

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

School of Education

Community leaders' perceptions of the role of a small, rural community college in contributing to quality of life

Presented at: Rural Community College Alliance, Oklahoma City, OK

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Background of Study

- Rural communities often rely on interactions with community colleges and other educational organizations to provide leadership, such as in the area of economic development.
- As a result, the community college assumes a crucial role in the development of a rural community.
- Persistent poverty, rapidly changing manufacturing and agricultural economies, and significant population dynamics are a few of the specific challenges facing rural communities (Clark and Davis, 2007).

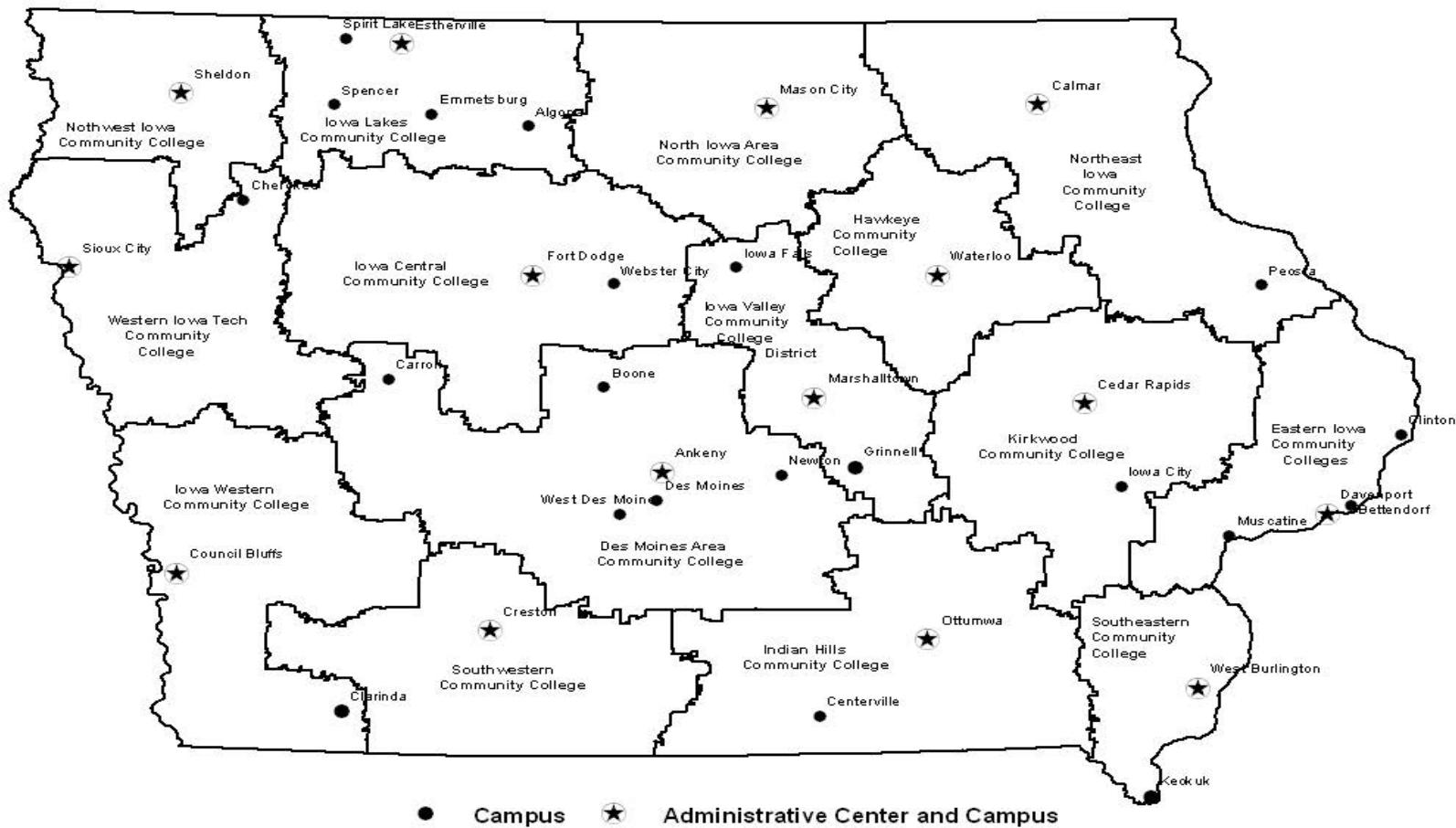
Need for Study

- Existing literature in education focuses on rural community colleges, performance measures, funding, and accountability.
- State funding for higher education continues to decline and costs for programs and services continue to increase
- Need to more closely examine the broader role and potential impact of the community college in a rural community

Client & Stakeholders

- Southeastern Community College
- Two campuses: West Burlington, IA, and Keokuk, IA
 - West Burlington is main campus
- Two centers: Fort Madison, IA, and Mt. Pleasant, IA
- Carnegie classification: *Two-year, small*
- Enrollment summary (2016):
 - Total enrollment: 2,844
 - Full-time: 1,312 (46.1%)
 - Part-time: 1,532 (53.9%)

IOWA COMMUNITY COLLEGES



Study Area

- Southeast Iowa – four counties; combined population 105,269 (2016 estimates)
 - Lee County, Iowa – Pop. 34,615
 - Des Moines County – Pop. 39,739
 - Henry County – Pop. 19,773
 - Louisa County – Pop. 11,142

Study Area population demographics

Southeast Iowa population data spreadsheet that I made for RCCA - Excel

Jared Reed Share

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A1 : f_x Southeast Iowa regional population characteristics

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Southeast Iowa regional population characteristics					
2	Variable	Des Moines County	Henry County	Lee County	Louisa County	
3	Population estimate (July 1, 2016)	39,739	19,773	34,615	11,142	
4	Population, Census, April 1, 2010	40,325	20,145	35,862	11,387	
5	Population percent change, 2010-2016	-1.50%	-1.80%	-3.50%	-2.20%	
6	Persons under 18 years, percent, July 1, 2016	22.70%	21.90%	21.30%	22.90%	
7	Persons under 18 years, percent, April 1, 2010	23.20%	23.20%	22.20%	25.80%	
8	Percent change, # of persons under 18 years	-0.50%	-1.30%	-0.90%	-2.90%	
9	Persons 65 years and over, July 1, 2016	19.90%	18.90%	19.70%	17.10%	
10	Persons 65 years and over, April 1, 2010	17.60%	16.00%	16.90%	15.00%	
11	Percent change, # of persons 65 years and over	2.30%	2.90%	2.80%	2.10%	
12	High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2011-2015	91.40%	91.80%	91.50%	82.40%	
13	Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2011-2015	20.00%	18.80%	15.50%	13.20%	
14	<i>Source: U.S. Census Bureau</i>					
15						

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Ready

Purpose

- Increase awareness of the impact that the community college has on a rural community.
- Specifically, examine the perceived role of a small, rural community college in contributing to quality of life from the perspective of individuals who live and work in the community where the rural community college is located.
- To provide recommendations based on insight gleaned from the responses of participants in this study, who have a familiarity with the community and the college located in the community.

Research Questions

- The following research questions guided the development of this study:
 - What are the challenges and needs of the rural community?
 - How is *quality of life* defined?
 - How is quality of life exhibited in a rural community?
 - What role does the small, rural community college have in contributing to developing a quality of life?

Challenges facing rural communities

- Rural areas of the United States represent over 85% of the nation's geography and contain only 15% of the population (Miller and Kissinger, 2007).
- This part of the country is characterized by decreasing populations, increasing poverty, limited economic growth, and limited access to cultural events (Eddy, 2007; Miller and Kissinger, 2007).
- Rural communities are aging as young people move out of the community for other opportunities and decide to stay away (Eddy, 2007; Crookston and Hooks, 2012).

Rural Community Colleges

- Community colleges often have a sound and visible relationship to the communities they serve (Torres et al, 2013).
- In the U.S., there are 553 rural community college districts, 922 rural campuses, almost 60% of all community college campuses across the nation (Hardy and Katsinas, 2007).
- Over 9 million students attended community colleges in 2000-2001 -- 34% of these students attended a rural community college (Hardy and Katsinas, 2007).
- Rural communities often rely more heavily on the community college to function as a catalyst for social and economic development in the region (Torres et al, 2013).

Quality of Life

- The term Quality of Life (QoL) has been identified, or defined, using factors such as housing, services, amenities, employment, health, and sense of community belonging (Eby, Kitchen, and Williams, 2012).
- Previous research has studied social capital (Veenstra et al, 2005), environmental perceptions (Wakefield and McMullan, 2005), and sense of place as it relates to QoL and health (and Williams et al, 2010).
- Lack of literature on the role of the community college and how it contributes to quality of life

Methodology

- Qualitative study
- Focus group interviews
 - Good data collection method when examining attitudes, perceptions, opinions
- Sample – 14 people (7 participants in each focus group)
 - Participants were selected based on their role in the community (resident/employee) and a knowledge of the community college
- Interviews took place in a public place in Keokuk, IA
 - 1 hour each
- Interview protocol
 - List of 8 questions and two were skipped in the essence of keeping on time
 - Same questions asked of each group

Findings

- Primary challenges facing rural communities: Transportation, housing, workforce development, geography, educational opportunities, and poverty
- A lack of public transportation in the rural community as a challenge for economic development and access to opportunities.
 - Transportation (or lack thereof) impacts individuals' ability to access educational opportunities in a rural community.
- Geography is a barrier to growth and development in a rural community
- The amount of distance between rural community and metro area (for employment, housing, medical care, leisure) can cause distress for rural residents

Findings

- A lack of jobs in rural communities can force people to have to drive long distances to metro areas and this adds expense to rural living
 - Underprepared individuals living in rural communities, driving long distances for lower-paying job opportunities, contributes to poverty and lack of development in the rural communities
- Poverty
 - Rural residents are often underprepared academically
 - Closed mindset – people raised in poverty begin to raise families the same way
 - Poverty makes it harder for people to understand opportunities and be willing to pursue educational opportunities for the sake of improving their lifestyle
- Quality of life
 - Recreation, basic needs, safety, and cost of living were highlighted as measures of quality of life.
 - Participants discussed that quality of life does not have one single definition.
 - Due to individual experiences in life, and circumstances that they face, participants discussed that quality of life definitions would be individualized.

Findings

- What is the role of the community college in contributing to quality of life?
 - opportunity, affordability, career and technical education, workforce readiness, dual credit opportunities, and technology.
- Providing opportunities to young people to get started with college in a safe environment with room to explore if undecided
 - Strong social support network is key to rural community college
- Career and Technical Education programming is important for rural communities
 - CTE is more important in rural communities than transfer education
- Technology infrastructure is needed in rural communities and community colleges can play the lead role because they need it, too

Recommendations

- *Recommendation #1: Small, rural community colleges examine ways in which they can utilize resources effectively in partnership with a local council of governments or planning agency to implement public transit include the community college on regularly scheduled routes*
 - Transportation has to be removed as a potential barrier to participating in education/job opportunities
 - Particularly important in underserved communities that are away from the main or primary campus of the institution.
- *Recommendation #2: Small, rural community college to increase capacity to provide services by utilizing resources to write and submit grant proposals for external funding not normally accessible to the institution.*
 - Action could help the institution increase capacity by reaching individuals in the rural community who present significant barriers to participating in educational opportunities
 - External grant funding could be utilized to hire additional staff in crucial areas (retention, outreach, student services) to create a strong social support network to address poverty

Recommendations

- *Recommendation #3: Develop an outreach plan designed to increase the level of interaction between the community college and the community.*
 - One way to accomplish this is for the community college to partner with public libraries, community centers, and other organizations to set up specific locations where the community college offers courses and training
 - Credit and non-credit programs held in the community at off-campus sites
 - Allows the institution to increase accessibility by offering programs/services in the community

Recommendations

- *Recommendation #4: The community college needs to take a lead role in bringing information technology infrastructure to the rural community.*
 - A lack of reliable technology infrastructure is significant problem in rural communities (literature and findings)
 - Rural communities need the ability to connect to the global world via the world wide web. Even though community colleges have limited resources, they are unique organizations that often serve a region.
 - With limited resources, they could utilize resources (staff/expertise) to take the lead on a major initiative such as improving IT infrastructure

Thank you for your attendance today.

- Q & A – any other recommendations or strategies already in use?

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