

Stories Students Tell: A Content Marketing Plan to Increase Enrollment
at Cumberland County College

by

Renee J. Post

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I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standards required by Wilmington University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Education in Innovation and Leadership.

Lynne L. Svenning, Ph.D., Chairperson of the Dissertation Committee

Thomas J. Vari, Ed.D., Member of the Dissertation Committee

Kim Ayres, Ph.D., Member of the Dissertation Committee

John C. Gray, Ed.D., Professor and Dean, College of Education

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation and my doctoral journey to my children, Owen and Abigail Post. My work is a symbol to you in dreaming, doing, and believing. You can do anything you put your mind to and you can reach any goal you set for yourself. Live your life to the fullest, chase your dreams, be happy, and never stop learning. I love you.

Many thanks to my husband, Dean, I could not have done this without you and I truly appreciate your sacrifice and your belief in me. I love you.

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Abstract

This qualitative research study focused on the importance of storytelling as an effective marketing tool in a higher education setting, specifically, community college. The study was conducted to guide Cumberland County College's (CCC) administration, recruitment, and enrollment staffs to strategically share stories from engaged students through a content marketing plan focusing on social media marketing to increase enrollment. There was a total of 44 participants. Twenty-one students participated in individual interviews. The individual interview questions focused on asking students to share stories about their reasons for attending CCC and their overall CCC experience. Twenty-three students participated in focus group interviews. The focus group questions were aimed at determining what social media applications were utilized by these students and why, as well as what individual interview stories resonated most with them. The findings from the individual interviews were six key themes that emerged that included: faculty, affordability, location, stepping stone/foundation for future, making connections/meeting new people, and acquiring a better job/building a better life. The focus group interview findings revealed social media utilization and three student stories as the most appealing. All focus group participants used a smartphone. Instagram, Facebook, and SnapChat are the top three favorite social media applications used. Students suggested that SnapChat, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram be used to connect with students. Based on the research conducted and the study findings, a content marketing plan was created for CCC.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Community College: A Constantly Changing Landscape

Community colleges play a unique role in higher education as both affordable and accessible institutions of learning for students and resource hubs within the communities they serve. The accessibility and lower cost of community colleges allows for broad-based regional impact and educational opportunities.

Community colleges owe their success to four values: access, community responsiveness, creativity, and a focus on student learning. America's community colleges have provided access to higher education and an opportunity for a better life to the most diverse student body in history. (Boggs, 2011a, p. 3)

A diverse student body has resulted from this "open door" policy. Community College students typically represent a wide range of race, ethnicity, income, age, preparedness, and focus. Thus, the value of community colleges to the areas they represent can be readily understood in terms of the opportunities they provide to such a wide range of residents. "Community colleges have traditionally served as an access point for educational opportunity and as a vanguard of innovation" (Mullin & Phillippe, 2009, p. 5). Throughout the years, these trademark characteristics have been tested by budget constraints, political agendas, and changing demographics.

Community colleges have responded to the challenges in their local communities by creating partnerships and collaborations via workforce development and training, as well as community service programs. "Community colleges maintained their innovative spirit through

cooperation and coordination with external entities, such as local business and industry, as well as with each other” (Mullin & Phillipe, 2009, p. 7). These partnerships have been positive for students, as well as college staff. “Community college leaders, faculty, and staff are among the most creative and innovative, experimenting with new methods to improve the effectiveness of their teaching and making services to students more convenient” (Boggs, 2011a, p. 3).

With this innovative approach to teaching, community colleges emerged in the 1990s as the leaders in focusing on the outcome of student learning as the core mission of higher education (Boggs, 1993b). In doing so, two-year institutions prioritized the importance of closing achievement gaps and in assisting more students to complete their educational goals (Boggs, 1993a). Boggs (2011a) states, “Community colleges improve the lives of individuals and improve the economic viability of communities, our nation, and the world we live in” (p. 4).

National Recession. The severe national recession beginning in 2008 served to shine a national spotlight on community colleges.

The destructive effects of the recession on the nation’s economy and resulting loss of jobs at rates not witnessed since the Great Depression resulted in the federal government’s reinvestment of trillions of dollars into the economy, including \$3.45 billion of funding earmarked specifically for job training and retooling in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. (Braverman, 2013, p. 12)

Factory closures, downsizing, and layoffs resulted in large numbers of displaced workers returning to community colleges, where they hoped to obtain the skills needed for re-employment. Major network television news stories and newspapers highlighted community colleges that were offering discounted tuition, midnight classes, accelerated and online programs,

and on-site counseling to the unemployed (Soin & Scheytt, 2006).

By fall 2009, the economic recession that started about two years earlier had a dramatic impact on America's community colleges and the students and communities they serve.

At community colleges across the country, dislocated workers returned for retraining, traditional-age college students reexamined their options, and institutions were asked to do more with less fiscal support. (Mullin & Phillippe, 2009, p. 5)

By fall 2010, the positive impact of the national recession was becoming evident. Community college leaders were reporting a significant increase in enrollments based on displaced workers attending classes to learn new skills and of younger students whose parents may have sent these recent high school graduates off to a university in better economic times (Boggs, 2011a, p. 5). According to Mullin & Phillippe (2010), "Between 2008 and 2010, credit enrollment in community colleges surged by 17 percent" (p. 5).

While increased enrollment was welcomed by this sector, it also presented new challenges for meeting the educational needs of students. In a 2010 report from the American Association of Community Colleges, "Doing More with Less: The Inequitable Funding of Community Colleges," author Christopher Mullin (2010) shared, "... community colleges are asked to educate students who are most at risk with the least support, by far, of any other sector" (Mullin, 2010, p. 5).

In the immediate future, jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as those requiring no college experience (Carnevale, Strohl, & Smith, 2009). Growth in the community college sector was also encouraged at the national level in order to meet the projected demands in the labor market (Boggs, 2011a, p. 8). Because of this trend, in

2009, President Obama challenged the nation's community colleges to produce an additional 5 million program completers by 2020, an approximate 50 percent increase over current levels. "In April 2010, six national community college organizations signed a call to action to commit member institutions to match President Obama's 2020 goal," according to the American Association of Community Colleges 2011 report (Boggs, 2011a, p. 8).

Diversity of education needs served.

Students enter a community college for diverse reasons. Some enroll to prepare for a career; others attend for a single course to upgrade a specific job skill, perhaps to earn a promotion; others seek a baccalaureate by completing their lower-division courses at a community college and transfer to a four-year college or university. Still others enter community colleges for personal enrichment alone. (Boggs, 2011a, pp. 11-12)

The design of the community college experience also contributed to its' popularity and importance. Community colleges are designed to be convenient for students. Campuses are located within commuting distance and many online classes are offered. Class times are extremely flexible and range from early morning to late in the evening and on weekends. Academic and career advising are intense, accommodations are provided for every type of learning and physical disability, and partnerships with four-year institutions are common.

The colleges cater to students who are place-bound, disabled, working, or raising a family. It is not feasible for many of these students to leave their communities. Several community colleges have established university centers on their campuses so that students can continue their education. (Boggs, 2011a, p. 10)

Doing more with less. Community colleges are also expected to pivot quickly to match

academic programming with changes in the job market or new technologies, all while coping with declining fiscal resources.

Doing more with less and doing so to creatively and effectively drive the bottom line—characterizes the circumstances found in most CE units today. As a new knowledge economy emerges and the country is now faced with tens of millions of adults without bachelor’s degrees, CE units are once again adding significant value on college campuses by providing increased access, adult-centric practices, career-ready programs, and support services for older learners who seek degrees and self-advancement that will, in turn, help restore competitiveness and productivity to the nation’s economy. (Braverman, 2013, p. 14)

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center found in 2015, “community colleges enrolled about 5.9 million students, while in 2014 that number stood at about six million” (Smith, 2016, para. 4). In fact, there appears to be an inverse relationship between the economy and community college enrollment. “The colleges have been on a steady decline since 2010, ending the increases many saw when the economic downturn hit in 2008” (Smith, 2016, para. 4). As shown in Table 1 below, community college enrollment is declining (Smith, 2016, para. 5).

Based on a March 2016 report done by The American Association of Community Colleges, The U.S. Department of Education and the National Student Clearinghouse release annual reports on higher education fall enrollment and student outcomes. Following a surge in enrollment for several years during the recession, in 2015, both sources document a continued decline in overall enrollment at community colleges. “Both reports indicated a continued

nationwide decline in community college enrollment, which began in 2011. The decrease in enrollment of older students has been the highest and the most consistent over the past 4 years” (Juszkiewicz, 2016, p. 3).

Table1

Community College Enrollment 2011 - 2016

Year	Enrollment	Change
Fall 2011	6,787,176	-2.3%
Fall 2012	6,544,820	-3.6%
Fall 2013	6,329,631	-3.3%
Fall 2014	6,052,069	-4.4%
Fall 2015	5,906,419	-2.4%
Fall 2016	5,721,676	-2.6%

Note. Adapted from “Community College Enrollments Drop,” by A. A. Smith, 2016, *Inside Higher Ed*, para. 4.

Based on data provided by the above-mentioned annual reports, Table 2 reveals these declines (Juszkiewicz, 2016, p. 4). With their critical role in educating a diverse population and retraining displaced workers, declines in enrollment are very concerning to both the institutions and the communities in which they reside.

Table 2

Changes in Fall Enrollment 2012-2016

Change from Prior Year	Total Fall Enrollment		Four-Year Public Institutions		Two-Year Public Institutions	
	IPEDS	NSC	IPEDS	NSC	IPEDS	NSC
Fall 2012	-1.9%	-1.8%	0.6%	-0.6%	-3.9%	-3.1%
Fall 2013	-1.4%	-1.5%	0.3%	0.3%	-2.4%	-3.1%
Fall 2014	-0.9%	-1.3%	1.7%	2.9%	-3.3%	-6.9%
Fall 2015		-1.7%		0.4%		-2.4%
Fall 2016		-1.4%		0.2%		-2.6%

Note. Adapted from “Trends in Community College Enrollment and Completion Data,” by J. Juskiewicz, 2016, American Association of Community Colleges, p. 4, Table 1.

Cumberland County College

Cumberland County College, located in Vineland, New Jersey, was established in 1966 as one of the first community colleges in the state. Through a strategic planning process the college has developed a vision and mission statement that explicitly links it to the community it serves. Cumberland County College’s (CCC) vision statement is as follows: “Cumberland County College will serve as a catalyst for a robust community, empowering people through excellence in higher education, collaborative relationships and engaged community leadership” (CCC, 2018, para. 2).

Similarly, CCC’s mission emphasizes both student learning, student engagement, and community improvement: Cumberland County College is a comprehensive community college that is “committed to student success and to serving a diverse community of learners and businesses by providing quality, innovative programs as an accessible, affordable, learning-centered community college” (CCC, 2018, para. 1).

CCC educates a diverse student body that includes many first-generation college students, as well as English as a Second Language learners. Students begin their education in developmental courses then register for college-level courses within their selected program of study. Like its sister institutions, CCC provides educational opportunity to a student body as diverse as the region it serves. In a community that leads the state in unemployment, low income, teen pregnancy, and various other measures of distress, the college is a much-needed resource and means to employment and opportunity (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017, “Table”).

Cumberland County College offers academic programs leading to Associate Degrees, Academic Certificates, Career Certificates, and Training Certificates. According to CCC’s 2016 Institutional Profile, in “Fall 2015, 3,453 students were enrolled” in these programs and Professional and Continuing Education courses (CCC, 2016, p. 5, “Table 1”).

CCC is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). Accreditation assures students and the public that prescribed higher educational standards are fully integrated at the institution. The Commission’s accreditation process also ensures institutional accountability, self-appraisal, improvement, and innovation through peer review and the rigorous application of standards within the context of institutional mission (MSCHE, 2018).

In 2016, CCC concluded its 50th anniversary. CCC is a two-year community college in a distressed portion of the State of New Jersey that ranks as one of lowest in educational attainment in K-12 education (TownCharts.com, 2016). With a diverse and bilingual population and many first-generation college students, and with over 60% of the student population receiving financial aid, the college is an integral resource in Cumberland County. If CCC did not

exist, many county residents would not earn a college degree, emerge as student leaders in the community, participate in extra-curricular activities, or obtain employment upon graduation.

From 2014 to 2016, unemployment numbers have decreased which coincides with CCC's enrollment numbers. Despite strong efforts to increase recruitment through traditional means of high school visitation, general advertising, and increasing enrollment staff, the college has seen a steady decline in the recruitment of new students. Along with this concerning situation, a significant budget deficit is a reality and a new president is transitioning into her first presidency with a top-down re-organization. Many senior level positions (including a director of public relations and marketing) and longstanding policies have been changed in a short period of time.

This study is being conducted to provide guidance to CCC's administration, recruitment, and enrollment staff to strategically share stories from engaged students via a content marketing plan focusing on social media marketing.

Statement of Problem

It is unknown what kind of stories engaged students tell about their CCC experiences and how those stories can be used in the creation of a content marketing plan.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to gather stories from engaged CCC students that can be used in creating a content marketing plan for Cumberland County College. The completed plan will be presented to CCC administration, faculty, and staff.

Need for Study

Currently, CCC does not have an effective marketing plan. Since 2010, CCC's enrollment numbers have decreased by 1,000 students that is approximately a 25% decline over

the last eight years. Part of Cumberland County College's strategic mission is increased enrollment. The college's marketing strategy will be a key element in helping CCC achieve this mission. Content marketing that features stories as a means of attracting the attention of the audience can be a key, low-cost aspect of CCC's overall marketing strategy. This study is needed to generate the stories that can be used in creating a content marketing plan that highlight engaged students' storytelling. CCC's president and executive leadership team, enrollment, and marketing team, as well as recruitment staff have communicated the need for a content marketing plan.

Research Questions

This study is designed to address two qualitative research questions based on the previously identified research and limitations focusing on student storytelling, content marketing, and student engagement. The study aims to address the following questions:

- 1.) What kind of stories do engaged students share about their CCC experience?
- 2.) How can engaged student stories, suggestions, or ideas be used in a content marketing plan for CCC?

Definition of Terms

Branding. "The marketing practice of creating a name, symbol, design, or some combination, which identifies the 'product' of a particular organization as having a sustainable competitive advantage" (Doyle, 1990, p.6).

Content marketing. "Delivering the content your audience is seeking in all the places they are searching for it. It is the effective combination of created, curated, and syndicated content" (Baltes, 2015, p. 112).

Involvement. Astin (1999) defines involvement as “an investment of physical and psychological energy that occurs along a continuum, meaning different students exhibit different levels of involvement at different times” (p. 519).

Leadership. “Creating a vision, providing the knowledge, tools, and inspiration to achieve that vision through your own efforts and through the efforts of those you lead” (Futch, 2004, p. 280).

Marketing. “The activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (AMA, 2013, para. 1).

Narrative. “A spoken or written account of events; a story” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17).

Recruitment. “An attempt to ‘sell’ your college or university to a student and convince them to purchase your product – their education” (Azizian, 2017, para. 1).

Storytelling. “Uses words, visuals and actions to relate meaning, as well as engage the audience’s imagination” (National Storytelling Network, 2018, para. 5).

Student engagement. Meaningful student involvement throughout the learning environment (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

Theme. An idea that can be seen running through several responses (Harding, 2013, p. 83).

Summary

Currently, higher education institutions, specifically community colleges in New Jersey, are threatened by several significant challenges that could affect their sustainability as critical institutions of higher learning and community engagement. These institutions provide integral

educational and engagement opportunities for populations that have traditionally been underserved. Low enrollment numbers, budget, and program cuts cause uncertainty on campus, which directly affects student learning and satisfaction. Cumberland County College, similar to other two-year schools, is facing all of these challenges. Using the stories of engaged students to inform the creation of a content marketing plan designed to better reach CCC's target population is seen as a strategy that may increase CCC's enrollment.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

Storytelling is one of the world's oldest teaching tools (Spagnoli, 1995). Plato, one of the greatest philosophers of all time, "...believed storytelling was fundamental to preparing Guardians (leaders) to perform their role in the ideal state (company). He recognized the key role stories play in shaping cultures, promoting desirable behaviours, and inspiring action" (Thestorytellers.com, para. 24). Storytelling captivates audiences no matter what age, gender, or ethnicity. Family histories and world cultures are passed down from generation to generation in the form of a story. Lessons are learned, empathy is felt, and mistakes are reflected upon through storytelling. Stories are also vital ingredients in persuasive messages. Plato understood that the more compelling a story, the more powerful its effect (The Storytellers, para. 22).

According to Finlay and Hogan (1995), stories are seen as both a window and a mirror, allowing people to look out at the world and offering a reflection back. Through literature, television, or film, stories teach us about what we don't know, take us to places far away, and allow us to build relationships.

"Stories are the fabric of our lives. If we explain our actions to others or ourselves, we tell stories. Stories help us to make sense of what we are, where we come from, and what we want to be" (Soin & Scheytt, 2006, p. 55). Soin and Scheytt (2006) proceed to explain, "When we aim to interpret what happens in cultures different than our own, we mostly obtain information via stories or other types of narrative, that are presented to us in different ways, for example through movies, novels, newspapers or comedy" (p. 55). It is anticipated that student

stories about life at a county community college would similarly offer a diversity of perspectives and a window on life at a community college.

Effective storytelling involves several important components. These components include: setting, character, plot, rising action, climax, and resolution. This same “formula” of storytelling can be utilized in organizations to build and maintain relationships, persuade people to embrace a vision or “call to action,” and to facilitate change. According to Purnima Nandy from the March 2017 article posted on Insiderhr.com, “When a person needs to be motivated or action is desired out of him/her, communication in the form of stories will generate a stronger reaction when compared to passive data given to him/her” (para. 7).

This literature review reveals that researchers, leaders, business professionals, artists, and educators provide evidence that storytelling can be an effective communication strategy used by leaders and other organizational members to market a product or service. The problem is that storytelling is an under-utilized communication skill that could be more purposefully utilized with positive results in marketing strategies.

Effective techniques and methods for storytelling were also generated in the literature review process. The goal of this review is to share this collection of knowledge, discuss why student engagement and storytelling could help create a content marketing plan, and suggest common themes that emerged from the literature review.

Much of the research focuses on articles written by these authors: Boggs (2011a, b), Boje, Rosile, Saylor, and Saylor (2015), Foreman and Retallick (2012), Futch (2004), Gayles (2009), Goodwin and Miller (2013), Guber (2007), Heugens (2002), Joyner (2012), McCarthy (2008), Miles (2010), Nissley and Graham (2009), Perkins-Gough (2013), Pulizzi (2012 a, b),

and Schedlitzki, Jarvis, and MacInnes (2015). These researchers provide an understanding of the possible impact student storytelling can have in community college recruitment and marketing efforts.

Search strategies and inclusion criteria. The focus of this literature review is to explore how student storytelling can be used in student recruitment and marketing efforts. Wilmington University's online library resources were used to access journal articles through databases such as Academic Search Premiere, Communication Source, EBSCOhost, Business Source Ultimate, ProQuest, PsychINFO, SAGE Journal Online, SocINDEX, and WorldCat. Searches started with search terms that might yield results related to *storytelling* and *leadership* but then transitioned into other searches including *communication*, *narrative*, and *marketing*.

Initial search terms included *storytelling*, *story*, *student leader*, *student involvement*, *student success*, *community college*, and *marketing*. The review of articles provided idea generation for additional and more focused search terms. These terms included *educational*, *education*, *engagement*, *experiential*, *communication*, and *narrative*. *Communication* and *narrative* were added as search terms that provided a key article used throughout this review. To gather more empirical research focused on marketing search terms, such as *content marketing*, *recruitment*, *persuasion*, and *extracurricular activities* were added. These additional terms provided an excellent article discussing *story-mining* and qualitative research.

Searches were also conducted via Cumberland County College's online library accessing ProQuest, Academic Search Premiere, and SAGE. Google Scholar was also utilized for this literature review. The use of Google Scholar as a search engine combining the search terms *storytelling*, *history*, and *theatre*, enabled the researcher to find the National Storytelling

Network that led to over 470 articles related to storytelling. This source provided more articles and journals dedicated to focusing my dissertation topic.

Since storytelling and marketing is a relatively new subject for empirical research, the search criteria were limited to scholarly articles with the date range from 2000 to present. Several articles were excluded based on reading the abstract which indicated the article wasn't relevant to the arguments being developed in the literature review.

Organization of the literature review. This literature review highlights the relationship between storytelling, student engagement, and marketing. The review also relays what is known about content marketing, its use and influence in attracting a target audience. Storytelling will be individually linked with each theme – relationships, strategy, and marketing with a focus on content marketing. Student engagement will be linked with student government, athletics, and student clubs. The literature review begins with the research on the importance of storytelling as a communication tool, then connects storytelling with relationships, strategy, marketing, and lastly, content marketing. Conclusions will be drawn from the research and what further steps need to be taken to move the research on using storytelling in content marketing for higher education institutions forward.

Storytelling: An Important Communication Tool

Gabriel (2004) suggests that storytelling is reflective. The past is reconfigured according to stories told and retold. Multiple storytellers add interpretations that can alter meaning but also help in “sense making” of the present and the future. Boje (1991) explains that organizational storytelling can be seen as “the institutional memory system” (p. 106).

According to the National Storytelling Network, “storytelling is interactive, uses words, uses actions, presents a story, and encourages the active imagination of listeners” (2018, para. 5).

Effective storytelling builds a connection between the storyteller and the listeners. The more senses engaged during storytelling, the more alive the story becomes for the audience. Gestures, actions, and physical movements help aid the telling of the story and the connection with the audience. All oral storytelling involves a narrative combined with an expressive, interactive delivery that encourages the audience to imagine the reality presented in the story. Storytelling can be combined with drama, music, dance, comedy, puppetry along with countless other forms of expression (National Storytelling Network, 2018).

Storytelling can happen over a cup of coffee with a friend, in a 1,000-seat theater space, or in a marketing campaign, but all these stories, no matter where they are happening, allow relationships to form through compelling content and expressive, interactive delivery.

Storytelling and relationships. According to Gresh (1998), “storytelling is one of the most distinguishing characteristics of people, communities, nations, and businesses” (p. 122). In everyday life, communication plays a key role in relationship building. Whether verbal or non-verbal communication, internal or external, human beings tend to communicate with one another regularly. Whether it is through face-to-face communication or digital technology, communication is a constant feature of our daily lives. Through communication, relationships are created and maintained. This idea is not only important in personal relationships, but also in professional relationships.

Barker and Gower (2010) suggest that storytelling is “an effective cross-cultural communication tool. . . that fills the diverse communication needs of today’s heterogeneous

workforce” (p. 296). Barker and Gower (2010) compare one narrative theory, narrative paradigm theory (NPT) and one communication model, storytelling model of organizational communication (STMOC) to further examine this idea. Both focus on storytelling as a key communication tool.

Barker and Gower (2010) discusses the NPT which recognizes that “storytelling is a cross-culturally accepted method of communicating” (p. 296). NPT is seen as an “interesting combination of a sender’s innate ability to tell stories and the theory’s assumption of the receiver’s ability to logically evaluate the story’s content offers an intriguing opportunity for NPT to be used more regularly in business environments” (Barker & Gower, 2010, p. 299). As shown in Figure 1, Barker and Gower built on Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm (1985, 1989).

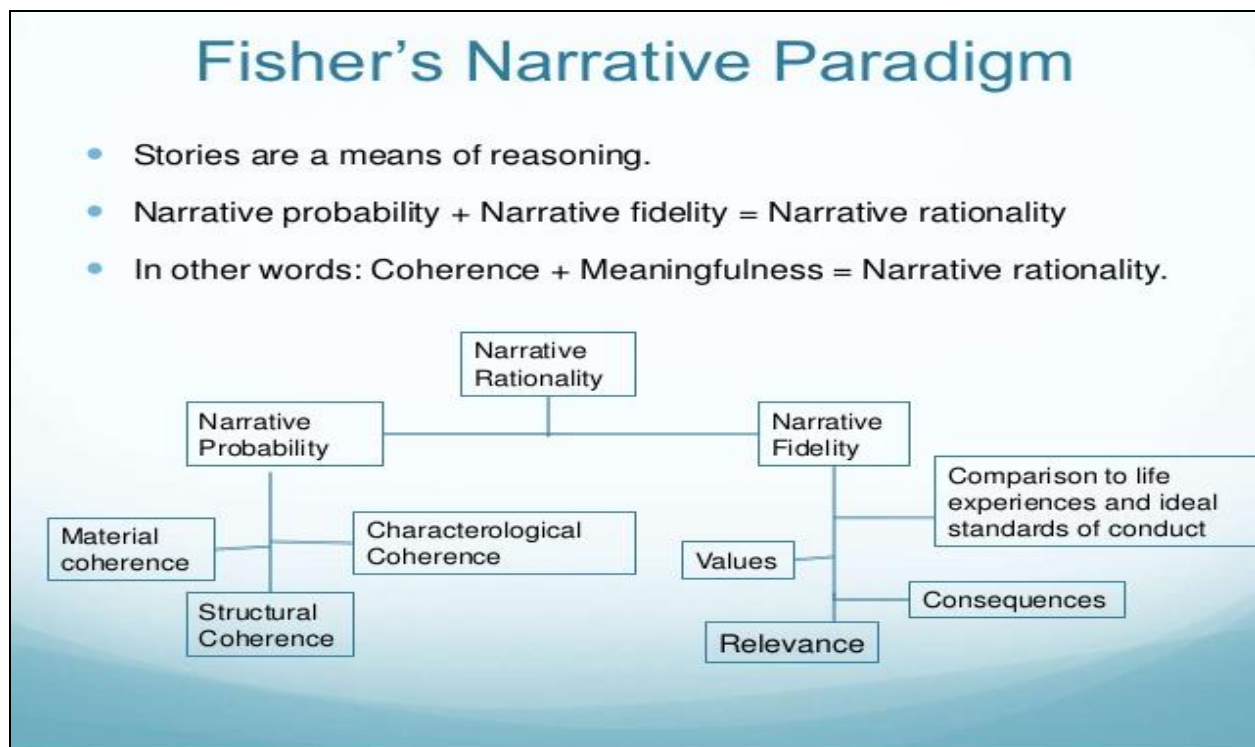


Figure 1. Narrative paradigm theory (NPT). Adapted from “Strategic Application of Storytelling in Organizations,” by R. T. Barker & K. Grower, 2010, *Journal of Business Communication*, 47(3), p. 300. Reprinted with permission, see Appendix.

The STMOC is an expansion of NPT. STMOC recognizes “all humans as storytellers with the ability to send and receive messages that establish a value-laden reality, establishes a common ground among all participants and provides a faster method of establishing a social relationship” (Barker & Gower, 2010, p. 302). This model suggests storytelling as a viable option for promoting clear communication, developing organizational understanding, building stronger relationships, and increasing productivity, and profit.



Figure 2: Storytelling model of organizational communication (STMOC). Adapted from “Strategic Application of Storytelling in Organizations,” by R. T. Barker & K. Grower, 2010, *Journal of Business Communication*, 47(3), p. 302. Reprinted with permission, see Appendix.

Both storytelling and organizational communication complement and support each other. Both suggest the power storytelling has as a communications method. These concepts

emphasize that transparent, truthful storytelling allows people to share knowledge, listen, learn, and inspire.

At the end of their article, Barker and Gower (2010) pose three questions that suggest future research opportunities. They are: “1) At what level of the organization is storytelling most effective? 2) What are the characteristics of an effective organizational story? and 3) Why aren’t more organizations using storytelling more consistently as a communication method?” (p. 308).

Although these questions are focused on organizations, storytelling can be an effective tool applied to the individual and organizational recruitment relevant to this study. The characteristics of effective stories are relevant, no matter what the message. If key characteristics are missing, the message may not be received as planned. Why organizations aren’t using storytelling as a consistent communication method, is something CCC needs to reflect upon as it evaluates its external communications efforts and seeks to strengthen them. Barker and Gower (2010) shared valuable research on the important NPT theory and STMOC model of storytelling, communication, and relationship building.

Storytelling and strategy. According to Tyler (2015), “While strategic plans are often described as living documents that educate stakeholders, guide decisions, and inform action, in many nonprofit organizations, it is not treated as an important document” (p. 327).

Usually, the strategic plan gets put into a binder and set-aside for a year, rather than informing the day-to-day decisions and work of the organization. To test the idea of strategic process reform, Tyler (2015) conducted a case study using a participatory action research approach with a small, grassroots, non-profit agency, My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) located in Baltimore, MD. The study was connecting organizational vision and a communication strategy

that emphasized the role of storytelling in the creation of mosaic art display of its organizational vision (p. 327). Tyler (2015) states:

We can consider strategy, at least in part, as an assemblage of ideas and images about a future state, a vision. The process of “strategic assemblage” applied in the action research study intentionally grounds mosaic work in storytelling and drawing. Implicit here is the assembling of people, their voices and perspectives, which are expressed and “fit together” in new ways on the basis of the process. Their storytelling fosters presentational knowing both individually and organizationally about the possibilities for the future, and by extension creates the potential for transformative learning to occur. (p. 328)

There were five phases created and implemented to complete this vision mosaic process and project. They include: visioning, image synthesis, collaborative expression, operational planning, and finalizing (Tyler, 2015, p. 331). See Figure 3 below for more information about each phase.

A schedule was established for two large-group work events on weekends, and six evenings were set aside for board, staff, and a handful of key volunteers to work on actually generating the vision and plan documents. The study advanced through five phases depicted in Figure 3 to complete the project. MBK’s Executive Director felt strongly that the project should be done within the agency’s building, to maintain focus on the “who, what, and why” of the MBK and focus on the organizational values. The project brought a diverse group of participants (in age, ethnicity, and experience) to work on something that felt “strange” and risky (Tyler, 2015, p. 334).

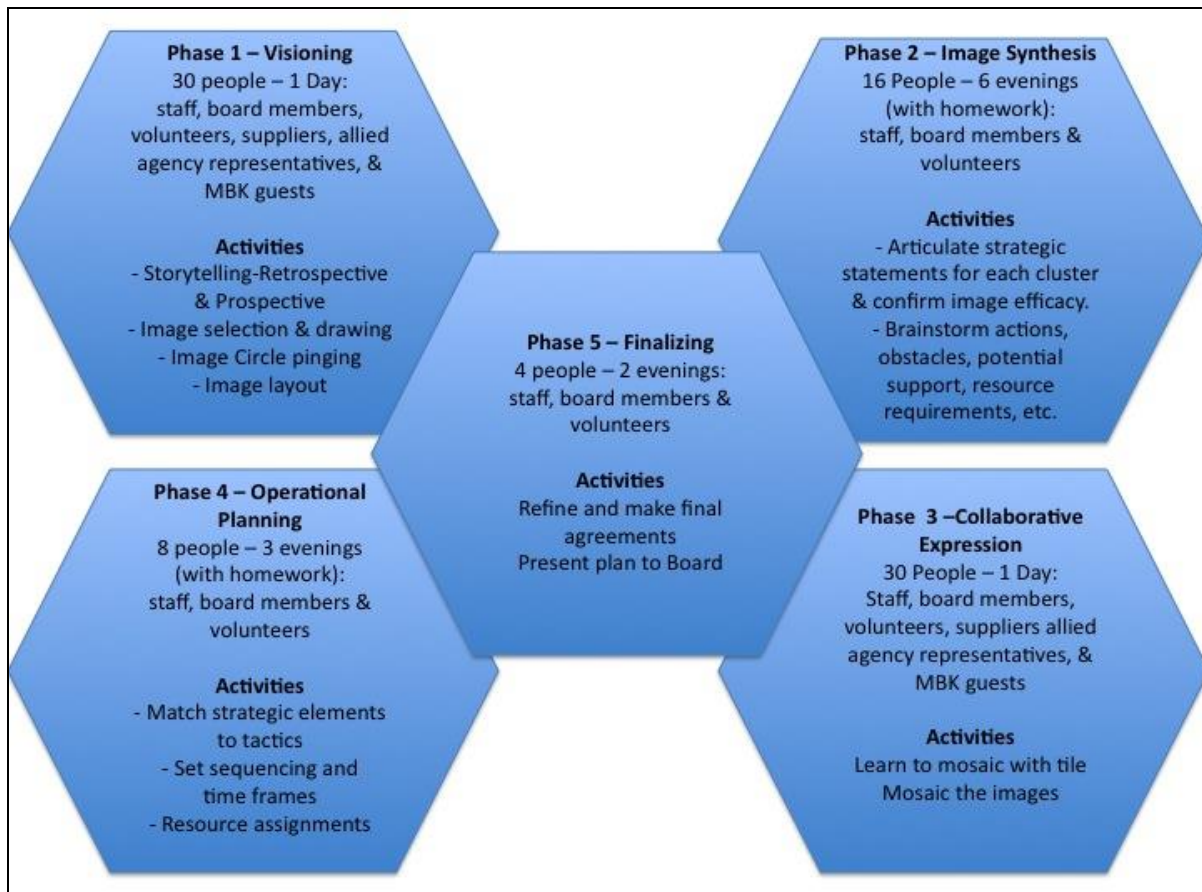


Figure 3. A summary of the five phases of strategic assemblage for vision and strategic planning undertaken in the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) action research project. Adapted from "From Spoke to Hub: Transforming Organizational Vision and Strategy with Story and Visual Art," by J. Tyler, 2015, *Adult Education Quarterly*, 65, p. 331. Reprinted with permission, see Appendix.

This article provided a new perspective on storytelling and strategic planning. The mosaic assembly literally and figuratively represented the planning process and the "coming together" of MBK's stakeholders. It also sheds light on the power storytelling has as an art form and how it can positively affect an organization's future through strategic planning. Also, as a visual art piece, created by stakeholders from the community and the organization, it provides a

constant visual presentation of the organization's past, present, and future. This article connects storytelling as part of the strategic planning process. Internal and external communication and marketing are key elements of a strategic plan. Driven by the mission and vision of the organization, important parts of the marketing plan can be implemented through effective, strategic storytelling.

Throgmorton (2003) states:

We choose to tell certain stories because they matter to us, and we tell them in certain ways because those ways of telling feel right. Thus, planning stories are often about (or are inspired by) powerful memories, deep fears, passionate hopes, intense angers, and visionary dreams, and it is these emotions that give good stories their power. In the end, such stories shape *meaning* and tell readers (and listeners) what is important and what is not, what counts and what does not, what matters and what does not. (p. 128)

Throgmorton (2003) continued to explain that storytellers who engage emotions, such as fear, anger, hope, sadness, and joy help people transform (p. 145). It is this type of transformation that could be highlighted with the use of storytelling for college recruitment.

Storytelling and marketing. Mancuso and Stuth (2014) share, "The art of storytelling is as old as Earth, representing perhaps one of the most ancient formats of human communication: conveying messages and sharing accumulated knowledge and wisdom to help navigate the world around us" (p. 18). Given the amount of time storytelling has been recorded, it is surprising it has not been used more frequently as a marketing tool.

In a Forbes 2015 article entitled, "Four Benefits of Using Storytelling in Marketing," Steve Olenski quotes Sue Gunelius (2013), "The opportunities to tell stories as part of direct or

indirect brand marketing initiatives have become a strategic priority” (para. 1). The four benefits are: 1) Convey your personality: Let your brand’s personality shine through via storytelling; 2) Bring your brand in front as the lead: Take your customers on a journey, involve characters and plot linked to the story’s message; 3) Hit the emotional quotient: Tell a real story that will hit the emotional chord with customers; and 4) Keep them coming back for more: Tell a story, stop using boring numbers, be creative and activate consumers brains (Olenski, 2015, para. 6). These four storytelling suggestions will help guide eliciting student stories during student interviews.

According to Heugens (2002), “External organizational constituents has long been the turf of branding specialists and marketing professionals, but practitioners from other backgrounds too have recently developed an interest in the psyches of firms’ external stakeholders” (p. 57). The information shared in this journal article discloses results from an empirical study of the public affairs management processes of several globally operated food firms that offer Genetically Modified Organisms GMOS. “Contenders from both sides relied on storytelling techniques to gain the support of the public at large and national governmental bodies” (Heugens, 2002, p. 58).

From a public relations perspective, three important characteristics of storytelling are: “helping to understand the outside world, using a plot that highlights certain elements of a story, and constraining their ability to portray facts or opinions based on competition” (Heugens, 2002, p. 58). Heugens, (2002) explains:

Stories used as sense-making vehicles allow outsiders to understand the organization and its impact. If stories are the preferred vehicle for sense-making for human relations with external stakeholders, then the primary function of a public affairs department is to share

favorable stories about the organization to the external audience it critically depends upon. (p. 60)

Stories used as plots allow stories to be malleable to a certain degree. Heugens notes that stories can be adapted and retold in a version slightly different from the original. Stories can be altered: “a) by highlighting historical events downplaying others; b) by retelling the story in a non-chronological fashion; or c) by introducing new elements in the story that are alien to the original” (2002, p. 60). Heugens argues, “The story plot is more persuasive and compelling than the original” (2002, p. 60).

With these three characteristics of storytelling in mind, “this inductive qualitative research examines how various related but dissimilar stories may coexist and struggle for dominance as it relates to the introduction of GMOs in Western Europe” (Heugens, 2002, p. 61).

Data were collected via interview reports, archival materials, and the field notes from roundtable discussions. The materials were read and sorted, and recurring story elements emerged. “The elements provided the raw materials input for the post hoc reconstruction of four compelling plots” (Heugens, 2002, p. 62). Script theory stripped away the non-essentials of a story. The next step was to add more flesh to the bones of the script. The outcome was four plots: Plot 1: Scientific progress; Plot 2: Science fiction; Plot 3: Human advancement; and Plot 4: Corporate heresy.

All four plots revealed a number of common story elements even though they had extreme views. One common, recurring theme emerged, “All the plots acknowledged that recent developments in the field of GMOs are likely to have a major impact on almost all contemporaneous societies in the foreseeable future” (Heugens, 2002, p. 66).

In summation, “storytelling can be a useful public affairs technique that helps secure the organizational purpose, even if the corporate story fails to command absolute hegemony over its rivals” (Heugens, 2002, p. 68).

In Heugens’ (2002) study, storytelling is revealed as a persuasive technique. The belief is that the most powerful tools available to managers for navigating the minds of outside parties is sharing stories. It is difficult to impact human behavior with numbers and statistics. Compelling stories relate and resonant with people which moves them to act. This research supports marketing and storytelling as an effective means to communicate with potential students, persuading them to connect and act by enrolling in Cumberland Community College.

Pinkerton’s (2003) article in *Nursing Economics* reveals three ways storytelling can be persuasive:

- Turning a negative incident into a positive learning experience;
- Assisting in recruitment efforts and influencing retention;
- Involving staff and customers as a compelling function (p. 298).

Joyner (2012) reflects, “Over the past several years, the world in which we live, and work has undergone a fundamental transformation, resulting in what is being described by some as ‘the new normal’” (p. 631). Stories are one way to make the world seem less complex. “Though in many ways counter-intuitive, effective action in the complex environment of the new normal may require a move towards simplicity” (Joyner, 2012, p. 631).

Peter Guber, an award-winning filmmaker and creator of Mandalay Entertainment, is in the business of creating compelling stories. In his 2007 article, “The Four Truths of the Storyteller,” Guber discusses understanding how stories touch audiences. Guber (2007)

explains, “Sometimes, a well-crafted story can even transform a seemingly hopeless situation into an unexpected triumph” (para. 3). He further explains the four truths.

“The leader as storyteller reveals the crucial importance of truth as an attribute of both the powerful story and the effective storyteller. Storytelling is not just entertainment but a way to instruct and lead human culture” (Guber, 2007, para. 15). The author states, “For the leader, storytelling is action oriented—a force for turning dreams into goals and then into results” (para. 17). “Although the mind may be part of your target, the heart is the bull’s-eye” (para. 26).

Truth to the audience reveals the “implicit contract between the storyteller and audience. It includes a promise that the listeners’ expectations, once aroused, will be fulfilled” (para. 27). Listeners give of their time, so storytellers need to spend it wisely for them. The elements of the story needed to be crafted in a way to take the listeners on a satisfying, emotional journey. The listeners’ journey results in an altered psychological state, which is the essence of storytelling (para. 29). Practical implications for the craft of storytelling include:

- Try your story out on people who aren’t already converts;
- Identify your audience’s emotional needs and meet them with integrity;
- Tell your story in an interactive fashion so they feel they participated in shaping the story (para. 30-32).

The fourth truth, truth to the moment, reveals that a great storyteller never tells a story the same way twice. The story is tailored each time to the situation. Preparation is key, and practice does make perfect. Guber (2007) concludes, “State-of-the-art technology is a great tool for capturing and transmitting words, images, and ideas, but the power of storytelling resides most fundamentally in ‘state-of-the-heart’ technology” (para. 69).

But what makes storytelling fun and compelling? Mancuso and Stuth (2014) write about the “perfect pairing” of storytelling and marketing. They cite a Fast Company article that highlights the research about why we find the self-disclosure associated with story telling so rewarding. Storytelling “...activates the rewards system of the brain, providing that same shot of dopamine we get from sex, food and exercise” (Mancuso & Stuth, 2014, p. 18).

Video technology takes this idea a step further. We can tell much more about ourselves using more narrative and more stories. Activity and interaction helps: “grab our audience’s attention, spark our imagination, and share our story with the world around us” (Mancuso & Stuth, 2014, p. 18). Mancuso and Stuth (2014) assert, “When video tells a memorable, compelling story, we are instantly engaged once again in the oldest form of social communication” (p. 18).

Storytelling through video is something anyone can create with a smartphone. It’s now mainstream technique. With this capability and information, what should marketers do? They should invite their audience to tell their stories with their unique spin and interpretation. “By talking about your target and brand, they will build a trust and loyalty with your customers. Through this storytelling experiences, the audience can be exposed to a long-term impression of your brand and make your brand part of their story” (Mancuso & Stuth, 2014, p. 19).

Tussyadiah, Park, and Fesenmaier’s (2011) study reports that introducing narrative in marketing is effective. The researchers note, “This study supports the underlying premise of introducing narrative in marketing, that is, the narrative reasoning that human beings possess with which they can retrieve information better through a story” (p. 64). The researchers also shared that “narrative is the most effective device to understand human experience. In other

words, it is argued that we can understand the ways people (and we) experience the world through understanding stories” (Tussyadiah et al., 2011, pp. 65-66). Narratives offer the potential to persuade by encouraging people to make desired (from the sellers’ perspective) choices (Tussyadiah et al., 2011, p. 66). Most importantly,

Audiences will be able to imagine the benefits of consuming the same products with the characters in the stories if: (a) they see themselves as similar to the characters (i.e., the audiences think that the characters resemble themselves) and/or (2) they can relate the story to stories stored in their memories. (Tussyadiah et al., 2011, p. 69)

Storytelling connects potential consumers to marketing messages by identifying with the storytellers and relating to the content of the message. This is why using students’ stories in content marketing may be an effective strategy for recruiting new students at Cumberland Community College.

Content Marketing

Pulizzi (2012a) defines content marketing as “the creation of valuable, relevant and compelling content by the brand itself on a consistent basis, used to generate a positive behavior from a customer or prospect of the brand” (p. 116). Content marketing is communicated in many ways including: digital magazines, e-newsletters, blog posts, videos, webinars, and podcasts.

Many companies are using content marketing to effectively reach their customers, but not much empirical research has been conducted on the subject. The few empirical studies discovered are featured throughout this part of the literature review along with information from trade publications and professional blog postings.

“Content marketing as been around for hundreds of years. John Deere’s *The Furrow*

magazine is the first example of corporate storytelling” (Pulizzi, 2012a, p. 116-117). John Deere became an informational expert about farmers’ equipment needs. JELL-O also used storytelling, giving away free recipe books to consumers. Sears launched its World’s Largest Store (WLS) radio show in the 1920s for the farming community (Pulizzi, 2012a, p. 117).

There were three major barriers to entry that used to exist as a gate to content marketing. These no longer exist, which has helped to fuel the growth of content marketing. The barriers included: content acceptance, talent, and technology.

Content acceptance. Today, consumers are no longer reliant on “media brands,” like the Wall Street Journal for their content. Consumers seek accurate, reliable sources in their search for relevant and valuable information to make educated decisions.

Talent. In the past, many journalists were against working for non-media brands, as it was seen as tainting their profession. Today, writers, editors and journalists are available in literally every industry to help brands produce great and compelling storytelling. The majority of journalism jobs available today are on the brand side, not in traditional media, as the media business model continues to struggle in many markets. The stigma of working for non-media brands, although still remaining, is not nearly as strong as it was.

Technology. Today, any person or company can publish content on the web for almost no investment (Pulizzi, 2012a, p. 117). For a non-media company, content is created to indirectly attract and retain customers. In all other respects, “the content creation activities in both types of companies are generally the same. This is important to realize, in that non-media brands are competing with traditional media for attention and retention, just like brands compete with their regular competitors in various industries” (Pulizzi, 2012a, p. 117). More and more,

for-profit and non-profit brands are starting to realize that all the technology tools available are worthless without a content marketing plan at the center of their marketing strategy.

Technology currently dominates educational innovation and is changing the way we teach and learn. It has also changed the way higher education is marketed. “Research conducted by enrollment management firms, such as Stamats Higher Education Marketing (2007) and others indicate that the primary method for seeking information on higher education is the Internet” (Braverman, 2013, p. 10) which has major implications for recruitment strategies in higher education.

Google recently released their research project, Zero Moment of Truth, that found consumers are engaging in twice the amount of content online year-over-year leading up to a buying decision.

In 2010, the average consumer engaged with approximately five pieces of content leading up to a buying decision. In 2011, that number was 10 pieces of content. To take advantage of these trends, brands must ensure that their content is “in the mix” while these decisions are being made. If not, companies without efficient content marketing practices may be left out of the buying process entirely. (Pulizzi, 2012a, p. 119)

Generalizing to students making decisions about where to attend college, one can hypothesize that with efficient and effective content marketing practices, higher education institutions may be left out of students’ decisions about how best to pursue their educational goals. Pulizzi (2012a) states, “The evolution of the marketing department transforms itself into more of a publishing department. The biggest corporate challenge is the creation of engaging

content” (p. 119).

Great content marketers have developed (some for many years) targeted, educational content portals similar to what media companies have been doing for decades. A best-of-breed example is consumer-packaged leader Procter and Gamble (P&G):

- Home Made Simple—targeting “Moms” on the go
- Being Girl—targeting adolescent women
- Man of the House—targeting husbands and Dads (Pulizzi, 2012a, p. 120).

Pulizzi (2012a) asks:

What is key about these sites is a laser-like targeting of a super niche category? Where most average content marketers fall down is by going too broad with their content focus.

A key to P&G’s success, is very specific content, targeted to a very specific buyer and a relentless focus on useful and entertaining content meant to truly engage readers and customers (p. 120).

The site and company, through the creation and distribution of compelling and relevant content, have defined the content market for themselves, their customers AND the media. With this type of success, we are seeing more brands embrace the role of the Chief Storyteller or Chief Content Officer within the marketing organization. Currently, content is being created and distributed in multiple silos in an organization, including: social media, public relations, marketing, email, mobile, and search.

“In many of our interviews with marketers, the heads of these departments were unaware of the stories being created and distributed in other silos. This type of content workflow does not set up for a working customer experience, as content often does not align” (Pulizzi, 2012a, p.

121). Pulizzi observes, “Leading organizations are hiring individuals with strong storytelling backgrounds (often journalists and editors) to help coordinate and fine-tune the content marketing process inside and outside the organization” (2012a, p. 121).

The future of the marketing department is half marketing and half publishing. Brands will have the ability to respond to real-time news as the stories develop, much like the media companies of today. “Brands will accomplish their marketing goals, not mainly through interruptive media, but by creating and distributing the most valuable information on the planet for that particular niche” (Pulizzi, 2012a, pp. 122-123).

The information provided in this article gives insight to content marketing being created and implemented with a small marketing staff and a small budget. Content, talent, and technology are easily accessible utilizing student stories for content and talent and a Smartphone, if need be, to capture a compelling story.

Lisa East, content marketing expert and blogger, discusses information about why a content marketing plan is so important in the digital age. East (2016) states that content marketing is “a great way to get in front of your customers in a meaningful way when they’re online” (p. 44). International research shows that 81 percent of consumers research online before making a major purchasing decision. This means having a solid online marketing plan is essential, as well as a well-thought out content marketing plan.

East (2016) affirms, “Content marketing is all about storytelling. Content marketing gives you the opportunity to attract, engage, convert, and retain new customers by providing relevant and valuable information that helps solve their problems” (p. 44). Website content, blogs, emails, social media, video, info-graphics, and print are all examples of typical content

marketing tools.

In sharp contrast to Web navigation just four or five years ago, social media sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, provide electronic forums where students can speak to one another or with peers, offering opinions, sharing practices and photos, and providing uncensored opinions about programs and professors that are immediately accessed and virally distributed. Most major programs at colleges and universities desiring to remain viable have pages on Facebook and Twitter. Social media marketing skills are critical for continuing educators to remain competitive in today's fast-moving, digitally oriented education marketplace. (Braverman, 2013, pp. 10-11)

Content marketing's prominence has increased due to the rise in the Internet and how it is used to inform decisions. Sharing valuable information through storytelling may sound simple but, it is not simple to do. There are several aspects to keep in mind. Linked to your overarching strategy, East (2016) states that you need to "incorporate key messages, know how and where you are going to communicate with customers, what action you want them to take, and how you will measure success" (p. 45).

It is important to know who your target audience is and what digital channels they will use. Next, a content calendar should be created to ensure key messages are communicated through the right channels at the right time. A mix of content is key, always putting the customers needs first (East, 2016, p. 45). Content should always be engaging, relevant, interesting and compelling with a call to action for the customer. East (2016) suggests, "A good rule is that of every six communications, four are content of interest to the client, one is about you and one is a sales offer" (p. 45).

Content marketing strategy allows a company to “attract, engage, convert, and retain customers, and build a strong brand, at a fraction of the cost of a traditional advertising campaign” (East, 2016, p. 45). The final step, as part of a content marketing plan, is to track, measure and analyze your results and if something isn’t working, make changes.

East’s (2016) article was valuable in defining content marketing as a way “to attract, engage, convert, and retain new customers” which is the goal of any content marketing effort using social media to reach the intended audience. East’s suggestions helped guide the questions asked during focus group data collection in this study.

Jessica Davis, a writer for Econtentmag.com, communicates important tips about how to create and publish easy-to-understand, relevant and expert content online. Her tips include:

- Always publish accurate information – be the expert in your field and share that expertise.
- Create blogs, not advertisements – provide useful advice and information, don’t try to sell.
- Make your content findable and professional – credibility is key and finding content should be easy.
- Create and use exciting visual content – designers can appeal to customers through info-graphics to share information.
- Hire journalists – content is about storytelling, so journalists can create cutting-edge, attractive, and original content.
- Engage with customers – respond promptly and positively to feedback. (Davis, 2013, pp. 29-30)

According to CMI and Marketing Profs research, only 36% of marketing professionals believe that they are using content marketing effectively to drive business goals (Pulizzi, 2012b, p. 21). Successful content marketers are creating a few trends: 1) Sites such as American Express are becoming category content leaders; 2) Companies are hiring chief content officers/storytellers to bring the content and customer experience together; 3) Instead of “feeding the beast” content marketing focuses on less stories but with truly inspiring and helpful content; 4) Brands are subscription focused, engaging the customer through the entire life cycle creating passionate subscribers to their brand (Pulizzi, 2012b, p. 21). Pulizzi concludes, “We are now in the middle of a renaissance in how brands are mobilizing their marketing strategy around content. It’s a new beginning, as we see the transformation of marketing departments into publishing entities” (p. 21).

The research above supports the limited number of stories being gathered versus the content quality of those stories. Instead of inundating customers with an overwhelming amount of information, storytelling can be used to inspire and inform so a customer will act.

According to Lin Pophal’s (2015) article, “The State of Content Marketing,” digital marketing is being inundated with content. This means that it is an increasing challenge to stand out and generate results. Pophal (2015) communicates Tammy Mangan’s advice on content marketing based on her work with an intellectual property law firm in Washington, D.C. Mangan states, “It is rare that a law firm would produce [a] voluminous report, but instead favor 500 to 1,500 words on a hot topic or a 2-minute video about a change in the law or impending legislation” (Pophal, 2015, p. 17). Mangan also asserts that content needs to be useful and timely (p. 17).

Hana Abaza, director of marketing at Uberslip states, “The overarching theme is a drive towards becoming more effective and finding tools that help measure performance and track ROI” (Pophal, 2015, p. 17). “Content strategy needs to drive data collection, and the analysis of the data needs to lead to adjustments in strategy, tactics, and content to generate real results. The result could help cut down the content clutter that consumers are facing” (Pophal, 2015, p. 17).

As content marketers look ahead, “planning should focus on reviewing and developing a clear strategy aligned with desired business outcomes, outlining a path for success” (Pophal, 2015, p. 17). Professionals realize that the traditional marketing communication strategies are failing so increasing their content marketing tools coupled with digital media will provide exciting, cost-effective alternatives.

Pophal’s (2015) article provides expert advice on using content marketing strategically and linking results to tactics that generate results and drive data collection. This supports the creation of a content marketing plan as part of an overall strategic marketing plan for any higher education institution. And, as the academic side of the house assesses student work, the college’s marketing leaders need to measure marketing performance and track effectiveness in order to have and to use data to guide future growth.

The content marketing definition given by Michael Brenner, author of B2B Marketing Insider, Co-Founder of Business 2 Community is: “content marketing is about delivering the content your audience is seeking in all the places they are searching for it. It is the effective combination of created, curated and syndicated content” (Baltes, 2015, p. 112). Baltes (2015) asserts, “...individuals must gain the trust of others to manage them, similarly the companies need to gain the confidence of their potential clients in their products and services in order to

impose themselves on the market” (p. 112). So, the content marketing should be based on the company’s values (Baltes, 2015, p. 113). Baltes (2015) outlines the common objectives of content marketing:

- increasing the brand awareness;
- building a relationship based on trust with the target;
- attracting new leads;
- solving the problems related to low audience traffic;
- creating a need for a specific product;
- developing customer loyalty;
- testing a product idea/business;
- creating an audience. (p. 14)

Smith and Wintrob (2013) posited that stories follow four primary constructs: heritage, contemporary, folklore, and vision. Each type of story serves a unique function and plays a different role in creating authentic, enduring experiences.

Brands are leveraging storytelling to break through increasingly cluttered environments to build passionate brand communities and provide their fans with a language through which the brand can be articulated to others. These stories supersede emotionless facts and figures for the simple reason that people connect with stories, build on them, and make them their own. (Smith & Wintrob, 2013, p. 41)

According to Baltes (2015), content marketing specialists indicate nine key areas to be considered in creating a content marketing strategy:

1. Focus on quality first and not on volume.

2. Topics your prospects/customers care about – the topics should be of interest to target.
3. Don't ignore Search Engine Optimization (SEO) – content marketing developed and promoted should take into consideration SEO, by including the keywords.
4. Think about variety - variety of media (pictures, videos, info-graphics, checklists, audio content, webinars and even live events), in addition to written content like blog posts, e-books and white papers. Also, variety can extend to what kind of content you create.
5. Build a social foundation - content is the fuel that keeps the social media “engine” humming as people share and re-share content they've discovered or that someone else (in most cases) shared with them.
6. Get your employees to share – it is also important that the company's employees share the content marketing.
7. Align content marketing and advertising efforts.
8. Monitor the reactions online by metrics.
9. Engage with people who share and comment. (p. 114)

In addition to monitoring mentions and shares, engaging with people who responded to the content can be a very powerful way to connect with potential prospects. The metrics used in content marketing should consider:

- Visits to the company's site;
- Page views;
- Number of newsletter subscribers;

- Followers on social media;
- Bounce rate; and
- Time spent on the company's site (Baltes, 2015, p. 115).

Also, content marketers must take into consideration four types of metrics: 1) Consumption metrics (Google Analytics, Traffic, Open Rates); 2) Sharing metrics (Retweets, Forwards, Likes); 3) Lead metrics (Leads generated); and 4) Sales metrics (Deals). "A well-defined strategy of content marketing has the ability to create a privileged relationship with the targeted audience by building a positive brand image" (Baltes, 2015, p. 115).

According to the statistics provided by the Content Marketing Institute,

The importance of content marketing is growing, as 70% of B2B marketers are creating more content than they did one year ago. Concerning the percentage of the organization's total marketing budget spent on content marketing, the average of B2B marketers from North America answered 28%. (Baltes, 2015, p. 115)

Valuable information colleges and universities can utilize to draw students to their website would be scholarship information, internship placements and successes, faculty expertise/mentoring, athletics, and student activities/club events. Basically,

Content marketing is the art of communicating with your customers and prospects without selling. Instead of pitching your products or services, you are delivering information that makes your buyer more intelligent. The essence of this content strategy is the belief that if we, as businesses, deliver consistent, ongoing valuable information to buyers, they ultimately reward us with their business and loyalty. (Baltes, 2015, p. 116)

Content Marketing Institute (2015) states, "The motivation behind content marketing is

the belief that educating the customer results in the brand's recognition as a thought leader and industry expert" (Baltes, 2015, p. 115). By content marketing, the fundamental tool of digital marketing utilizing content marketing, brands can cater campaigns and stories around buying patterns and personalities" (Cohen, 2016, para. 11).

That's why, to be relevant to your audience utilizing content marketing, brands can cater campaigns and stories around buying patterns and personalities" (Cohen, 2015). "The strategy of content marketing is adapted to each company, but it must consider the following elements: objectives of content marketing, analysis of the target, type of used content marketing, promotion channels, content marketing timetable (frequency), as well as metrics for measuring the impact of marketing content" (Baltes, 2015, p. 114). To be relevant to your audience and create a powerful brand you must win their trust and admiration. With the creation of a valuable content marketing plan, you build interest that transforms into lasting relationships.

Thackeray, Neiger, and Keller (2012) discuss a four-step, strategic thinking template to successfully include social media into an organization's marketing plan. The steps include: "1) Describe the audience, 2) Write down the purposes for wanting to engage with the audience, 3) Write down a specific strategy to engage the audience and accomplish your identified purpose, 4) Choose technology based on audience preferences and practices" (pp. 166-167).

This article's four-step thinking strategy supports the creation of the plan for this study and provides reasons why social media should be utilized as part of an overall marketing plan. Practitioners can realize social media's untapped potential by incorporating it as part of the larger social marketing strategy. Social media's added value is the opportunity to create ongoing conversations and dialogue with an audience in the "exchange of ideas and opinions" (Kent &

Taylor, 1998, p. 325).

“The inherent value of using social media applications is that they enable people to be actively engaged in the communication process and stay connected with individuals and groups of people they care about” (Rainie, Purcell, & Smith, 2011, p.13). These conversations are the starting point for creating deeper connections and longer-term relationships with audience members. Overall, audience members may be more involved in the process of developing and implementing the social marketing plan, as well as engaging in desired behavior change, because it is something they care about (Thackeray et al., 2012, p. 166).

Higher Education Marketing

Higher education institutions face an increasingly competitive marketplace as non-traditional purveyors offer adults opportunities to pursue short and long-term learning goals in a variety of delivery modes. Traditional two and four-year colleges and universities are finding more so than ever before, they must be active marketers to maintain and grow their student bodies.

Constantinides and Stango (2011) state, “Higher education institutions show increased interest in the potential of social media as a marketing tool. Particularly important is the potential of these tools to reach and attract future students” (p. 7). An important issue to understand is how social media influences the decision-making process for potential students making a choice about a college or university and a program of study. The following study divulges information based on a national survey conducted in the Netherlands. This research provides three distinct market segments and provides university marketers insight on engaging social media as effective marketing tools as part of a marketing plan.

Regarding this topic, Constantinides and Stango (2011) conducted a national survey among future university students in the Netherlands. The targeted population was students in the last two years of high school in four specific curriculum profiles. The target sample of 400 students was selected from a panel of 120,000 high school students. The survey questions were divided into three groups: socio-demographic, information sources used for decisions of higher education studies and university, and the use of social media. Emails were sent out to 3,226 people and 1,200 respondents could access the information online. A sample size of $N = 403$ was achieved after excluding 563 cases that did not belong to the defined population, 126 cases that were incomplete or faulty and 108 cases because the strata target was met (Constantinides & Stango, 2011, pp. 12-13).

Three segments of the Dutch student market also emerged from the data. They were: 1) Beginners, 2) Social users, and 3) Informational users (Constantinides & Stango, 2011, p. 17). The researchers found male students were beginner users and female students were social users as well as informational users.

Three social media applications were discussed. The Dutch social networking site (SNS) Hyves, YouTube, and Facebook. The four social media application types mentioned in the survey as information channels were: “weblogs, communities, forums, and social networks. Surprisingly, when students responded, these networks rated lower than traditional media when learning about higher education” (Constantinides & Stango, 2011, p. 18).

The first study objective was to identify market segments of future university students in the Netherlands depending on their participation in social media related activities. The results indicated: (1) Beginners (29.5%) had a low level of participation in online informational and

social activities; (2) Social Users (40.7%) had a high level of participation in social activities and intermediate level in informational activities; and (3) Informational Users (29.8%) had high levels of participation in social and informational activities (Constantinides & Stango, 2011, p. 18).

The second study objective was to examine what impact the social media, as communication and marketing channels, have on the choice of university courses and institutions. Findings included that social media marketing cannot and should not replace a traditional marketing plan but be a strategic part of the institutions' marketing plans.

Constantinides and Stango (2011) share a 2010 Pew Research study stating, "While the social media movement is a relatively recent phenomenon, the rate of adoption by both the general public and business is staggering . . . 83% of Americans between 18 and 33 years old are already users of social networking sites" (p. 8). A study carried out by Statistics Netherlands (2010) showed that 91% of Dutch youths between 16 and 25 years old were active on SNS (Statistic Networking Site) in 2010 (Constantinides & Stango, 2011, p. 8).

A key theme of this research is the gaps between the information students want versus the information we (university marketers) want to give them. "It is reasonable to assume that engagement with social media applications as part of university marketing could contribute to increased enrollment numbers and help prospective students make better-informed decisions regarding their study choices and university selections" (Constantinides & Stango, 2011, pp. 8-9). According to a study of Opinion Research Corporation, "84% of Americans are influenced by online product reviews written by other customers. This reveals that peer-to-peer communication is a factor in their shopping decisions" (Constantinides & Stango, 2011, p. 9).

Constantinides and Stango (2011) argued that customer behavior has changed because of market transparency. Because of the increase in social media use by customers, marketers have less control of the communication process and less power (p. 10). Constantinides and Stango's (2011) study reveals that social media should be integrated into an overall marketing plan and be an extension of online marketing but should not replace traditional marketing efforts.

Gibbs (2002) suggests, "Marketing education is best undertaken within a model of 'collaborative relationships'" (p. 333). Influential relationships and mentorships resonate value to students and if peers are sharing stories reflecting relationship and community building, value is added to their lives and aids them in making a decision.

McAlexander and Koeing (2001) stated,

For higher education institutions, relationship marketing involves building and maintaining a relationship of value exchanges between the institutions and the three main customer groups: alumni, current students, and future students. The quality of these relationships is positively related to the customers' long-term loyalty. (para. 8)

Constantinides and Stango (2011) also noted that literature on strategic issues or best practices specific to social media as a higher education marketing tool is limited. They argued that organizations are not using social media to its full potential for relationship cultivation with prospective students. The study did indicate how the Netherlands and other European countries are pioneering a few efforts to use social media as part of their student recruitment programs in higher education (Constantinides & Stango, 2011, p. 11). Some of these efforts include using, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and eLearn (blogging site). Live chats are also being explored so students can speak directly to a peer about the school and its program. Live chats, as part of a

university's marketing efforts, helps "launch a new platform for potential students allowing them to receive information from enrolling students in an interactive way" (Constantinides & Stango, 2011, p. 11).

The Constantinides and Stango (2011) study referenced earlier is similar to the Goldman's (2012) study that found "family, friends, and acquaintances continue to play a major role in students' choice of university and study" (p. 20).

Constantinides and Stango (2011) concluded:

The lack of suitable higher education social media platforms, as mentioned earlier, can be a reason for the low availability of contributed content. This leads to the question how do university marketers energize present students and future students to contribute more content, preferably content that is also beneficial to their institution? The challenge is to stimulate influential individuals and brand advocates to provide comments and reviews in university-sponsored forums or online communities and to also publish in their own online social networks, blogs, or other forms of social applications. This is a practice already implemented by many business marketers, with very positive results on brand awareness, acquisition, and customer loyalty. Considering the former, we argue that university marketers should approach social media in a proactive way. The simple presence in the social media space is not enough for successful higher education marketing. Recruitment officers should actively and continuously engage with social media in their promotional mix, understand the online behavior of potential students, and accept that the customer is a powerful partner in the social relationship. (p. 21)

The Constantinides and Stango's study demonstrates the importance of taking a closer

look at various social media strategies for reaching prospective students. Social media focusing on content marketing will fill the gaps in relationship building between the academic world and students through peer-to-peer interactive information sharing and help support recruitment efforts. It also supports that traditional marketing methods should be used because parents, friends, and family still have a significant influence on students' higher education choices. Constantinides and Stango (2011) recommendations for future research include, "segmenting markets using other criteria such as lifestyle, behavior, or benefits and contribute to the development of new higher education marketing models" (p. 21).

This further research suggestion supports the development of a social media, content marketing plan for Cumberland County College. It supports using content and social media marketing to recruit and retain customers. This study also reinforces the need for active and engaged marketing in higher education to mirror current marketing strategies used in successful business practices.

A new marketing model or plan including social media applications is something higher education institutions need to consider now that the marketing landscape has changed due to accessibility to technology and digital media platforms. "Digital media has spawned numerous social media Internet options for marketing professionals" (Melchiorre & Johnson, 2017, p. 74). Many marketers have followed the four Ps of marketing: product, price, place, and promotion. Given today's market dynamics, Tuten & Solomon (2013) argued that, "a fifth P, participation, has become an important component to include as part of a marketing strategy" (p. 75).

"Integrating a website and social media with the overall marketing plan can provide engagement and enrollment benefits for professionals in higher education" (Melchiorre &

Johnson, 2017, p. 75). When a marketing plan is developed, a social media, content marketing plan is also needed as part of the marketing strategy (Cockburn, 2014).

Melchiorre and Johnson (2017) advise, “Social media marketing builds on the marketing plan components and includes specific details related to the unique characteristics of social media” (p. 75).

A social media plan is relative and relevant to a traditional marketing plan while distinctly different as a social media plan emphasizing customer, organizing internal activities and resources to creating and delivering a value proposition (content strategy), and the measurement and management of the media plan results in order to determine effectiveness and adjust both internal and external stages of the plan. (Melchiorre & Johnson, 2017, p. 78)

Higher education professionals need to determine the social media plan format that simultaneously works best internally and externally for their organization. The key to a social media, marketing plan is adapting to the unique elements (timing and message form) of social media channels to the marketing plan. Internal activities should be based on strengths and aligned with goals, values, and mission. External activities should be meeting customers’ needs by delivering value to them in a customized way (Melchiorre & Johnson, 2017, p. 78).

Melchiorre and Johnson (2017) outline several steps to creating a social media, marketing plan that are detailed below.

Situation Analysis – A competitive analysis needs to be completed revealing the competitors trying to reach and recruit your target market.

Objectives – Objectives also need to be clear. What does the organization want to

accomplish through the use of social media marketing?

Target Audience – Who is your audience? Who are you trying to reach? Social media usage patterns of students need to be determined. A short verbal survey or evaluation sheet could be used to gather this information.

Social Media Mix Options – Knowing the social media use patterns of students will provide a basis for developing the social media marketing mix. Applications, such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Flickr, and LinkedIn are some of the most popular and commonly used channels to date. The college’s website also needs to be included as part of this online strategy as well as online advertising (Melchiorre & Johnson, 2017, p. 78-79).

Activation plan/timeline – An activation plan allows professionals to determine deadlines/dates, audience, message, media/event/outlet, who’s responsible for each area of social media and what budget allocations support this marketing effort. One of the key elements of this plan is when social media posts should occur. Posting times for content will vary by the media platform being used (Melchiorre & Johnson, 2017, p. 78-79).

As a benchmark, the infographic, “The Best Times to Post on Social Media” (Simmerman, 2018) found at loritaylor.com, provided the best times to post based on the number of active users online: Facebook: 1:00 p.m.; Twitter: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.; LinkedIn: 7:00 to 9:00a.m. and 5:00 p.m.; and Google+: 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.

Melchiorre and Johnson (2017) also share “Developing an activation plan ensures a timeline is established along with content and budget information. Crafting a message and content that meets established objectives is also a key element (p. 79). See Table 3 below for an example of an activation template.

Manage and Evaluate: Evaluation and management of the plan need to be constant. This is the only way to ensure effective return on investment and effectiveness. What content students use, and share will provide guidance for content decisions. The number of members, fans, or followers in a particular social community reflects in engagement and will help track successful marketing efforts focused on engagement and recruitment.

Example of Activation Planning

Note. Adapted from “Finding New Ways to Reach Older Students,” by M. Melchiorre and S. Johnson, 2017, *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 65(2), p. 80. Reprinted with permission, see Appendix.

Building lasting relationships between students and the higher education institution of their choice occurs through student engagement outside of the classroom. Student involvement via clubs and organization participation is one specific strategy for involving students on college campuses. Student engagement activities provide another pathway for student development and growth. Gathering and telling of engaged student stories is an effective way to communicate

these personal transformations occurring outside the classroom and provide potential students inspiration to pursue their degree and ultimately, change their lives.

Engaged Students in Community Colleges

Student engagement at community colleges does not occur spontaneously. Engagement activities must be intentional (McClenney, 2007, p. 12). Because opportunities for involvement must be deliberate, mechanisms and structures must be in place in order to both interest and involve students, which may in turn lead to increased retention. “Institutions can benefit by creating opportunities for involvement for students from the beginning of their college careers” (Miles, 2010, p. 85).

The student population of community colleges, however, is changing (Boggs, 2011a). They are younger and more diverse. According to Boggs (2011a), “46% of community college students in the United States are age 21 or younger” (p.4). These younger students may have more time to dedicate to traditional campus services and activities. Through participating in clubs and organizations, students interact with peers, faculty, and staff. Involvement in clubs and organizations can have a positive effect on developing mature relationships, establishing purpose, and increasing self-confidence. “Academic clubs, honor societies, sports clubs, political organizations, and student governments all provide contexts for such development” (Miles, 2010, p. 78).

With the influx of younger students, community college student life and athletics programs are thriving. CCC is no exception to the growing proportion of younger students who seek more involvement in college-based activities. Over 20 student-led clubs are active on campus each year completing many community and service learning projects. CCC also has

active honor societies including Phi Theta Kappa, Alpha Beta Gamma, and Alpha Delta Nu. CCC's Athletic programs are ranked nationally as part of NJCAA Division III. Men's athletics include baseball, basketball, cross country, and soccer. Men's baseball competed for the World Series Championship in 2014 and has continued to be regionally dominant. Competitive women's sports are also offered including basketball, cross-country, soccer, and softball. Women's head basketball coach, James Boney, reached his 100th win with the Lady Dukes in January 2017.

Other student engagement opportunities provided on campus include Student Pathways Leadership Institute (SPLI) and Student Senate. SPLI students earn a non-credit certificate after attending and participating in various leadership workshops. CCC's Student Senate functions as the student government body, building leadership skills via a link between the student body and the administration. The Student Senate focuses on both service and leadership development opportunities.

Student academic cohorts or learning communities are also effective student engagement, retention, and recruitment tools. Being part of a cohort of learners focusing on the same academic goals provides support to students. Direct contact, communication, advisement, and mentorship experiences with lead faculty members give students a sense of connection and direction as first-year students and beyond. Based on the results from a University of Toronto study, students in the First-Year Learning Communities program reported "a higher level of satisfaction with their university experience than students who were not in the program. A strong motivation for students to participate was the opportunity to make new friends and establish a peer support network" (Goldman, 2012, p. 17-18).

According to CCC's 2017-18 Annual Report, currently, CCC's Top 10 largest academic cohorts include: Biomedical Science, Justice Studies, Nursing, Social Service, Liberal Arts, Education, Business Management, Business Studies, Social Science and Alcohol and Drug Counseling. The five academic cohorts my study focuses on are: Nursing, Justice Studies, Social Service, Graphic Design, and Engineering.

Student government, student clubs, athletics, and academic cohorts provide growth and development opportunities, both professionally and personally, for CCC students. Students are transformed by these experiences, gaining confidence and allowing inherent-leadership qualities to surface. Discovering and retelling these engaged student stories will allow CCC to enhance its marketing and recruitment efforts through a strategic content marketing plan.

Student government. Student government leadership opportunities allow students to work directly with college administration and represent their peers needs and interests. They also provide students a chance to work with peers who have different values and belief systems. Miles (2010) shared that students have the opportunity to become involved in their institutions in many different ways. They may become involved through their academic programs, interactions with faculty or staff, working on campus, or participating in student activities and organizations. "Through participating in clubs and organizations, students interact with fellow students, faculty, and staff" (Miles, 2010, p.78).

Miles (2010) indicated the purpose for conducting the study shared below was to describe and understand the experiences of student leaders at community colleges. Five community college student government presidents were interviewed. The community colleges were located in the Southern and Midwestern regions of the United States. Interviews were conducted in the

fall of 2009 and the spring of 2010. The students were asked to share background information and to describe their experiences as student government presidents. Each interview was recorded, and field notes were taken. All interviews were conducted in person at locations chosen by each of the student government presidents—campus food courts, libraries, and campus offices. The questions were designed to elicit the experiences of each student government president.

Since community college student governance is not widely covered in the literature, qualitative research provides flexibility and room for participant reflections. In addition, it is descriptive and allows the researcher to learn from the experiences of the participants. In this study, “the three themes that emerged were institutional pride, developing relationships, and support of administration” (Miles, 2010, p. 82).

The five student government presidents demonstrated institutional pride in their colleges that established the first theme. They also shared that they would do whatever they could to strengthen the institution and student government for students. These presidents shared that they wanted to increase morale and student activities as well as students’ engagement in the college and community.

Developing relationships was the second theme that emerged from the study. The presidents shared their experiences about working with new people and how much they could accomplish together. Networking was a positive attribute from this experience, as well as building personal relationships with faculty and staff.

The third theme that emerged from the study was support of administration. Students who participated in student government leadership positions worked closely with administrators,

advisors, and other college leadership. “Because a connection between campus involvement and academic performance is accepted in the traditional four-year institution of higher education, community colleges could benefit from exploring and encouraging that involvement. One form of that involvement may be student governance” (Miles, 2010, p. 84).

Student government leaders gain a wide variety of skills through participating in institutional decision-making. Because of the skills learned and the benefits associated with student government participation, that activity should be of increased interest to community college students and administrators.

Student clubs and organizations are one specific strategy for involving students. Involvement in clubs and organizations can have a positive effect on developing mature relationships, establishing purpose, and increasing self-confidence for students. This personal discovery and development can provide great stories connected to active and engaged student activities that can help create relevant content marketing themes.

Athletics. In recent years, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) passed several eligibility rules to address concerns about the academic performance and the overall experience of student athletes on college campuses. “As such, the literature related to the impact of participation in college sports on student learning and personal development over the past two decades has grown substantially” (Gayles, 2009, p. 33).

Student athletes on most college campuses today represent a special population of students with unique challenges and needs different from their non-athlete peers. “These students are also expected to perform well in the classroom and earn grades strong enough to maintain their eligibility for playing college sports” (Gayles, 2009, p. 33). Gayles (2009)

continues, “Such academic and athletic demands can be difficult to balance. Most athletics programs at the Division I level, where the time constraints are demanding, have high-quality support service programs in place to assist student athletes with managing academic and athletics tasks” (p. 34). These support programs offer many services and programs designed to enhance the overall experience of student athletes. Chickering and Gamson’s (1999, p. 76) noted “seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education have been widely cited in the literature on how the college experience affects student learning and personal development”.

Student learning and personal development are also desired outcomes of undergraduate education and have several subcomponents. Particular to student athletes, these subcomponents consist of academic performance, cognitive development, attitudes and values, and psychosocial development (related to career maturity). In studying the effect of athletics on student learning and development, scholars have relied on various data sources to answer key questions about how students grow and what they learn in college. (Gayles, 2009, p. 35)

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is administered by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and the Indiana University Center for Survey Research. Since 2000, over twelve hundred colleges and universities have participated in this project.

Indiana University scholars designed NSSE to assess undergraduate educational experiences, particularly concerning how students spend their time and what they gain from the college experience. Data from the NSSE have been used to formulate five benchmarks that represent good practices in education similar to the seven principles of

good practice developed by Chickering and Gamson (1999): level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environments. (Chickering & Gamson, 1999, p. 76)

Spring 2003 administration of NSSE data was used, which contained a sample of 57,308 freshmen students across 395 four-year colleges and universities of varying institutional types.

Overall the authors found that student athletes were as engaged in educational activities compared to their non-athlete peers. In fact, the authors found that student athletes were more satisfied with the college experience and perceived their campus environment to be more supportive. (Gayles, 2009, p. 38-39)

Donald W. Cameron, president of Guilford Technical Community College in Jamestown, North Carolina, underscores the importance of importance of athletics in community college institutions, “Many young people are looking for experiences. Athletics is just one way of offering extracurricular opportunities that make a whole student” (Ashburn, 2007, para. 2).

Gayles’ (2009) study provides support for the utilization of an athletic cohort in student storytelling and marketing. Not only does the article support a diverse group of students representing a college campus, but it also reveals how athletics helps student learning and professional growth and how rich stories can be shared through these athletes’ experiences.

Student clubs and organizations. In recent years, student-learning outcomes have been the focus of higher education reform. Professional skill development, as well as learning and leadership experiences outside the classroom are being measured and have made an impact on students’ satisfaction with their college experience and academic performance.

Senior students in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Iowa State University

completed an online questionnaire about their extracurricular experiences. The purpose of the study was to identify and describe experiences of undergraduate extracurricular involvement that result in increased leadership development. The Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS–R2) group scale was used to assess leadership group values, and the Omnibus SRLS–R2 was used to measure the overall leadership construct.

(Foreman & Retallick, 2012, p. 111)

Ninety–six percent of respondents indicated they were involved in an extracurricular activity. “Students who reported serving as an officer of a club or organization and students who reported spending more hours per week in extracurricular clubs and organizations scored significantly higher on both the SRLS–R2 group and an Omnibus SRLS score” (Foreman & Retallick, 2012, p. 111).

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) identified leadership development as one of 16 student learning and development outcomes and suggested that leadership can be intentionally learned (CAS, 2006). According to Foreman and Retallick (2012), student leadership research shows that the entire campus community should be involved in educating students about social responsibility not just faculty teaching leadership courses (p. 111).

An adaptation of Reason, Terenzini, and Domingo’s (2006) model explaining first–year college student experiences served as the framework for Foreman and Retallick’s (2012) study. The collegiate leadership development model developed for this study had three constructs. “The pre-collegiate construct of this model includes socio-demographics that have been linked to leadership development, gender, academic success, class rank, as well as extracurricular

experiences including leadership self-efficacy” (Foreman & Retallick, 2012, p. 112).

According to Foreman and Retallick (2012), there are three types of individual student college experiences associated with leadership development: classroom experiences, curricular experiences, and out-of-classroom experiences” (p. 113). Extracurricular activities are often perceived as important to students’ social and personal growth. These attributes include: “positive interpersonal skills, academic achievement, persistence (grit), social maturity, purpose, and life management” (Foreman & Retallick, 2012, p.113).

Foreman and Retallick proposed a social change model (SCM) for explaining student participation in extracurricular activities, “The Social Change Model (SCM) describes leadership as a purposeful, collaborative, values-driven process” (p. 114). “Its central principles are assessed through eight core values that describe students’ level of self-awareness and ability to work with others. This model views leadership as a process not a position” (Foreman & Retallick, 2012, p. 114). Those eight values are: equality, social justice, self-knowledge, personal empowerment, collaboration, citizenship, and service.

The purpose of Foreman and Retallick’s (2012) quantitative study was to identify and describe experiences of undergraduate students whose extracurricular involvement resulted in increased leadership development. Four research objectives guided this study:

- 1) Describe the demographics of students who participate in extracurricular activities; 2) Describe the extracurricular experiences of undergraduate students; 3) Explore whether the average hours per week spent in extracurricular clubs and organizations influences the level of leadership; and 4) Determine if serving as an officer in extracurricular clubs and organizations influences the level of leadership.

(Foreman & Retallick, 2012, p. 114)

This study was part of a larger study designed to examine the role of undergraduate extracurricular participation in leadership development. Full-time undergraduate college students classified as seniors in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Iowa State University ($N = 969$) were surveyed. Students over 24 years old were excluded to reduce outliers in the data. The university database and researcher-designed questionnaire were used to meet the research objectives. The questionnaire contained three sections: pre-collegiate characteristics and experiences, collegiate experiences, and leadership development outcomes (Foreman & Retallick, 2012, p. 114).

Demographic and academic information were collected from student records provided by the university registrar's office. This information included: gender, age, race, high school class rank, cumulative grade point average, and entry type (i.e., direct from high school or transfer). Researcher-designed questions were used to collect data about college experiences. Based on the responses to these questions, subjects were asked additional questions to learn more about their experiences (Foreman & Retallick, 2012, p. 115). This mixed methods study with the survey questionnaire results provided information for follow-up interviews.

Leadership development outcomes were assessed using the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS-R2; National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs, 2009). The scale consists of 68 Likert-type items with eight separate scales that measure specific leadership components. Each of the eight scales had six to nine questions (Foreman & Retallick, 2012, p. 115).

The group included faculty and graduate students with expertise in undergraduate

outcomes, extra-curricular experiences, and leadership development reviewed the instrument for validity. These experts provided feedback about the content of the questionnaire. In addition, the instrument was field tested with students similar to those in the sample to establish validity of the instrument.

To ensure these students were not part of the sample population, all students on the panel had completed between 60 and 85 credits, which equals junior status. Based on their feedback, changes to content, question format, and data collection procedures were made to improve the validity of the instrument. (Foreman & Retallick, 2012, p. 115)

Foreman and Retallick (2012) report,

Qualtrics, a web-based survey program, was used to collect data because of the program's capabilities to improve the flow of the instrument. Ninety-one (45.7%) males and 108 (54.3%) females responded to this study. All were full-time students and were classified as seniors. Ninety-six percent of respondents indicated they were involved in an extracurricular activity, including 21% in the Greek system, 95% in extracurricular clubs and organizations, and 29% in competitive teams. The number of extracurricular clubs and organizations that students reported being involved in ranged from 0 to 11 ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 2.44$) extracurricular clubs and organizations. (p. 116)

An ANOVA revealed (using the average hours per week as the independent variable and leadership development as the dependent variable) that students who spent more hours per week involved in extracurricular clubs and organizations scored higher on both SRLS–R2 scales. (Foreman & Retallick, 2012, p. 116)

Foreman and Retallick's (2012) study helped articulate the importance of extracurricular

student activities and how those activities provide students an opportunity of professional and personal growth. This study also examines how student affairs staff people are often the individuals responsible for creating opportunities to engage students in college activities. When working collaboratively with students who want to involve their peers, administrators are in a unique position to create positive change. College staff members are role models for students developing leadership skills as well as social and life management skills. This study provided a strong example of how personal experiences can be shared through quantitative research.

Individuals charged with increasing enrollment would benefit from understanding the perspectives of students. Retelling stories of students engaged in student government, athletics, and student clubs will provide a strong foundation for a content marketing campaign.

Storytelling will allow college leaders to share these student stories highlighting not only the excellent education they received but also their personal and professional growth. McKee and Fryer (2003) shared that a story tells how and why life changes. McKee argues, “Stories fulfill a profound human need to grasp patterns of living, not merely as an intellectual exercise but within a very personal, emotional experience” (McKee & Fryer, 2003, para. 4).

Academic cohorts. Learning communities or academic cohorts focused by major beginning with first-year students has been the formula for recruitment and retention in higher education. Administrators seek to develop programs that can be easily marketed and implemented to advance these institutional goals (Dabney, Green, & Topalli, 2006, p. 46). In the competitive market of higher education, institutions vie for quality students and the revenue streams that these consumers generate. The evolution and growth of the college student population has led administrators at today’s colleges and universities to create programs that

facilitate the achievement of these academic goals for a new generation of educational consumers (Dabney et al., 2006, p. 46). Two academic learning community studies are highlighted next. Qualitative data were collected and analyzed to reveal higher student engagement at Georgia State University (GSU) and University of Toronto, respectively. Both programs were created to strengthen their recruitment and retention efforts and to show the success of academic-focused learning cohorts.

Georgia State University is a large (28,000+ students) urban research university located in the heart of downtown Atlanta. The campus is spread out over 15 square city blocks. There is little green space and few open areas conducive to student congregation, and only one dormitory is currently available to students, with a capacity of 2,000 persons (Dabney et al., 2006, p. 51).

The Freshman Learning Community (FLC) initiative was launched in the fall of 1999 as a means of enhancing “community” among incoming freshmen. There were 295 incoming students enrolled in 11 separate FLCs in 1999, making up 16% of the incoming class. By the fall of 2005, more than 1,200 seats were set aside in 50 FLCs, to accommodate well over half of the incoming freshman class (Dabney et al., 2006, p. 51).

The first criminal justice FLC was offered at GSU in the fall of 2001. This was a time of declining student enrollments for the department and the university. From the start, “the criminal justice FLC was designed to increase departmental visibility, recruit majors, enhance learning outcomes, and boost student retention rates” (Dabney et al., 2006, p. 52)

The qualitative data derived from student evaluations in the Criminal Justice FLC class revealed that on the whole, students tend to be quite satisfied with their FLC class. These affirmations are captured in the following written comments:

One student said: “I really loved my GSU 1010 class. We went on lots of field trips that were educational, yet fun and informative.” A second commented: “This was educational and fun. I wish the FLC was both semesters [of my freshman year].” For example, one participant said: “The field trips contributed a lot to understanding the criminal justice system.” Another student observed: “This course kept me really interested and I think that I learned a lot about the criminal justice system.” It is not just the field trips that the students appreciate; they also like the fact that the class helps them acclimate to college and make new friends. Yet another member of that cohort said: “All parts of the class were great, especially the friendships made by the class being small.” Upon implementing the Criminal Justice FLC, GSU received positive feedback immediately from the students. (Dabney et al., 2006, p. 60-61)

At GSU, the implementation of a criminal justice oriented FLC has produced a number of benefits for the students enrolled in the program. First, as the above comments suggest, “Students from all walks of life are thrust into a cohort setting that allows them to make new friendships, expose themselves to diverse viewpoints, and work together through the social and academic rigors of the first-year college experience” (Dabney et al., 2006, p. 63).

The GSU Office of Undergraduate Studies also commissioned a focus group interview with a sample of eight faculty members who served as part of an FLC. Relevant themes included “enhanced recruitment of majors, faculty collaboration across course sections, enhanced faculty/student relationships, and enhanced student-to-student relationships. Collectively, the data from the three focus groups and student evaluations reveal value added by the FLC model” (Dabney et al., 2006, p. 63).

This study revealed that academic cohorts are important to include in my research based on the cultivation and success reported. It reported the students' satisfaction based on their experiences in the Criminal Justice FLC. It supports the need for students making new connections, exposing themselves to new ideas, and working together to solve problems. This study also provided qualitative data and theme analysis that help guide the methodology for this study. The student comments bring a diverse group of voices to fruition and provide a wealth of varied perspectives and rich content that could be used as part of an effective marketing recruitment plan for higher education.

Another study conducted by Goldman (2012), from the University of Toronto, provides more qualitative data and theme analysis examples focused on student experiences in academic cohorts. "The University of Toronto is a large, research-intensive university with approximately 76,000 undergraduate and graduate students on three campuses. Approximately 6,000 students enter each year directly from high school" (Goldman, 2012, p. 2).

Goldman (2012) reports on the assessment of a learning community program for first-year students over a five-year period, using student academic records and self-reported survey data. "Students in the University of Toronto's First-Year Learning Communities (FLC) program perform better academically and report a higher level of satisfaction with their university experience than students who are not in the program" (p. 1). "Students who have participated in such communities have reported to feel more connected with the university, as well as a greater satisfaction with university life" (Tinto, 2003, p. 5).

Each FLC group of 24 students met bi-weekly for eight months (13 sessions total) between September and April. Sessions focused on academic, developmental, and social

programming (such as study strategies, time management, and field trips). Students who actively participated in the program received a notation on their academic transcript, but they received no academic credit for participating in these learning communities. There was no fee associated with participation in an FLC. Approximately 10% of entering students enrolled in the FLC program in September 2011. “This study presents data representing the Life Science cohort, as this is the largest cohort in the FLC program (with a minimum of 11 FLC groups each year since 2005-06)” (Goldman, 2012, pp. 6-7).

Significantly more students in Life Science FLCs (44.96%) reported being involved in extra-curricular activities in their first year than students not in FLCs (32.90%) (Goldman, 2012, p. 13). FLC participants (from all cohorts) completed a year-end evaluation in late March/early April. This survey contained about 30 multiple-choice questions. “Student satisfaction was very high, with 95.9% of students reporting (“strongly agree” and “agree”). An important outcome of participating in FLC was making new friends and establishing an academic and social support network. Qualitative comments such as the following support the numerical data” (Goldman, 2012, p. 16). Below are testimonials extracted from the surveys:

- “Making new friends is the best thing I got from the FLC program. University is really big and if there were not such a program it would be really hard to make friends.”
- “[In FLC] I made best friends, who were there to share happy times and sad times, before and after labs and tests, and who were willing to help online and walk to the subway after class. Overall, FLC gave me the best peer mentor, friends, and staff and faculty advisers, who made life easier than if I had not joined FLC. Joining FLC was

one of the best things I ever did.”

- “What I like best about FLC is the fact that it allowed me to feel part of a community.”
- “I loved everything about FLC, especially the peer mentor and staff. I’m glad I joined and wished everyone could have been part of it. I wish there was FLC next year. I’m going to greatly miss it.” (Goldman, 2012, p. 16)

The Goldman study at University of Toronto supports the success of academic cohort students that are important to retention and recruitment. It also supports my choice of using CCC’s largest and most popular academic cohorts to study as part of my focus group research. The information in this study also makes the case to focus on FLC students for rich marketing content to create effective social media campaigns. It is clear that academic cohorts build a sense of community that positively affects a student’s over all college experience. It also reveals that student testimonials can be used for marketing purposes. Again, another study supports that the student perspective lends a new voice to the research and allows natural storytelling to occur that could be influential to prospective students.

Conclusion

As noted in the beginning of this paper, the focus of this review would be on storytelling, marketing, and student engagement, analyzing the relationship between engaged student stories and content marketing. Storytelling was linked to relationships, strategy, marketing, and content marketing. Themes, such as student government, athletics, student clubs, and learning communities/academic cohorts were connected to student engagement. Student engagement and

storytelling were connected individually throughout the articles analyzed but were not connected together in one study.

Recurring themes continued to shine through the literature: persuasion, marketing and content marketing, as well as communication, relationships, commitment, and student engagement. Also, research revealed that storytelling could initiate a positive organizational change by creating a content marketing plan based on engaged student storytelling to increase enrollment. The research reported in this study explores how engaged student story telling can be used in creating a content marketing plan to support CCC recruitment efforts.

It is important to note that the lack of empirical research studies focusing on storytelling and content marketing does not decrease the value of the power of storytelling, marketing, and student engagement. This deficit clearly illustrates the need for extensive empirical studies to measure storytelling effectiveness as it relates to content marketing.

Two research questions emerged from the literature reviewed:

- 1) What kinds of stories do engaged students share about their CCC experience?
- 2) How can engaged student stories inform a content marketing plan for CCC?

Creating a content marketing plan for Cumberland County College to enhance recruitment efforts and increase enrollment will be a beneficial and rewarding challenge. Sharing engaged student stories highlighting rich academic experiences and invaluable social development with future CCC students may provide persuasive support for choosing and enrolling in Cumberland County College to continue one's education.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

This study gathered stories from engaged students that will be used to create a content marketing plan for Cumberland County College aimed at increasing college enrollment. This chapter describes the research approach used in collecting those stories, the students selected to generate the stories, and the interview protocol used to inspire student storytelling, and how focus groups were created to assess the appeal of the collected stories. The data collection and analysis procedures are explained along with a discussion of the validity (credibility and trustworthiness) of research approach and possible ethical issues. The chapter also describes how the researcher will employ these stories in creating a content marketing plan for CCC. The research questions posed in this study were:

- 1) What kind of stories do engaged students share about their CCC experience?
- 2) How can engaged student stories create a content marketing plan for CCC?

Research Design/Approach

Gathering stories from engaged students at Cumberland County College required one research approach, while generating a content marketing plan that features these stories required another. However, both elements of this study employed qualitative methods to answer the posed research questions. Ranney et al. (2015) stated, “In a qualitative study, the majority of effort in the design phase should be spent developing a systematic, well-developed, data collection protocol” (p. 1103).

A qualitative approach to answering the research questions provides a more complete account of the tactics to enhance credibility of the findings, to provide a context for future uses, to ensure information is more useful to practitioners, and to enrich the work of others in the space of using storytelling to reshape organizational culture (Creswell, 2008) or in this case organizational marketing. “Qualitative researchers focus on depth rather than breadth; they care less about finding averages and more about understanding specific situations, individuals, groups, and moments in time that are important or revealing” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 2). “The essence of qualitative research is to make sense of and recognize patterns among words in order to build up a meaningful picture without compromising its richness and dimensionality” (Leung, 2015, p. 324). A combination of individual interviews and focus groups interviews are at the heart of the research approach for this study.

Rationale. In order to provide a meaningful analysis of these engaged-students’ stories, a qualitative research approach was chosen using individual interviews to gather student stories and focus groups to gather student reactions to these stories. A qualitative research study is appropriate for gathering rich data through interviews and focus groups from a diverse student population.

Strengths and weaknesses of storytelling as a research method. Narrative inquiry or asking participants to relate meaningful stories has for many decades been used across academic disciplines to study subjects’ experiences of and in the world. In the field of education, Clandinin and Connelly (1991) view the storying and restorying of our lives as a basic human experience and a “fundamental method of personal (and social) growth” (p. 259). The stories we tell about ourselves and our lives not only reflect our realities but construct them as coherent and

meaningful. Grumet (1992) states, “Wherein remembering events and narrating those memories involves a, “double awareness of encounters in the world and of experience of those encounters extended through ...inner time” (p. 35). Narrative storytelling also reveals a tension between self-expression and self-knowledge (Rose & Granger, 2013, p. 216). For example, oral narratives shared through digital stories could possibly be enhanced and undermined, revealing a shift in the storytelling, based on the original story or script, and what is the storyteller’s conscious intention” (Rose & Granger, 2013, p. 217).

Participants

Forty-four participants were targeted for this research: 21 Cumberland County College engaged student from academic honor societies, athletics, student senate, and student clubs were recruited to tell stories. An additional 23 students from CCC’s most popular programs - nursing, criminal justice, engineering, education, graphic design, and social science, were invited to participate in the focus groups that helped decide on the stories/themes to feature in the content marketing plan and which social media to use in disseminating the stories.

Recruitment of participants. In this study, the primary goal was to gain access to twenty-one engaged CCC students from seven different student groups for the individual interviews. Those groups were: PTK Honor Society, Men’s basketball/baseball team, Women’s softball team, Environmental Club, Student Senate, and Las Vias. Each academic cohort advisor contacted these students through face-to-face communication, email, and StarFish (CCC’s academic student communication software). Twenty-one students were invited to participate in the storytelling individual interviews and 21 students participated. As a CCC professor and club advisor, access to student leaders through work with the Student Life and Athletics staff was not

difficult. Advisors, coaches, or the Student Life and Athletics staff selected three engaged students from each group. CCC's Institutional Research department provided current contact and transcript information. Transcription information was necessary, because a 2.5 grade point average was necessary for selection into the storytelling group of participants.

Another 23 participants representing CCC's largest academic cohorts were invited to participate in the focus groups. All 23 participated in the focus groups. These academic cohorts included: Nursing, Criminal Justice, Engineering, Education, Graphic Design, and Social Science. These students were recruited with help from and encouragement of their academic cohort advisors through class discussion, email, and Starfish (CCC's academic student communication software).

Selection criteria for storytelling group. The criterion for selection of students participating in the individual interviews were 2.5 GPA or higher, at least 24 credits completed, and an active member of student government, athletics, or clubs. The researcher worked closely with CCC's Institutional Research Director and Student Athletics and Activities Director, his staff, and specific club advisors to identify students who fit the criteria. Students were then asked via a formal email if they would like to participate in the study. The Student Athletics and Activities Director who manage all student groups selected for this study agreed to follow up with their cohorts to help generate a higher response rate. The email included an introduction of the researcher's intent and a summary of the study to help them understand their role in the study. The email also included the consent forms and the questions to be asked. A brief biography of the researcher was included. Students, who decided to participate, were sent a Google form link via email asking for contact information, and available times during which an

interview might be conducted. Table 4 describes the demographic characteristics of individual interview participants ($n = 21$) in this study.

Table 4

Individual Interview Characteristics

Demographics	Number ($n = 21$)	Percent ($n = 21$)	CCC ($n = 3,125$)
Gender			
Female	11	52%	64%
Male	10	48%	37%
Age Range			
18-25	21	100%	
Average Age	21		25
Race			
White	12	57%	40%
Hispanic	6	30%	35%
Black/African American	2	9%	17%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1	4%	<1%

Note. CCC data from 2017-2018 CCC Fact Book

Selection criteria for the focus groups. The criterion for selection of students participating in the focus groups was students enrolled in the following academic programs: Nursing, Criminal Justice, Engineering, Education, Graphic Design, and Social Science. Five academic cohorts were asked to participate in the focus groups but one academic cohort, Education, did not participate. The academic cohorts listed above were used excluding

Education and Graphic Design was added as an academic cohort due to its popularity and high enrollment numbers. Each academic cohort advisor contacted these students through face-to-face communication, email, and StarFish (CCC's academic student communication software). The focus group included a total of 23 students. Table 5 describes the demographic characteristics of focus group participants in this study.

Table 5

Focus Group Characteristics

Demographics	Number (<i>n</i> = 23)	Percent (<i>n</i> = 23)	CCC (<i>n</i> = 3,125)
Gender			
Female	16	76%	64%
Male	7	34%	37%
Age Range			
18-25	14	61%	
26-35	5	22%	
36-45	3	13%	
46-55	0	0%	
56-65	1	4%	
Average Age	28		25
Race			
Black/African American	10	44%	17%
White	8	35%	40%
Hispanic	4	17%	35%
Native Hawaiian/Other: Pacific Islander	1	4%	<1%

Note. CCC data from 2017-2018 CCC Fact Book.

The individual interview and focus group participant characteristics partially reflect CCC's 2017-2018 enrollment data reported in the college's Institutional Profile Report published on the organization's website. The individual interview characteristics reveal age range and race being similar but not gender percentages. The focus group characteristics of gender percentages were similar, but race percentages were not. Age range was unable to be determined due to the CCC age range being 18-24 versus this study using 18-25.

Instrumentation/Measurement

There were two interview protocols used in this study, one for the individual interviews and the other for the focus group interviews. Ranney et al. (2015) provides an Interview Guide consisting of seven sections of questions for semi-structured interviews and focus groups. They are: "introduction, main topic (opening questions), main "grand tour" questions, follow-up questions (prompts), probes, summary, and debrief" (p. 1104). Qualitative interviewing usually involves a carefully selected group of interviewees whose responses allow the researcher to garner themes from the interview conversations (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Individual interview protocol. The instrument used to gather the stories from CCC students was an interview protocol designed by the researcher. The interview protocol consisted of 10 open-ended, qualitative interview questions, and two closed-ended questions about permission to use the stories told during the interview, and to use the audio/video recording of the stories that were told. The questions are as follows:

1. Tell me the story of how you decided to go to college.
2. Tell me why you chose to attend CCC.

3. Tell me a story that illustrates why participating in sports (club, student senate, etc.) at CCC is important to you.
4. What benefits do you think you gain by participating in college-related extracurricular activities?
5. Tell me a story about a CCC faculty or staff person who made an impact on you and why.
6. What keeps you motivated to complete your degree?
7. What would you tell a potential student who was thinking about attending CCC?
8. Share with me your fondest CCC memory thus far. Why did you choose that memory?
9. Tell me how your CCC degree will help you reach your future goals.
10. Please share any other stories about your CCC experience.
11. Do I have permission to use your name and interview data in my dissertation? Yes or No
12. Do I have permission to feature your stories in CCC's content marketing plan? Yes or No

Focus group interview protocol. Focus groups were utilized as a follow up to the individual interviews. Stories from the individual interviews were shared via video with each of the focus groups selected representing the five academic programs. The focus group participants were not the same students who were interviewed. The focus groups were created to help determine the stories/themes that will be used in the content marketing plan. The focus groups

also provided data about what social media outlets CCC should use to share these stories with the target audience. Some focus group questions included:

1. What technological devices do you own? (Smartphone, tablet, desktop, laptop)
2. What device do you use the most to connect to social media?
3. What type of Smartphone do you use? (Apple, Android, Blackberry)
4. What is your favorite social media outlet and why?
5. What social media outlet should CCC use to connect with students like you?
6. What student story resonated with you the most and why?
7. Would this story appeal to you as a recruitment tool to attend CCC?
8. Can you share an example of an advertisement or promotion on social media (you may use your phone) and explain why you liked it?
9. Are there any other stories you think CCC should share via social media that you didn't hear today? If so, please share.
10. Do I have permission to use your feedback in the creation of CCC's content marketing plan? Yes or No

Piloting of interview protocols. The individual interview and focus group questions were piloted in the fall 2017 semester before they were used to collect data for the study. I asked my Public Relations students (PR105) if they would volunteer to participate in testing my questionnaires. Five out of 13 public relations students participated in the individual interview question piloting and 8 out of 13 public relations students participated in the focus group piloting. By piloting my instruments, I was able to practice my interviewing skills, become comfortable with the order of my questions, and test if any questions needed to be rewritten.

Based on this piloting exercise, I did not need to change any of the questions or the order of the questions in either the individual or focus group questionnaires.

Data Collection Procedures

The first step in data collection was getting the necessary approvals from the organizations affected by the study. For this study, approvals were sought from Wilmington University and Cumberland County College in the fall of 2017. The Human Subject Review Board (HSRB) and Institutional Review Board (IRB) certifications were completed, submitted, and approved in October 2017. Approvals can be found in the appendix.

Individual interviews. A total of twenty-one student were interviewed for approximately 60 minutes each. The interviews took place between the months of February 2018 through March 2018. The interviews were conducted in a small study room or classroom at the college based on room availability. With the student's permission, the interviews were audio or video recorded.

Each student received an email from the researcher sharing a personal introduction and biography, as well as an overview of the research topic. Once the process and purpose of the research was thoroughly explained in the email, the student was asked if he/she would participate in the study. It was communicated to each student that his or her participation was voluntary and that the interview would take approximately 60 minutes of his or her time during a designated time selected by the student.

After a student agreed to participate, another email was sent, providing the student with contact and scheduling information, consent forms, as well as interview questions in advance.

Providing the interview questions in advance allowed the participant the opportunity to reflect internally and externally before the recorded interview.

First, several stories were collected from each of 21 student participants using an interview protocol designed to elicit stories about their Cumberland County College experience (see above). Students engaged in activities such as academic honor societies, athletics, student senate, and student clubs were recruited to tell stories. Most interviews were video-taped (with each student's approved consent) or audio taped (if the student declined using his or her image). Each individual interview lasted for approximately an hour.

Each student was interviewed in a face-to-face setting and the interviews were audio and/or video recorded for later transcription, indexing, and coding. "Data from recordings should be transcribed and de-identified. Data can be transcribed by the researcher which is time consuming or transcribed by a professional transcription service" (Ranney et al., 2015, p. 1108). In this case, the primary researcher contacted a professional transcriptionist to transcribe the data in late May 2018. The transcriptionist was hired in mid-June, after the researcher explained to her in a detailed email what was being done with the data and why. The primary researcher negotiated a timeline and cost via email. All the data were sent to the transcriber via email on July 5, 2018. The video data was sent as .mov files and the audio files were sent as .mp4 files via email to the transcriptionist. These files were identified as interview or focus group files with a specific code (letter or number) so the primary researcher could identify the file and match the transcription easily. The transcriptions were returned to the researcher on July 17, 2018.

Focus group interviews. Focus groups were audio recorded. The purpose of these focus group interviews was to have students watch and listen to the stories gathered, and then offer

their opinion about which stories were most appealing and/or appropriate for the marketing plan. The focus groups helped determine the stories/themes that would be used in the marketing plan. Information gathered about social media practices was also gathered to help determine what social media outlets CCC should utilize to share these stories with the target audience.

Four focus groups with 6-10 students from each of the college's most popular programs (nursing, criminal justice, social services, engineering, and graphic design) were used as a follow up and complement to the individual interviews. The focus group participants were not the same students from whom the stories were collected. The focus groups were used to help determine the stories/themes to be featured in the content marketing plan and the social media outlets to utilize in the content marketing plan.

Each focus group took approximately 90 minutes in length to permit sharing some of the recorded stories told during the individual interview sessions as a prompt for conversation about the themes or stories that will be featured in the marketing plan. A total of 23 students from five academic cohorts met with the primary researcher and reviewed a selection of the recorded individual interviews. The selection of individual interviews was based on the recurring themes that surfaced during the analysis of individual interviews.

The primary researcher facilitated the focus groups and asked the questions (see focus group questions above) while a note taker took notes and audio recorded the discussions. These five academic cohort members were interviewed during four different days based on the availability of the students. Days and times varied based on the students' class and work schedules, family obligations, and campus engagement. The focus group research took place at the end of the spring semester (April - May 2018) as finals were looming. "Engaging multiple

methods, such as observation, interviews, and recordings will lead to more valid, reliable, diverse construction of realities” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 604).

Students were encouraged to participate by allowing them to include their participation on their resume as a designated CCC student leader. These students’ cohort advisors were also utilized to encourage students to participate in the focus groups to benefit the college’s future by effective marketing strategies.

The interviews and focus groups were planned around each student’s class, work, and family schedules. Interviews and focus groups were conveniently located on the main campus in a comfortable, private conference room or classroom in the University Center. Scheduling of the space was completed through CCC’s conference center reservation process. Times varied based on the students’ and researcher’s schedules. Early morning or late afternoon sessions were most successfully scheduled from Monday through Friday.

Data Analysis

The data from both the individual and focus group interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Once all transcriptions were completed for the twenty-one hours of individual student interviews, as well as the four, 90-minute focus group sessions, coding was undertaken. Leung (2015) stated, “The essence of qualitative research is to make sense of and recognize patterns among words in order to build up a meaningful picture without compromising its richness and dimensionality” (p. 324). Identification of these themes and key words was very time consuming but my facilitation of the individual interviews and focus groups, as well as my note taking, provided familiarity with the data, making it easier to surface the important themes.

“Creating the coding structure is perhaps the most challenging part of qualitative research and is what defines the qualitative approach” (Ranney et al., 2015, p. 1108).

Individual interview data themes. The individual interview data themes are connected to Research Question 1: What kind of stories do engaged students share about their CCC experience? The individual interview recordings were watched or listened to multiple times by the primary researcher in order to capture the essence, emotion, and passion from each participant. The individual interview transcriptions were read, re-read, then sifted through to identify themes. Words or phrases that repeated throughout the transcription pages were highlighted red. Once all the words were highlighted, themes started to surface. Next, all the transcription pages were reviewed again listing each word that was highlighted red. Once all the repeated words were presented in a list, index cards were used to tally the repeated words or phrases. Once the top six categories surfaced, they were tallied and listed in numerical order (largest to smallest). These categories are discussed in Chapter 4.

According to Harding (2013), the four steps to coding data are: 1) identifying initial categories based on the reading of the transcripts; 2) reviewing codes alongside the transcripts; 3) reviewing the list of codes, revising the list of categories and deciding which codes should appear in which category; and 4) looking for themes and findings in the research (p. 83). Gibson and Brown (2009) note that a “code draws attention to a commonality within a dataset” (p. 130).

Based on recommendation of the experts listed above, if the topic was represented six or more times it was recognized as a key theme. Ranney et al. (2015) concluded, “Theme development is the process of identifying common threads between the pieces of data, which

have been artificially divided and categorized by codes. Critical, theory-informed immersion in the coding categories is a necessary first step toward developing themes” (p. 1109).

Ranney et al. (2015) states:

Codes are labels that the researcher applies to the data. Coding is designed specifically to categorize the data in a way that can be analyzed further. Each code corresponds to an idea or concept. Codes differ from the themes that emerge after the analysis is complete. (p. 1108).

Focus group data themes. The focus group data themes are connected to Research Question 2: How can engaged student stories, suggestions, or ideas be used in a content marketing plan for CCC? The focus group transcriptions were read multiple times and the data was analyzed with two purposes in mind. The first purpose was to identify what social media applications are used the most by engaged students and why. The second purpose was to gather stories shared by the focus group participants based on their connection with the individual interviews they watched. The focus group questions that targeted media use were listed and tallied utilizing an Excel spreadsheet. This data helped pinpoint what social media applications should be suggested in the marketing plan.

The two focus group questions asking: “What stories resonated with participants?” and “If there were any other student stories they wanted to share?” were asked to help provide insight as to why the students chose those particular stories and possibly share additional stories that were not told. The recordings were repeatedly listened to and the transcriptions were read multiple times by the primary researcher to identify similar themes and match the stories shared. The focus group data based on stories were compared then matched to the interview themes.

Lastly, the primary researcher asked if focus group participants had any examples of social media advertisements or promotions they liked and explain why. Those results are discussed in Chapter 4.

Methodology for Development of the Content Marketing Plan

The methodology for development of the content marketing plan was derived from the following: 1) the main categories/themes that emerged from the individual interview data, 2) the feedback regarding the individual stories that resonated the most during the focus group sessions, 3) the focus group data revealing the most heavily utilized social media applications by students, and 4) suggestions and ideas of advertising and promotional examples shared by the focus group participants.

The content marketing plan focuses on social media as the main communication method for reaching potential CCC students, CCC's target audience. The format of the plan follows the advice, of (Melchiorre & Johnson, 2017, p. 78-79) and includes these elements: Target audience, goals, objectives, strategies, tactics, timeline, who's responsible, and how the effectiveness of the content marketing plan will be assessed.

Based on my 20 years of marketing experience, the research I have conducted on this subject, and the themes I have gleamed from my research is how this content marketing plan was created. Many of the elements of the plan were determined by the current direction of CCC and its mission and vision. The interview and focus group data are reflected in the strategies and tactics of the content marketing plan. Below is a description of how each element of the plan was determined:

Target Audience: The target audience was determined based on the students targeted in this research and the students who are targeted by CCC as the most popular age group of CCC's current student population, 18 to 25-year olds.

Goals: The goals are general statements linked to the mission and vision of CCC for student recruitment and increasing enrollment.

Objectives: The objectives are measurable elements of the plan based on mission, vision, and goals of CCC.

Strategies: The strategies were created through the themes developed through this research (individual interviews) and linked to the goals and objectives listed above. Strategies created answer the question: How will CCC reach its goals and objectives?

Tactics: The tactics are the tools (social media outlets) used to reach the target audience determined by the focus group research.

Timeline: The timeline is based on when the plan is completed, what social media outlets are recommended, and how the strategies work within the constraints of the academic year.

Who's responsible: Administrators directly in charge of CCC's marketing department will determine who is responsible for implementing the recommended strategies and tactics.

Evaluation method (measuring effectiveness): Most evaluation methods are built into each social media application (i.e. measuring/counting how many likes, shares, retweets transpire) that helps focus the marketing strategy by securing the data needed to evaluate CCC's efforts effectively.

Validity Concerns

In any qualitative research, the aim is to “engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining features” (Johnson, 1995, p. 4). The qualitative study has a purpose of explaining and generating understanding. “A good qualitative study needs to help bring understanding to something confusing” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 601).

Instead of using terms, such as reliability and validity, qualitative studies terms could be credibility, transferability, dependability, or confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Credibility is established based on the participants’ perspective. The participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results. Transferability refers to the results of this research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. Dependability allows the researchers to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs. Confirmability assumes that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study. (Trochim, 2006)

Lastly, reflexivity in primary qualitative research is a concern. Reflexivity is defined by Harding (2013), as “involving the self-examination of how the research findings were produced and, particularly, the role of the researcher(s) in their construction” (p. 6).

Validity concerns of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were addressed in the following ways: 1) Credibility: the CCC students who were the participants in this study also reflect the target audience of prospective/future students for recruitment and since the focus group students were asked specific questions based on the individual interview results their perspectives were considered; 2) Transferability: the research that was conducted as part of this study can be generalized and transferred to other higher education institutions, as well as

corporations by utilizing the interview and focus group protocol focusing on employee or customer storytelling and social media use; 3) Dependability was tested and documented in the discussion of how the study was conducted, including how the data were gathered and analyzed; and 4) Confirmability: The researcher is a full-time, college professor teaching Communications who has a unique perspective of this study based on her knowledge of the college, students, and recruitment marketing efforts that allows her to confirm the validity of study findings and conclusions.

Threats to internal validity. Presence of a researcher and note taker can change the dynamics of the cases being observed as well as the recording device(s) causing a participant to be uncomfortable. Internal validity can also be compromised if the collection of data from each participant takes a long period of time. The individual interviews in this study took approximately one hour each and the focus groups were 90 minutes in length. Because of the nature of these interviews, the participants could have experienced fatigue and/or lost of interest. Based on my observation, this did not occur. Another threat to internal validity may be credibility. The participants did not review the transcriptions/research results after the study was complete.

Threats to external validity. Cases may not be representative of the college community as a whole (de Vaus, 2001, p. 237). A small sample of the CCC student population were interviewed so external validity may be an issue because these cases may not be representative of the college community as a whole. A small sample of students from a limited number of academic cohorts also participated in focus groups so this does not represent all the academic areas of the college.

Ethical Concerns

Some ethical implications that may occur are informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. Each student participant signed a consent form that already exists, created by CCC's public relations office, to confirm they are willing to share their recorded image on the college's website or social media channels or any other marketing materials. A second consent form was created by the researcher informing each student that he/she are voluntarily participating in this study and that the information collected in this process can be shared if featured in the content marketing plan.

The participants did not receive any form of compensation for their participation in this research study. Participation in the study was voluntary. The recordings and transcripts will be kept in locked files on the researcher's hard drive for three years following the publication of the study.

To conduct successful interviews, overall trust of participants and the college leadership and community needed to be established. The researcher believes that her role as a professor and club advisor at CCC for the past eight years ensured the trust and credibility that enabled collaboration with students in generating the results reported in this study. Ethics in narrative research is a set of responsibilities in human relationships: responsibilities for the dignity, privacy, and well being of the participants. The narrative researcher is in a dual role in an intimate relationship with the participant and in a professionally responsible role in the scholarly community (Wang & Geale, 2015, p. 197).

All participants in this study were informed about the purpose of the study and how the stories and other information they provided would be used to inform CCC's content marketing

plan. All participants were informed via email and face-to-face communication before the interviews and focus groups were conducted. All participants also signed both consent forms in front of the researcher before the interviews or focus groups began. All participants were proud to share their stories, inspirations, and discuss their growth.

Conclusion/Transition to Results

Wang and Geale (2015) state, “The process of storytelling provides the opportunity for dialogue and reflection, each intertwined and cyclical” (p. 198).

This chapter described the method and approach that was used in this qualitative study of CCC student leaders and why they decided to enroll and stay at CCC, or to join a club/sport at CCC, and the benefits from all of these decisions. The study collected student stories, shared these stories with other students to determine which stories they felt would be most likely to appeal to potential CCC students, as a basis, for creating a content marketing plan for Cumberland County College aimed at increasing enrollment.

This chapter included the research design, instrumentation and participants, nomination strategy, reliability and validity, and data collection and data analysis procedures. Lastly, ethical issues of this study are discussed. Chapter IV will present the results of the data analysis.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to gather stories from engaged, Cumberland County College students that can be used in creating a content marketing plan for Cumberland County College. This study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What kind of stories do engaged students share about their CCC experience?

Research Question 2: How can engaged student stories, suggestions, or ideas be used in a content marketing plan for CCC?

This chapter brings to life the themes that surfaced from the stories told in the individual interviews, as well as what was learned in the focus groups about the appeal of the student stories and how they might be used in marketing CCC to potential students. The chapter reports the themes that emerged from the individual interviews and the stories that were told. The chapter also highlights the findings from the focus group interviews.

Participants

Forty-four participants were targeted for this research: 21 Cumberland County College student leaders from academic honor societies, athletics, student senate, and student clubs were recruited to tell stories. An additional 23 students from some of CCC's most popular academic programs: nursing, criminal justice, engineering, social science, and graphic design were invited

to participate in the focus groups. These students helped decide on the stories/themes to feature in the content marketing plan and which social media to use in disseminating the stories.

Findings from Individual Storytelling Interviews

The individual interviews were designed to collect the stories to answer research question one, along with additional information about these participants' CCC experiences.

Research question 1: What kind of stories do engaged students share about their CCC experience?

The student stories revealed several themes including: positive faculty experiences, affordable tuition, close proximity to campus location, and their two-year degree from CCC is a stepping stone and a strong foundation for their future. Students also shared that making connections and meeting new people through their classroom and student club experiences, as well as learning leadership skills created a positive college experience. Lastly, students strongly believed that their overall CCC experience and earning their degree would provide them the opportunity for a better job and a better life. Figure 4 depicts the themes that emerged from the individual interview data.



Figure 4. Themes that emerged from the individual interviews.

Based on the interview data, 20 out of 21 students felt that helpful, caring, and inspiring professors made their CCC experience great. Students shared that if it weren't for dedicated, caring faculty, many of them would not be graduating and/or pursuing their future goals. A social science major stated,

“It's quality professors here that really have compassion and really want to educate you and see you succeed.”

Another social science student said, “From my experience, with all of my professors, they are always there to push and encourage, and that encouragement is something that we need.”

Josh, a CCC environmental science student, disclosed,

My science professor she helped me get the internship with the U.S. Mission Wildlife, and she's really pushing us in the classes to do well. I feel like I'm not just learning, I'm not just sitting in a class, I'm actually preparing for the future, and it's a great feeling.

There are a lot of professors like that here, that they push you, not to the point where you can't do the work, but to the point where you're growing and you're getting better.

Fourteen out of 21 students said that affordability was a key decision maker to attending CCC. Students realized that they would receive a quality education at less than half the price of a local university.

Kit, a CCC theatre major, expressed the financial theme echoed by as many as two-thirds of the participants,

It's (CCC) very good on your finances because it's not cheap, but it's inexpensive. It's easy to get the degrees you want, and you really do have some good, quality professors

here who give you great quality for the classes that you're taking, and you don't have to pay that much for them.

Heather, a PTK student honor society member, reflected,

Well, first it was affordability and location. I was born and raised in Cumberland County. I've lived here most of my life, raising my children here. I needed to find something that worked with me, needing to have a commitment to my family and a commitment to my education, and with having such a large family, something that was going to be affordable, so that I was able to maintain all of my goals and responsibilities.

As mentioned above, location was another deciding factor for students attending CCC.

Student Senate President, Josh, shared his thoughts about location being one of the main factors why he chose to attend CCC. Josh stated,

The location is a big one for me because I wanted to adjust to college with a familiarity, ya know, I can still go home, I'm still in a comfortable environment, adjusting to the college life. Getting used to how the classes flow and how the workload is going to be without having all the stress of a new place and new people.

Eleven out of 21 students agreed location of the college was important in proximity to their homes, families, and jobs. Many students juggle full-time or part-time jobs, families, medical challenges, as well as other issues. CCC's location allows them to stay close to their job, home, and family, who provide support in a variety of ways.

Several students (9 out of 21 students) used the words "stepping stone" or "foundation" when describing their CCC experience. These students shared that CCC provided them a place to grow and mature to build confidence and pursue their dreams. The students, who participated

in the individual interviews, were engaged in clubs or athletics on campus but only 8 out of 21 discussed the networking opportunities, connections, and new people they met through their extracurricular activities at CCC. Heather stated,

Coming here, we have such a small number of students and such a great faculty. If you're going to get the hands on [experience], so if you're nervous about what your future holds, this is a great place to iron it out. It's a great stepping stone. I feel like the success that I found here, builds my confidence to go to the four-year level.

PTK student honor society president, Alex, reflected,

Well yes, my degree here at Cumberland is a stepping stone towards my future goals, like I said, I'm going to Fairleigh Dickinson University in the fall and without coming here and getting my degree it wouldn't be possible, wouldn't even be possible at all. So, I think I needed this time, this degree, without it, I don't know where my life would be.

Melanie, an environmental science student, explained,

That it's a great foundation you know. You come here and save money. The faculty members are good. In all colleges there's good faculty and bad faculty, but I feel like here you have a more intimate relationship with your professors, in a way, because it's not as big of a classroom. If you really have a question or if you're struggling, you can go to them and they're like there to help you instead of having hundreds of students where you just become a number.

Some students (6 out of 21) commented on the leadership skills they learned through their CCC experiences. Student Senate secretary, Emily, said, "Working on the student senate

fundraisers makes me feel good about myself, but it also helps me learn teamwork skills, leadership skills, and presentation skills.”

Matt, president of CCC’s 2nd Nature Club, noted,

I definitely think being part of 2nd Nature Club gave me a lot of leadership skills, and management skills; trying to make sure that everything gets done that we want to do, pretty much scheduling everyone around their crazy schedules, and it gave me a better sense of purpose. Like, I felt I was doing something good and helping.

Lastly, 6 out of 21 students connected their CCC experience and degree with securing a better job and making a better life for themselves and many times, their families. Eric, a Las Vias and DACA student said,

My associate’s degree will help me get a better job while I’m transferring into a four-year institution. Whereas, if I just started off going to a four-year institution, I wouldn’t really have anything right now. I mean, I’d still be working towards my degree; whereas, now I have an associate’s degree and I also have an accounting certificate, and that’s going to help me get a job during those four years. The education I gained at CCC will help me make a better life for me and my family.

Kit, a drama major, agreed, “There’s a family vibe here at Cumberland, and that vibe, it helps really connect you to the college, and it makes you feel as if its not just going to school and getting your degree, you’re actually making a better life for yourself.”

These data reveal that CCC professors make an impact on students and should be utilized as part of the content marketing plan. Affordability and location should also be highlighted as to why students attend CCC. These two important aspects are taken for granted and are sometimes

communicated in a negative way (i.e. CCC wasn't my first choice but since it is cheaper and close to home, I will attend).

Another theme that could be used as CCC's branding or "tagline" is the "foundation or stepping stone," several students communicated about their time at the college. CCC does provide a foundation for its students and is a stepping-stone to a four-year college or university or employment for our graduates. These keywords should be used as a positive aspect of attending CCC, because it is one of its strengths.

Lastly, extracurricular activities, such as clubs or athletics can be used in recruitment efforts communicating the leadership skills and networking opportunities students receive from participating. Emily, an environmental science major said it best,

Well, I mean it's cheaper to come here than to go to a university and here I felt like you can make a foundation for when you want to go further, and a lot of credits you take you can transfer to the University, so it's like a lifesaver in a way and I love the people here and the professors, they're very helpful.

Findings from Focus Group Interviews

The focus group interviews were designed to obtain student feedback about the stories shared by their peers and to gather their ideas of how best to market CCC to potential students highlighting their social media preferences/usage. Twenty-three (23) students from some of CCC's most popular academic programs: nursing, criminal justice, engineering, social science, and graphic design, participated in the focus groups.

Research Question 2: How can engaged student stories, suggestions, or ideas be used in a content marketing plan for CCC?

The focus group interviews began by exploring the social media use of the participants. In summation, the focus group questions 1 through 5 revealed that all students who participated in the focus groups own and use a smartphone. All 23 students also reported that they use their smartphones the most when connecting to social media. The majority of students (15 out of 23) owned and operated an Apple iPhone. Their top three favorite social media outlets were Instagram, Facebook, and SnapChat, respectively. When asked what social media outlet CCC should use to connect with students, the top four answers were SnapChat, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, respectively. Based on a 2018 Pew Research Center study on social media use, “18-24-year olds in the United States ($n = 201$), responded via telephone/cell phone survey, in the following way: YouTube (94%), Facebook (80%), Snapchat (78%), Instagram (71%), and Twitter (45%)” (Smith & Anderson, 2018, p. 4). Four out of five of these social media applications reflect the CCC study findings.

When answering why CCC should use these specific social media outlets, students highlighted the following reasons: 1) students use SnapChat for personal purposes the most, so it would be easy to connect with them because they are on it multiple times during the day; 2) students also use SnapChat because it is very easy to create small group chats to communicate with fellow classmates and professors to keep up-to-date on lectures, projects, and club activities; 3) several students reported liking Instagram because it isn't text heavy, students like to receive photos or short videos to learn information; 4) most students shared that YouTube is utilized to clarify processes they may be learning in class that they may need more guidance on and where they can find popular memes to share; and 5) Facebook provides a way for students to

update and interact with their families who live far away and let their loved ones know, on a daily or weekly basis, that their children are safe.

Table 6 presents the results focusing on social media use. The additional stories they shared as well as suggestions will be revealed later.

CCC student stories. Focus group questions 6 and 7 revealed the top three stories that resonated with students the most were Eric's story (39%), Josh's story (33%), and Samantha's story (26%), respectively. Eric shared that he is a DACA student, a CCC Title V Las Vias scholarship recipient, and he attended CCC to build a better life for himself and his family. Eric shares why he decided to go to college,

Well, I'm a DACA student. In the beginning, when I was in high school, like sophomore year, I wasn't aware of not being able to go to college because I'm an immigrant, so after sophomore year, well, I became a DACA recipient, and then that actually opened my eyes because I always thought about going to college, but now I actually can to go college, so my mother always pushed me, and told me you have to do this. You have to get a better life for yourself. You're smart. You've always been smart. You have to achieve what you've always wanted, and you know that just pushed me to come to college. I knew what I wanted to do, um, since I went into high school. I always wanted to be an electrical engineer. I like math a lot, and you know my mom works outside, she doesn't want that for me. She wants me to use the skills that I have. She knows that I like math, and I like reading and all that stuff, so she said I had to pursue something towards that instead of being outside, doing manual labor.

Table 6

Focus Group Responses on Social Media Use (n = 23)

Questions	Number	Percent
What technological devices do you own?		
Smartphone	23	100%
Laptop	7	30%
Tablet	3	13%
Desktop	2	9%
What device do you use the most to connect to social media?		
Smartphone	23	100%
Laptop	14	61%
Tablet	10	43%
Desktop	4	17%
What type of Smartphone do you use?		
Apple	15	65%
Android	8	34%
Blackberry	0	0%
What is your favorite social media outlet and why?		
Instagram	8	34%
Facebook	7	30%
SnapChat	6	26%
Twitter	1	4%
YouTube	1	4%
Linked In	0	0%
What social media outlet should CCC use to connect with students like you?		
SnapChat	6	26%
YouTube	4	17%
Facebook	3	13%
Instagram	3	13%
Linked In	2	9%
Other (Remind)	2	9%
Twitter	1	4%
What student story resonated with you the most and why?		
Eric (DACA student, Las Vias, Better Life)	9	39%
Josh (Student Senate, athlete, logical choice)	8	34%
Samantha (Athlete, close to family/home)	6	26%

Then, Eric revealed why he chose to attend Cumberland,

Um, I had a few advisors, just like my counselors back at Vineland High School, and a few of my mom's friends, their sons came to me. They went to CCC, and they were like, 'it's a smart choice.' It's a lot more inexpensive than going onto a four-year college right away. You get to stay close to your parents. I'm still at home. It's one less expense that I have to worry about. They feed me. They clothe me; it's just a smart choice. Now, I'm the one telling my friends in high school, that are about to graduate, that they should come to CCC, it's a smarter choice. It's a fraction of the cost and you take the same classes, everything transfers over, and everyone here helps you.

When Eric was asked to tell me a story to illustrate why participating in a group or club was important to him, he reflected,

Um yea, I'm in Las Vias, and I'm also in the Latin American club. Yea, it's so important because it just gets you out there, you get all of these sources. Like Las Vias, if they see that Student Senate is providing any additional help, they'll guide you toward that. They'll guide you towards different help. They'll provide anything you may need. I know if I have a question, or I don't know how to do something, they'll help me out in any way. They'll provide assistance. Like Transfer Day, they let me know the important stuff that's going to happen, the colleges there, and anything I need to know, because I mean we all get the emails, but sometimes not all of us read them.

Eric continues,

The clubs provide a lot of services that you might need. And just being a part of a club like Latin America Club, you get involved with more people that you'd never know.

You're coming right out of high school. You're stuck with your high school friends, but now you're meeting people from Bridgeton and Millville and everyone around, and it just feels good to be a part of something as well. Like a group and you get to know each other.

Lastly, Eric reflects about his experiences at CCC,

Like even in the beginning, with the DACA stuff, I was one of those kids that was scared to say anything. I would always say, 'yea I was born here, yea I was born here', I was scared to let everyone know who I was, but coming to college, opening up, my advisors talking to me, letting me know they were there for me, no matter what. It just allowed me to speak up for myself and for everyone else that can't speak up. Ms. Diana and Ms. Iris always tell me, 'if you're comfortable speaking about it,' speak about it. Because that way other people might find courage in you, so now, I'm really open about it. I'm a DACA student. I struggled here, here and here. I found hope; you can find hope as well. I know they've opened up possibilities for scholarships for me, and anybody else can apply for them, if they look for it.

Josh was CCC's 2018 graduation speaker, Student Senate president, Cross Country Student Athlete, and said he attended CCC because it was the logical and best choice for his future. Josh tells his story of how he decided to go to college,

So, I definitely had some options. I was in my senior year of high school, and I had one welding competition, welding sculpture competition, so I had a full ride to either Ohio Technical College or Lincoln Tech, so I mean it seemed kind of obvious that I should go with those options, but I worked summers as a welder. It's a great trade, and I do enjoy

welding, but I had some other passions. I work at Beaver Dam Boat Rentals, and I've kind of always been like really an outdoorsy kind of person, and I have this passion for biology, and I wanted to pursue that and the education I got at CC tech for welding um set me up to be a welder. If I wanted to be a welder, I could've used that and went with it, so to explore biology I thought, I started thinking about, other opportunities, and my guidance counselor told me about some university's I could go to and of course CCC was always an option, and um, I had School Counts and NJ Stars, so it was another thing like the technical schools. I had basically a full ride and uh it just seemed like the obvious choice to me really, and then on top of that, I had, I'm a runner, so I was running track and at the county meet. The coach here at the college came to my county meet, and uh he watched me run. I believe he started emailing me, uh and he talked to me, chatted to me at the race after I had raced, and uh he told me how he would really like to have me here, so that was a huge motivating factor as well. So, I mean with the School Counts, NJ Stars, cross country set up, it seemed, I mean there was no other option for me. I knew I wanted to come here, to be close to home, and in Cumberland County, is where I wanted to be.

Josh also told his story about the importance of participating in clubs and other groups at CCC, Um, I'm very active at CCC. I'm vice chair for Student Senate. I'm a part of the 2nd Nature Club. I'm a cross country runner. I'm also a member of PTK; Phi Theta Kappa, so it's quite a bit, but I'm able to manage it. Cumberland County College is good about that, you can be involved in a lot of things and not be over stressed. I've been able to keep my grades up as well, which is awesome. Cross country; I completely fell in love

with it. I did both seasons, and um, I even earned 2nd Team All American status. It was amazing and uh, ya know, it helps you if you're in a familiar environment. You're close to home, and even if you're not, it's a community college, you're in a tight environment, but being on a sports team no matter where I've been, high school, everything, it's helped me to adjust so much better. You have friends, it's like a family really. A sports team is like a family. So, you make memories and you have good times. You always have people there, and that's one of the most amazing things about the teams, sports teams, and I mean one cool thing I think, is that at this level, its almost like, because I started cross country my senior year of high school, so it was really a late start but I did well but I had just started so I wasn't at a high enough level to go into a higher level than this. If I was to go D3, I would've been all right, but it would've been a struggle. Whereas at the junior college level, I was able to do these two more years, and now I'm at a place where I'm comfortable going into a D3 or even a D2 level, and coaches are reaching out to me as well, so that's really awesome, Then, Student Senate, as soon as I joined Student Senate, I had a big role. I felt like I was doing something big, and um I was elected vice chair, and I was trying to do great things. We're trying to make an impact on campus, and uh Student Senate is kind of like student government. It's almost like being a class officer in high school or something, so um, it's a great way to help the community, and Phi Theta Kappa (Honor Society) is on a bigger scale. It's a national organization, and that is something that you are able to become a member of by having certain grades, so I got the letter. I joined, and um I could've been an officer for that, I believe, of course you have to run for it and everything, but I didn't try because of my position in Student

Senate. I felt that I could make a bigger impact by, because it was less members, so I ran for the officer position in Student Senate, Then, 2nd Nature Club, my main science teacher is the advisor, so as a science major, it's helpful being able to get that extra connection with her. They're also doing pretty awesome things. One of the things they did was raise money to buy solar powered phone chargers to send to Puerto Rico after they had their natural disaster. So, it's just everything you get involved in, it just feels good to help out the community; it gives you that sense of pride and helping out.

Samantha was a Student Athlete (softball pitcher and team captain) and she attended CCC because it was close to her home, family, and job. When Samantha was asked to tell a story of how she decided to go to college, she said,

Um, I pretty much always wanted to go to college continue my education. Since I was younger, my parents' sort of always pushed it, like, 'you're going to go to college, you're going to finish school, blah blah blah'. I decided to come here because like I said before because its five minutes away from my house so it's pretty convenient. I kind of went to a small high school, so I graduated with 26 kids. I went to Cumberland Christian right there down the street, so going from like 26 kids to a big university is kind of like a shock to me so I was like let me stay local get my first two years done, get all my basic classes out of the way, and then, if I want to go somewhere after, I can. I can stay home and play softball. I can still work, and I can still go to school because I'm only five minutes away.

When asked to tell a story that illustrates why participating in softball, or any club or other organization on campus, is important to her, Samantha answered,

Um, you kind of get more involved with people. You get to know more people. I've made more friends doing this than I would've if I hadn't been playing softball, you saw me with Megan earlier like, I honestly feel like the girls that I have on my team right now, I'm going to be friends with for a while, so its kind of helps with that. Um, we get involved. We do other stuff like outside. We did some fundraisers, so we did like a spaghetti dinner thing, raising money f or Myrtle [Beach], and we got to just meet a bunch of different people that you didn't know kind of thing, so its just kind of cool that you get to know more people and get involved in stuff.

When asked what benefits being part of team or club provided her, Samantha said,

Um, you make more connections. I've met new people that can help me get to different places in my future career, then if I hadn't been participating in things, so it's just getting that extra connection, that extra I don't know, level of support from new people.

Samantha also shared that her CCC advisor, Kellie Slade, was the person who made an impact on her and why,

I love Kellie Slade. She is awesome, from the get, she had made sure that I got all the classes that I wanted. She made sure I had all the professors that I wanted. She got me, she was like, 'This person's great, you're going to love them.', or 'This person helps you whenever you need anything.' She was always emailing me right back, if I emailed her. I texted her sometimes too, like, 'Hey Kellie, I have an issue with this.'; reply instantly. Like she was always on it. She was awesome. She made sure that all of my classes were in order in a way that worked with my schedule, so it worked around my softball schedule. It worked around my personal schedule, my work schedule, and everything

just kind of fit into place, and she was always just checking on me, like, ‘Is everything good? Are you okay? Do you need help in any of your classes?’

Lastly, when asked what keeps her motivated to earn her degree, Samantha explained,

I’ve always had this idea that I wanted to start some type of career, and then I was like, I never really knew what it was. I bounced from teacher to radiologist to everything under the sun, and when I finally decided that I wanted to be an athletic trainer, like from that point on, everything just made sense. Like, if I go, my sister plays sports, so if I’m at my sister’s games and somebody gets hurt, I’m like, ‘uh I could be helping you, but I’m not properly trained yet.’, or if somebody get hurts on our team, I’m like, ‘ah, I cant wait to just finish my degree and have the tools and the skill set to be able to help people like that.’ So that’s really what gets me going and like I got into the athletic training program at Rowan, so I’m just like super excited. I probably have another three years and then I’ll have my master’s and I just can’t wait.

When asked if these stories would appeal to the focus group participants as recruitment tools, all 23 students answered, yes.

CCC student suggestions/ideas. A few suggestions or ideas surfaced from focus group questions 8 and 9. Some students gave online examples and links to those examples to share social media promotional ideas with the researcher to help connect recruitment messages with prospective students but most described or suggested ideas of how to enhance what CCC already has to offer to help connect and recruit students. Among the examples offered were TEDTalk platforms for faculty, face-to-face freshman seminar connection, and promotion of NJ Stars and School Counts scholarships.

TEDTalk platforms for faculty. Students suggested that faculty create two-minute videos and share them on YouTube focusing on academics, advisement, or inspirational content that would interest prospective students and keep current students connected to the faculty and help them focus and reflect. A social science student who participated in the focus group shared:

I think outlets where professors try to reach out to people without having to be like physically enrolled in a class or physically signed up or be present in a meeting would always help. It's just easier to be in touch with your professors. I feel like the school itself, with the help from faculty, should advertise majors that people don't really talk about, like my friend is majoring in Art Therapy. Like it could just be a banner on the website like every day or every week they advertise a new, less popular major on Instagram or Facebook just to get it out there. Get a teacher that's already here [at CCC] and have them take a picture and have a short passage talking about it [major]. I know Rutgers Camden does that, because I'm transferring there. On their Instagram page they have that.

Face-to-face freshman seminar connection. Students revealed that utilizing the freshman seminar, a non-credit course CCC students are required to complete to graduate, would be a good way to recruit and connect with prospective students. Student suggestions included offering this course in the summer prior to registration to give the prospective students a "taste" of college. Students discussed the use of more face-to-face, traditional 7-week freshman seminar classes instead of the current online freshman seminar offerings. Connections to classmates and professors are seen, as a positive aspect of what CCC offers its students and the relationship-building students can have with faculty. A graphic design student stated:

Connect with us in freshman seminar, this class helps us make connections and breakthrough from high school to college. I feel like having class face-to-face, you build more connections and relationships with classmates, yea. And I think that's one thing most students don't realize is that building connections with professors and students builds you as a person and also gets you the experience you need. And also, if you get that connection with a certain professor you can use him/her as a reference. If you need feedback, you can use that professor. So, I think freshman seminar is a very good way to connect with students, and it should not be a burden. Freshman seminar should be face-to-face not online, and it shouldn't be a burden because if it becomes a burden, people don't use it the right way. And that's another thing that isn't publicized enough is how friendly and genuinely these professors want to see you succeed.

Promotion of NJ Stars and School Counts scholarships. A cohort of engineering students who participated in the focus groups shared their ideas about promotion of scholarship opportunities to attract high school students. Two popular scholarship programs include NJ Stars and School Counts. Based on GPA/class rank and/or attendance all four years of high school, NJ students attending CCC can be offered a full, two-year scholarship if the criteria are met. One engineering student suggested:

I think CCC should start advertising straight, like first day of 9th grade, because I didn't realize the scholarships existed until sophomore year of high school. Luckily, I was automatically signed up somehow, but if I didn't know about the eligibility and I got a C or D in a class, I would've missed my chance to attend here for free.

When watching Eric's individual interview video during the focus group session, another engineering student connected the scholarship opportunities with Eric's story. He shared:

I mean, most of my friends are kind of in a similar financial situation. Everyone kind of fits into the middle class, can't afford to go to a big college but not so poor that you get financial aid, so the scholarship opportunities at CCC are important to know about early in high school.

The focus groups informed my thinking about the content marketing plan in a variety of ways. First, it focused what social media applications to utilize to reach the intended audience. Secondly, the focus groups supported the individual interview themes that surfaced through the three student stories that resonated with the focus group participants the most. Thirdly, the focus groups offered additional ideas and suggestions on ways to market CCC to prospective students. And lastly, it reaffirms the importance of storytelling as an effective tool to create meaningful content.

Summary of Study Findings

The six main themes about CCC that surfaced from the individual interviews were: a caring, positive faculty, affordability, location, a foundation or stepping stone for the future, making new connections, and building a better life.

The focus group participants' social media preferences, what stories resonated with them, as well as their ideas/suggestions for additional marketing efforts provided good ideas for the content marketing plan. All participants used Smartphones, their favorite social media applications were Instagram, Facebook, and SnapChat, respectively, and the most frequently utilized social media applications were SnapChat, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram,

respectively. The three stories told by Josh, Samantha, and Eric were the stories that resonated with the focus group participants the most.

The additional ideas/suggestions from the focus group participants were TEDTalk platforms by sharing their expertise or providing motivational content, more face-to-face Freshman Seminar classes offered in the summer to help recruit students (possibly a part of orientation), and better and earlier promotion of NJ Stars and School Counts scholarship opportunities for high school students.

Chapter V

Discussion, Conclusions, and A Content Marketing Plan for CCC

Introduction

This chapter discusses the research results in connection with the research questions, and the literature reviewed, limitations of the study, implications for marketing to attract new students, conclusions, and reveals the content marketing plan created based on CCC student stories.

Discussion

Research Question 1: What kind of stories do engaged students share about their CCC experience?

The student stories revealed several themes including: positive faculty experiences, affordable tuition, close proximity to campus location, and their two-year degree from CCC is a stepping stone and a strong foundation for their future. Students also shared that making connections and meeting new people through their classroom and student club experiences, as well as learning leadership skills created a positive college experience. Lastly, students strongly believed that their overall CCC experience and earning their degree would provide them the opportunity for a better job and a better life.

Research Question 2: How can engaged student stories, suggestions, or ideas be used in a content marketing plan for CCC?

The focus group interviews explored the social media use of the participants. These students also shared additional stories and recruitment ideas based on their CCC experiences. Three individual student stories (Eric, Samantha, and Josh) resonated the most with the students,

all students owned and operated a Smartphone, and TedTalk faculty posts, face-to-face Freshman Seminar classes, and enhanced scholarship promotion efforts in high school were some of the suggestions that surfaced from Research Question 2.

Gabriel (2004) argued that storytelling is an important communication tool because it is reflective. This is evidenced in this study due to the information and reflections shared by CCC students. The posed questions allowed the students to take time to reflect on decisions and experiences at CCC and reflect on their time at the college. Barker and Gower (2010) suggested storytelling helps build relationships. This concept is clear in the majority of students giving examples of faculty who have made an impact in their lives. Many students who participated in the individual interviews and focus groups discussed how an individual faculty member or advisor impacted their lives through communication, mentorship, and understanding. The relationships built during these interactions, successes, and challenges reveals how stories can connect individuals.

As part of strategic planning, storytelling can help create a living document as part of an assemblage of ideas and images, a vision, according to Tyler (2015). This confirms the cooperation of CCC administration with this study to support the institution's vision, improve enrollment numbers, and serve students better. The strategic planning process is led by the mission and vision of an organization. If CCC's mission and vision did not exist or was ineffective, it would be difficult to create a plan to support it. The content marketing plan is a living, evolving document that allows a gathering of goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics to help increase student enrollment. As part of this strategy, marketing utilizes storytelling as a persuasive technique based on Heugens' (2002) study. Participants connecting to the CCC

student stories they witnessed and stating that those stories resonated with them and engaged them supports the findings from Heugens' study.

Tussyadiah et al.'s (2011) study reports that human beings retain information better through stories. Thus, gathering student stories to persuade prospective students to enroll at CCC helped create a content marketing plan. This study is supported through the focus group participants relating to the stories, reflecting on those stories, and connecting to personal stories by the re-telling of the stories shared. Pulizzi (2012a) defines content marketing as "the creation of a valuable, relevant and compelling content by the brand itself on a consistent basis, used to generate a positive behavior from a customer or prospect of the brand" (p. 116).

Costantinides and Stango (2011) focus on higher education marketing and the use of social media as an effective communication tool, showing how social media influenced the decision-making process of potential students choosing a college. With this in mind, the content marketing plan created through this study focuses on social media applications as the main communication tool. Results support that claim by CCC students sharing the main social media applications they use to gather and distribute information, as well as expressing why they prefer one application over the other.

Melchiorre and Johnson (2017) support the elements of the content marketing plan created for CCC. Some elements include: Situation analysis, target audience, objectives, goals, frequency, and evaluation. These elements are reflected in the content marketing planned created for CCC. The elements shared by Melchiorre and Johnson (2017) guided the creation of the marketing plan and helped initiate a logical, effective plan to increase student enrollment at CCC.

Limitations of the Study

There are two major limitations with this study. First, the study cannot comment on the perspectives of other students in higher education. Second, there is a limitation due to the purposive sampling used to select the participants for the storytelling interviews and focus groups. Participants were selected based on Cumberland County College cohort advisor recommendations for students who met the criteria outlined in Chapter III. There is also a limitation due to sample bias. As a byproduct of the convenience/purposive sampling, there is the possibility of a systematic error that can prejudice the results due to the sample selection process (Harding, 2013).

Conclusions

The first research question inquired about the kind of stories that engaged students share about their CCC experience. Based on the themes that surfaced, these data provided key messages CCC could utilize to focus its content marketing. The key themes were: caring and supportive faculty, affordability, location, education foundation, and a building a better life.

The second research question inquired about the appeal of the collected student stories and how they might be used in marketing CCC to potential students as well as students' social media preferences. Three stories resonated with the focus group students and each story was unique in its own way. Eric's shared that he is a DACA student, paying his way through college and attending CCC to build a better life for himself and his family; Samantha chose CCC because of the proximity to her family and job; and Josh shared that CCC was the logical choice for him due to the affordability, as well as the connections he made with faculty and peers.

This second question also shed some light on what social media applications students use and why. Some of the top applications included: Instagram, SnapChat, Facebook, and YouTube. Students shared that ease of use, concise message with images, and providing relevant, helpful information were some of the reasons why those specific applications were chosen.

In conclusion, using student stories in a social media campaign may be an effective approach for attracting potential students to CCC.

Implications for Marketing to Attract New Students

Implications focusing on policy, practice, or action based on the results of this study are shared below. Policies are usually organizationally specific, and since a single organization was represented in this study, policies can be suggested. Practices and actions related to increasing enrollment and developing a content marketing plan may also be informed by study findings.

Policies recommended are adoption of a content marketing plan focusing on student storytelling and social media to help attract and recruit potential students leading to increased enrollment. This study shows there are student stories to gather and tell that can enhance an institution's marketing plan. This policy should link to the organization's mission and vision and evolve as the institution grows. Another policy should include marketing strategies linked to recruitment efforts with measurable enrollment objectives.

In addition to implementing the content marketing plan highlighted below, CCC should consider hiring a full-time Marketing Director focusing solely on recruitment and enrollment. During my research, when reviewing CCC's strategic and marketing plans, there was a lack of focus on recruitment and increasing enrollment in either plan. CCC needs a cohesive recruitment marketing strategy to address its enrollment challenges.

Practices and actions can take place by replicating this study through individual interviews and focus groups utilizing the interview and focus group protocol highlighted in this study. The content marketing plan format can guide other research by utilizing student stories as an approach to increase enrollment.

Cumberland Community College Content Marketing Plan to Recruit New Students

The proposed Content Marketing Plan (CMP) is designed to increase visibility and enrollment by appealing to the target audience through social media using student stories. Success with a content marketing plan will build enthusiasm and morale within the college and help achieve CCC's student recruitment objectives. This plan outlines strategies and tactics for content marketing utilizing social media.

The recommended CMP details goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics for reaching Cumberland County College's main target audience, its prospective students. Below is information detailing CCC's mission and vision. By aligning with CCC's mission and vision, the content marketing plan will strengthen CCC's recruitment efforts.

Situation Analysis

Cumberland County College, located in Vineland, New Jersey, was established in 1966 as one of the first community colleges in the state. Through a strategic planning process the college has developed a vision and mission statement that explicitly links it to the community it serves. Cumberland County College's (CCC) vision statement is as follows: "Cumberland County College serves as a catalyst for creating collaborative relationships across the county that enhance the quality of life through excellence in education, community leadership, and economic growth" (CCC, 2018, para. 2).

Similarly, CCC's mission emphasizes student learning, student engagement, and community improvement: Cumberland County College is a comprehensive community college that is "accessible, learning-centered, and dedicated to serving a diverse community of learners and employers through quality, innovative programs and services. The College is committed to student success and completion, and to the core elements of liberal arts, transfer, career, technical, professional and community education" (CCC, 2018, para. 1).

CCC educates a diverse student body that includes many first-generation college students as well as English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. The majority of students begin their education in developmental courses then register for college-level courses within their selected program of study. Like its' sister institutions, CCC provides educational opportunities to a student body as diverse as the region it serves. In a community that leads the state in unemployment, low income, teen pregnancy, and various other measures of distress, the college is a much-needed resource and means to employment and opportunity.

Lack of consensus around the articulation of institutional identity and the value of or investment in institutional marketing over a significant period of time may have contributed to the decline in enrollment. CCC also faces threats from increased competition from Rowan University and its premiere partnerships with surrounding community colleges (RCGC and RCBC).

According to The Chronicle of Higher Education, the U.S. population age 18 and under will shrink from 34% today to only 21% by 2050. Since 2010, CCC's enrollment numbers reflect these findings decreasing by 1,000 students, which is approximately a 25% decline in eight years.

Competitive Landscape

CCC faces competition from Rowan University, a four-year school, located approximately 25 miles north of CCC. Due to the decrease in community college enrollment numbers over the past few years at CCC and other community colleges, like Gloucester County College (GCC) and Burlington County College (BCC), Rowan University has offered premiere partnership opportunities to GCC and BCC.

Both community colleges recently partnered with Rowan University, rebranding themselves as Rowan College at Gloucester County (RCGC) and Rowan College at Burlington County (RCBC). These partnerships act as feeder schools offering Rowan’s “3+1” program to all students.

Rowan University is working together with RCGC and RCBC to make earning a four-year college degree more affordable. The “3 + 1” option enables students to attend three years at RCGC and their senior year at Rowan University to complete a bachelor’s degree. The highlights are below:

- Earn a four-year degree at a reduced price: less than \$30,000 for a bachelor’s degree
- Save on tuition and fees — three years at the community college cost and the final year at the university rate
- Follows Rowan University course curriculum with 300-level classes taught by advanced-degree faculty
- Graduate with a Rowan University bachelor’s degree
- Future internships and co-op opportunities being developed to enhance work experience and career potential (citation need here – RCGC brochure)

Position Statement for Content Marketing Plan

For a diverse group of prospective high school graduates who need a quality, affordable, and learning-centered college education, Cumberland County College meets these needs through advanced-degreed faculty who teach, inspire, and mentor their students. Cumberland County College prepares students to transform knowledge into action, build the foundation of a successful career, and live a meaningful life.

This CMP position statement is strengthened by the following key distinctions based on the information gathered from the student participants:

1. Cumberland County College's (CCC) faculty members teach, inspire, and mentor our students creating a family-friendly atmosphere.
2. CCC offers accessibility and affordability to prospective students.
3. CCC offers a convenient location for local residents and surrounding county residents located on the Route 55 corridor between Philadelphia and the shore points.
4. CCC provides a strong foundation and/or stepping stone for students' futures by finding gainful employment or earning their four-year degree.
5. CCC students make new and lasting connections through networking and service learning opportunities
6. CCC's degree earning students secure better jobs and build a better life for themselves

Target Audience: Prospective students, 18-25 years old.

Goal: To increase awareness and visibility of CCC to 18 to 25-year-old prospective students utilizing student storytelling through an effective social media content marketing campaign.

Objective: To increase enrollment of 18 to 25-year-old prospective students utilizing student storytelling through an effective social media content marketing campaign by 3% to combat declining enrollment.

Strategies:

Strategy 1: Enhance CCC's social media marketing utilizing student stories highlighting: faculty, affordability, accessibility, location, networking, stepping stone to educational achievement, and building a better life.

Tactics:

- 1a. Develop a "bank" of stories (similar to the stories of Josh, Samantha, and Eric) highlighting CCC's affordability, accessibility and location via SnapChat, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube and post throughout the academic year.
- 1b. Capture similar stories via digital media highlighting faculty and student relationships, focusing on inspiring connections posting on all social media outlets.
- 1c. Create a photo essay of students supported by narration or captions sharing CCC as students' stepping stone to earning their degree and building a better life (Instagram and SnapChat focus).

Strategy 2: Create cohesive, campus-wide social media messaging, leveraging current resources, to achieve enrollment goals.

Tactics:

- 2a. Create a digital media campaign similar to a TedTalk format entitled, “Consider Cumberland,” focusing on faculty inviting prospective students to attend Cumberland as well as providing inspirational quotes to post on Instagram, Facebook, SnapChat, Twitter, YouTube and the college website.
- 2b. Market the face-to-face Freshman Seminar connection via current students and faculty via SnapChat, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and CCC’s website sharing all the benefits and the head start students gain by completing the class by offering this required class during the summer.
- 2c. Design a social media campaign high school counselors and teachers can easily utilize to promote NJ Stars and School Counts scholarship opportunities to their students beginning freshman year (campaign will provide a Google link to register for more information with CCC representative capturing student data).

Strategy 3: Create the next generation of student recruitment and enrollment social media tools.

Tactics:

- 3a. Utilize tagging capabilities on web-based content to share information and stories between website sections and social media applications.
- 3b. Add more student voices/stories to social media and the website through blogs, Instagram feeds, Twitter feeds, and other interactive tools.
- 3c. Create content, URLs, keywords, page titles with search engine optimization in mind. Develop landing pages for possible future search engine marketing (SEM) highlighting content specific campaigns around key enrollment cycles.

Content Timetable (frequency)

1. Best Sharing times

- a. SnapChat: 10:00pm to 1:00am
- b. Facebook: 1:00 p.m. to 3:00pm
- c. YouTube: Weekdays - 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and 12 p.m. and 3 p.m. on Thursday and Friday. Weekends Saturday and Sunday, a post-time between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m.
- d. Instagram: 5:00-6:00pm;
- e. Twitter: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

2. Posting frequency

- a. SnapChat: 5-20 per week
- b. Facebook: 8-15 per week
- c. YouTube: 2-3 videos per week
- d. Instagram: 5-10 per week (posts), 8-16 x 2 per week (stories)

Measurement and Market Research

Engagement with Media:

- Conduct monthly audits of social media channels to benchmark the number of followers/likes and engagement with content.
- Assess number of positive media stories and placement, including online publications.

Messaging Evaluation and Audit:

- Establish strategies for ongoing research focusing on prospective high school students and current students using focus groups.
- Develop strategy to evaluate recruitment advertising, such as custom URLs, website analysis, and the use of hashtags to encourage social media engagement.
- Create and distribute a survey in freshman seminar classes to find out if the student stories resonated with new students and attracted them to the college.

Closing Remarks

Currently, CCC is discussing a future merger with Rowan College of Gloucester County. This merger will be the first of its kind in higher education. Ultimately, it is two community colleges merging to create Rowan College of South Jersey (RCSJ). If approved by Middle States Accreditation, this merger will take place July 1, 2019. This means that CCC will dissolve as a non-profit, educational institution and become a branch campus of Rowan College of South Jersey.

This possible merger is being discussed based on the budget deficit CCC faces, as well as future trends in community college enrollment numbers declining. As discussed in Chapter 1, one of the reasons for this study is due to the 25% enrollment decrease CCC has suffered in recent years. The effort to create an effective content marketing plan for CCC utilizing popular social media applications and focusing on student stories can still be considered but the decision to implement this plan may be more complicated if this potential merger takes place.

Regardless, even if changes take place at CCC and some of the ideas shared in the plan may not

work anymore, the ideas gleamed from student story-telling as part of an effective marketing plan are valid.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Review Committee Approval



WILMINGTON UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW COMMITTEE (HSRC)

HSRC-11

PROTOCOL REVIEW

This section is to be completed by the HSR Committee Person.

Principal Investigator: Heide Post

Date Submitted: 10/30/17

The protocol and attachments were reviewed:

The proposed research is approved as:

☐ Exempt ☒ Expedited ☐ Full Committee

The proposed research was approved pending the following changes:

☐ See attached letter
☐ Resubmit changes to the HSRC chairperson.

The proposed research was disapproved:

☐ See attached letter for more information.

HSRC Chair
or Representative

Nina Buchanan
Printed Name
[Signature]
Signature Date 10/30/17

HSRC Chair
or Representative

Taith Norman
Printed Name
[Signature]
Signature Date 10/31/17

Appendix B

National Institutes of Health Certificate



Appendix C

Cumberland County College Institutional Review Board Approval



Institutional Review Board Research Certification Form

This form will be completed by the Institutional Review Board and forwarded to the President of the College for final action. Following this action, a copy of this form and a letter will be sent to the researcher to authorize the study or to request additional information.

Researcher Renee J. Post

Title of Research Study Stories Students Tell: A Content Marketing Plan to

Date Submitted for Review Increase Enrollment at CCC
10-12-2017

Date of review by Institutional Review Board 10-23-2017

Institutional Review Board Action:

Approved ☒

Denied ☐

Request Revisions ☐

Revisions Requested:

None

Cumberland County College

Institutional Review Board Certification: I certify that the Institutional Review Board has approved this study.

[Signature]
Signature of Authorized IRB Member

11-02-2017
Date

Appendix D

Permission to Use Tables from Authors Ashley Smith, Jolanta Juskiewicz, and Marilyn

Martin Melchiorre and Scott A. Johnson

Ashley Smith <ashley.smith@insidehighered.com>

Mon 12/3/2018 9:41 AM

Hi Renee,

That's fine as long as you attribute to me and Inside Higher Ed.

You may also find this article interesting:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/21/community-college-enrollment-rates-expected-keep-falling>

Good luck,

Ashley

Ashley A. Smith

Reporter, Inside Higher Ed

202-448-6117 | O

313-737-3201 | M

Sent from my iPhone

Post, Renee J. (Adjunct)

Sun 12/2/2018 7:46 PM

Sent Items

To: ashley.smith@insidehighered.com;

Hello,

My name is Renee Post. Last week, I successfully completed my doctoral defense at Wilmington University in Delaware. My study is entitled, "Stories Students Tell: A Content Marketing Plan to Increase Enrollment at Cumberland County College.

As part of my literature review, I would like to receive permission from you to use the following Table in my dissertation: Community College Enrollment 2011-2016 (Smith, 2016, para. 5)

Online Article title: Community colleges examining low and stagnant enrollments. To hit my graduation deadline, I would need to receive permission via email from you (if granted) by Dec.

10. Thank you for your consideration,

Renee Post

JOLANTA JUSZKIEWICZ <jjuszkieicz@aacc.nche.edu>

Mon 12/3/2018 7:18 AM

To:

Post, Renee J. (Adjunct);

Bing Maps

You have my permission to use the table. But you should be aware that there is a more recent publication with the same table with updated information (2013-2016).

<https://www.aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CCEnrollment2017.pdf>

Should you decide to use that table instead of the one you reference, please know that you have my permission for that also.

JJ

Jolanta (J.J.) Juszkieicz, Ph.D.

Director of Policy Analysis

1 Dupont Circle, NW

Suite 700

Washington, DC 20036

(202) 416-4502

From: renee.j.post@wilmu.edu [mailto:renee.j.post@wilmu.edu]

Sent: Sunday, December 02, 2018 8:01 PM

To: JOLANTA JUSZKIEWICZ <jjuszkieicz@aacc.nche.edu>

Subject: Permission request to use Table in my dissertation

Hello,

My name is Renee Post. Last week, I successfully completed my doctoral defense at Wilmington University in Delaware. My study is entitled, "Stories Students Tell: A Content Marketing Plan to Increase Enrollment at Cumberland County College. As part of my literature review, I would like to receive permission from you to use the following Table in my dissertation: Changes in Fall Enrollment 2012-2015 (Juszkieicz, 2016, p. 4). https://www.aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/TrendsCCEnrollment_Final2016.pdf To hit my publication and graduation deadline, I would need to receive permission via email from you (if granted) by Dec. 10. Thank you for your consideration, Renee Post

Marilyn Melchiorre <MMelchiorre@collegeofidaho.edu>

Sun 12/2/2018 9:32 PM

Renee

Congratulations on being this close to graduation.

Per your email:

As part of my literature review, I would like to receive permission from you to use the following Table in my dissertation:

Activation Planning Table (Melchiorre & Johnson, 2017, p. 79).

You do have my permission to use the Activation Planning Table in your dissertation.

If your work is published, I would appreciate having the opportunity to read your dissertation.

Best,

Dr. Mel

Dr. Marilyn Martin Melchiorre, MBA

Associate Professor & Chair

Business & Accounting Department

The College of Idaho

2112 Cleveland Blvd, Box 50

Caldwell, ID 83605

mmelchiorre@collegeofidaho.edu

ph 208.459.5806

Office KAIC 214

Post, Renee J. (Adjunct)

Sun 12/2/2018 7:56 PM

Sent Items

To:

mmelchiorre@collegeofidaho.edu <MMelchiorre@collegeofidaho.edu>;

Hello,

My name is Renee Post. Last week, I successfully completed my doctoral defense at Wilmington University in Delaware. My study is entitled, "Stories Students Tell: A Content Marketing Plan to Increase Enrollment at Cumberland County College.

As part of my literature review, I would like to receive permission from you to use the following Table in my dissertation:

Activation Planning Table (Melchiorre & Johnson, 2017, p. 79).

To hit my publication and graduation deadline, I would need to receive permission via email from you (if granted) by Dec. 10.

Thank you for your consideration, Renee Post

Appendix E

Permission to Use Figures from Authors Randolph T. Barker and Kim Gower, and Jo Tyler



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Title: Strategic Application of Storytelling in Organizations
Author: Randolph T. Barker, Kim Gower
Publication: Journal of Business Communication
Publisher: SAGE Publications
Date: 07/01/2010
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Comments? We would like to hear from you. E-mail us at customercare@copyright.com

Jo Tyler <jotylerspsu@gmail.com>

Sun 12/2/2018 11:10 PM

Hi, Congratulations on your defense. I am happy to provide permission for you to use the figure you mention in your note, as long as it is properly formatted and cited. All the best going forward. Best, Jo

Post, Renee J. (Adjunct)

Sun 12/2/2018 8:04 PM

Sent Items

To:

jat235@psu.edu;

Hello,

My name is Renee Post. Last week, I successfully completed my doctoral defense at Wilmington University in Delaware. My study is entitled, "Stories Students Tell: A Content Marketing Plan to Increase Enrollment at Cumberland County College.

As part of my literature review, I would like to receive permission from you to use the following Figure in my dissertation:

A Summary of the Five Phases of Strategic Assemblage for Vision and Strategic Planning (Tyler, 2015, p. 331).

To hit my publication and graduation deadline, I would need to receive permission via email from you (if granted) by Dec. 10.

Thank you for your consideration,
Renee Post