

MULTIPLICITIES OF MEANINGS OF THE PHRASE “CUSTOMER SERVICE” IN
EMPLOYEE GROUPS IN ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

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This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Ferris State University

December 2019

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ABSTRACT

Research shows that students are looking beyond the experiences in the classroom and expecting a level of service and personalization in all areas of the college. Tie the need for an all-encompassing experience with the heavy burden of community college funding that is now placed onto student tuitions, and the increasing importance of the student experience becomes apparent. Because of this demand, community colleges need to gain a better understanding of what customer service looks like in an academic setting.

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the multiplicity of meanings of the phrase “customer service” and the perceived impacts on the service provided by employee groups in Illinois community colleges. Data collection techniques were based on an online survey, semi-structured in-person interviews, field notes, and documents. Site selection was randomly stratified based on the Carnegie community college classifications. Once a site was identified, a survey was sent out to all employees. Based on the results from the surveys, participants who opted in for the video portion received an email asking them to participate further, and those who responded to the email were selected to participate in the video interview.

The major findings in this study show four themes in the definition of customer service in community colleges. The results of the research study also indicated that the larger the school, the less likely employees felt that their institution promoted student success and that employees are less likely to feel encouraged to assist students.

Recommendations for future research include evaluating the impact that customer service has on a student’s decision to study at a specific institution and identifying promising practices

for an institution's transition to an organizational culture that is focused on providing students with customer service that leads to student success.

KEY WORDS: student experience, customer service, student success

DEDICATION

For what it's worth, here's to the crazy ones!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If you could have only been in the room where it happened, you would have been able to see the tremendous support that I have had throughout the last four years. To all of those who have been in the room where it happened, thanks for your continuous support and encouragement. I don't know that I could have finished such a daunting task without my friends and peers in the Harper Cohort. Thank you to Harper College and Drs. Ken and Cathy Ender for your endless support through this process.

To my amazing committee, thank you for letting me think different. To Dr. Jeff Doles, it is because of your class in junior and senior years of high school that I wanted to share my research through video. Thanks for helping support me throughout the last four years; your willingness to helping at the drop of the hat did not go unnoticed. To Dr. Rosemary Papa, thanks for your unwavering time and support to help me reach my goal; your expertise really helped push me to the finish line. To Dr. Regan Myers, thanks for helping mentor and support me both professionally and scholarly throughout my doctoral journey.

Thanks to my family. To my parents, Pat and Mike: You never stopped believing in me; thanks for loving me and supporting me throughout this journey. Mom and Dad, thanks for not being upset when I missed holidays or passed up an evening out. To Gus and Spencer: Thanks for always welcoming me home after a rough day and never being upset when I didn't always want to walk 500 miles. To Kimi: Thanks for always being my cheerleader and not judging me when I stress ate cheese! To Pepe the VIII: Thanks for always showing me no matter what you are up against you can always fight through and persevere.

I could not have done this without a little help from my friends. To soon-to-be Dr. Katy McGuinnis: Thanks for always reminding me that when I was hanging tough, I could always take a break in Bluebell. To Dr. Jessica Papa: Thanks for the thousands of times you have told me everything will be fine. To Dr. Tammie Mahoney: Thanks for always listening to me ramble on and dealing with our crazy layovers and journeys.

To the 2,077,920 minutes: You gave me some of the best of times of my life, at times you made me a basket case, and sometimes you made me take the long way around; but in an mmmmbop you helped my become the best version of me.

I've never been fond of the rules or the status quo. I've always been one to see things differently. Thanks to anyone I may have missed who helped me make my untraditional dissertation a reality.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

There has been an abundance of research regarding the phrase “customer service” within businesses and corporations. However, very little research has been done to discuss the phrase “customer service” in higher education, let alone community colleges. Of full-time undergraduate students, 42% are currently enrolled at community colleges across the nation (Ma & Baum, 2016). The trend of reduced funding for education from the state and federal government has placed the heavy burden of community college funding onto student tuitions and fees (Goldstein & Goldstein, 2019). In many cases, these changes in funding have turned the students into the primary funding source of the community colleges and therefore made the student a more predominant customer. Research (Berkner & Choy, 2008; Community College Survey of Student Engagement [CCSSE], 2009; Scott, 1999) has shown that there is an issue regarding the need to reinvent the service provided at an educational level for the 21st century student.

Mastering Customer Service

Companies such as Disney Inc. and Apple Inc. have become successful masters of making their customers feel welcome (Doucette, 1998). Disney Inc. and Apple Inc. accomplished this welcoming feeling by training all staff members to understand the two major interactions occurring at any given time: one between the guest and the company’s employees and another between guests and other guests (Pullman & Gross, 2003). With the increasing

importance of the student experience, community colleges need to start to gain a better understanding of what customer service looks like in an academic setting.

Students are looking beyond the experiences in the classroom and expecting a level of service and personalization in all areas of the college. CCSSE (2009) identified the importance placed on community colleges to create a personal connection with each “customer,” also known as the college’s students.

This study focused on the intersection depicted in the conceptual framework between: (1) organizational culture, (2) customer service, (3) student experience, and (4) student-as-a-customer. Examination of these four key elements helps provide an understanding of how customer service can be identified in education (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Kaminski’s Customer Service Model

The concept of customer service has changed over the last 200 years, especially as technology has advanced. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, every item was either made by the household or by someone within the village (Green, 2012). Since the Industrial Revolution, there have been many advancements that have changed the way customers expect their services including the invention of the telephone, assembly line (History, 2009), call center (McGuinn, 2009), interactive voice response (Bloomberg, 2017), Internet (Seeman & O'Hara, 2006), smart phones (Isaacson, 2011; Zaman, 2013), social media (Gunarathne, Rui, & Seidmann, 2018), and artificial intelligence (Chakrabarti & Luger, 2015). Thanks to companies such as Amazon Inc., customers expect instant gratification when it comes to receiving a product purchased (Melnyk & Stanton, 2017); social media sites such as Twitter Inc., have conditioned customers to expect assistance with a product, service, or issue 24/7 (Morgan, 2016). These changes in customer expectation have revolutionized how customer service is defined; many scholars define customer service as building long-lasting relationships which focus on satisfying the customers' needs and desires (Ackerman, 2007; Destiny Solutions, n.d.; Salesforce, n.d; Towbin, 2018; Wahab, 2016).

Defining Customer Service

The perceived level of customer service that an institution provides is determinate on their market orientation (Parvu & Ipate, 2012) and organizational culture (Wahab, 2016). Scholars define organizational culture as a social phenomenon (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985) which highlights an organization's shared beliefs (Smart & St. John, 1996).

As further discussed in Chapter Two, there are two lenses to view organizational culture: on an instrumental level (Smart & St. John, 1996) and on a symbolic level (Schein as cited in Schein & Schein, 2017). Smart & St. John's (1996) theory on the competing values framework focused on the four instrumental frames of organizational culture: clan, market, bureaucratic, and

adhocracy. In an organization's culture, Smart and St. John's (1996) theory can help identify what types of actions are most likely to be seen in a culture. For example, market cultures focus on a controlled external orientation which positions market cultures to put an emphasis on providing customer service. Schein's (as cited in Schein & Schein, 2017) theory of three levels of culture focused on the different levels of organizational cultural phenomenon: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. In an organization's culture understanding the symbolic level can help identify how symbolic stories and shared beliefs shape the way an organization reacts when interacting with customers. Understanding what is seen as an institution's organizational culture can help gauge how a student or customer perceives the level of service received.

As technology helped pave the way to eliminating distance as a barrier for students to attend a chosen institution, the student experience began to morph (Brown, 2019). The student experience is no longer just what happens within the walls of the classroom, rather it includes the experiences in the student café, bookstore, academic advising, student clubs, etc. (Tinto, 2012). With the widespread use of smartphones, the Internet, and social media, the community college student demographic is no longer just those individuals who live within the district but rather includes student from across the world (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008). Furthermore, if students find their local community college is not meeting their needs, they can easily find other distance learning opportunities (Danjum & Rasli, 2012; Wallace, 1999). The shift in demographics of the college marketplace has modified the traditional college oligopoly to a more competitive monopolist market (Clemes, Ozzane, & Tram (2001); Danjum & Rasli, 2012; Scott, 1999; Seeman & O'Hara, 2006; Voss, Gruber & Szmigin, 2007; Wahab, 2016). The more competitive

the market, the more a community college needs to be focused on what drives student success and the customer service provided to the students.

With the continuing trend of declining funding at both the state and federal levels, Illinois community colleges are relying heavily on student tuition as the main source of income. Traditionally, in many community colleges, most of the fees received from student tuition only covered a small percentage of instructional costs, limiting the power students possessed in effecting university responses to their needs and desires (Scott, 1999). In light of recent Illinois budget issues, community colleges have continued to cut their budget expectation from the state (Fain, 2014). With Illinois community colleges struggling for funding, student completion and retention are becoming increasingly important for student satisfaction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the multiplicity of meanings of the phrase “customer service” and the perceived impacts on the service provided by employee groups in Illinois community colleges. Four dynamics for providing quality service were examined through this research (a) customer service theory, (b) organizational culture, (c) the student experience, and (d) student-as-a-customer.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- RQ1. What are the multiple dimensions of the phrase “customer service” in community colleges?
- RQ2: How do employees’ perceptions of “customer service” impact the services they provide to community college students?
- RQ3. Why are individuals considered customers prior to enrollment into college and students after they are enrolled?

Definitions of Terms

1. Community colleges: “Any not-for-profit institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree” (Cohen & Brawer, 1982, p. 5).
2. Customer service: “The extent to which the perceived standard of service (note that there are no absolutes) matches the expectations of the customer” (Scott, 1999, p. 198).
3. Employee groups:
 - a. Full-time verses part-time: “As defined by the institution. The type of appointment at the snapshot date determines whether an employee is full-time or part-time. The employee's term of contract is not considered in making the determination of full- or part-time” (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems [IPEDS], 2019).
 - b. Staff: Any member of the college employee group that does not fall under the Faculty or Administration classifications.
 - c. Full-time faculty: An occupational category that is comprised of staff who are either: 1) Primarily Instruction or 2) Instruction combined with research and/or public service. The intent of the Instructional Staff category is to include all individuals whose primary occupation includes instruction at the institution. (IPEDS, 2019)
 - d. Part-time faculty: Non-tenure track instructional staff serving in a temporary or auxiliary capacity to teach specific courses on a course-by-course basis. Includes both instructional staff who are hired to teach an academic degree-credit course and those hired to teach a remedial, developmental, or ESL course; whether the latter three categories earn college credit is immaterial. Excludes regular part-time instructional staff (who, unlike adjuncts are not paid on a course-by-course basis), graduate assistants, full-time professional staff of the institution who may teach individual courses (such as a dean or academic advisor), and appointees who teach non-credit courses exclusively. (IPEDS, 2019)
 - e. Administration: Management function should include those staff whose job it is to plan, direct, or coordinate policies, programs, and may include some supervision of other workers. In addition, Postsecondary Deans should be classified in this category as well, even though they perform similar activities to the workers that they supervise. (IPEDS, 2019)
4. Organizational culture: Defined as the accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the

correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation to those problems. (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 6)

5. Student experience: “Students’ expectations and perceptions of higher education service, and from the dimensions of quality and culture-related aspects of the academic education experience, and socio-economic development” (Vauterin, Linnanen, & Marttila, 2011, p. 182).
6. Student-as-a-customer metaphor: “We find students buying their education and shopping around for classes and majors; our goal as educator becomes attracting and retaining students for our courses” (Franz, 1998, p. 63).

Assumptions

The researcher has identified the following assumptions in this study:

1. Students would like to receive better service in and out of the classroom.
2. The participants in the survey have answered all the questions truthfully and to the best of their ability.
3. The sample selected was representative of the population of employees in Illinois Community Colleges.
4. Employees may not be completely honest answering questions on camera about their job, culture, or behaviors.

Limitations

The researcher has identified the following limitations in this study:

1. The scope of the study was small.
2. The participants were asked to reflect on their self-perceptions.
3. The researcher has worked for many companies who pride themselves on customer service so there is potential for research bias.
4. At each site, the participants for interviews were limited to a maximum of one member from each of the five major employee groups (full-time faculty, part-time faculty, full-time staff, part-time staff, and administration).
5. If no members of one of the five major employee groups opted into the video interview portion of the study at any site, that employee group was left out of the video portion of the interview.

Significance of the Study

The research in this study is intended to shine light on the varying views of Illinois community college employee groups as to how they define customer service and their implications within the institution. This research project elicited community college employees' perspectives on customer service in the hope to better understand Illinois community college employees' perceptions of customer service and the impact of these perceptions on the service provided to the institution's students.

Summary

This study is divided into three chapters following this introductory chapter. Chapter Two provides a review of relevant literature that helps build an understanding of how customer service can be identified in education. Chapter Three reviews the methodology used to conduct the study's research. Chapter Four reviews the results of the study's data, provides conclusions, and recommendations for community colleges moving forward.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the multiplicity of meanings of the phrase “customer service” and the perceived impacts on the service provided by employee groups in Illinois community colleges. The outcome of the results was used to develop a video for use by community colleges for customer service training. This chapter is divided into the following sections: (1) Customer Service, (2) Reinvention of Education, (3) Background of Community College, (4) Organizational Culture, (5) Student Experience, (6) Student-as-a-customer Metaphor, and (7) Summary.

Customer Service

Throughout the last 200 years, customer service has continually focused on the idea of providing a service to someone who is buying a product or service from another individual. Technology advances and inventions have significantly changed the way organizations conduct their business, and in turn these technological changes have morphed the expectations of customer service. Kaplan (2013) reiterated that organizations need to “frame the way you want to change the world and make it about the customer” (para. 5).

Historically, individuals used to buy products in town from local vendors because it was impractical most of the time to walk or ride a horse to the next town over (sometimes hundreds of miles apart). Furthermore, before advanced manufacturing, merchants only had the resources to make one type of product and the customer would buy what was there (Smith, 2017).

As technology has changed, especially with the development of innovations such as the manufacturing line, businesses were able to manufacture items more quickly. With Ford's invention of the car, people were able to travel farther to purchase more specific products. The ability to produce products at a quicker pace also allowed for companies to manufacture more variations of their products at a lower cost; this provided the birth of customizations. As products became more customizable and as consumers had the option to make decisions on what to purchase, consumer expectations began to evolve.

As seen in Figure 2, the development of customer service can be viewed in five distinct phases. These phases are described in more detail below.

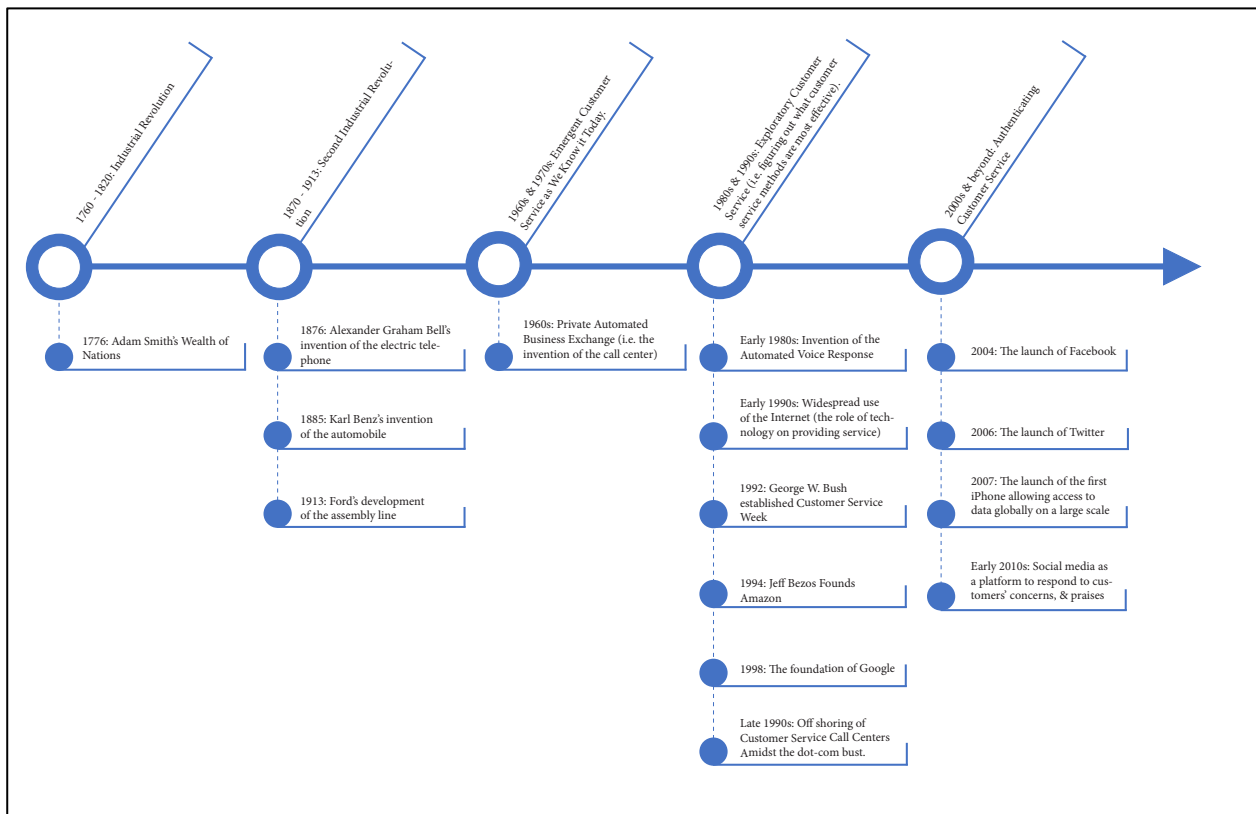


Figure 2: Kaminski's Timeline of Customer Service

History of Customer Service

1750–1820: Industrial Revolution

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, most humans never owned a single item outside of their community due to limited transportation options: “The Industrial Revolution was an increase in production brought about by the use of machines and characterized by the use of new energy sources” (Green, 2012, 2:14). The Industrial Revolution was important to the development of customer service because machines were used to help cut down on production costs, therefore allowing organizations to produce a larger variety of products to meet a wider demand from the customer base. Also, with the development of steam, coal, and iron, the invention of the steam engines and locomotives allowed for items to be transported quickly throughout countries.

1776: Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations

Adam Smith’s wealth of nations introduces the underlying notion of competition in the marketplace which in turn introduces the idea of organizations competing for customers.

1870–1913: Second Industrial Revolution

The Second Industrial Revolution brought further advancement of machines and the manufacturing process. The improvement in technology made mass production of products and faster transportation more feasible (Robinson, 2016).

In the early twentieth century, managing customer relationships was a fairly simple task. Merchants had fewer customers, and most were local. Recordkeeping was done in the merchant’s head or in a simple ledger. Merchants knew who their customers were and what they wanted. (Seeman & O’Hara, 2006, p. 25)

1876: Alexander Graham Bell's Invention of the Electric Telephone

With the invention of the electric telephone, individuals could speak to people in other areas of the world. This invention allowed businesses to speak to their customers without their customers leaving their homes. Customers were able to avoid traveling to their retailer for information on a product or to schedule service repairs.

1885: Karl Benz's Invention of the Automobile

The invention of the gasoline powered automobile by Karl Benz was a game changer when it came to how people or items were transported (Library of Congress, 2017). The automobile allowed for products and individuals to be quickly transported to areas that may not have been accessible via train and created a new expectation of how and when services or products were accessible.

1913: Henry Ford Develops the Assembly Line and its Ability to Provide Low-Cost Automobiles

The assembly line and low-cost automobiles had two distinct innovation paths. The assembly line paved the way for manufactures to more quickly produce products allowing for lower cost products and larger profit margins. The low-cost automobile allowed the middle class to travel beyond their community to purchase goods and commodities (History, 2009).

1960s and 1970s: Emergent Customer Service as it is Known Today

In the 1960s and 1970s, customer service began to evolve to resemble the notion of customer service that most customers expect today (McGuinn, 2009). In the 1960s, now consumers had the options of buying automobiles made from several different automobile manufacturers; these automobiles could now be bought in different colors and styles, and with different features. This change brought on competition between manufacturers who wanted to

acquire new customers while retaining their current customer base. By providing more and more services, features, and options, manufacturers could retain and grow their customer base.

1960s: Private Automated Business Exchange

The invention of the private automated business exchange (aka the call center) allowed customers to call for assistance on a product to a centralized location where a large number of operators all resided (Pawlewicz, n.d.). This allowed organizations to reduce labor costs while allowing the organization to handle a large volume of calls.

1980s and 1990s: Exploratory Customer Service

During the exploratory customer service phase (i.e., figuring out what customer service methods are most effective) (McGuinn, 2009) many scholars observed organizations piloting new ideas of how to handle customer service. Techniques such as service guarantees (Hart, 1988) and quality management (Colier, 1987) were explored. During this period, there also was a growth in the mindset of who could be considered a customer (Berry, 1980) and how organizations measured customer service (Mant, 1990).

Early 1980s: Invention of the Interactive Voice Response

The invention of the interactive voice response meant that callers could get basic questions answers and/or be funneled to the correct department without any human interaction (Bloomberg, 2017). This was a labor and cost savings for organizations and led the way for the development of the use of the artificial intelligence bots of the 2010s (Bloomberg, 2017; Chakrabarti & Luger, 2015).

Early 1990s: Widespread Use of the Internet (Role of Technology on Service) (McGuinn, 2009)

Although the first official Internet transmission was in 1965, the Internet did not gain traction until the late 1980s when training was developed for vendors to explain how networking and TCP/IP worked (Leiner et al., 1997). Once understanding of the Internet was more widespread, inventions of products like personal computers, laptops, pagers, PDAs, and cell phones helped get the Internet into a large number of homes (Leiner et al., 1997). According to Seeman, and O’Hara (2006), “In the last 20 years, the super store concept, the Internet, the rise of the suburbs, and increased consumer mobility, have made the customer relationship more complex” (p. 25).

1992: George W. Bush Established Customer Service Week

The establishment of a national Customer Service Week displayed publicly the belief that customer service plays an integral part of the economy in the United States (Pawlewicz, n.d). When George W. Bush established Customer Service Week, he noted that it was an opportunity for organizations to provide high-quality products and services by listening to and leveraging its employees (Hyken, 2019).

1994: The Founding of Amazon

The foundation of Amazon introduced the idea of a digital marketplace. Amazon provided a centralized location for customers to purchase millions of products from millions of businesses. Not only is Amazon a catchall for purchasing products, but Amazon’s introduction of two-day shipping changed how quickly customers expect their products after purchase (usually at no additional cost) (Melnyk, and Stanton, 2017). Beyond basic customer satisfaction based on almost-instant gratification, Amazon has advanced the customer service market by leveraging their customer data to strategically customize and promote products for each individual user. The

use of data analytics drives customization for individual customers, such as using “that information to personalize transactions, perhaps in the form of calling the customer by name during the transaction. This is often referred to as the Cheers effect” (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007, p. 325).

Late 1990s: Offshoring of Customer Service Call Centers Amidst the Dotcom Bust

Offshoring call centers moved first-level call service to countries with cheaper labor costs. This reduced business costs but over time caused frustration for customers. In the late 2000s, organizations turned away from offshoring call centers as their customer bases began to feel frustrated and alienated by call center representatives who cannot relate to the customer base (DePillis, 2018).

1998: Page and Brin Found Google

The invention of Google allowed its users to easily search the Internet for information; a drastic change from having to know exactly what server or site the information desired was hosted on. Google changed the way customers searched for organization or product reviews, user manuals, manufacture recommendations, and/or updates (Google., n.d.). Google has become so synonymous with searching for information that when someone references looking for a piece of data it is referred to as “Googling it.” Having the ability to “Google it” has given customers more empowerment to solve their own problems without always needing a customer service representative.

2000s and Beyond: Authenticating Customer Service

Authentic customer service is defined as “the recognition of the essentiality of customer service” (McGuinn, 2009, p. 60). This can be seen over the past several decades as a large body

of research and discussions have created the symbolic idea of customer service (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Chakrabarti & Luger, 2015; Gunarathne, Rui, Seidmann, 2018; Hart, 1988; McGuinn, 2009; Morgan, 2016; Pawlewicz, n.d.; Pullman & Gross, 2003; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; Schein & Schein, 2017; Scott 1999). Therefore, authentic customer service has been depicted as the intersection of the reality of the service delivered and symbolism of the ideal customer service experience.

As the start of the 2020s approach, customers can buy their cars at a local dealership, online through the manufacturer, from third-party sellers both online and in person, and can compare price points to find the price/value that works best for them. As customers have more options of how to get a product, the need to provide the best value for a customer's money becomes significantly more important. Customizing interactions using systems like customer relationship management (CRMs), analytical artificial intelligence data, and more have helped businesses maximize the customization of their product or service to meet the needs of their customers. This optimization of product selection provides a unique and customized experience for each and every individual; this provides a level of customer service that has been almost unmatched in previous decades.

2004: Zuckerberg, McCollum, and Moskovitz Launch Facebook

The introduction of Facebook allowed members to network, socialize, and connect with friends, classmates, and family easily in one centralized location. Facebook provided a location for businesses to digitally reach their customer base. Businesses had the opportunity to market, promote, and respond to customer complaints, suggestions, questions, or praise almost instantaneously (Gaines-Ross, 2010).

2006: Dorsey, Glass, Stone, and Williams Launch Twitter (Carlson, 2011)

The launch of Twitter provided customers a place to directly praise or complain about a product or service to their group of followers (Gunarathne et al., 2018; Picazo, 2016). The @ Twitter feature allowed users to directly mention a product or business both to the user's followers and the business' followers. This ability to instantly express thoughts and ideas about a product or organization meant that businesses had to be ready to respond any hour of any day; if an organization's response time was too delayed there became an increased risk for bad publicity from followers on Twitter (Morgan, 2016).

2007: Apple Inc. Launches the First iPhone

“Every once in a while, a revolutionary product comes along that changes everything” (Jobs, 2007 as posted by Zaman, 2013). The introduction of the iPhone allowed access to the Internet on a large scale across the globe (Jobs, 2007 as posted by Zaman, 2013; Isaacson, 2011). By 2010, over 90 million iPhones were sold (Isaacson, 2011). This invention paved the way for billions of users to carry the Internet in their pocket. In 2018, there were over 3.6 billion Internet users which equates to about 47% of the global population (Stryjak & Sivakumaran, 2019). Once the availability of the Internet became omnipresent to the masses, interactions with peers, business, and other users became instantaneous; therefore, the customer's expectation for feedback also became instantaneous (Gunarathne et al., 2018; Picazo, 2016; Salesforce, n.d.).

Early 2010s: The Development of Social Media as a Business Platform

Social media is used as a platform to respond to customers' concerns, questions, and praises. With the advances to social media, including the clout from influencers, customers have changed how and when they expect an educated response (Gunarathne et al., 2018).

Mid 2010s: Use of Artificial Intelligence Chat Bots

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) chat bot became very prevalent in the mid-2010s and again redefined how organizations meet their customers' needs. AI chat bots have recently become intelligent enough to pass as a live customer service representative and bots have developed the ability to answer complex questions and relay detailed information through their text responses (Chakrabarti & Luger, 2015).

Customer Service Defined in Literature

Over 40 years ago, Zinszer (1976), argued that “the phrase ‘customer service’ presently seems to lack generic definition, apparently because of the highly situational use of the term” (p. 13). This ambiguity of what defines customer service can be seen in the various definitions that scholars have discussed and refuted throughout the last half century.

Domegan and Donaldson (1992) stated that customer service “enhanced profitability and customer satisfaction which in turn positively affect corporate image” (p. 204). Scott (1999) believed that customer service was defined by the “the extent to which the perceived standard of service (note that there are no absolutes) matches the expectations of the customer” (p. 198).

Over the last 15 years, the definition of customer service has evolved, focusing on how customer service is a frame for building long-lasting relationships rather than providing specific support before or after an interaction (Ackerman, 2007; Destiny Solutions n.d.). Mark (2013) believed that customer service theory, much like education, has evolved to engage customers as active participants. Wahab (2016) stated that “customer service is based on the premise of identifying and satisfying the needs of customers and their desires” (p. 107). Towbin (2018) referred to customer service “as a series of activities intended to enhance the level of customer

satisfaction” (p. 1873–1874). Salesforce (n.d.) defined customer service as “the support you offer your customers—both before and after they buy and use your products or services” (p. 1).

Definition of a Customer in the Context of Education

Since the word “customer” is embedded in the phrase “customer service,” it is important to see how the literature defines the term “customer” in the context of education. There is not one institution in higher education that does not have a wide range of stakeholders from students to employees to governmental institutions as well as to the community and its local businesses; each institution needs to focus on finding ways to satisfy the specific needs of each group of stakeholders (Seeman & O’Hara, 2006; Voss et al., 2007). Seeman and O’Hara (2006) highlighted that “the stakeholder with the most influence is the customer – the student” (p. 27).

Kitchroen (2004) states:

Griffin (1996) defined a customer as anyone who pays money to acquire an organization’s products or services. Stanton, Etzel, and Walker (1994) suggested that customer is the individual or organization that actually makes a purchase decision, while a consumer is the individual or organizational unit that uses or consumes a product. In education students are customers who come to contact with service providers of an educational institution for the purpose of acquiring goods or services. Hill (1995) mentioned that as a primary customer of higher education services, the student should focus on expectations. Waugh (2002), however, suggested that viewing students as customers created some tensions in universities by making universities seem to be too aligned with businesses. Some researchers also view academic faculties as customers of university administration. Pitman (2000) examined the extent to which university staff perceived students and academics as customers in Australia. (p. 19)

Courtney and Courtney (2006) define the customers as the future employers and taxpayers on which the students will have an impact in their career later in life. Ackerman and Shibrowsky (2007) distinguish the difference in definitions between customers and clients by how they are served: customers are served in groups, while clients are served as individuals. Wallace (1999) suggests that each area of the college (food services, housing, bookstore, etc.) must define who their customer is and reiterates that there is not one set standard operational

definition of who the customer is and what their needs are. Beyond this idea of multiple definitions of “customer,” Wallace (1999), argued that most scholars leave out the customers’ responsibilities when they define customers. These responsibilities are expectations that a customer is expected to follow to ensure optimal use of the product or service that they have purchased (Wallace, 1999).

Many scholars have identified situations in the business world that redefine the qualifications of the term “customer,” and many colleges have issues defining customers and the responsibilities of these customers. These situations include how safety standards on an airline mirror campus curriculum and grading policies (Tasie, 2010), car owners completing basic maintenance and putting gas in their car (Wallace 1999), or a fitness center where every member is welcome to follow their own personalized workout plan (Franz, 1998). Buck (2002) argues that students should not be viewed as customers and the motto the “customer is always right” is a generalization that doesn’t even apply in many businesses for health, legal, or other reasons.

Who is the Customer in Education?

Many scholars have varying opinions regarding who is the primary customer of community colleges. Scott (1999) mentions that students are not the only customers of higher education and suggests that parents, society in general, the government, and the research community should also be considered customers. Schwartzman (1995) argues that students cannot be the only customer as some of the students new to higher education may not know what they need to get out of the institution. If one classifies customers into separate categories, how does one allocate the priorities of the college’s customer? According to Courtney and Courtney (2006), “Viewing the taxpayer and employer as customer stresses course outcomes and valid assessments of student accomplishment. Viewing the student as customer stresses student

evaluations of teachers and retention (to keep the headcount high for the following semester)” (p. 3).

Mark (2013) argues that students, although not always funding their own education, are the primary customers. Students should be viewed more as customers than they currently are and when students don't feel their needs are being met, they will move to a different institution; there is no longer a captive audience (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007; Danjum & Rasli, 2012; Kuper, 2014; Parvu & Ipate, 2012; Scott 1999; Sines & Duckworth, 1994; Vauterin et al., 2011). Kuper (2014) discussed the rising number of institutions, nontraditional students, lifelong learners, and the ability of easy mobility and transfer. Some professionals center their comments around institutional finance needs, stating that students may be admitted because they can pay the full sticker price rather than on their educational abilities (Trachtenberg, Snyder, Bejou, Vedder, & Taylor, 2010).

Many scholars disagree with the idea that students should be considered customers (Buck, 2002; McGhee, 2015; Rinehart, 1993; Trachtenberg et al., 2010). McGhee (2015) states, “It seems strange to exhort universities to treat learners as customers at a time when businesses are increasingly trying to treat customers as learners” (p. 1). Buck (2002) argued that calling students customers has steered colleges away from the purpose of education, “the nurturing and facilitating of others not only to acquire knowledge, but also to grow intellectually” (p. 3). Furthermore, Rinehart (1993) stated that “students cannot be considered the primary customer of education for the purpose of educational quality, for this simple reason: students have no conception of what they must learn; they are, after all, students” (p. 59).

Reinvention of Education

The 21st century student can be seen walking around campus with his/her head bent over staring at his/her mobile device, and because of this, Rosen, Carrier, and Cheever (2010) coined this generation of students the iGen. This generation of students expects their information to be ubiquitous. This means the expectation is for information to be readily available on their mobile device, communication in electronic format, and for learning to occur seamlessly throughout their daily lives.

Defining the Issue

Before exploring possible solutions, one must fully understand the importance of the reinvention of education. Education has always been used as a method to prepare students for the working world. The working world is ever changing with new inventions, processes and procedures, and improving technologies. With these global changes, the workforce structure has been evolving; however, our education system has been lagging behind. This struggle can be seen in how our colleges are stacking up against other countries (Figure 3).

According to Kalantzis and Cope (2008), “schools themselves have reflected Fordist, post-Fordist and the productive diversity approaches to work” (p. 84). In the Fordist era (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008), schools developed curriculum to teach students the basic skills needed to work in an assembly line workforce. Students learned basic literacy and numeracy skills as well as social expectations, such as how to behave and take orders from authority. Being taught these basic skills in the classroom is appropriate if students are working in an assembly line career, as most assembly line workers need to learn a few tasks and then be able to repeat them day in and day out. However, as society evolved, so did the national workforce. As a society, the

demand was for products to be more customized and so the assembly line mentality also evolved to meet the needs of the consumer.

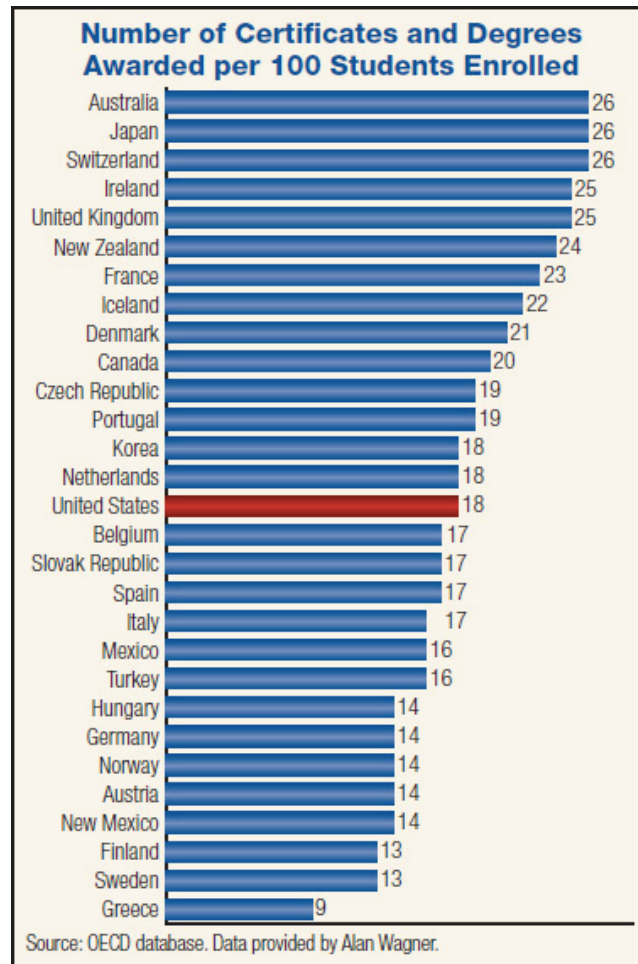


Figure 3: College Completion Has Never Been a U.S. Strength (Callan, 2008)

This movement towards more customized goods pushed the workforce out of the Fordist era into the post-Fordist era. In this era, companies revamped the standard assembly line workforce and moved to teams of people who each have flexible specializations. These teams are “constantly interacting with each other and the information systems, interacting as a group, reading the information flow and taking responsibility by intervening when necessary” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008, p. 57). With this new mindset in the workforce, the format of

education changed towards authentic education. Matthews (2010) defined authentic education as lessons that connect students to the real world; for example, by allowing students to have practical experience such as taking the students of a physics class to a nuclear power plant. Humphreys mirrors this idea of authentic education by pointing out that employees are demanding that schools teach students how to complete research projects and apply what they are learning to real-world settings (Humphreys, 2012).

After the post-Fordism era, the workforce moved into what has been coined “productive diversity” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008, p. 51). According to Kalantzis and Cope (2012), productive diversity environment workplaces will “foster autonomy and responsibility, that devolve power, that honor the differences among their members—that, in short, establish new working relationships and a new balance of agency” (p. 97). What this means for the workforce is that the lines between work, home, and personal and organizational lives are blurred and create a seamless work environment. This workforce can be seen in a variety of companies such as Whirlpool, but it is best seen within startup companies such as Enplug Inc. and FiveStar Inc. These companies rent locations where employees can live, work, entertain guests, and even sleep (Silverman, 2013). Unfortunately, the current design of our education systems has not caught up with the productive diversity workforce. Most community colleges have not developed training for their teachers and staff, nor have they put enough emphasis on this idea of the consistent availability of learning.

Background of Community Colleges

With the advancements in technology and the ease of accessing information, the development of a global workforce is critical. Colleges need to reflect these workforce changes and look into developing more ubiquitous learning environments. Over 20 years ago, Cavan

(1995) identified the need for the development of more distance learning programs: “With distance learning technology, community colleges will not only be able to provide training for traditional students but will also be able to provide opportunities for those needed baccalaureate programs, graduate programs, and continuing education for professionals” (p. 13). Cavan (1995) goes on to point out how distance learning creates global collaborative efforts. Since then, this need to move towards continual availability of learning has been echoed throughout many other publications. According to Rhoades (2012), “We are cheating our demographic future by closing the door to so many students and preventing them from educationally pursuing their talents to the fullest” (p. 7). The question is, with so many industry leaders over so many years identifying the need to move towards a more ubiquitous learning environment, why have community colleges been so slow to make the change?

U.S. community colleges are falling behind the curve in enrollment, completion, on-time completion, and transfers. According to Jones (2015), “While we have to ensure that many more students can attend college, we have done far too little to make certain that far more complete college, even when they take 50% more time to complete the degree than full-time attendance should require” (p. 3). Are these struggles due to the fact that the colleges are not meeting the expectations that their students demand from them? Are community college faculty and administrators not doing enough to incorporate technologies, distance education, and new teaching pedagogies into our community colleges and classrooms? Jones further goes on to point out that “success demands the sober recognition that we must reinvent centuries-old institutions to help ensure the success of students who have rarely succeeded” (p. 6). Why aren’t faculty and administrators making more efforts to reinvent their institutions to further the growth and meet the demands of their students?

Community colleges have been slow in moving forward and creating ubiquitous learning environments for their students. According to Humphreys (2012), “colleges and universities must continue to calibrate these learning outcomes to their missions and to twenty-first-century needs” (p. 5).

The idea for community colleges dates back to the late 19th century when visionary William Rainey Harper sought to revolutionize higher education in America (Kane & Rouse, 1999). At that time, William Rainey Harper was the president of the University of Chicago, and his vision was to separate the first two years of college from the second two years of college. He mapped out his plan based on the German “Gymnasium” and he desired to have six-year high schools and two year “junior colleges.” These junior colleges would be responsible for teaching lower division preparatory material and provide students with basic training to help promote career growth and opportunity. Community colleges were an uncharted territory and thrived as the new responsibilities and lack of a status quo meant that these institutions did not have to live up to any past traditions, alumni, employees, or philosophy (Cowen & Brawer, 2003).

Junior colleges saw their first surge in students after World War II due to the passing of the GI Bill which gave military veterans tuition vouchers to attend college (Kane & Rouse, 1999). The GI bill is identified as a turning point for community colleges, and enrollment in junior colleges doubled (Kane & Rouse, 1999). Enrollment increased again after the Korean War, but it was the 1960s, when baby boomers returned from the Vietnam War, that marks one of the most significant moments in the history of community colleges. After the Vietnam War, enrollment in junior colleges quadrupled and the number of junior colleges in America doubled from 440 in 1930 to over 1,000 during the 1970s (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Kane & Rouse, 1999).

As community colleges continued to develop, the mission of these institutions began to morph into providing community members access to post-secondary education. With this change, community colleges began to focus on the needs of their local communities. This mission and lack of status quo allowed community colleges to be flexible and develop into exactly what their specific communities needed (Quint-Rapoport, 2006).

Organizational Culture

Colleges need to look at their market orientation and ensure customer-focused organizational goals (Parvu & Ipate, 2012). Wahab (2016) reiterated that customer service has the potential to be dictated by the college's organizational culture; therefore, stipulating what type of priority the college gives to its customers.

The improvement process both creates and depends on cultural change. The appropriate culture has many elements including the internalization of quality and continuous improvement as a goal of all activities, the absolute priority of customer satisfaction, a systematic and rational approach to quality improvement issues, more open communication so that those further down are listened to by those further up, the greater involvement of a wider range of people in the decision making process, and the creation of high-trust social relationships (Tasie, 2010).

Obendhain & Johnson (2004) define culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that an organization learns as it responds to problems” (p. 98). Based on this definition, organizational cultures learn from the decisions that their leaders make confronted with a problem. The way these decisions are handled by the college's leadership then gets translated into the espoused beliefs of the organization (Schein & Schein, 2017). Furthermore, as discussed in the section on redefining education, community college's face the challenge of innovate or become obsolete (Obendhain & Johnson, 2004). If community colleges want to continue to

remain innovative and relevant, the community college must ensure that its culture and espoused beliefs are those that reflect providing a quality customer service experience to its students.

How Organizational Culture is Defined in the Literature

According to Ouchi and Wilkins (1985), organizational culture was born out of the research and literature around organizational sociology: “Organizational culture is the idea of an organization as a social phenomenon that has its own features which distinguish it from an environment on the one hand and from the individual desires and predispositions of its members on the other” (p. 469). Smart and St. John (1996) suggested that higher education researchers define organizational culture as “shared beliefs and values held by organization members” (p. 221). Tierney (1988) defined an organization’s culture as “what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it. It concerns decisions, actions, and communication both on an instrumental and a symbolic level” (p. 3). Ouchi and Wilkins (1985) discuss “the interpretation of a formal organization as a purposive aggregation of individuals who exert common effort towards a shared and explicitly recognized goal” (p. 465).

Organizational Culture Theories Related to Student Customer Service

Because organizational cultures are not easy to intentionally direct down a specific predetermined path, scholars typically turn to examining environmental factors to explain the organizational culture (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; Schein & Schein, 2017; Smart & St. John, 1996). There are two lenses to view organizational culture in an organization: (1) in the way organization’s cultures are classified (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983) and (2) in the way organizations share data (Schein & Schein, 2017).

Organizational Culture on an Instrumental Level

Quinn and Rohrbaugh's (1983) competing values framework has been a seminal work in the field of organizational culture. It looked at 17 pairs of effectiveness values found in organizations that were opposite in nature, such as flexibility versus stability or internal versus external (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). When these values were graphed in a three-dimensional space, four main quadrants appeared: human resources, open systems, internal processes, and rational goal models (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983).

The competing values framework was groundbreaking research and paved the way for other similar frameworks such as Smart and St. John's 1996 cultural congruence for organizations. The cultural congruence model has been consistently referred to and further modified (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Lukas, Whitwell, & Heidi, 2013; Obendhain & Johnson, 2004). Even though many variations exist, the focus of this research was on Smart and St. John's (1996) cultural congruence of organizations model as the lens for viewing organizational culture on an instrumental level. Smart and St. John (1996) focused their cultural congruence research on the following four frames: clan, bureaucratic, adhocracy, and market cultures.

The clan culture is characterized by having a flexible internal emphasis (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). Furthermore, clan cultures typically are more likely to be spontaneous and have a short-term orientation (Smart & St. John, 1996). Directly opposed to clan cultures, market cultures are characterized by having controlled external emphasis (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). According to Smart and St. John (1996), "Market cultures are more likely to be predictable, stable, and have a long-term orientation. Those with a dominant market culture are more successful in their interactions with external environments" (p. 223).

Bureaucratic cultures thrive in internally controlled organizations which stress stable short-term orientation (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; Smart & St. John, 1996). Diametrically opposed to the bureaucratic cultures are the adhocracy cultures. The adhocracy cultures are described as being flexible and focused on external positioning and are generally focused on long-term achievement-oriented activities (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; Smart & St. John, 1996).

Organizational Culture on a Symbolic Level

Within each cultural congruence quadrant, the culture can be identified using Schein's three levels of culture: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. Schein and Schein (2017) defined the term "level" as the "degree to which the cultural phenomenon is visible to you as participant or observer" (p. 17). Symbolic artifacts, beliefs, and underlying assumptions build a predetermined level of understanding about an institution including the level of customer service an institution may provide (Harder, 1999).

Artifacts. Artifacts are tangible, cultural symbols that are embedded deep within the DNA of the culture (Harder, 1999; Schein & Schein, 2017). Some common artifacts include metaphors, stories, rituals or ceremonies, or mission, vision, or values statements (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Harder, 1999). Ouchi and Wilkins (1985) suggested that "popular stories may have more influence on decisions and commitment than rules and statistics" (p. 470). Furthermore, Ouchi and Wilkins (1985) highlighted the use of rhetoric, stories, and metaphors to help "participants in a culture to use the past to understand the uncertain or complex future" (p. 474).

Sometimes stories can become metaphors that demonstrate an institutions climate, mission, vision, and culture. This can be seen in stories such as the following Nordstrom customer service story:

It's about a man who went into the Nordstrom in Anchorage, Alaska, to return a set of tires. Nordstrom—an upscale retailer that sells mostly apparel, shoes, and accessories—

does not sell tires. The customer bought the tires at the store that occupied the same space prior to Nordstrom moving in. Still, after some discussion, the Nordstrom store manager decided to allow the customer to return the tires there. (Conte, 2012, para. 6 & 7)

Moreover, Mio, Riggio, Levin, and Reese (2005) suggested that “speeches that contain more metaphors may be perceived to be more inspiring because they can stir up emotional connections with the topic or with the speakers while also conveying the message of action” (p. 288).

Espoused Beliefs and Values. Espoused beliefs and values of an organization are those that reflect a leader’s original beliefs and values (Khandelwal & Mohendra, 2010; Schein & Schein, 2017). Strong cultures are defined as those where there is harmony between espoused beliefs and values and actual organizational practice (Smart & St. John, 1996). Conversely, Smart and St. John (1996), pointed out that “weak cultures are characterized by incongruence between espoused beliefs and actual practices” (p. 223).

Basic Underlying Assumptions. Basic underlying assumptions refers to unspoken and sometimes taken-for-granted norms that are present in an organizational culture; some examples of underlying assumptions are mutual respect, time orientation, dress code, and conflict resolution methods (Harder, 1999; Ott, 1989; Schein & Schein, 2017). Typically, these assumptions are not taught explicitly to new members of an organization, but rather they are learned through observation, modeling, and the cultural artifacts (Ott, 1989). Furthermore, these underlying assumptions can preconsciously define how a culture is perceived both internally to the organization and externally (Manning, 2013; Ott, 1989).

Student Experience

Every student has a unique experience when attending college from the institution a student selected, to the classes and major selected, and even to the clubs and friends that are

made along the student's journey. These experiences have come to the forefront of discussions and research around student success and retention (Brown, 2019; Scott, 2014). Tinto (2012) explored how the student's experiences outside the classroom at a college have a direct correlation to the student's success and retention. Astin (1973) argued that a student's involvement in the institution and the perceptions of the institution due to those interactions creates how well the student feels he/she fits in at their institution. Furthermore, Schwartzman (1995), pointed out "if a student's needs are not satisfied, if she lacks what she must have to continue, then the student does not return or does not graduate" (p. 21).

Brown (2019) stated that the student experience is being prepared to serve a more diverse learner community that will continue to require greater thought, planning, and resources. Schwartzman (1995) took the idea of an increasingly diverse learning community one step further, pointing out that "some groups of students may have desires, needs, or interest may conflict with other groups" (p. 14). Kuper (2014) adds, "Today's nontraditional students have the same service expectations when selecting a higher education institution as they do when making any other major purchase" (p. 1). Opp and Gsetti (2014), called for community colleges to "internationalize the student experience to better prepare students to live and work in a global economy" (p. 67).

Tasie (2010) stated, "Quality includes innovation, which is the search for more effective ways of meeting customers' requirements, as well as improving the efficiency of existing operations" (p. 310). The more an institution knows its market orientation, the more likely it is to hit its institutional goals (Parvu & Ipate, 2012). With colleges wanting to know more and more about their learners, data analytics and big data has become a large part in tailoring learners' individualized needs (McGhee, 2015). Ackerman and Schibrowsky (2007) pointed out the oddity

that online retailers such as Amazon and eBay greet customers by name every time the site is accessed, yet when a student enters the school library, food services, or classroom, it is an exception if they are greeted by name.

A fitness center is a metaphor that Franz (1998) used to frame what colleges may begin to look like in the future. Amidst the organized chaos of a fitness center, each member is following his/her own path to success. In a college setting, “it will no doubt look messier and seem more confusing than the neat, assembly-line educational factories or the glamorous educational shopping malls, but it will also give better value to society and produce much more capable graduate” (p. 69).

Change in Traditional Student’s Expectations and Needs

With the physical barrier of the distance a student lives from an institution becoming less and less of a limitation determining which college a student will attend, students’ expectations of their chosen institution have changed. According to Danjum & Rasli (2012), “Today’s higher education customers, notably students, expect better services across all dimensions of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy” (p. 350). Furthermore, students are becoming more critical about the value of their money and what they receive from their selected institution (Parvu & Ipate, 2012). As institutions continue to compete for the limited numbers of students, some institutions have looked at lowering the cost of their education. However, “if low price impacts service quality, the value attached to the price may be threatened” (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, p. 323). Destiny Solutions (n.d.) states, “Today’s students expect a high level of customer service – before and after enrollment – in all interactions with their institution” (p. 2).

In 1999, Scott (1999) had correlated the small share that student fees covered of instructional costs to the reason why students had limited power in universities responding to their demands. Through his research, Scott warned of the free market in higher education and the trend of tuition fees rising faster than inflation. Twenty years later, Goldstein and Goldstein (2019) argued that the state funding reductions have caused colleges to continue to increase tuition and fees. Since students are now paying for a larger portion of the institution cost, they are expecting their voices to be heard and their demands met. Since students are supporting a larger part of the college budget:

Colleges and universities need to treat students as a business treats its best customers. It becomes important, then, that colleges and universities make the effort to learn about students, their needs, their preferences, and the criteria they use to make choices. (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007, p. 328)

Colleges Becoming a Competitive Market

Wahab (2016) discussed how education is becoming a reality for all people and not only for the elite. There are more places than ever where people can learn a new skill, trade, or talent. There are institutions, massive open online courses (MOOC), YouTube channels, and businesses that are being created by the minute, making competition for the student fiercer. As the educational marketplace becomes accessible to a wider audience, “it’s time for educational institutions to face two facts: they are in a competitive battle for students, and students are customers” (Sines & Duckworth, 1994, p. 2).

Wallace (1999) stated, “Schools no longer operate in an environment where students have limited choices about where to attend school” (p. 1). One effect from this change in the educational marketplace from an oligopoly market to a more competitive monopolistic market is that quality of service that a student receives is increasingly important (Clemes et al., 2001; Danjum & Rasli, 2012; Scott, 1999; Seeman, & O’Hara, 2006; Voss et al., 2007; Wahab, 2016);).

All countries are feeling the pressure of competing in a global and ubiquitous world (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008; Smyre & Richardson, 2016; Vauterin et al., 2011). According to Scott (1999), “Few would deny that, where there is true competition, customer service is an important ingredient of business success” (p. 197).

Some traditional colleges may be hesitant to change and could potentially miss out on a large population of new students (Danjumi & Rasli, 2012). Mark (2013) agreed, stating, “It is therefore important for educational institutions, if they are going to remain viable in a time of unprecedented global competition, to ensure that students receive an education that meets their needs in our modern world” (p. 8).

Student-as-a-Customer Metaphor

Metaphors such as the “student-as-a-customer,” which is discussed in detail throughout this research, can also represent a “structural change in a field of meanings” (Gerhard & Russell, 1984, p. 95). Bolman and Deal (2013) stated, “Metaphors are used to convey emotional meaning and create understandable images to represent more complicated issues and, therefore, can more easily influence attitudes and actions” (p. 262). According to Heracleous and Klaering (2014), the “use of metaphors can lead to the creation of new meaning through the creative juxtaposition of previously unrelated concepts” (p. 139). Even more importantly, “metaphors can also appeal to people and groups with diverse interests, as they are inherently ambiguous, and they convey a multiplicity of connotations and meanings” (Heracleous & Klaering, 2014, p. 139).

Earlier research from Schwartzman (1995) found that “the configuration of students as customers has significant consequences for how the relationships among students, between students and teachers, and between educational institutions and students are conceived” (p. 10). Tasie (2010) added, “The forces of management rationalism have positioned universities more

squarely as players in an education marketplace and students have embraced the role of customer —‘shopping around for courses that best suit their desires’” (p. 309).

Using the framework of the student-as-a-customer metaphor, one might find students shopping around for the courses, schedule, classroom modality, or major that best suits their needs (Franz, 1998). The notion of educational institutions using the metaphor of customer implies that higher education institutions are looking at education as a business, thereby setting the expectations that the institution intends to treat their students as a business treats their customers (Schwartzman, 1995).

With the change in mindset from student to customer, institutions have to think of this change as “not just a change in semantics, but a change of culture” (Schwartzman, 1995). Budd (2016) sees the student’s relationship with an institution as “similar to the relationship between a customer and a seller” (p. 26).

Although many scholars believe the framework should be student-as-a-customer, there are many alternative metaphoric names for similar methodologies. Franz (1998) suggested finding a different guiding metaphor for students, “one that treats students as partners in the educational process” (p. 65). Halbesleben, Becker, and Buckley (2003) focused on student-as-labor contributor rather than student-as-a-customer. Halbesleben et al. (2003), viewed student-as-laborer students as a part-time employee who, although is a customer of service, has to contribute their own labor to maximize the value of the education. Tasie (2010) suggested combining student-as-a-customer and student-as-learner together to provide a learning experience which provides student success, learning, and growth. Scott (1999) looked at the student-as-a-customer metaphor with the lens that “as students, they belong to us; as customers, the learning process is mutually owned” (p. 199).

Implications in Higher Education of Student-as-a-Customer Metaphor

Parvu and Ipate (2012) suggested that to succeed in using the student-as-a-customer framework, the college's employees must have a strong understanding of expectations and needs of their customers, the students, upon their entrance to school. Schings (n.d.) focused on student perceptions of student-as-a-customer and discussed the need to view student-as-a-customer as service dominant rather than exchange dominant interactions. Schings also noted that student-as-a-customer could be an available tool for institutions who are looking to increase enrollment as long as the students are given clear guidelines and are co-producers.

Motwani and Kumar (1997) also discussed co-production, which is a theory that shares responsibility between company and customer. Co-production argues that student success is both the college's and student's responsibility (Motwani & Kumar 1997). Franz (1998) argued that colleges shouldn't view students as customers or products, but rather as partners who are being trained to learn and build character and self-motivation.

Schwartzman (1995) identified issues with the student-as-a-customer metaphor as educational institutions typically have internal and external customers and their needs are significantly different. Courtney and Courtney (2006) discussed the implications of classifying students as the customer, specifically on how student-as-a-customer in education can cause tenure and other processes to be weighted heavily on student evaluations rather than content.

Budd (2016) discussed the idea of student-as-a-customer at two institutions, one in the United Kingdom and the other in Germany. The study looked to see if students perceived their education as an entitlement or something to be earned. In the United Kingdom, the study found students thought about their career and with that the reputation of the college in every instance. However, since the idea of institution reputation was a relatively new idea in Germany, Budd's (2016) research found that fewer students were focused on the reputation of their selected

institution. Nell and Cant (2014) focused on students' perceptions of quality service in South Africa higher education, and their research found positive correlation between students' perceptions and the quality of service provided.

Buck (2002) disagreed with the idea of student-as-a-customer, "the concept of 'customer' has blinded these individuals to the real purpose of education: the nurturing and facilitating of others not only to acquire knowledge, but also to grow intellectually" (p. 3). Furthermore, Budd (2016) pointed out that students not only are the recipients of education, but that students are also actively involved and "unlike other services—the ongoing benefits of a degree are not immediate and as such can only be assessed over the longer term" (p. 24). According to Destiny Solutions (n.d.), "Leading customer service is about forging long-lasting relationships between the student and their institution" (p. 3).

Summary

The recent push for community colleges to provide their students with a global, ubiquitous, and individualized experience has brought the need to gain a better understanding of how customer service is both defined and viewed. As technology continues to allow students to delve into the global educational marketplace, the need for community colleges to remain competitive is at the forefront of many institutional initiatives, including the student's experience while in and out of the classroom (Tinto, 2012). As the literature suggests, the educational market is at a crossroad between students and customers. This review of literature provided a deeper understanding of the intersection of (1) customer service, (2) reinvention of education, (3) background of community colleges, (4) organizational culture, (5) student experience, and (6) student-as-a-customer metaphor.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the multiplicity of meanings of the phrase “customer service” and the perceived impacts on the service provided by employee groups in Illinois community colleges. The outcome of the results was used to develop a video for use by community colleges for customer service training. This chapter is divided into the following sections: (1) Sample, (2) Design of Study, (3) Instrumentation, (4) Pilot, (5) Data Collection, and (6) Data Analysis.

This research model looked at how the recent change of funding sources has modified the community college environment. In many cases, these changes have turned the students into a primary funding source as the community college’s customer.

Sample

With the data obtained from surveys and in-depth interviews, the researcher used mixed methods to gain an understanding of what the phrase “customer service” means in the context of community colleges within Illinois. In order to get the best understanding of the multiplicity of meanings of customer service, the researcher utilized the two-tier sampling technique (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To represent the entire study’s population, a cross-section of colleges of various sizes (college student data for purposes of describing the demographic) and types was used. There are 37 individual community colleges and two multi-college systems in Illinois (Illinois Community

College Board [ICCB], 2017). Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (Carnegie, 2016) separates two-year institutions into five categories based on each institution's full-time enrollment (FTE) count. FTE is calculated by full-time enrollment plus one-third the part-time enrollment. Carnegie's (2016) five categories range from very small, under 500 FTE students, to very large, defined as having over 10,000 FTE students. The two Illinois multi-college systems were excluded from this study due to fact that the cultural organization of each of these systems had the potential to differ significantly from single community college systems and did not fit the profile of institutions being researched. The cultural difference has potential to impact an employee's perception, both real and perceived, of customer service. William Rainey Harper College was also excluded from the study as the researcher's involvement in the community college's customer service initiatives had the potential to bias employee perceptions.

To ensure random stratification, each college name was keyed into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet according to their Carnegie FTE category. The random number generator equation, '=RAND ()' (Trochim, 2006), was used to randomly order the community colleges. For each FTE category, the researcher selected the college which had the randomly assigned number closest to zero.

Once the initial three colleges were selected, the researcher reached out to the presidents at the identified colleges to see if they were willing to participate in the research. When a president did not respond or declined to participate in the survey, the college with the next closest number to zero in the same classification was selected.

Following Institutional Board approval at each institution, an email was sent to every employee's work email from a representative within their college (see Appendix A). This email asked the recipient to participate in this research study and provided the link to the survey (see

Appendix B). FreeOnlineSurveys was selected as the host for the survey questionnaire for several reasons including contingency, participant confidentiality, and ease of use for study participants. Contingency questions provided the opportunity for the researcher to automatically direct survey participants to multiple next questions based on their response. In this research, the contingency questions were utilized so if a participant did not qualify for the survey, it would automatically direct them to a “thank you, but you don’t qualify” page. Using the contingency questions to develop the online survey allowed the researcher to easily ask follow-up questions to only specific populations based on their responses.

The researcher understands that due to time, cost, and practicality, it was not possible to “interview, observe, or analyze all the people, activities, or documents within the case,” and therefore the researcher planned to sample within the case (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2016, p. 99).

Participant Criteria

Within each of these three selected sites, there were up to five participants selected for phase two of the research. The criteria for selecting these participants included the following four demographic contingencies criteria:

1. In order to ensure the different community college employee group’s definitions of customer service were represented, each community college had up to one participant in each employee group represented (full-time faculty, full-time staff, administration, part-time faculty, part-time staff).
2. Due to the very public, interpretive, and subjective nature of videography, all in-depth interview participants must have indicated, at the end of the initial survey, a willingness to share further information on video.
3. Considering that this research is exploring the multiplicities of meanings of the phrase “customer service” in Illinois community colleges, participants must have been currently working in an Illinois Community College at the time of the study.
4. Since this research is aimed at community college employee perceptions of customer service, participants must have had at least one year of experience at a community college.

Design of the Study

The methodology used in this study was a mixed-methods study based in the bounded system of employees at community colleges. The intent of this research is to tell the narrative of the participants' stories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). How employees perceive the phrase "customer service" may affect the participants' views on how the employees provide service to community college students.

This study utilized the interview methodology to uncover participants' personal experiences and stories relating to the phrase "customer service." The use of interviews provided the researcher the ability to gather reliable and comparative data between participants, which provided an opportunity to analyze a variety of alternative viewpoints.

In conclusion, this study employed both quantitative and qualitative data with a post-modern methodology that explored the multiplicity of meanings of the phrase "customer service" through the lens of community college employee groups in Illinois. The research revolved around survey data and in-person interviews with the participants providing a narrative story and the context to the multiplicity of meanings of the phrase "customer service."

Instrumentation

The research survey and interview questions were developed in such a way to receive a variety of different data based on the customer service model developed for this study (see Figure 4). The two instruments developed for this study included a questionnaire and an interview protocol.

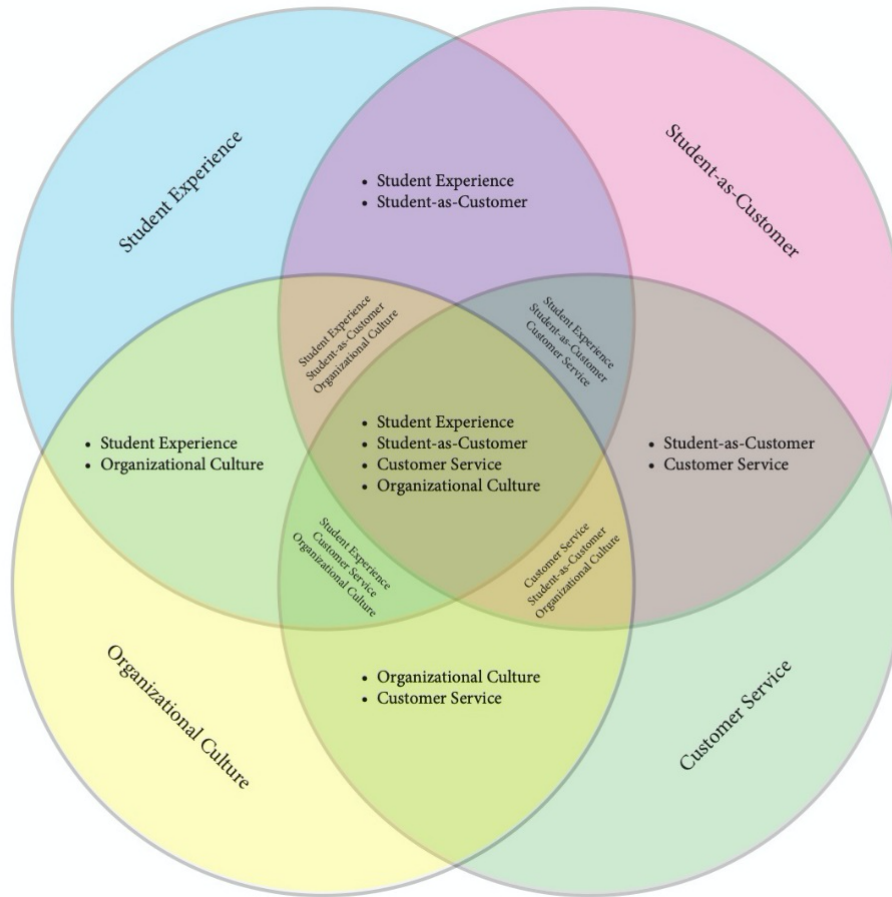


Figure 4: Kaminski's Customer Service Model

The online survey included close-ended questions using the Likert scale as well as several open-end responses in such a way as to acquire more detailed information (see Appendix C). The survey included questions about the participant's demographic information, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions. These responses helped the researcher obtain information about the study participants and uncover participant's past experiences (Lake, 2017). For more specific data collection within the randomly stratified institutions, some specific demographic questions were asked to get the specific sample of the survey respondents.

The interview protocol included five open-ended expansive questions that allowed the participants to take the question in several directions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012) (see Appendix

D). Several of the open-ended questions had probe questions to highlight specific areas that may not have been addressed in the participants initial response (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since the interview protocol was semi-structured, the researcher had the ability to ask unplanned questions based on the interviewee's responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The open-ended questions were structured from the least invasive, provide a definition, to the most invasive, the interviewee's perception of the service provided to students at their site. Each interview protocol lasted less than one hour and was conducted in a neutral setting at the study sites.

With the sampling method selected, the researcher was most concerned about the social threats to construct validity based on the experimenter's expectancies. Since the research intent was to derive a better understanding of perception of the phrase "customer service," the researcher was concerned about consciously or unconsciously imparting beliefs and bias through the survey question's language and format. In order to mitigate these threats to construct validity, the researcher conducted a pilot study completed by similar non-study participants to vet the validity and usability of the survey questions, ease of use, and technology.

The researcher made decisions concerning the type of outcome project that would best display the stories described through the research. The researcher made the decision to express the results with a video documentary, which explored the questions and results from the data collected. Once the type of study was identified, analytic questions were developed. During this phase, the researcher used the pilot study to analyze and develop analytic questions to ensure the questions probed for information that was relevant to the key goals of the study.

Pilot Study

As mentioned previously, the survey questionnaire was reviewed to ensure that the questions reflected the customer service model presented earlier. The reviewers were community college employees from three of the groups represented in the study. After engaging with the survey, the researcher asked the reviewers to provide feedback based on the tool's ease of use and the clarity of the survey questions.

The reviewers provided feedback on ease of use, reporting that the tool FreeOnlineSurveys was easy to access and use, the amount of content on each page was not overwhelming, and the length of the survey was manageable. The one comment several reviewers had was that the original colors selected were distracting and hard to read. The survey colors were modified based on this feedback.

The reviewers provided feedback on the clarity of the survey questions that included rephrasing several questions to ensure the intent of the questions was not obscured. Concerning the demographic questions, feedback was provided about ensuring inclusivity with the language about gender and ethnicity. Based on comments from the reviewers, the statement on the customer service Likert scale, "I believe customer service should be provided to students" was divided in two separate statements, one statement for academic interactions and one statement for non-academic interactions.

In preparing the interview protocol, the pilot study was completed to vet the validity and usability of the interview question and to ensure that environment and technology was appropriate. The pilot study gave the researcher the opportunity to test the technology equipment and not only ensure that the equipment was working as expected, but also verify that the camera angles, lighting, and sound provided adequate footage for creating a powerful, emotional documentary for the final portion of this dissertation.

The interview protocol pilot provided the researcher with information regarding how to physically set up the cameras and seating in a way that the light provided in the room enhanced the interviewee in the video frame. The reviewers of the interview protocol provided feedback on the original interview questions including suggestions to add a question to define customer service, asking the study participants to reflect on the service the participant provided to students, and to provide the participants perceptions of how they believe their community college students view service at their institution.

Data Collection

The mixed-methods format of this research lends itself best to the use of multiple data collection sources ensuring a well-rounded understanding of meaning of customer service in higher education. The research was aimed at exploring the multiplicity of meanings of the phrase customer service; therefore, the use of the mixed-methods study provided evidence which shows the research has been explored from a variety of angles. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained how an individual validates data from multiple methods through the example of “what someone tells you in an interview can be checked against what you observe on site or what you read about in your documents” (pg. 245). Similar to how a global positioning system triangulates a location through the use of three separate satellites to pinpoint with precise accuracy where the location is in relation to the satellite, the data in this study was viewed from multiple angles to ensure that the research was refined, and the results were pinpointed. The triangulation data collection methods in this research were surveys, interviews, and documentation (college student data).

The utilization of surveys, interviews, and documents allowed for data to be re-verified through multiple methods. The surveys provided anonymous aggregated data, the interviews provided unique personal experiences, and the college student data provided a framework. By

integrating the results from the different formats together, the researcher was able to support the understanding of the multiplicity of meanings of the phrase “customer service” in community colleges.

Just as the results of the data were fact-checked against the different methods for triangulation, where the data was derived from can also be triangulated. In this study, the research was collected from multiple sources. As identified in the sampling section, the research was derived from a cross-section of community colleges in Illinois and allowed the research to be gathered from different perspectives throughout the state.

Surveys

A survey link to FreeOnlineSurveys.com was sent out via email to the three sites identified in the multi-methods study. Survey invitations were sent out by a member of the designated college to each employee’s college email. Participants were provided unique links based on their community college’s FTE category so that participant data could be coded accordingly. Participants were asked to complete the survey in one session within a two-week time period. The researcher hoped the short time period would help prevent history threat thus the researcher minimized the possibility for participants to react to media coverage or historical events that may have altered their perception of the phrase “customer service.” As discussed in the section on selection criteria, once the surveys were returned, the response rate and willingness to participate further dictated who at the three sites was invited for face-to-face in-depth interviews (see Appendix E).

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow for flexibility and flow within the interview environment. The researcher was an active observer and presented the interview

questions in a natural setting. The interviews were no longer than one hour in length and were videotaped with two cameras; each video included its own separate audio recording to ensure proper audio for the final documentary.

One advantage of video recording the interviews was that the researcher had the opportunity to actively engage in the interview while having the opportunity to re-watch the sessions for any missed connotation or content. Since the researcher had the opportunity to re-watch the sessions after the conclusion of the interview, the researcher was able to gain a better understanding of the body language, nonverbal cues, and tone of voice of the participants.

The researcher was an active observer throughout this research project. Having the ability to participate in the research provided the researcher the ability to encourage a conversation style interview and was able to make the decisions in real-time to probe a participant further if needed during the semi-structured interviews.

Data Handling and Securing Data

The research required several data management techniques to be in place in order for the easiest analysis as possible. This mixed-methods study database was a Microsoft Excel database, giving the researcher the ability to create forms, queries, and easily export data. Due to both digital and print documentation, having an organized database pointing the researcher to the correct piece of information was paramount.

Within the digital mixed-methods study database (O'Halloran, Tan, Pham, Bateman, & Moere, 2016), the researcher employed storyboarding (Orr, Golas, & Yao, 1994; Walker et al., 2015) and coding techniques (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to identify key themes and messages within the documentation. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), "coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of

your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data” (pg. 199). The Center for Evaluation and Research (n.d.) recommends developing a storyline as one of the first steps in data analysis. The University of California at Berkley Graduate School of Journalism (2015), recommends the following three key components to developing an effective storyboard:

- Define the boundaries of the story within the available resources and time constraints.
- Organize and focus the story by dividing the story into logical and non-logical parts including events.
- Decide what type of multimedia to use for each part of the story.

Because the data included video documentation, data security was of the utmost importance. The raw data files were stored in a minimum of three locations, one external redundant array of inexpensive disks (RAID) 10 system, one external encrypted drive, and one cloud storage solution. The mirroring and striping of the drives in the RAID system provided both the redundancy of the data as well as maintaining a quick performance for organizing the data. When identifying a cloud solution, the researcher verified that security protocols in place were current with industry standards and ensured that the cloud solution does not in any way own the data placed on their servers.

Ethics and Trustworthiness: Protecting Subjects

To gain the trust of the subjects and viewers, the researcher focused on the protection of the study’s subjects. With the inclusion of videography, protecting the subjects played an even more predominate role throughout the duration of the study.

Informed consent was one way that the researcher protected the subjects (Appendices F and G). Since the researcher created a documentary, the informed consent also included the three topics identified by Mosher (2011).

1. The high-level goals of the project.
2. Determination of who is the intended audience.
3. Identifying possible conflicts of interest.

These three topics were discussed with the potential subjects prior to any cameras rolling. Due to the personal nature of filming subjects, the researcher obtained both written and filmed consent as a way to protect both the subject and the researcher in case of any future litigation (Mosher, 2011).

Responsibility to the Subjects

Throughout the study, the researcher kept in mind the responsibility one has to the study's subjects. This responsibility included ensuring that the study's subjects are not exploited through the documentary process.

Regardless of which research methodology is chosen, quality, validity, trustworthiness, and ethics need to be addressed in the final product. During the entire process of the study, the researcher continually addressed the rigor of the research. Although the topic of exploring the multiplicity of meanings of the phrase "customer service" is based on the notion that each individual has a unique definition of customer service characterized through the reality that each individual had different experiences throughout life, it was still important to ensure that the research study maintained the protection of the study's subjects.

Researcher Bias

Although the researcher used multiple sources of data and multiple methods of data collection to confirm the validity of the data, the researcher understood that research bias would still be a contributing factor in the analysis of the data.

The researcher's past employment with companies that pride themselves on their exceptional customer service has positioned the researcher to have a pre-defined understanding of customer service. This understanding tied with the trend of student-as-a-customer and motivated the researcher to look further into what the phrase "customer service" means in a higher education setting (Scott, 1999).

Responsibility to the Viewer

In post-production, the documentary must maintain the viewer's trust. According to Mosher (2011) the raw footage should be organized and edited in such a way that keeps the integrity while still building in a sense of curiosity, drama, and entertainment. This trust was built in the way in which the documentary was edited.

Data Analysis

As with the study proposed in this research, descriptive studies are typically done when minimal research is available in the specific area being studied. The lack of inferential statistics does not limit the potential growth that the results of this study may bring to the current academia body of research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Since descriptive studies do not include hypothesis, Type 1 and 2 errors were not addressed in this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

During Collection Analysis

The researcher reviewed field notes as a way to continuously analyze while conducting formal interviews, modifying the interview structure to pursue specific themes or leads discovered in previous interviews. Similarly, when different themes emerged during the process, the researcher incorporated these themes and patterns with participants to fill in any gaps in data discovery (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A key component to this research was the video footage; the researcher used visual devices to help bring clarity to the analysis. Storyboards were a key data management and analysis technique used throughout the research (Orr et al., 1994; Walker et al., 2015).

Survey Data Analysis

Basic summary statistics were utilized for each question in the Likert format (frequencies of each response as well as means and standard deviations for each question). Open-ended questions were analyzed via content analysis. The results of survey analysis were integrated with the results of the video interviews.

Use of Field Notes

The researcher utilized field notes to identify the researcher's thoughts and observations that occurred during and immediately after the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After every face-to-face interview, the researcher left the interviewing environment and jotted down a memo regarding the interaction. These notes helped the researcher later when exploring further analysis of the interviews.

Coding

Along with the digital component to this research, both print and college demographic data were coded. The researcher identified codes using three categories: pre-assigned codes, open codes, and digital video coding (Center for Evaluation and Research, 2012). Pre-assigned codes were themes that were defined prior to starting the analysis process, while the use of open coding was used to define codes that were developed through the analysis of the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Unique to the digital videos, the

researcher's digital coding entailed marking the videos in Final Cut Pro with flags identifying the time stamp where different themes materialized.

Storyboarding

Following the accepted processes of creating a movie or documentary, storyboarding played a large role in the qualitative research. Furthermore, the storyline was a beginning step to describe the research evaluation in general terms.

Post-Collection Analysis

After managing the data through the use of coding, the researcher inputted all the data into the mixed-methods study database. The researcher then used this database to create queries that pulled specific data into designated groups. For example, the researcher created a query that pulled all the traits provided of customer service into their own report. The researcher continued to create queries for each identified code.

Once these data were separated by code, the researcher analyzed each individual coded segment by reviewing the storyboard and seeing how the code supports the story (Walker et al., 2015). The use of the database allowed the researcher to break down the data into manageable parts that enabled the ability to search for patterns and find relevant information that helped answer the initial purpose statement.

Summary

This research was conducted as a mixed-methodology study and was used in the development of a customer service training video. Participating institutions were selected randomly based on Carnegie Classification size. Through the use of surveys and in-person interviews, both qualitative and quantitative data was collected. Since there was a video

component the researcher had a responsibility to both the research participants and the viewers to build a compelling video that did not take away from the integrity of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the multiplicities of meanings of the phrase “customer service” and the perceived impacts on the service provided by employee groups in Illinois community colleges. This chapter discusses each of the study’s research questions:

- Research Question 1: What are the multiple dimensions of the phrase “customer service’ in community colleges?
- Research Question 2: How do employees’ perceptions of “customer service’ impact the services they provide to community college students?
- Research Question 3: Why are individuals considered customers prior to enrollment into college and students after they are enrolled?

This chapter will discuss the findings collected during the video interviews. The video files created for this study are available for review (see Appendix I).

RQ1 Results

What are the multiple dimensions of the phrase “customer service” in community colleges?

RQ 1 was addressed with the survey response data and in-person video interviews. The survey asked participants to rate their perceptions on a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) and respond to three open-ended questions.

As can be seen in Table 1, approximately 73-83% strongly agreed with each question. The respondents strongly agreed in general that customer service is important, that they had

received outstanding customer service, and had been in situations where better customer service was needed. Over 82% of respondents strongly agreed that customer service has a place on a community college campus.

Table 1. *Research Question 1 Results*

SURVEY QUESTION	STRONGLY DISAGREE %	DISAGREE %	NEUTRAL %	AGREE %	STRONGLY AGREE %	N	MEAN
I believe customer service is important when purchasing a product or service.	0.00	0.00	1.41	25.35	73.24	71	4.72
I have received outstanding service.	0.00	1.41	2.82	18.31	77.46	7	4.72
I have been in a situation where I wish the customer service was better.	0.00	2.90	1.45	13.04	82.61	69	4.75
I believe providing customer service has a place on a community college campus.	0.00	1.43	1.43	14.29	82.86	70	4.79

In terms of the open-ended responses, each survey participant was asked to provide three characteristics of customer service. Out of the 199 responses, *friendliness* was the most common theme when asked to identify characteristics of customer service. The theme of friendliness appeared 29 times, the next most commonly used theme was *knowledgeable* with 23 responses. After these two characteristics, the following five themes appeared: helpful (14 responses), respectful (13 responses), attentive (12 responses), empathy (12 responses), and listener (12 responses).

Based on the 71 given definitions of customer service, which were provided in the open-ended responses of the survey, the most frequent key word used was “customer” which appeared 37 times. Appearing with a frequency of 25 times within the definitions was the word “provide/provided.” “Service” and “Assist” were tied for usage with 16 times. Following close behind the top three usages were “people/person” (15 times) and “students” (13 times).

A few examples of definitions provided are as follows:

- Survey Respondent 7 suggested that customer service is “assisting a customer in achieving their goal(s) in a way that is both pleasant and thorough. If a customer's goal cannot be reached in a particular interaction, providing clear and correct guidance for next steps.”
- Survey Respondent 17 stated that “customer service is providing resources so that the ‘customer’ can have problems and questions addressed in a timely manner and making sure that their “buying’ experience is ‘hassle free.’”
- Survey Respondent 18 responded that “customer service is providing support to students and community members as needed.”
- Survey Respondent 46 defined customer service as “providing help and assistance to make a person's event/experience enjoyable and without problems.”
- Survey Respondent 65 suggested that customer service is “how an employee (faculty or staff) assists a customer(student).”

Addressing the multiple dimensions of customer service, each participant of the in-person interviews was asked to define customer service. Although all in-person interviewees identified the need to provide individuals attending community college with a quality education, some interviewees were hesitant using the word “customer” to define these individuals. The following four common dimensions around the definition of customer service emerged as a response to this question.

1. Customer service is providing a product or service which meets the needs of the intended audience.

Comments from the interviewed employees in all three community colleges support this statement and include the following responses.

- Large Community College Administrator: “Designing and deploying a product delivery system to meet the quality expectations of an intended audience.”
- Large Community College Full-Time Staff: “It’s providing a service or product to a potential client, that meets their satisfaction.”

- Medium Community College Full-Time Faculty 2: “Providing someone with an experience that when they come in and have a need, they leave either having that need met, or if you’re not able to meet that need at that time, they have a plan and a next step to meet that need.”
- Medium Community College Administrator: “Providing a service to a consumer in exchange for them giving you something and you’re giving them back something, whether it’s a product or a service.”
- Small Community College President: “Doing what we can to assist that person or that organization in being successful.”

2. *Customer service is assisting the person in being successful.*

Comments from the interviewed employees in all three community colleges support this statement and include the following responses.

- Small Community College President: “When I think about providing good customer service to students, it is that we’re providing everything that we can within reason, so the student has an opportunity to be successful.”
- Medium Community College Full-Time Faculty 1: “Providing information to help the person coming into your establishment.”
- Large Community College Full-time Faculty: “Customer service at a community college is helping the students, find, how to make use of the services provided by the college, the opportunities that the college provides.”

3. *Customer service includes communication, kindness, willingness to help, and follow-through.*

Comments from the interviewed employees in all three community colleges support this statement and include the following responses.

- Small Community College Administrator: “Relates to treating people with dignity and respect... from respect also grows friendliness. Not just the willingness to help, but the enthusiasm to help somebody.”
- Large Community College Full-Time Staff: “You can be as nice as you want to be, but if you’re not following through, then it really doesn’t matter.”
- Medium Community College Full-Time Faculty 1: “They will find someone to help you, if they don’t have the information right away.”

4. *Customer service has a negative connotation when applied to students.*

Comments from the interviewed employees at two of the three community colleges support this statement and include the following responses.

- Small Community College Full-Time Staff: “I don’t like the word customer in this setting [education] because it makes it sound like they’re [students] buying something and we owe them something.”
- Small Community College Administrator: “The basic understanding of customer service is that the customer is always right, in higher education, or any education, the student is not always right.”
- Medium Community College Full-Time Faculty 1: “I don’t know in a community college setting or even in any educational setting, is that the customer is always right, I think the customer should always be heard- the student, or whomever is speaking as a representative for the student, should be heard, but I think that student or the representative must understand that they might not always get the exact outcome they want.”

RQ1 Conclusions

The responses to RQ 1 both in the survey data and in-person video interviews shows a fairly consistent understanding of the phrase “customer service” within community colleges in Illinois, although Zinszer (1976) argued that the phrase “customer service” lacked even a very generic definition because of the situational use of the term. This study’s participants provided four similar themes (1) providing a service that meets the need of the intended audience, (2) assisting a person in being successful (3) communication, kindness, willingness to help, and follow-through, (4) customer service has a negative connotation when applied to students, and consistent messaging of the characteristics of the phrase “customer service,” although participants frequently used the same seven descriptive phrases (1) friendliness, (2) knowledgeable, (3) helpful, (4) respectful, (5) attentive, (6) empathetic, and (7) listener.

Furthermore, the responses in this study agreed with Mark’s (2013) suggestion that customer service theory has evolved to engage customers as active participants. Tasié (2010),

Wallace (1999), and Franz (1998) each provided ways in which customers have become active participants in the business world. Similarly, an interviewee at Small Community College viewed students as active participants because “we expect something from the students and the students expect something from us.”

RQ2 Results

How do employees’ perceptions of “customer service” impact the services they provide to community college students?

Based on this research study, the results of the sample indicate that the larger the school, the less likely employees felt that their institution promoted student success and that employees are less likely to feel encouraged to assist students. This can be seen in the Likert survey results both in the percentage of respondents who disagreed with these statements and the vast gap in mean numbers (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Research Question 2 Results*

SURVEY QUESTION	STRONGLY	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY	N	MEAN
	DISAGREE				AGREE		
	%	%	%	%	%		
1. I believe my community college promotes the success of students							
Large institution	0.00	5.56	22.22	38.89	33.33	18	4.00
Medium institution	0.00	0.00	20.00	40.00	40.00	25	4.20
Small institution	0.00	3.57	0.00	32.14	64.29	28	4.57
Total	0.00	2.82	12.68	36.62	47.89	71	4.30
2. I believe my institution’s culture encourages every employee to assist students							
Large institution	0.00	16.67	27.78	33.33	22.22	18	3.61
Medium institution	0.00	4.00	28.00	48.00	20.00	25	3.84
Small institution	0.00	3.57	3.57	39.29	53.57	28	4.43
Total	0.00	7.04	18.31	40.85	33.80	71	4.01

As seen in Question 1 in Table 2, the mean of the small community college (4.57 out of 5) was .57 points higher than the large community college’s mean (4 out of 5). Furthermore,

27.78% of respondents at the large community college identified that they either are neutral or disagree with the statement that their institution promotes the success of students; whereas only 3.75% of respondents at the small community college identified that they were either neutral or disagreed with the statement.

As seen in Question 2 in Table 2, the mean of the small community college (4.43 out of 5) was .82 points higher than the large community college's mean (3.61 out of 5). Furthermore, 44.45% of respondents at the large community college identified that they either are neutral or disagree with the statement that their institution culture encourages every employee to assist students; whereas only 7.14% of respondents at the small community college identified that they were either neutral or disagreed with the statement.

When asked during the in-person interviews, "What do you think students would say about the quality of service at your institution and why?" the interviewees responses including the following:

- Large Community College Administrator: "It really depends on the student group. As a community college, we serve lots of student groups. We serve day students, we serve evening students, we serve online students, we serve traditional-aged students, we serve non-traditional-aged students. We serve students that are seeking, you know, a career path immediately to work, CTE students, transfer students. We serve full-time students, we serve part-time students, we serve GED students. We serve students who didn't even know their path."
- Large Community College Full-Time Staff: "It's like a small-town atmosphere. I see people all the time, championing students all over the school in all areas."
- Medium Community College Full-Time Faculty 1: "It's something that we have really worked to improve, so that way, it's not just 'Go to the welcome center and find the information.' I think we're all trying to be more knowledgeable about where to take students or where to send students, or whatever for students, because it shows that you're more than just a person who punches in and punches out."
- Medium Community College Full-Time Faculty 2: "It's an open dialogue here from the president down. I have seen our president stop and talk to students at community events, and give up, a decent amount of fair time at that point, and at that place, listening and trying to solve student problems."

- Small Community College Administrator: “I feel that students have a very positive experience with customer service. I see that not only in terms of the qualitative feedback that we receive from our students, [but] I’m very active with the students’ clubs and organizations.”
- Small Community College Full-Time Staff: “I think for the most part the students are going to say it is good” and “that’s our goal to have the students succeed.”
- Small Community College President: “I very much have an opinion that if we have done anything to disadvantage a student, a customer, then we need to take responsibility.”

RQ2 Conclusions

The survey data showed that larger institutions felt that their respective institution’s culture was less likely to promote assisting customers than respondents from smaller institutions. This reflects the research done by Mattox and Creamer (1998) which showed a significant difference by size of institution in the ratio of support staff to students.

Although the survey data indicated a difference in assisting customers between large and small institutions, every one of the in-person interview participants identified one or more times where they personally went above and beyond to assist customers. As seen in these responses from the in-person interviews there are two reoccurring themes, (1) providing students with customer service and (2) going above and beyond to assist an individual. The finding of Theme 1, providing students with customer service, is in line with scholars such as Goldstein (2019) and Danjum and Rali (2012), and supported their findings that a student’s expectations is for better service across all dimensions of a student’s community college experience. The finding of Theme 2, going above and beyond to assist an individual, supports the research of Towbin (2018) and Wahab (2016), and agreed with their findings on the implications of customer service within an organization.

RQ3 Results

Why are individuals considered customers prior to enrollment into college and students after they are enrolled?

Based on question 1, approximately 92% of participants strongly agreed with the statement that customer service should be provided in areas that are considered non-educational. However, in question 2, only 64% of participants strongly agreed with the statement that customer service should be provided in areas that are considered educational. Furthermore, in question 3, 62% of respondents believed that students were customers. Based on this research it is evident that there were 30% of the respondents that had less conviction on providing customer service within the classroom (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Research Question 3 Results*

SURVEY QUESTION	STRONGLY DISAGREE %	DISAGREE %	NEUTRAL %	AGREE %	STRONGLY AGREE %	N	MEAN
1. I believe customer service should be provided to students in areas that are considered non-educational (i.e., registrar office, financial aid office, café, etc.).	0.00	0.00	1.45	5.80	92.75	69	4.91
2. I believe customer service should be provided to students that are considered educational (i.e., in the classroom, in interactions with faculty, etc.).	2.86	1.43	10.00	21.43	64.29	70	4.43
3. I believe students are customers.	5.63	2.82	8.45	21.13	61.97	71	4.31

During the in-person interview each individual was asked to provide an example when they assisted a student. Seven examples were provided helping students in non-educational settings and five examples were provided in educational settings. Below are a few of the provided examples from the interviews.

Non-educational Settings

- Large Community College Administrator gave an example of advising a first generation returning adult student who was in Phi Beta Kappa who had been at the

community college for two semesters and wanted to make sure he had the correct courses.

- Small Community College Administrator spoke about a student who was agoraphobic and hadn't left home for over two years. This student was very nervous about attending community college, but Small Community College Administrator chose to be her champion while she attended community college and made a point to say 'Hi' anytime she saw her around campus or in town.
- Medium Community College Full-Time Faculty 2 shared a story about a student that was in his non-credit grant-funded program. The student met all the criteria for the program but shortly after the community college informed her that she could not participate because she owed money. The student stated that she had never attended the college. Medium Community College Full-Time Faculty 2 assisted the student by digging into what the student owed money for and found out it was for a course the mother signed the student up for when she was three.

Educational Setting

- Medium Community College Full-Time Faculty 1 provided an example when a student reached out after class with concerns about passing her biology course. The student had already taken the course three other times without success. Medium Community College Full-Time Faculty 1 told the student if he was willing to put in the effort and work that she would provide him with any support needed.
- Small Community College President discussed a time when he was a faculty member and had a student in her early 20s who Small Community College President identified as being overqualified for the course; he pulled the student aside and let the student know that she had already met the course objectives and had an open dialog about what she wanted to accomplish.
- Large Community College Full-Time Faculty spoke about a student in his class that was going to quit because of frequent epileptic seizures and another student who had significant test anxiety. The Large Community College Full-Time Faculty reiterated that special cases arise and that the students don't get to choose these special cases; although modifications may be needed, the student is still responsible to put in the effort and work.

RQ3 Conclusions

The responses to RQ 3 shows a multitude of perceptions depicting when and where an individual should be considered a "customer" versus a "student." This falls in line with Wallace's (1999) argument that each area of a community college needs to identify who their

specific “customer” is and then work towards meeting the needs of that group of individuals. Brown (2019) discussion further supports the idea of a diverse learning community. This study’s findings mirror the multiplicity found in previous student-as-a-customer metaphor research (Courtney & Courtney, 2006; Schwartzman, 1995). Furthermore, Budd (2017) viewed the relationship an individual has with institutions similar to that of a customer and seller, Scott (1999) viewed the relationship of students as something that belonged to the institution whereas when viewed as customers the learning process was mutually owned.

Recommendations

The implications of the findings in this study continue to highlight the diverse needs of community college students (Quint-Rapoport, 2006). Based on this study and combined with a thorough review of literature, the following recommendations for future research are provided.

1. Explore the impact of the perception that an institution’s culture is one that encourages employees to assist students in relation to the expectations of their experiences and decisions to persist.
2. Research the likelihood that students will leave their current institution and look for a community college that will provide them a better service if the students don’t feel their needs are being met within their current institution.
3. Consider strategies for encouraging community college employees to provide students with better service.
4. Evaluate the impact that customer service has on a student’s decision to study at a specific institution.
5. Identify promising practices for an institution transition to an organizational culture that is focused on providing students with the customer service that leads to student success.
6. Explore how the meanings of customer service is altered depending on which employee group (i.e., admiration, faculty, staff, etc.) an employee identifies with at their community college.

Summary

Regardless of the needs of the students, the size of the institution, or the location within Illinois, four common themes emerged from this research. These four themes are (1) customer service is providing a product or service that meets the needs of the intended audience, (2) customer service is assisting the person in being successful, (3) customer service includes communication, kindness, willingness to help, and follow-through, and (4) customer service has a negative connotation when applied to students.

Institutions organizational culture needs to reflect the ideology that helping students looks different in the 21st century. Students at community colleges don't fit a one-size-fits all mold, and due to this, community college's must be flexible enough to address the needs of their students in a variety of ways.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTERS



Date: Feb 14, 2018

To: Sandra Balkema, Amy Kaminski
From: Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair
Re: IRB Application for Review

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, " *Multiplicity of Meanings of the Phrase Customer Service in Employee Groups in Illinois Community Colleges*" and determined that it does not meet the Federal Definition of research on human subjects, as defined by the Department of Health and Human Services or the Food and Drug Administration. This project does not meet the federal definition of research on human subjects because the data being collected in some cases relates to institution-specific responses as opposed to individual level. In addition, the data collection focuses on comparing definitions and performance of other institutions to established standards or measures of customer service. Therefore, this would not be defined as human subjects research. As such, approval by the Ferris IRB is not required for the proposed project.

This determination applies only to the activities described in the submission; it does not apply should changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities are research involving human subjects, submit a new request to the IRB for determination. This letter only applies to Ferris IRB Review; it is your responsibility to ensure all necessary institutional permissions are obtained and policies are met prior to beginning the project, such as documentation of institutional or department support. Note that quality improvement project findings may be published, but any findings presented or published should be clearly identified as part of a quality improvement initiative and not as research.

Your project will remain on file with the Ferris IRB for purposes of tracking research efforts at Ferris. Should you have any questions regarding the determination of this letter, please contact the IRB.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gregory Wellman".

Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair
Ferris State University Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

Prairie State College
Institutional Review Board
Federal Wide Assurance FWA00011479
Protection of Human Research Participants
Chair – Cynthia Cornejo, PsyD
708-709-7775

May 6, 2019

Amy Kaminski
Ferris State University

Protocol Title: The multiplicity of meanings of the phrase customer service in community colleges in Illinois.

Protocol # 00156

Funding Source: Ferris State University

IRB Review Date: 4/1/2019

Effective Date: 05/02/2019

Expiration Date: 05/02/2020

IRB Review Type: Expedited

IRB Review Action: Approved

Dear Ms. Kaminski:

On 05/02/2019, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Prairie State College has approved the above referenced submission. **Please note that approval for this protocol will lapse on 05/02/2020.**

This approval includes:

All items outlined in proposal.

All attachments

IRB determination:

Protocol – approved as submitted

Participant Risk Level: No greater than minimum risk

Please contact me at 708-709-7775 or ccornejo2@prairiestate.edu if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Cornejo, PsyD

Cynthia Cornejo, PsyD
Institutional Review Board Chair

★ **Joe Bright**

November 19, 2018 at 8:54 AM



Re: Sauk Valley Community College Research

To: kaminsa7@ferris.edu



Hi Amy,

Your research has been approved by our IR board. Would there be a time when we can discuss the next steps in greater detail? A phone call would be preferable.

Cheers,

[See More from Joe Bright](#)

--
Joe Bright
Director of Research and Planning
Sauk Valley Community College
173 IL Route 2 Dixon, IL 61021
Phone: 815-835-6336



Sauk Valley Community College is dedicated to teaching and scholarship while engaging the community in lifelong learning, public service, and economic development.



David Cook
Exec. Dir. of Institutional Research & Planning
1 College Drive
East Peoria, Illinois 61635-0001
Voice 309-694-8551
Fax 309-694-5450

Through learning, minds change. We believe by changing minds, we can change the world.
- Mission

Date: April 18, 2019
To: Amy Kaminski, Doctoral Candidate, Ferris State University
From: David Cook
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Re: IRB Action on Proposed Project

This memorandum is to inform you of the action taken on behalf of the College regarding your research proposal titled, "The Multiplicity of Meanings of the Phrase Customer Service in Community Colleges in Illinois." Please be advised that I have determined that your proposal met the requirement for an expedited review under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

With this memorandum, you are authorized to proceed with the proposed activities as presented in your IRB request. It is your responsibility as the investigator, to submit, in writing, changes or corrections that you make to any of the plans submitted for IRB approval prior to implementation of such changes or corrections. You must file a request for extension should you require data collection beyond twelve months from the date of this memorandum.

Failure to comply within the parameters of the project as submitted, including the conditions set forth in this memorandum, shall forfeit your right to conduct research related to this proposal at Illinois Central College.

"Learning, Integrity, Responsibility, Community and Excellence"
- Core Values

APPENDIX B: EMAIL INVITATION FOR ONLINE SURVEY

From: Amy Kaminski
Sent:
Subject: Dissertation Research Survey

Dear (insert school name here) employee,

I am a doctoral student at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, MI—and work for Harper College in Palatine, IL, a large suburban community college.

I am in the process of gathering data for phase one of my dissertation and would appreciate if you would take 15 minutes to complete the following survey as part of my research. Specifically, I am trying to identify the views on the phrase “customer service” within all employee groups at community colleges in Illinois.

I am attaching the Participant Consent form for your review. Please understand by accepting the first page of the survey you are providing your consent.

At the end of the survey you will be asked if you would be willing to participate in a follow-up videotaped interview for phase two of my research. If you indicate your willingness and are selected to be a phase two participant, I will reach out to schedule either a face-to-face interview at your location or a remote Skype session. Your name and email address will not be associated with your survey responses and only be used for scheduling a face-to-face interview.

The survey can be accessed here: (link for survey will be here)

I look forward to hearing from you.

Amy Kaminski
Doctoral Candidate Student/Ferris State
Employee Training Coordinator /Harper College
1200 W. Algonquin Road
Palatine, IL 60067
847.925.6261 (work)
847.529.8567 (cell)
kaminsa7@ferris.edu

APPENDIX C: ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Survey Questionnaire

Link to the formatted survey with conditional logic built in:

<https://freeonlinesurveys.com/s/JVJ4iUAp>

General Qualifying Questions

1. Which one of the following categories best describes your job position or primary role's employee group?*
- a. Full-Time Faculty
- b. Part-Time Faculty
- c. Full-Time Staff
- d. Part-Time Staff
- e. Administration
- f. Other
2. Do you currently work in a community college?*
- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure
3. How many years have you worked in any community college*
- a. 0-1
- b. 1-5
- c. 5-10
- d. 10 and over

Demographics

4. What Gender do you identify with?
- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Other
5. What is your ethnicity
- d. Caucasian/White
- e. Hispanic
- f. African American
- g. Asian/Pacific Islander
- h. Other
6. Please identify your Age Range*
- i. 18 and younger
- j. 18-24
- k. 25-34
- l. 35-44
- m. 45-54
- n. 55-64
- o. 65 and older

*indicates conditional logic is built into the survey question. These questions are qualifying questions for participation in the study.

**indicates conditional logic is built into the survey question. These questions are qualifying question for participation in phase two of the study.

Survey Questionnaire

Customer Service General Questions:

7. Please define customer service.
8. Please list what you believe are the top three traits of customer service
9. On a scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) please identify how you as an individual perceives each of the following statements:
 - p. I believe customer services is important when purchasing a product or service
 - q. I have received outstanding customer service
 - r. I have been in a situation where I wish the customer service was better

Customer Service Community College Specific Questions:

10. Please list what you believe are the top three traits of a student:
11. On a scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) please identify how you as an individual perceives each of the following statements:
 - a. I believe customer service has a place on a community college campus
 - b. I believe customer service should be provide to students in areas that are non-educational (i.e. the registrar office, financial aid office, cafe, etc.)
 - c. I believe my community college promotes the success of students
 - d. I believe my institutions culture encourages every employee to assist students
 - e. I believe students are customers

Final Question: Participation in follow-up interview

1. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview which would be videotaped for an educational documentary?***
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure

*indicates conditional logic is built into the survey question. These questions are qualifying questions for participation in the study.

**indicates conditional logic is built into the survey question. These questions are qualifying question for participation in phase two of the study.

Survey Questionnaire

Conditional Thank You Responses:

If the participant did not qualify for the study:

Thank you for Completing this Survey. At this time you do not Qualify for the Survey.

If the participant qualified for the study but opted out of phase two:

Thank you for completing this survey.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding the information you have provided please contact

Amy Kaminski
Ferris State University
Doctoral Candidate
Kaminsa7@ferris.edu
847-925-6067 (office)
847-529-8567 (cell)

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a subject in this study, please contact: Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Participants, 1010 Campus Drive, FLITE 410G, Big Rapids, MI 49307, (231) 591-2553, IRB@ferris.edu.

If the participant qualified for the study and opted into phase two:

Page 1:

Thank you for participating in this survey. To help enhance the research, the research would be interested in talking with you to further understand your perceptions of what customer service means in community colleges. This follow-up interview session will be videotaped because part of the research study is to create an educational video illustrating the perceptions of the phrase customer service in community colleges. Some of the statements you make in the interview potentially can end up in the final video. This educational video will be published and educators looking to help provide better experiences to students will be viewing it. As an individual that works at a community college, your perception of customer service will provide valuable information that will contribute to the study.

By providing your name and e-mail address you are providing the researcher with consent to follow-up and schedule a time to complete the interview. Interviews will be completed in the months of April or May 2018.

Thank you again. I am looking forward to learning more about your perceptions of what customer service means in a community college!**

*indicates conditional logic is built into the survey question. These questions are qualifying questions for participation in the study.

**indicates conditional logic is built into the survey question. These questions are qualifying question for participation in phase two of the study.

Survey Questionnaire

Page 2:

Thank you for completing this survey.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding the information you have provided please contact

Amy Kaminski
Ferris State University
Doctoral Candidate
Kaminsa7@ferris.edu
847-925-6067 (office)
847-529-8567 (cell)

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a subject in this study, please contact: Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Participants, 1010 Campus Drive, FLITE 410G, Big Rapids, MI 49307, (231) 591-2553, IRB@ferris.edu.

*indicates conditional logic is built into the survey question. These questions are qualifying questions for participation in the study.

**indicates conditional logic is built into the survey question. These questions are qualifying question for participation in phase two of the study.

APPENDIX D: VIDEO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to provide further insight into the multiplicities of meanings of the phrase customer service within all employee groups in Illinois community colleges. Specifically, the study hopes to provide further understanding of employee perceptions on customer service within community colleges in Illinois.

If you can remember to do so please include the question in your answer.

1. Since this part of the study involves producing a video that will be later used for publications, presentations, and training purposes, there is no confidentiality of data. Information that is collected through video will have individuals and their likeness identified. Some segments of what you say may end up in the final video. Due to the fact that the educational video may be used for publications, presentations, and training purposes, your employer has the potential to view the video. Video footage will be stored on a computer that is password protected while being edited. As a participant, you have 24 hours identify if there is anything you said that you would like to be withdrawn from use in the video. Do you give your consent to use information and video from today's interview?
2. What is your current definition of customer service?
3. Can you please reflect on a time when you had both a good and disappointing customer service experience?
 - a. What made these experiences stand out?
 - b. Is there anything you would have changed about these experiences?
4. Were you a student who attended any higher educational institution?
 - a. If so, can you recall a time when someone at the institution went above and beyond?
 - b. What made this experience so memorable?
 - c. If so, can you recall a time when someone at the institution did not meet your expectations or that you had bad support?
 - d. What made this experience so memorable?
5. Do you recall a time when you assisted a student?
 - a. How did that interaction occur?
 - b. Do you think you met the student's expectations?
 - c. If you had the opportunity to re-do the interaction what would you do differently?
6. What do you think students would say about the quality of service at your institution? Why?

APPENDIX E: EMAIL INVITATION FOR IN-PERSON VIDEO INTERVIEW

Email Invite for Face-to-Face interview

From: Amy Kaminski

Sent:

Subject: Dissertation Research Interview: Multiplicity of Meanings of the Phrase Customer Service

Dear _____,

Thank you for returning your signed consent. I will be at Illinois Central College on XXXXX, XX to conduct in person interviews. Below are the time slots available for the interview, please rank your top three preferred times. If XXXXX, XX does not work for you please let me know and I will try to accommodate a time that would work better.

Available Interview Times:

1. XX - XX
2. XX - XX
3. XX - XX
4. XX - XX
5. XX - XX

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions.

Kind Regards,
Amy Kaminski

Doctoral Candidate Student/Ferris State
Employee Training Coordinator /Harper College
1200 W. Algonquin Road
Palatine, IL 60067
847.925.6261 (work)
847.529.8567 (cell)
kaminsa7@ferris.edu

APPENDIX F: ONLINE SURVEY CONSENT FORM

Consent Form: Survey Participation

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research study. I am a student in the Doctorate in Community College Leadership program at Ferris State University and am working on a dissertation study designed to provide insight into the multiplicities of meanings of the phrase customer service within all employee groups in Illinois community colleges.

Your participation is completely voluntary and will require approximately 20-25 minutes and is completed online at your computer. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this survey. This research will benefit the educational community by providing further understanding of how community colleges provide customer service to their students.

Please review the following information carefully. At the time of the interview, I will review the study details with you and will answer any questions that you may have on the study.

Thank you again,

Amy Kaminski

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: The Multiplicity of Meanings of the Phrase Customer Service in Employee Groups in Illinois Community Colleges.

Principal Investigator: Amy Kaminski Email: kaminsa7@ferris.edu Phone: (847) 529-8567

Faculty Advisor: Sandra Balkema... Email: SandraBalkema@ferris.edu.. Phone: (231) 591-5631

STUDY PURPOSE

This research is being conducted to learn more about employee perceptions on customer service within community colleges in Illinois. Employees at selected community colleges will be surveyed and asked about their perceptions of customer service both in general and specifically within higher education. You have been selected for this study because, as an employee in a community college in Illinois, your opinions and perceptions about customer service will help answer the questions posed by this study. I will be asking you about your perceptions, opinions, and feelings towards customer service both in a general sense as well as in higher education. I am interested in how customer service in higher education is viewed throughout multiple community colleges within Illinois.

Consent Form: Survey Participation

PROCEDURE

After electrically agreeing this consent form, you will complete a survey complied with questions about you and your experiences with customer service. This survey will be confidential; unless you opt-in to the video interview portion of the study, your responses will not be identified with you. The survey takes about 20-25 minutes.

PARTICIPATION RIGHTS

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary.

As a participant in this research study, you have the right to be informed about:

- Why the research study is being completed
- What will happen to you during the research study
- The risks, discomforts, and any side effects that may occur from taking part in the study
- The possible benefits from taking part in this study
- How your privacy and/or confidentiality will be protected

Research participants also have rights to:

- Decide not to take part in the study, or decide to drop out, at any time.
 - Decide whether to take part without any external pressure
 - Ask questions at any time
 - Receive a copy of the consent form
-

POTENTIAL RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

This phase of the research does not constitute any risk to subjects beyond the minimal level. The data being collected is the participants perception of customer service and all data collected will only be stored only by employee group identifiers (ie. Full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, Full-time Staff, Admin, etc).

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

This research will benefit the educational community by providing further understanding of how community colleges provide customer service to their students. The educational community will also better understand how to make a positive impact and increase the

Consent Form: Survey Participation

understanding of how to bring community colleges into the future. As a participant one benefit is that you can reflect on how customer service is handled at your institution and how each you can influence the student experience by how you act.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Unless you opt-in to the video interview portion of the study, the survey will have no identifying information. If you opt-in to the video interview portion, the survey will ask for an email address so the researcher can coordinate a time to complete the video interview portion of the study. Regardless of the opt-in video interview, all data will be entered in a database without identifying information. The database will be on a computer that is password protected.

QUESTIONS

The primary researcher conducting this study is Amy Kaminski, a student at Ferris State University. If you have any questions, you may contact Amy Kaminski at kaminsa7@ferris.edu or at (847) 529-8567. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Participants at IRB@ferris.edu or access their website at <https://ferris.edu/HTMLS/administration/academicaffairs/vpoffice/IRB/>

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the survey portion of this study. I understand by clicking the "Next Page" button below indicates that you are 18 years of age or older, and indicates your consent to participate in this survey.

APPENDIX G: VIDEO CONSENT FORM



Consent Form: Video Participation

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research study. I am a student in the Doctorate in Community College Leadership program at Ferris State University and am working on a dissertation study designed to provide insight into the multiplicities of meanings of the phrase customer service within all employee groups in Illinois community colleges.

Your participation is completely voluntary and will require approximately 30 minutes. Although there are minimal risks and discomforts associated with this interview, there is a chance your employer may view the video for educational purposes. This research will benefit the educational community by providing further understanding of how community colleges provide customer service to their students.

Please review the following information carefully. At the time of the interview, I will review the study details with you and will answer any questions that you may have on the study.

Thank you again,

Amy Kaminski

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: The Multiplicity of Meanings of the Phrase Customer Service in Employee Groups in Illinois Community Colleges.

Principal Investigator: Amy Kaminski Email: kaminsa7@ferris.edu Phone: (847) 529-8567

Faculty Advisor: Sandra Balkema Email: SandraBalkema@ferris.edu Phone:

STUDY PURPOSE

This research is being conducted to learn more about employee perceptions on customer service within community colleges in Illinois. Employees at selected community colleges will be surveyed and asked about their perceptions of customer service both in general and specifically within higher education. You have been selected for this study because you identified on your digital survey that you would be willing to participate in further discussions about your opinions and perceptions about customer service will help answer the questions posed by this study. I will be asking you primarily open-ended questions about your perceptions, opinions, and feelings towards customer service both in a general sense as well as in higher education. I am interested in how customer service in higher education is viewed throughout multiple community colleges within Illinois.

PROCEDURE

After signing this consent form, you will participate in a video recorded with questions about you and your experiences with customer service. There is a video component to my project and portions of your video recording may be part of the final video. The purpose of this video will be to help educators and researches better understand the multiplicity of meanings of the phrase customer service within community colleges. The video interview is expected to last approximately thirty minutes.

LOCATION

The video interviews will take place either at Illinois Central College or via Skype subject to participants' locations and availability. All interviews will take place in a neutral setting with minimal distractions.

PARTICIPATION RIGHTS

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary.

As a participant in this research study, you have the right to be informed about:

- Why the research study is being completed
- What will happen to you during the research study
- The risks, discomforts, and any side effects that may occur from taking part in the study
- The possible benefits from taking part in this study
- How your privacy and/or confidentiality will be protected

Research participants also have rights to:

- Decide not to take part in the study, or decide to drop out, at any time.
- Decide whether to take part without any external pressure
- Ask questions at any time
- Receive a copy of the consent form

POTENTIAL RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

Consent Form: Video Participation

This phase of the research does not constitute any risk to subjects beyond the minimal level. The interview will be video recorded to complete an educational video where your responses and/or likeness may be used. Due to the fact that the educational video may be used for publications, presentations, and training purposes, your employer has the potential to view the video.

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

This research will benefit the educational community by providing further understanding of how community colleges provide customer service to their students. The educational community will also better understand how to make a positive impact and increase the understanding of how to bring community colleges into the future. As a participant one benefit is that you can reflect on how customer service is handled at your institution and how each you can influence the student experience by how you act.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Since this part of the study involves producing a video that will be later used for publications, presentations, and training purposes, there is no confidentiality of data. Information that is collected through video will have individuals and their likeness identified. Some segments of what you say may end up in the final video. Video footage will be stored on a computer that is password protected while being edited. As a participant, you have 24 hours identify if there is anything you said that you would like to be withdrawn from use in the video.

QUESTIONS

The primary researcher conducting this study is Amy Kaminski, a student at Ferris State University. If you have any questions, you may contact Amy Kaminski at kaminsa7@ferris.edu or at (847) 529-8567. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Participants at IRB@ferris.edu or access their website at <https://ferris.edu/HTMLS/administration/academicaffairs/vpoffice/IRB/>

STATEMENT OF CONSENT/SIGNATURE AND DATE



Consent Form: Video Participation

Research Subject: I understand the information printed on this form and received answers to any questions I asked. I understand that if I have more questions or concerns about the study or my participation as a research subject, I may contact the people listed above in the "Contact Information" section. I understand that I may make a copy of this form. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, either I, or my legal representative may be asked to re-consent prior to my continued participation.

Signature of Subject: _____ *Date of Signature:* _____

Printed Name: _____

Contact Information: email - _____ *phone -* _____

Principal Investigator (or Designee): I have given this research subject (or his/her legally authorized representative, if applicable) information about this study that I believe is accurate and complete. The subject has indicated that he or she understands the nature of the study and the risks and benefits of participating.

Printed Name: _____ *Title:* _____

Signature: _____ *Date of Signature:* _____

APPENDIX H: VIDEO INTERVIEW FILES

The video interviews can be accessed here:

- YouTube video link: <https://youtu.be/cDMYyBbvUQo>
- A .mov file is also included appended to this dissertation (file name: KaminskiDissertationShort.mov)