWD especially in regards to how policy decisions would be affected by legislative funding decisions. Again, the lobbyists’ and state agency staff members’ accessibility and availability were of great value.

**Community College Students and Constituents**

Legislators said they listened to community college students and constituents as well, but these were not primary sources of information and support. Although I found
nothing in the literature referring to this, according to the legislators, both groups tended to visit legislators regarding the same issues year after year. Community college students, in general, were typically looking for lower tuition and fees and constituents wanted tax relief. While these were important issues to legislators, they did not indicate that their funding decisions were influenced in major ways by these common concerns.

In summary, legislators are in touch with a number of individuals and are influenced by their interactions with those individuals. Underlying this system of contacts and relationships was a foundation of trust, integrity, and mutual respect among and across political parties. If someone compromised this ethical code, legislators implied that they never gave that person much credibility again. And, the word got around legislative circles. Legislators also wanted to be recognized as fellow human beings with feelings and sensitivities. Their decision making could be affected by how respectfully they were treated. I felt that they wanted to be viewed as individuals who had feelings, had families and personal lives first, and were legislators second. They expressed the sentiment that they were providing a public service and looking out for the greater good. Yet, sometimes the legislators indicated that they were met with disdain. One legislator expressed an almost amazed reaction about an experience with a publicly disgruntled and disrespectful constituent. He just shook his head and was clearly disappointed in that individual’s behavior. I sensed that should that legislator encounter that individual again, he would probably discount him. As he expressed, “do not bite the hand that feeds you.”

This section described how legislators made their funding decisions and what influenced those decisions. They relied primarily on relationships they had with community college presidents to learn more about the colleges’ needs, the multitude of roles they had, and the various alternative funding sources that came with those roles. As community colleges were involved in recruiting and developing partnerships with business and industry, leading the charge of economic development within their communities, and receiving grants and contracts, legislators were informed about and often engaged those activities. Although legislators in this study were not explicit about their perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges, my observation was that they expected that opportunities for
community colleges to receive alternate funding should be available and ongoing and that community college should pursue as many alternative fund sources as they could.

**Research Question 4: What is the relationship of legislators’ perceptions of alternative funding sources and their funding decisions (i.e., allocation of state resources) regarding community colleges?**

This section describes legislators’ perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges in relation to their perceptions of funding solutions that would solve funding shortfalls. Legislators shared their perceptions about the future of alternative funding for community colleges, the positive and negatives of alternative funding, and other solutions to make up for funding shortfalls.

Legislators implied that alternative funding would always need to be a portion of community college funding, so community colleges should plan to continue to pursue alternative funding. This viewpoint was shared as an obvious course of action and agreed with Merisotis and Wolanin (2000) and Meister (2001) that inferred that it was common for community colleges nationwide to make up for differences in revenues and expenditures by alternative funding means. In fact, one legislator in this study suggested that it was a responsibility of community colleges to seek alternative funding. At least one legislator reported that while he hoped the period of funding shortfalls would be a short-term problem and that the economy would rebound, community colleges should continue their pursuit of alternative funds in spite of any corrections in the economy. My impression: “That’s just the way it is.” In general, legislators in this study expected community colleges to continue to do more with what funds they had and, at the same time, seek additional funds to fulfill their funding needs. Legislators saw the procurement of alternative funding by community colleges as generally a positive development for colleges.

Legislators’ perceptions appeared to be that the more community colleges partnered with business and industry, the better their public relations were with their communities. They were pleased that community colleges recruited new industries (i.e., brought in new jobs) and brought in new tax revenues to the local areas and the state. In
agreement with Merisotis and Wolanin (2000), legislators felt that the more activity generated by seeking and obtaining new sources of funds, the momentum of such activities that were created would generate even more activity and greater revenues would result.

According to legislators in this study, alternative funds necessitate more creativity and innovation. Aligned with Judy and D’Amico (1997) and Merisotis and Wolanin (2000), legislators thought of colleges who operated outside their day-to-day functions as being more responsive to the needs of their communities and thus, could better meet the needs and ambiguities of a transforming workforce. Legislators also felt that alternative funding through partnerships with businesses and through business recruitment would bring additional revenues to their states. Community colleges were “goodwill ambassadors” to businesses who would otherwise choose other states in which to develop or expand their businesses.

One positive aspect of alternative funding that wasn’t mentioned in the literature but was by legislators in this study was that alternative funding caused community colleges to be more accountable. With their reporting requirements and their charge to provide “deliverables” or tangible outcomes required by their alternate funding sources, legislators believed community colleges were required to prove how they made a difference in society and the educational needs of their constituents.

Legislators’ perceptions about funding solutions agreed with what the review of the literature reported. Consistent with the literature, legislators felt that community colleges should continue to partner with business and industry, charge more fees for services, and seek additional funding through grants and contracts (AACC, 2006; Merisotis & Wolanin, 2000; Meister, 2001; NCES, 2000). Not necessarily “alternative” sources of funding, legislators saw raising tuition, capping enrollments, and cutting back on services as possibilities to create savings. But, they saw these “solutions” as probably negatives in the long run because they would discourage enrollment. One legislator felt that community colleges could better partner with K-12 systems to share resources and get students through college more quickly, thus saving expenses.
This section described legislators’ perceptions about alternative funding sources for community colleges in relation to their perceptions of funding solutions that would solve funding shortfalls for community colleges. They saw many positives and few negatives to community colleges’ use of alternative funding. In essence, legislators in this study perceived that alternative funding would be a valuable, ongoing and important source to help community colleges to not only survive shortfalls, but to thrive.

Summary

This section described the findings of my study and discussed the findings in relation to the related literature. The findings were presented in relation to the four research questions: (a) How do legislators form their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding?, (b) What are legislators’ perceptions about the availability of alternative funding sources for community colleges?, (c) What are legislators’ perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges?, and (d) What is the relationship of legislators’ perceptions of alternative funding sources and their funding decisions (i.e., allocation of state resources) regarding community colleges? Many of the findings were consistent with those reported in the literature.

There were findings within Research Question 1, How do legislators form their perceptions about alternative sources for community college funding?, that agreed with the related literature. The political cultures from which this study’s legislators’ came seemed to have some influence on their perceptions, but no one came out as having extreme viewpoints or approaches to their legislative decision making. Although coming mostly from historically conservative/ populist/ individualistic backgrounds, these legislators seemed to be more moralistic in how they viewed their roles. Besides being gatekeepers of state funds, they saw their roles as public servants who were trying to do what was best for the citizens of their states. Also in agreement with the literature was how theses citizen legislators went about gathering information to make their decisions. As part-time legislators with few supporting staff, they relied heavily on community college presidents, legislative colleagues, and legislative staff as main sources of information. Lobbyists and state community college staff members were also important sources.
A finding in the related literature regarding Research Question 1 that did not emerge within this study was with references to legislators’ personal characteristics affecting their perceptions of higher education. The literature also reported that biennial legislatures and those states with term limits affected the efficacy of legislative decision making. Legislators within this study gave no indication that biennial sessions affected their ability to carry out their duties. Both Idaho and Oregon defeated efforts to place term limits on office holders.

One area that emerged within the findings of Research Question 1 that affected legislative decision making, but was not found in the literature, was the legislators’ strong perception that community colleges should remain under local control rather than depend on state funding. They felt that state funding should provide an ongoing contribution to community colleges, but that local control should remain so that community colleges could be more responsive to local needs. This local control would allow more flexibility to meet those needs, require no special demands or limits (i.e., “strings attached”), and promote innovative strategies to seek alternative funding.

Findings of Research Question 2, What are legislators’ perceptions about the availability of alternative funding sources for community colleges?, were consistent with the literature. Legislators understood the various roles community colleges played, from providing transfer education to providing short-term workforce training. They expected community colleges to continue to expand their missions to meet the constantly changing needs of their communities.

Findings in regard to Research Question 3, What are legislators’ perceptions about the expected budget share of alternative funding sources for community colleges?, centered on how legislators made their funding decisions and what influenced their decision making processes. Foundation for the decision making process was a mix of values and backgrounds legislators held, which was consistent with the description in the literature. Legislators in this study described their decision making process, which was not found in the literature. The process included using their values and backgrounds to prioritize needs and where funds could help the greatest numbers of people. They remarked that
they made the best decision they could given the information they had. Sometimes the
decision was made on gut feelings or was used as a learning experience.

Information they gathered came from a variety of sources that had influence on
their decisions—the most important of which were community college presidents,
legislative colleagues, and legislative staff. These findings were consistent with the
literature.

Findings in regard to Research Question 4, *What is the relationship of legislators’
perceptions of alternative funding sources and their funding decision (i.e., allocation of state resources
regarding community colleges)*, related to legislators’ perceptions of funding solutions. Some
of the findings were consistent with the literature and other emerged from this study.

Consistent with the literature, legislators believed that community colleges would
and should continue to pursue alternative funds through grants and contracts with
businesses and other agencies. They recognized that such alliances created good public
relations and perhaps greater opportunities for community colleges to create more
business for themselves. In addition, colleges partnering with business brought in new
businesses and thus, tax revenues to the state. Although some of the legislators in the
study were fairly individualistic in their beliefs regarding the federal government’s
involvement in local affairs, they saw the benefits of federal grants and contracts also, and
that the benefits outweighed any negatives.

A positive aspect not mentioned in the literature but found in this study was that
legislators felt that alternative funding sources caused community colleges to be more
accountable and to prove their abilities to succeed. An outcome of this effect on
community colleges was the ability for community colleges to continue receiving
alternative funding for successful programming that often made a difference in the socio-
economic arenas in the local areas and statewide.

Often, the legislators in this study seemed perplexed at finding other ways to help
community colleges attain more funding outside state and local taxing structures. One
said he just “didn’t know” (L3). But some thoughts they had were common solutions such
as tying funding to enrollments, raising tuition, capping enrollments, and cutting back on
services to create some savings. Even though these were possible solutions, they felt that
raising tuition, capping enrollments, and cutting back on services would be very negative options in the long run because students simply would not enroll.

However, these are not “alternative” solutions to funding shortfalls. These are solutions colleges and universities have used for years to address funding cuts. I did not get the sense that legislators were fully aware of the array of alternative funding sources community colleges could seek, nor did they seem to have ideas for creative solutions to funding shortfalls. Further, I do not believe the legislators in this study had the awareness of community college funding issues they thought they had, given the lack of depth in their responses to the open-ended interview questions. And, I recognize that depth of answers may have been limited by the timing of the interviews.

In the next section, I discuss the implications for practice for community college leaders.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

The purpose of the study was to help community college administrators by finding out what legislators’ perceptions are about community colleges’ abilities to generate revenues through alternative funding sources and the resultant effects on state allocations to these colleges. My hope is that this research will assist community college leaders and other stakeholders to understand:

The influences on legislative decision making regarding community college funding;

The pressures legislators endure to fund competing critical needs;

The expectations legislators now have about community colleges’ responsibilities for their own funding;

In what ways community colleges can assist legislators with their funding decision making processes.

The following section describes implications for practice and policy within the community college context.

Based on my study findings, there are important factors that influence legislative decision making which community colleges may affect. Legislators have clear expectations about community colleges’ abilities to acquire alternative funding and the
purposes for seeking alternative funds. The follow is a description of the insights I gained from my findings.

**Alternative Funding is a Given**

The pressure to find alternative funding for community colleges is unlikely to change. Seeking alternative funding will be expected even in good financial times; community college administrators should plan to invest in this process for the long run. It is not likely that states will ever fund community colleges at comparable levels they did in the 1970’s, 1980’s and 1990’s. Community colleges need to plan on pursuing alternative funds as part of their ongoing operations because the budget situation is not likely to change in the near future. Community college leaders need to capitalize on the advantages of alternative funding activities, such as the positive public relations that bring attention to what community colleges do for their communities. Gaining outside funding is politically smart, too. Bailey (2002) states, “New programs have the potential to create new constituencies that in turn generate state- and local-level political support at the needed level to maintain the flow of tax revenues” (p. 70). Alternative funding sources typically require substantial evidence that their contractors have successfully met or surpassed outcomes or “deliverables” set forth in their agreements. Community colleges can market the results of those outcomes to a constructive effect; the greater the perception that a community college produces good results, the more likely its enrollments will rise and other funding partners will be interested in contracting or raising funds for programs and services offered.

Along with capitalizing on the advantages of gaining alternative funding, community colleges will need to develop ways to mitigate the disadvantages. Investing in resources to manage the paperwork, coordination, and outreach that many alternative sources require, can create tremendous internal operation and resource allocation challenges. According to Gronbjerg (1991), alternative funding sources “vary in their predictability and the scope of management work they demand; these funding contingencies can impede strategic planning and can drain other organizational resources” (p. 5). In addition, Gronbjerg (1991) states that each funding agreement
“involves a particular set of interactions and timings” that may “take on a life of their own.” Planning for additional grant writing, reporting on activities and outcomes, managing differing reimbursement systems, attending meetings and conferences with the funding stakeholders generates extra work and more complexity. Community colleges will need to know how to draw boundaries as to where their responsibilities and loyalties are toward their students and community members in relation to their obligations to their alternative funding sources.

**Collegial Relationships Among Legislators**

A significant implication for practice from this research was the influence various relationships had on legislators. Their work is “people” work. They highly prized good relationships to help them make their funding decisions. Again and again, they referred to the importance of the relationships they had with their colleagues, community college staff, legislative staff, and agency staff as being integral to their work. As part-time citizen legislators, these connections were crucial to their acquiring the information they needed to make funding decisions. As a result, legislators work in a complex environment of personal networking. They communicate and work very closely with other legislators. They consult agency and legislative office staff and community college representatives. They discuss issues with businesses, students, and lobbyists. They communicate with their constituents on a daily basis.

Within these relationships, legislators follow a code of honesty, integrity, and respect. Out of those characteristics and relationships, trust is built. If they ever sensed that those they were dealing with were untrustworthy, there would be little that individual could ever do to rebuild that trust. Because of their networking, legislators intimated that “word gets around” about who to trust, and who to be wary of. Public service was what they saw their roles as being and they wanted to be dealt with as individuals devoted to a larger cause. Legislators felt they were “regular folks” doing their constituents a valued service. If any of them were treated unkindly, they took it very personally, and it tainted their outlook on the offender and that person’s request of the legislature.
Community colleges were highly regarded among legislators and in many ways, I believe legislators saw community college presidents as respected colleagues. Legislators were influenced by the community colleges’ reputations; they were proud of community colleges and felt the colleges were a good value to the citizens of their states. They wanted to do what they could for the community colleges because the colleges were so well thought of in their communities.

The personal relationships legislators developed with community college presidents and staff were outstanding. The more closely legislators worked with community college presidents and staff, it seemed the more trust they had in those individuals. I thought they were very well-informed about the roles of community colleges and empathetic about the financial struggles they faced. But I did not sense that legislators fully understood how community colleges attempted to resolve their funding shortfalls. There seemed to be a disconnect between what legislators saw as merely the role community colleges have in procuring contracts and recruiting business and industry commerce with the need to make up for funding shortfalls. I came away thinking that it is very important that community colleges continue to develop and build on the trusting and quality relationships they have established with legislators to help them understand the ramifications of funding shortfalls and the strategies community colleges use to offset those deficits. I thought of the legislator-to-legislator relationships and wondered if community colleges could develop similar relationships with legislators. Quash Coats’s study (2002) revealed how powerful building personal relationships between community college presidents and legislators could be. Quash Coats’s suggestions for community colleges presidents and staff on how to more successfully work with legislators align with what the legislators in this study reported; a model that could be emulated by community colleges. Participating in a more involved way with legislators by getting to know them and their families, interacting with them in workgroups, meetings, or having regular contact and sharing new information as it emerged could expand communication and solidify the bonds between legislators and community colleges even more. With a move to increased state funding for community colleges, community college presidents’ center
of attention must expand beyond their local legislators. They must appeal to and build relationships with legislators throughout the state.

Legislators appreciated the “can do” attitudes of community college presidents, their being approachable, accessible, and available for consultation with legislators. I thought that possibly the positive working relationships community colleges had with legislative staff and other agencies helped community colleges become part of the legislative networking milieu and thus helped legislators see community colleges from another perspective. Community colleges’ ability to empathize with legislators by recognizing and acknowledging the difficulties they face in stretching budgets to meet critical and competing needs heightens their “can do” image. Also, showing legislators how community colleges assist their funding competitors, such as corrections and health and welfare programs, could enhance their reputations even more.

As colleagues of legislators, community college representatives can help legislators find solutions to funding challenges. As part of this helping role, community colleges can show legislators how community colleges’ state funding affects the greatest number of people and particularly how community colleges assist their competitors for funding (i.e., corrections and health and welfare systems). Community colleges can work closely with legislators regarding economic development of their regions and the state so they can see the impact community colleges have on the socio-economic health of their local communities and states.

Community Colleges Must Let Legislators Know What They Want and Plan Ahead

An additional implication for practice found in the study was to understand another aspect of legislators’ decision making process. Most of them made an assessment of their priorities first. This would seem to be a critical period of time for community colleges to provide information to legislators about their needs and to keep them informed about issues as they develop.

Legislators wanted community colleges to let them know what their needs are -- to be vocal about their needs. They expected community college presidents to contact
them. Again, ongoing and personal communication with legislators, whether or not legislators are in session, seemed important in my discussions with legislators. Since Idaho and Oregon legislators are “citizen” legislators, it would seem appropriate to invite them to become involved in local activities related to community colleges and possibly other organizations that enhance the socio-economic stature of the local communities and the state. These kinds of connections could improve mutual understanding of concerns community colleges and legislators face on a more consistent basis, rather than only during intense periods of legislative activity.

And, finally, legislators wanted community colleges to communicate their needs in priority, as well as a suggested plan for meeting the colleges’ funding goals. Knowing the community colleges’ strategic goals and what their long-term plans were for at least the ensuing five years, could help legislators understand the larger picture and get a better sense of where the future of community colleges in their states was leading. Along with the list of community colleges’ priorities, legislators could be better informed if a rationale for the priorities were included. In turn, legislators could be watching for funding opportunities for community colleges, could inform community colleges about consequences of plans they may be making, or helping community colleges better problem-solve as issues occur. Such collaboration between legislators and community college representatives could help create more support for the colleges, and perhaps, more problem-solving capabilities before negative events occur.

Educational Systems Need to Unify Toward the Common Goal

A major frustration, especially to Oregon legislators, has been the competition between community colleges for funding. When some community colleges were suing the state to redistribute state funding, legislators were clearly troubled about the divisiveness that had developed. At the time of my interviews, they were pleased that all of the community colleges in their state had finally come together to present their needs as a unified team of educational leaders. I sensed that legislators were more confident in the community colleges’ planning and thoughtfulness about budgets. They could review the budget needs as a whole rather than in smaller, competing parts. Unfortunately
though, the agreement Oregon for colleges to work together has since fallen apart at least to some extent.

Legislators in Idaho look for coordination and cooperation among community colleges as well. They appreciated that the two community colleges in their state worked together to help legislators plan their budgets. The two colleges agreed to equal allocations for many years, even though one college had fewer students. Two years ago, the legislature decided to award one college more funding based on the differences in student enrollments. It was because the two colleges negotiated an agreement together and brought it to the legislators, that it was authorized.

Legislators in the study also looked for community colleges to present a united front along with K-12 systems, four-year colleges, and universities. As L4 put it, they need to “marry” across systems so they’ll “gain political strength” (L4). Community colleges could benefit from powerful lobbyists representing public schools and four-year colleges and universities. Legislators are looking for funding solutions throughout the educational system and, by showing that education is working together as a unified group that plans strategically, legislators are more likely to understand and plan for those upcoming needs.

**Implications for Further Research**

The legislative perceptions about community college funding is a multifaceted topic that could be researched further in a variety of ways. Following is a discussion of areas recommended for further research.

**More Diverse Viewpoints on Alternative Funds**

This study is limited in that it included only qualitative data about perceptions of eight legislators in Idaho and Oregon. Perryman’s study (1993) found that varied demographic backgrounds of legislators in several states affected their perceptions of higher education funding. The legislators who agreed to participate in my study were fairly homogeneous. They hailed from suburban and rural communities, had similar backgrounds, came from similar political cultures, and had similar personal experiences with community colleges. All were Caucasian and six of the eight were Republicans. The
community colleges they had the most experience with were small- to medium-sized institutions. The legislators who participated came from the same areas of their states, perhaps limiting their viewpoints.

Those legislators who were unable to participate may have had different perceptions. They included legislators who were persons of color, from urban areas that housed large metropolitan community colleges. Studying legislators from more culturally and regionally diverse backgrounds and from other states may provide additional information about their perceptions of alternative community college funding.

**Costs Versus Benefits of Alternative Funding**

The expectations that community colleges should seek alternative funding are fully entrenched in legislators’ perspectives. However, a cost-benefit analysis may provide information to help legislators and community colleges see what impact those alternative resources have on community colleges. It would be useful to assess the value of specific types of alternative funding given the time and expense of (a) procuring funding, (b) developing programming that may or may not fit the mission of a particular community college, (c) determining whether the outcomes are met, (d) determining whether the impact of the outcomes are lasting, and (e) analyzing the amount of time and resources involved in managing the funding and programs.

Another facet of this research may be to investigate what community colleges are experiencing currently in regards to alternative funding acquisition and use. It could be helpful for community colleges for planning purposes to know: (a) how the benefits and costs of alternative funding are affecting the sustainability of programming, (b) what effect alternative funding has had on community college missions, and (c) how community colleges are balancing the various obligations that come with alternative funding.
Another area for further research could be how or if legislators’ political ideologies, such as political party affiliation, liberalism or conservatism, or worldviews based on where they live, have an effect on their perspectives regarding alternative funding. There is research on political cultures and their effect on higher education funding (Gittell & Kleiman, 2000), but nothing has been written about how political ideology affects the acquisition of funding in this new era of community colleges relying on alternative funding. I was interested to find that there were few differences in decision making approaches and perceptions about alternative funding for community colleges among the legislators within this study even though they came from two different parties. I wondered if their similarities were due to the limitations of this study, in other words, the homogeneity of the legislators in regards to their backgrounds and their demographics. Investigating further, perhaps with a more diverse group of legislators, could indicate whether legislators’ perceptions about alternative funding and community colleges are similar or whether their perceptions are affected by their political ideologies. A study on this topic could identify whether there are unique funding patterns among individual legislators’ political ideologies in regards to alternative funding acquisition by community colleges. Given the results of such a study, community college administrators could use the results to become even better informed about and anticipate questions and concerns legislators may have about community colleges’ involvement with alternative funding sources. Further, they could use the information to better assist legislators to understand the effects of alternative funding on their institutions.

The Impact of Committee Membership on Funding Decision Making

Legislators within this study expressed the importance of committee membership on their decision making processes. It may be useful to explore the various committees on which legislators participate and study whether the types of committees on which they serve affect their perspectives regarding alternative funding for community colleges. Perhaps if community college leaders know which committees have the most effect on
legislators’ budget decision making, they may be able to leverage their own influence through mutually invested connections.

**The Role of Legislative Staff**

Legislative staff members were important resources for legislators within this study. Another area of further research could be to explore legislative staff members’ roles in funding decisions. Such a study could inform community colleges about key relationships between legislators and staff, and how to develop strategies for creating more support for the community colleges within legislative staff.

**The Relation Between Community Colleges’ Relying More on Alternative Funding and State Allocations**

This study relayed information on some advantages and disadvantages to community colleges’ operating with alternative funding. A concern was that legislators may possibly limit funding support because community colleges have access to alternative financial resources. However, some community colleges have successfully obtained alternative sources of funding that have put them in the spotlight—a source of pride within legislative circles. They have recruited businesses to their areas with the goal of provided contracted training to the businesses’ employees. These recruits bring jobs and tax dollars to the community and state, providing economic and social stimulus. A new area of study could be to investigate how alternative sources of funding have been leveraged into additional state and local funding as a form of legislative endorsement. Studying legislators reactions to community colleges’ successes at acquiring funding on their own could inform community colleges about approaches that may assist them to gain additional funding support from their states.

**Best Time to Interview Legislators**

I was somewhat disappointed that I wasn’t able to meet with all of the legislators selected. I probably chose the worst time to meet with most of the Oregon legislators – during legislative sessions. They were extremely busy; I felt like I did not have much time with them and felt in some cases my interviews weren’t as thorough as they could have
been. Legislators that I met with outside of their sessions were able to spend more time in answering my questions thoroughly and to discuss with me more in depth their thoughts. And, I had more time to develop rapport with them so they seemed more at ease in answering my questions. An area of study could be to examine most productive times in which to interview legislators for research. Such a study could produce guidelines that would help researchers best utilize their and legislators’ time and energies.

**Summary**

The purpose of my study was to discern the nature of legislators’ perceptions about community colleges’ abilities to generate revenues through alternative funding sources. I found that legislators expect community colleges to seek and utilize alternative funds to enhance their programming, bring new revenues to the state through business recruitments, and fill in the gaps of budget shortfalls. They were proud of community colleges and felt deep connections to the presidents and activities that took place at community colleges in their districts.

Legislators were very knowledgeable about the activities that took place at community colleges and appreciated the varied services the colleges provided. They would have preferred to award more funding to community colleges than to corrections and health and welfare programs in their states, but they expressed goals of keeping their constituents safe and providing resources for the basic survival of individuals and their families. But, they saw community colleges as one key to improving their constituents’ lives.

Until the economies of Idaho and Oregon make a major surge upward, community college funding in those states will remain at stationary levels. Building and fostering relationships with legislators will continue to be extremely important. Keeping legislators informed about community colleges’ activities and needs will be critical as competition for state resources will only continue to grow.

At the same time, community colleges will need to continue to seek and obtain alternative sources of funding to meet the growing and expanding needs of their communities and states in times of decreased funding. What was once considered a
bonus resource, alternative funding at community colleges has now become an essential and familiar part of the community college budgeting process.
REFERENCES


Perryman, B.C. (1993). The perceptions of state legislators toward funding higher education (dissertation), Colorado State University, Colorado.


APPENDICES

A: Interview Questions for Legislators

B. Data Categories

C: Informed Consent Document-Institutional Research Board

D: Staff Survey

E: Letter of Invitation to Idaho and Oregon Legislators

F: Idaho Code for Community College Funding
Appendix A
Interview Questions for Legislators:

1. What is your personal experience with Community Colleges?

2. What role(s) do you think community colleges play in Oregon?

3. What roles should they have?

4. How would you describe your funding decision making processes?

5. How do your party affiliation and caucus affect your decision making processes?

6. Since you are so busy, how do others assist you to determine community college funding needs; i.e., how do you get your information about CC’s, and how do you stay informed?

7. What other factors (if any) influence your decision-making?

8. How do you think community colleges should address their dwindling state funding resources (while enrollments continue to skyrocket) in these difficult economic times?

9. How are you working directly with community colleges to overcome the effects of their declining resources?

10. What are your overall thoughts about Oregon’s/Idaho’s current budget situation related to community college funding?

11. What do you think the impact will be of budget shortfalls on community colleges in comparison to K-12 schools, four-year colleges and universities?

12. Describe your perceptions of moves to change the current community college system.

13. Would you vote differently in different times?

14. Community colleges typically have other sources of funding, i.e., local property taxes, contract training, social service contracts, and federal grants such as Adult Basic Education. What role do you think these will have in future community college funding?
15. What other ways do you see “other than state funding” resources playing a role in community college funding?

16. What affect do you think “other” (contract training and grants) funding will have on community colleges?
Appendix B
Data Categories

1. **Control**: legislators’ philosophies of who should have funding control of community colleges: state, local, or combination of both

2. **Emotions**: how legislators feel about being a legislator within the current community college funding situation

3. **Limitations on resources**: how legislators prioritize funding requests

4. **Competing needs for funding**: legislators’ awareness and perceptions on how community college funding fits into their state’s critical funding needs

5. **Responsibility**: legislators’ views about their funding responsibilities

6. **Community college attitudes**: legislators’ perceptions of community colleges’ attitudes toward the current funding situation

7. **Taxpayers’ concerns**: what legislators here from their constituents about community college funding

8. **Property tax issues**: legislators’ perceptions concerning community college funding and property taxes

9. **Equalization of budgets among community colleges**: legislators’ thoughts on efforts to equalize community college budgets in Oregon

10. **Experiences** legislators have with community colleges

11. **Functions and roles of community colleges**: legislators’ perceptions regarding what they believe community colleges’ roles are in their states

12. **Technical programs’ roles**: legislators’ perceptions regarding what they believe community colleges’ technical programs’ roles are in their states

13. **Proposed community college system changes** in each of the states

14. **Training needs** of business and industry

15. **History of community college funding**: their personal experiences and understanding of community college funding in their states

16. **Partnerships**: legislators’ understanding of how community colleges have with business and industry

17. **Stability of funding**: legislators’ perceptions regarding stability of community college funding

18. **Rural issues**: legislators’ thoughts on community college access—physically and politically
19. **Tuition and fees**: the role tuition and fees have had, currently have, and will have in the future of community college funding

20. **Higher education**: what effect community colleges have had on higher education

21. **Solutions to lack of funding**: legislators’ thoughts on outcomes as a result of inadequate funding for community colleges

22. **Caucus influences** on legislators’ funding decisions

23. **Alternative funding as an answer**: legislators’ reflections on the impact of funding coming from outside state and local funding.

24. **Socio-economic impact of community colleges** on the state and their communities

25. **Decision-making processes**: legislators’ description of how they make their funding decisions

26. **Opinions about community colleges**

27. **How legislators get their information** regarding community colleges

28. **Personal wants**: what legislators say they want personally from community colleges

29. **Community college responsibility toward funding**: what legislators need from community colleges to help them address the community colleges’ funding needs

30. **The current climate for being a legislator**: legislators’ descriptions of what it is like to currently be a legislator

31. **Public opinions of community colleges**: what legislators hear from their constituents regarding community colleges, overall

32. **Legislators’ employment backgrounds**

33. **Treatment of legislators by their constituents**

34. **Legislators’ personal relationships with community colleges**

35. **Voting differently in different times**: legislators’ views on how they vote now as opposed to times when there is greater funding available

36. **Frustrations with being a legislator**: legislators’ personal disappointments and dissatisfactions with being a legislator during this period of time

37. **Comparisons of higher education funding with community college funding**

38. **Effects of alternative funding on community colleges**: legislators’ perceptions of the possible effects alternative sources could have on community colleges
Appendix C
Informed Consent Document

Project Title: The Impact of Legislative Perceptions on the Funding of Public Community Colleges

Principal Investigator: Debra S.E. Klimes, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education
George H. Copa, Professor, School of Education (and doctoral advisor to Debra Klimes)

PURPOSE
This is a research study. The results will assist college presidents, boards of trustees and college planning teams to more effectively work with legislators to address community college funding issues. The results of this research may be used for publication and presentation. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. This research study is being conducted in partial fulfillment for the Doctor of Education degree requirements at Oregon State University.

Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in this study or not. This process is called “informed consent”. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

We are inviting you to participate in this research study because your name emerged from respondents as a legislator who has significant influence in community college funding issues.

PROCEDURES
If you agree to participate, your involvement will last for approximately 4 – 6 six hours; two of which may be face-to-face interviews, and the remaining hours used for observation and checking in with you regarding interview interpretation.

As a participant in this study, I understand that Debra Klimes will:

1. Survey staff members from community college-related organizations for names of (State) Legislators whom they perceive as having the most influence on Community College funding decisions. Postage-paid return envelopes have been coded for mailing purposes only and the envelopes and surveys will be destroyed once the participating legislators have been selected. Survey responses and the identification of survey respondents will be kept confidential.
2. Analyze the survey results and invite the legislators whose names appear most frequently to participate in the study. The names of the selected legislators will be kept confidential and will be identified in the study as “Legislator One,” “Legislator Two,” “Legislator Three,” and so forth.

3. Contact me to arrange a time and location for a face-to-face on-hour initial interview as a participating legislator, with an opportunity to follow-up. Follow-up may consist of e-mails, telephone or in-person meetings. The researcher may also ask for recommendations on other related materials that would be helpful for her review as well as share any correspondence I might see as useful. The sharing of materials and correspondence are voluntary. The interview will be audio taped and field notes will be taken. All tapes and field notes will be kept for three years beyond the completion of the research study and destroyed at that point.

4. Observe me during the (2003-2005) Legislative Session as I meet with and work with other state legislators. I agree to notify the researcher of any planned meetings and/or public hearings I may participate in regarding community college funding. I understand that the researcher will check in with me on her interpretation of the interview, observations, and document analysis.

RISKS
In signing this form I agree not to disclose my participation in this study. I understand that if I do disclose my participation, legislators and community college staff members who were not selected for the study may treat me differently, be awkward or uncomfortable in my presence.

BENEFITS
There may be no personal benefit for participating in this study. However, the researchers anticipate that, in the future, society may benefit from this study by community colleges and legislators more effectively working together to address complex and critical funding issues.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, federal government regulatory and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies involving human subjects) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. It is possible that these records could contain information that personally identifies you. All data collected will be stored in a secured location for a minimum of three years after the conclusion of the research study. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.
VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. During interview sessions, you are free to skip any questions that you would prefer not to answer. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. Should you decide to withdraw, some data collected prior to your withdrawal may be included in the study results.

QUESTIONS

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Debra S.E. Klimes, PO Box 5811, Twin Falls, ID, XXXXX; (XXX) XXX-XXXX; (email address) If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at (541) 737-3437 or by e-mail at IRB@oregonstate.edu. Your signature indicates that this research 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)

RESEARCHER STATEMENT

I have discussed the above points with the participant or, where appropriate, with the participant’s legally authorized representative, using a translator when necessary. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

________________________________________
Researcher’s Name (Printed)

________________________________________
(Signature of Researcher) (Date)

Please return this signed document in the postage-paid envelope provided by the researcher.

THANK YOU!
Appendix D
Staff Survey

Most Influential Legislators on Funding
of Community Colleges in (Idaho/Oregon)

You have been selected to participate in this study because of your expertise in working with state legislators and (Idaho’s/Oregon’s) state community colleges.

Please name 3 to 5 (Idaho/Oregon) legislators whom you perceive as having the most influence on community college funding.

Thank you for your help!

Please return this completed survey along with the signed informed consent document in the “numbered” postage-paid envelope provided. If you misplace your envelope, you can mail the completed questionnaire and informed consent document to:

Debra S.E. Klimes
PO Box XXXX
Twin Falls, ID XXXXX

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE!
Appendix E
Letter of Invitation to Idaho and Oregon Legislators

Dear Legislator’s Name

My name is Debra Klimes and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Oregon State University. As part of my degree requirements, I am engaging in a research study on the perceptions legislators have of community colleges, how those perceptions are developed, and what influence those perceptions have on legislators’ funding decisions concerning community colleges. The importance of this research is twofold: 1) as public institutions of higher education, community and colleges compete with other entities in state government for limited funding, and 2) community colleges need to be better informed about legislators’ funding perceptions of community colleges, and how to use the information, if necessary, to design new strategies for supplementing already tight budgets. The purpose of the study will be to assist college presidents, boards of trustees and college planning teams to more effectively work with legislators to address community college funding issues.

Selected staff members from the (Idaho Community Colleges and Idaho Legislative Staff/Oregon Community College and Workforce Development department and the Oregon Community College Association) were asked in a survey to name legislators whom they perceive to have the most influence in community college funding decisions. Your name emerged from the respondents as a legislator who has significant influence in community college funding issues.

With that, I would like to invite you to participate in my research study. Your participation is voluntary but vital to this study. Your identity will be kept confidential and I ask that you not disclose your participation in the study as well. Legislators participating in the study will be referred to as Legislator One, Legislator Two, Legislator Three”, and so forth.

Enclosed is an informed consent document outlining the procedures of the research study and information about your rights and responsibilities as a participant. Please read, sign, and return this document in the postage-paid envelope provided, indicating your willingness to participate in this study. Once I have received the signed form, I will contact you directly to schedule an interview that I anticipate will last for approximately one hour. In addition, I will ask that during this 2003 Legislative Session, you allow me to observe you as you work and that you share any correspondence you have with other legislators. If you have questions about this study, please contact me at (XXX) XXX-XXX.

I look forward to hearing from you, and thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,
Debra S.E. Klimes, doctoral candidate
Enclosure: Informed Consent Document
Appendix F
Idaho Code for Community College Funding

Fund: General (0001-00)
Sources: Idaho Code §67-1205 prescribes that the General Fund consists of, "moneys received into the treasury and not specially appropriated to any other fund." The fund sources are: 1) individual income tax, 2) corporate income tax, 3) sales tax, 4) cigarette tax, 5) beer tax, 6) wine tax, 7) liquor revenue, 8) kilowatt hour tax, 9) mine license tax, 10) Treasurer’s interest on investments of certain idle state funds, 11) court fees and fines, 12) insurance premium tax, 13) sale of alcoholic beverage licenses, 14) unclaimed property, 15) articles of incorporation and uniform commercial code filing fees, 16) estate and transfer tax, and 17) other miscellaneous sources from various agency receipts.

Uses: General Fund money is used to support and maintain the instruction and public service functions of the two community colleges, including related institutional support, operation and maintenance activities.

Total General Fund (0001-00)

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Fund: Community College (0506-00)
Sources: The State Junior College Fund consists of all moneys which may be appropriated, apportioned or allocated to the Fund, pursuant to Idaho Code §33-2139. Recent revenues into this account have come exclusively from that portion of the funds generated by the controlled sale of liquor in the state designated for the community colleges. It is a flat, statutory distribution of $300,000 per year, half of which goes to North Idaho College and the other half going to the College of Southern Idaho.

Uses: The State Junior College Fund is allocated to qualified junior college districts as a direct payment to the governing board of each junior college with half paid on July 20 and half on the first day of September of each year according to Idaho Code §33-2141. Both North Idaho College and the College of Southern Idaho comingle funds from this account with their other revenue sources and expend them to fulfill their mission of providing access and quality academic and professional-technical programs to their student bodies.
Total Community College Fund (0506-00)

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Community Colleges Grand Total

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