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Neoliberalism is a far-reaching ideology that has impacted public higher education since its inception. This ideology poses significant challenges to historic and contemporary promises of public higher education. In this paper, I explore the complex and often contentious relationship between neoliberalism and public higher education beginning with a brief historical analysis the purposes and goals of public higher education within the United States. I also examine the historical and contemporary democratic elements of public universities, specifically those that comprise the UNC System.

As part of this study, I also examine the macro-level implications of neoliberalism on a national level. As a former administrator within public higher education, I share my experiences within the Academic and Student Affairs fields to illustrate the micro-level effects of neoliberal influences within higher education. I conclude with recommendations that are focused on greater institutional equity, increased access to public higher education, and collaborative practices that can be implemented to create a more democratically robust public university.

THE CHALLENGES OF NEOLIBERALISM TO THE DEMOCRATIC
PROMISES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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CHAPTER I

DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION – AN INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

I begin this dissertation with a story about my experiences as a student and professional. This story is significant because it outlines my journey and transition from the private sector to higher education and illustrates some of my concerns with many higher education institutions today. Providing insight about the growing similarities between the Fortune 100 corporations I previously worked for and public higher education institutions today helps me to argue in favor of a renewed focus on the civic mission of public higher education institutions.

Approximately 10 years ago I completed my undergraduate degree. Like many other recent graduates, I began my professional career, which at that point, I thought would be in wealth management and finance. I can still vividly recall my first day of work for a large bank located in Charlotte, NC. This institution had a sprawling physical facility that housed over 10,000 employees, and during the years of the recession beginning in 2008, I felt fortunate to be working for this company. This excitement was short lived. After several months in this role, I quickly realized that while I enjoyed working with numbers and monetary assets, I didn't enjoy being assessed on approximately twenty-two different metrics that supposedly gauged my efficiency and effectiveness in the role, especially since this assessment was tied to the profitability of the institution. In terms of profit for the company, I consistently exceeded established

goals and while successful, still wasn't happy with the work I was doing. Something didn't feel right, and I decided to move to a different company and industry to see if it aligned with my own goals and values as an employee.

As I continued my work in the private sector, I soon realized that the troubling measurement and assessment practices at a banking institution were also prevalent in other industries. Rather than providing positive experiences that enhanced people's lives and bolstered employee engagement and satisfaction, these Fortune 100 companies seemed to only focus on the bottom line: profit. I remember waking up one morning and thinking, I can't do this for the next 25 years. I wasn't happy, and I didn't feel like I was contributing to society in any way. On my commute that morning, I decided that working in the private sector wasn't for me, so I took the next exit on the highway, turned my car around and headed back home. Fortunately, for me, this rash decision to leave my job and move to another city with no future employment in place worked well. During this time of transition, I began to think about possible career paths. I knew that I wanted to help people and contribute to our society in positive ways. One idea that came to mind was a career in higher education. There were many individuals who supported me during my time in college and having a parent who works as a teacher in public education gave me unique insight into the field of public education. I was fortunate to secure a position as an academic advisor at a small liberal arts university where I began my career in public higher education.

As an academic advisor, I was eager to assist students so that they could succeed academically. Having a background from the private sector, at first the difference

between the operation of the private corporate institutions and public education seemed vast. It wasn't until several months into my role that I became more accustomed to the policies and procedures of the higher education institution, at which point I slowly started to notice similarities between corporations and public universities. As I continued my career, I became more versed in the missions and role of public higher education as they relate to our democratic society. As my knowledge increased, I started to pay close attention to the policies and procedures of the institution, specifically the aims of these policies and who they benefited. I also thought more and more about the relationship between these policies and the espoused democratic mission of higher education.

Professionally, I have been fortunate to advance my career within the field of public education and my experiences at various position levels directly impact my perceptions of public higher education institutions today. Over the last five years as an administrator, I have become intimately aware of the challenges public institutions face at the local, state, and national level, particularly with funding. I also recognize that in some ways, universities are indeed businesses, and thus we should expect some similarities between institutions of higher education and corporations. When thinking about many of my past experiences, one trend that I have consistently noticed is the ever-increasing call for assessment to gauge effectiveness and efficiency, particularly quantitative, comparative, reductive forms of assessment. This includes assessment of students, staff, programs, departments, and graduates. Based on my own experiences, it seems this focus on assessment and frequent measurement of quantitative educational outcomes associated

with economic output has dramatically impacted the democratic promises of higher education, which is problematic on many levels.

As a former director of an academic unit within a publicly funded institution of higher education, I often think about the challenges presented by the call for greater “accountability.” During my doctoral studies, I was introduced to a term I was unfamiliar with prior: neoliberalism. I remember doing preliminary research on this concept and was initially overwhelmed. While at earlier in my graduate experience I could not formally articulate my own understanding of neoliberalism, I noticed that many of the processes and procedures within higher education were explicitly linked to this ideology. Coming from the private sales sector, I immediately noticed almost identical processes between many universities and corporations. This was most obvious in recruiting processes. At the institution where I was working then, thousands of dollars are spent each year to recruit students from various regions of North Carolina in a three-day tour across the state. This practice is not uncommon, as many universities increase enrollment targets each year (an issue that I will discuss later in the dissertation), as enrollment is tied to funding for the institution. Increasing the number of students concurrently increases tuition dollars and thus funding for operations. What I found interesting about this particular recruitment event that the campus sponsored was that during a two-hour open house, the majority of time was used to discuss the new facilities on campus, dining options, the physical location of the institution and the many opportunities to experience nature, and ultimately, the state-of-the-art facility that will eventually house STEM departments. What was most vexing is that there was no talk about the civic work being done on

campus, nor was there discussion about the preparation of students for the future outside of an economic context. Instead, it seemed that the institution was embracing what Saunders (2007) highlights as an education model that is “increasingly dominated by individualistic goals and extrinsic beliefs in which students are consumers of an educational product” (p. 4).

After this event, I made a point to meet with some of the administrative staff who planned this event to ask about their selection of material, goals, and the ways in which they were marketing our university. During this conversation it became apparent that the sole purpose of this event was to get students to commit to the institution; one staff member stated explicitly the end goal was to “meet our enrollment growth expectations!” I never imagined that I would find myself discussing the academic or civic aspects of higher education with administrators who work within that same institution, arguing in favor of the civic goals associated with higher education and the importance of such experiences for students and our society. I was disappointed to realize the model that was being used at my campus mirrored the model used within private marketing efforts, targeting a specific type of student (consumer) for consumption of a specific product (education and student experience on campus). Rather than educating potential students about the academic offerings of the university or the democratic commitments associated with the public good or the global community for that matter, this event focused on career possibilities and the individual outcomes (and potential enjoyment) for students who commit to the university. Moreover, the assessment measure used was simply the total number of students admitted and enrolled at the institution.

While this experience was quite some time ago, I'm still reflecting on the dangerous implications of practices such as these. I want to be clear that I am not suggesting that higher education institutions have ever fully focused on the democratic and civic opportunities of higher education, but I do find it problematic when through enrollment efforts such as the one I took part in, students are primed and even encouraged to only think of the individual merits of higher education – and the most daunting part about these expectations is that they are being reinforced before students even set foot on campus by employees within higher education institutions, ostensibly not for-profit companies. Of course, the glaring reality of such a practice is that fact that funding is in part based on the ability of the institution to meet and exceed admission targets on an annual basis, which I would argue is the driving force behind this recruitment approach.

This story reflects just one of the ways neoliberal ideologies create challenges for higher education institutions. My goal in sharing this experience is not to cast blame on a specific department or group of individuals, but to bring to light the practices of universities which may seem harmless (focusing potential students on what they personally can gain from higher education), but instead are perpetuating a neoliberal agenda and effectively chipping away at the democratic promise of higher education. Processes such as these prompted me to ask myself, “How can I as a single administrator respond to these immense challenges?” I soon grew discouraged as my own actions seemed inadequate when compared to the overwhelming challenges that neoliberal ideology poses for public education institutions. This quandary prompted my interest in analyzing and better understanding the changes within higher education that are linked

with neoliberal ideology. My hope is that an analysis and critique of the gradual changes within higher education since mid-1970's will provide administrators such as myself with ways to respond to the challenges while continuing to nourish the democratic promise of higher education.

Problem Statement

Scholars agree that since the inception of American higher education, public universities and colleges have served many different purposes for many different stakeholders. While these purposes sometimes may be at odds, there is a substantial body of research that outlines the commitments of American public colleges and universities to civic goals that promote simulation and realization of a more democratic American society (Checkoway, 2001; D'Innocenzo, 1999; Singh, 2013). While many colleges and universities mention their commitment to the public good in various ways on their websites and within their charters, I am hard pressed to find examples of institutions who fully realized their commitments to the public over the last three centuries. Instead, it seems that the pressures many universities and colleges face have grown, and in today's fast-paced ever-changing society, higher education institutions face unparalleled economic challenges and societal pressures so tremendous that staff at many universities and colleges have begun to question and analyze their own long-term viability. Certainly, the challenges of balancing economic viability with civic purpose are not new. There are many scholars and educators who have worried about the changing nature of higher education and have called for the revitalization of its civic purposes. One such example is George Counts (1932), who in his well-known 1932 speech *Dare the School Build a New*

Social Order urged and encouraged educational and political action as a response to the economic challenges facing the country. Counts believed that schools possessed the unique ability to “formulate an ideal of a democratic society,” communicate it to students, and encourage its use as a standard for students to use for their future actions (p. x). He argued that schools were uniquely positioned to provide students with the experiences necessary to become active democratic citizens. While he was writing largely about K-12 education, no doubt his words also apply to public higher education. 88 years after his passionate call for a democratic vision for schooling, many public universities and schools struggle to sustain and enhance the civic aspects of higher education in the face of economic challenges.

Why are institutions that Hanson (2014) argues have a central mission of character formation forsaking or shifting their focus away from the democratic missions that have long been associated with them? I argue that while there is no one reason for the shift away from historic civic missions, one of the main driving mechanisms is a school of thought referred to as neoliberalism and that this ideology is one of the predominant forces influencing the changes in policies/procedures associated with the commodification of education which is now prevalent in many higher education institutions. It is difficult to describe neoliberalism succinctly; it is often discussed as a compilation of characteristics and values aimed at elevating private interests above public ones, emphasizing entrepreneurship and self-interest, and advocating for individual responsibility more than social responsibility and common goods. The implicit argument embedded within neoliberal ideology is that individual gains will trickle down and

metaphorically “lift all ships,” thereby creating growing economic security for all people, whereas focusing on collective goods compromises excellence and possibility for greatness.

At present, we live in a fast-paced world of global competition and ever-growing consumerism; in this context colleges and universities face myriad challenges unlike many in the past. Public social programs, of which schools and universities have historically been included, face increased scrutiny by various groups for their so-called lack of efficiency and effectiveness. Continuous attacks and endless surveillance from various political groups have resulted in a vastly underfunded public education system within the U.S. This dramatic shift in economic support poses serious challenges for many public universities (Canella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017) and has significant implications for both the organizational structure and mission of public higher education institutions. Challenges such as declines in public funding and an emphasis on economic productivity of graduates have impacted outcomes and goals associated with critical thought, education of the “whole” student, and informed and thoughtful citizenship. As these types of challenges become more pervasive, administrators must not only be aware of them, but actively identify and respond to them in an effort to preserve the democratic promise of public higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify how neoliberal ideology has impacted the civic mission of American higher education and to draw attention to specific student focused processes within the University of North Carolina system associated with this

ideology. More specifically, my goal in this research is to bring together literature associated with the democratic mission of higher education, neoliberalism, and common higher education practices within public institutions as a way of rethinking and identifying spaces for resistance and strategic action in service to sustaining and revitalizing democratic visions for higher education.

Research Questions

My primary interest in this study is providing some ideas for how we can speak back to neoliberal challenges and keep alive a democratic role for higher education institutions in the United States (even as I think this study has relevance globally). To achieve this goal, I first must describe how democracy and higher education have historically been connected, and then detail the kinds of changes that have been taking place over the past several decades and that have been written about extensively by scholars and researchers who are worried about the long-term consequences of these neoliberal changes. This foundational work sets the stage for the unique contribution of my study, which is bringing together a range of possibilities and strategies for revitalizing the democratic mission of higher education. I focus in particular on the UNC system in drawing specific examples of both challenges and possibilities for speaking back to the neoliberal influence in higher education. Three research questions guide these efforts:

1. What are the democratic goals associated with the mission of public American higher education institutions, both historically and presently?

2. How have the changes within public American higher education precipitated by societal changes and demands for “return on investment” compromised the democratic promises that have historically been part of higher education?
3. How can public higher education administrators respond to the challenges posed by neoliberal policies within higher education institutions?

Background Context

To better understand how neoliberal ideology has impacted, and in many cases muted, the democratic goals of public higher education and provide higher education administrators with the background knowledge need to create strategies for revitalizing the democratic mission of higher education, I bring together three areas of study in this dissertation (which I develop further in the dissertation): the relationship between public universities and democracy, the ideology and practices of neoliberalism, and current higher education trends and processes. In the remaining sections of this introductory chapter, I briefly explore the origins of public education and the commitments of public institutions to the public good and democracy. I follow with a brief overview of my understanding of the meaning of democracy and explore the traditional and contemporary democratic mission of higher education. I then define neoliberal ideology and conclude this section by briefly highlighting some of the ways this ideology has drastically impacted the civic mission and goals of higher education. These analyses provide the broad background context for the more detailed aspects of these conversations that I will discuss in subsequent chapters of the dissertation.

The Origins of the Public Schooling

The origins and goals of public education, even three hundred years ago, have always involved a number of objectives by various groups, each of which hold different stakes in an ongoing debate. These goals have typically included the development of the habits and dispositions of citizenship. While there is no period of time in which public universities have deliberately and fully recognized the democratic promises of public education, I fervently believe that public higher education institutions remain one of the few institutions that have the capacity (as an inherent part of their missions and goals) to contribute to creating a more robust democratic society. Thus, it is important in my study to discuss the origins of public education even while recognizing and noting that there continue to be tensions and myriad objectives within public education, many of which are at odds with the renewal of the civic mission I call for. Generally speaking, both public K-12 education and public institutions of higher learning have been traditionally associated to some degree with creating and promoting democracy. Many of the civic goals of both public K-12 education and higher education institutions overlap, and there are many commonalities between democratic visions at both levels. Throughout this study, I draw on literature associated with K-12 public education to help ground my work associated with higher education institutions, especially outcomes associated with critical thought. I more fully discuss and unpack the civic mission of higher education in subsequent chapters of this dissertation, relying on the work of John Dewey who frequently described the role of public schools at the K-12 level in cultivating the habits necessary for democracy to function.

The Common School Movement began in the 1830s and 1840s and involved a compilation of educational ideas and practices from prior generations (Spring, 2011). While American education had been in existence for over 100 years, there were few if any institutions that were classified as public, and concurrently benefiting the public good. Arguably, one of the most well-known figures during this movement was Horace Mann. Mann is often thought of as “The Father of the Common School Movement” (Spring, 2011; Warder, 2015). Mann believed that common schools (a form of universal education) could provide the country with the political stability and social harmony needed to avert social fragmentation as well as moral and cultural decay (Harris & Neiman, 2019). More specifically, Mann’s idea was that the common school would promote the common good by leveling the playing field between both the rich and poor, while instilling a sense of morality and common political values in students through quality teaching and exposure to a range of ideas (Jeynes, 2007).

While many of Mann’s initial goals associated with common schools are contentious (for example, the use of the Bible and Christianity as a basis of moral teaching and the original inception of the common school as a way to mitigate cultural change) the idea of a publicly funded educational institution that would function as “the great equalizer” continues to draw attention and has inspired contemporary educators, and the outcomes associated with Mann’s concept of public education can still be seen today. The Common School Movement put into motion some very important changes. The movement established a publicly funded model of education that extends access for education to “all” students, regardless of socioeconomic status. This movement also

helped to professionalize the teaching profession and standardize the quality of education to some degree, thus ensuring a more uniform educational experience across a large geographic area. The Common School Movement is important for my work because this foundational model of K-12 public education is closely linked with the later development of American public higher education.

American universities and colleges have long been associated with goals that in part help to cultivate in students as citizens the habits and dispositions that make democratic life possible. For example, Giroux & Giroux (2004) cite the work of John Dewey and W.E.B. Du Bois who believed that in order to achieve a truly equitable society with conditions of equality and social justice, education for a democratic citizenry must be provided through public schooling and higher education. Contemporary scholars such as Braskamp (1998) posit that historically, higher education institutions have operated for the good of society with commitments such as the preparation of future citizens and leaders, development of skills in critical analysis, contribution to broader scholarship that can improve society, and experimentation with ideas, to name a few. Not only do higher education institutions have the capacity to deliver commitments associated with the public good, critical thought, diversity of opinion, and open dialogue, they are one of the few existing public institutions that are well poised to enable individuals to practice these democratic tenets. This practice can range from in-classroom projects, conversations, and other pedagogical activities, to shared governance at the institutional level, to organized community events that address local or regional challenges.

Of the hundreds of public higher education institutions today, my focus in this study is on The North Carolina University System, which includes 17 educational institutions with differing histories and purposes. I focus on one system to help ground my critiques and recommendations in higher education practice. UNC Chapel Hill, the first and only public university to award students degrees in the 18th century, was founded with an initial mission of training and providing leadership for the state of North Carolina (“About Our System,” 2017), while other institutions had different missions. For example, Western Carolina University started as a college for teachers in the Western Carolina region (Blethen et al., 2019) and UNC Pembroke was founded in 1887 to provide education for American Indians (“UNC Pembroke About Us,” n.d.). While public UNC institutions have certainly changed over time and vary based on size, location, and student populations, their contemporary missions each include thematic similarities associated with the public good. Each institution, in some form or another, focuses on a varying degree of public contribution, be it developing global citizens for a rapidly changing world, community engagement at the local or regional level, or research aimed at improving the quality of life within the state of North Carolina. These contemporary commitments are important to note because they illustrate one of the many hallmarks of higher education: a commitment to a greater collective good rather than simply self-interests and profits of private entities or individual interests. These types of commitments are directly associated with the democratic goals of higher education that I will trace and analyze in chapter 2 of this study.

Democracy as a Process

Democracy stems from the Greek word *demos*, which in its simplest form means rule by the people (Fleck & Hansen, 2006); succinctly put, democracy is a model of political governance in which citizens actively participate in public decisions. Democratic political models vary in operation, and on a personal level, the idea of democracy can mean different things to different people. My goal in this study is not to analyze each of these models in detail, but to briefly highlight the democratic models found within the United States to provide the context for my understanding of democracy and its relationship to higher education. There are multiple models of democracy operating at different levels and locations within the United States. Of these models, four are particularly salient (and often overlapping): representative, deliberative, participatory, and critical models. The representative model, indicative of the name, emphasizes representation in which citizens of the state elect representatives who make decisions and represent citizens' interests. Within the United States, there are multiple levels of representation including representatives at the federal, state, and local level. These representatives are elected in regular and timely elections on behalf of constituents in those regions. Some of the most recognizable of those positions include the President of the United States, Senators, and House Representatives.

As part of this process, representatives also deliberate on issues, bills, and laws before representative vote is taken. Deliberation characterizes the deliberative model, a process that the Deweyan model of democracy also emphasizes, and one that I will discuss in further detail in chapter 2 of this dissertation. Individuals do not only elect

representatives to represent their interests, they may also vote directly for bonds, amendments, and other types of measures during elections when necessary. This participation is a central feature of the participatory model of democracy, where public decisions are made based on the participation of the public. Similarly, both participation and critical thought are of paramount importance in my work as it pertains to democracy. The critical democratic model is also sometimes associated with the work of John Dewey (Goodman, 1989; Crowley & Apple, 2009), though it is also influenced by critical theory. A critical vision of democracy not only entails educating students through democratic processes, but also encouraging critical thought and analysis on current conceptions of our democratic way of life. This model of democracy extends beyond the responsibility of the educator and encourages the student to use their own critical thought processes to not only critique the current shortcomings of democracy within our society, but also engage and participate in critical action to create a more equitable democratic future.

In higher education, we must be mindful of how we characterize, explain, and teach democracy and the tenets and principles that have historically been associated with a democratic way of life. Many acts of injustice have been committed under the guise of democracy, and as our world becomes more complex, the concept of democracy seems to become more muddled. Apple and Beane (2007) argue that “efforts to sharpen the definition of democracy and extend its meaning throughout society are seen by some of the more privileged people of this country as threats to their own status and power” (p. 6). While it would be difficult to list each and every definition associated with democracy, it is important for me to describe the working vision of democracy that shapes this study.

This process of naming is in itself a source of reclamation – a taking-back and pushing against anti-democratic processes that support neoliberal ideologies. Current confusion and vagueness around what democracy means begs the question of how administrators can respond to the challenges associated with the democratic mission of higher education if we cannot agree on some shared features of what democracy entails?

While of course democracy serves as a form of governance as highlighted above, I am much more interested in democracy as a process that is embodied and that individuals willingly embrace throughout daily life. While I will elaborate on this in my next chapter, it is important here that I provide a brief overview of my use of the term and concept of democracy. I draw inspiration for my understanding of democracy from John Dewey. While democracy is commonly thought of primarily as a form of government, Dewey (1916) saw democracy as something more. He posited that:

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer to his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own. (p. 93)

John Dewey was American philosopher and educator who over the course of his life made tremendous contributions to many different fields of study. He is arguably one of the most, if not the most, significant educational thinkers of the 20th century (Harris & Neiman, 2019). His foresight and approach to both progressive education and democracy are still relevant today and his conception of the role of schools in relation to a democratic society is important for my work. Dewey saw schools as “embryonic

communities” (Dewey, 1907, p. 44), and believed that schools have the power to dramatically influence society, particularly as schools shape the understanding and habits of the children who become future citizens. Dewey argued schools should abandon traditional authoritarian, skill and drill models of schooling and instead he believed schools could both model and provide practices to teach and instill democratic habits in students. He believed that the curriculum should attend to the problems of life, and through this approach, students could discuss and solve social problems that were relevant to their individual and communal lives. Providing students with engaged, problem-based, collaborative, and interactive activities not only helps students learn to make decisions for themselves, but also serves the democratic goals of society. This is because students learn how to solve problems and take actions beyond the classroom walls and learn how to shape the society in service to a more robust democratic reality.

I begin with Dewey’s definition of democracy because of his belief in democracy as a way of life more than a set of procedures. In his conception of democracy, Dewey not only focuses on individual freedom and flourishing, but also the relationship of the individual to others, specifically the effects of individual action on others and the outcomes associated with actions when people consider communal needs alongside their own. My own conception of democracy, shared and shaped by many of the theorists I will discuss in this dissertation, is democracy as a system of values associated with a socially just and equitable society. Much like Dewey, I believe that democracy is a conjoint effort, in which citizens must be willing to communicate with others, even when this communication may be uncomfortable. I define democracy not only as a process by

which people work to define and achieve social and political goals, but also as a set of principles that encourage critical inquiry and thought through intentional participation in learning activities that require group work, collaboration, and critical understanding through mutual respect of others.

In addition to Dewey's vision of democracy, I also draw on the work of more contemporary scholars and educators within the philosophy of education field. Stitzlein (2014) expands upon Deweyan democracy as a process and argues that the very notion of democracy itself is forever changing to meet the needs of both the people and the environment, noting that if it were to be pinned down or if specific habits were to be assigned to a democratic education, the active participation that Dewey calls for would no longer be relevant or needed. Stitzlein (2014) argues that Deweyan democracy functions within a social framework that relies on one's habits, dispositions, and beliefs to sustain and enhance what she calls a "collective democratic life" (p. 62). The democratic model that Stitzlein calls for requires that citizens value diversity of thought and opinion and much like Dewey supported, engage in open-dialogue across lines of difference.

Similarly, Noddings (2013) supports to the pragmatic nature of Deweyan democracy, citing two distinct characteristic traits of democratic social groups: a variety of interests from various individuals within the group and varied and multiple interactions and exchanges. She calls discussion and an immersion of diversity and difference to take place within schools and universities, both of which can offer the environment and opportunities conducive to discussing relevant social problems. These settings ideally also bring together students from a variety of backgrounds and cultures who might not

otherwise discuss societal issues or problems in the few remaining public spaces within our society. Colleges and universities are unique in this way, that is, they are poised to bring together groups of students with varying backgrounds and experiences to discuss a broad range of topics that can directly benefit the public good.

Currently, universities have fallen short of fully realizing the democratic potential of public higher education. Both the curriculum and pedagogy that Dewey scholars argue for are being replaced by processes that are more narrow, instrumental, and quantitatively measured and assessed. Knowledge that can be easily measured through testing and other means has become common, while subjects such as the humanities and arts are slowly being eliminated because of their supposed lack of worth in terms of economic weight. Limiting, devaluing, or eliminating courses that provide opportunities for discussion and critical inquiry, two hallmarks of Dewey's notion of democracy, leaves our current democratic way of life to chance. These are but a few of the democratic goals that I develop in this project, with support from a range of education and political theorists. I do not offer an exhaustive list of democratic goals, rather I offer several important ones that serve as a broad frame of reference for better understanding my call to revisit the democratic promises of higher education. In Chapter 2 of the dissertation, I more closely examine Dewey's concept of democracy and describe and discuss the promises associated with this concept as they relate to public higher education.

Neoliberal Ideology and the Public Sector

Neoliberal ideology has dramatically reshaped social, political, and economic sectors of the globe in every aspect of daily life. Unfortunately, it cannot be easily

defined, and I would argue the impacts of this ideology are even more difficult to pinpoint. This ideology is deeply embedded in almost every aspect of daily life, and only within the last two years have I been able to understand and identify neoliberal impacts in my professional and personal life, including those that I argue are associated with significant shifts in the missions and everyday practices of colleges and universities.

Neoliberalism is, in part, rooted in liberal economic theory which was put forth in the 18th century by Adam Smith and the Manchester School and is closely associated with free trade and laissez faire economics (Palley, 2005; Saunders, 2007). *Neo* is Greek in origin, meaning new and when compounded with liberalism forms what is now known as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a new form of liberalism. It is an ideology that guides the reform of public services and programs and involves the limiting of certain historically public goods and services (through suggesting that these are better handled in the private sector), effectively privatizing services such as hospitals and medical care, education at various levels, and many other types of social programs (Brathwaite, 2017). The premise behind this privatization is that competition is a good thing – that those services which are privatized are more efficient in a free market. Thus, neoliberals not only place a strong sense of faith in the free market, but also individual choice and power.

Neoliberalism entails faith in the private sector that is premised upon individual ownership and private control of the distribution of all goods and services. This ideology is grounded in belief in the free market and individual choice and freedom based on a cost/benefit analysis. It is directly linked to individual responsibility and personal “choice,” which is a driving force in neoliberalism. I place choice in scare quotes because

neoliberalism functions under the guise of individual freedom and limited government regulation, while employing “centralized state power to create the social and economic conditions needed to engender certain forms of subjectivity” (Ambrosio, 2013, p. 321). Under a neoliberal ideology, the responsibility and ownership of one’s success is directly on the individual, while systems, structures, and oppressive conditions that affect traditionally minoritized and historically oppressed populations are ignored, effectively limiting what is touted as choice.

While a neoliberal political rationale is dangerous for public services, the increasing privatization of public education is particularly worrisome. Without public higher education institutions, the civic aspects of education, particularly those associated with democratic processes, critical thought, and respect for others are being replaced with outcomes related almost exclusively to personal gain and economic profit. Hill and Kumar (2009) maintain that neoliberal ideology entails the deregulation of the market through the privatization of the state. This privatization, however, is not meant to completely eradicate the state, but to manipulate the programs within the state’s control to realign them with business models that focus primarily on profitability. This reality is particularly concerning in terms of public education, which has been a mainstay of democratic societies who hope to reinforce democratic characteristics, actions, and processes through learning, not simply or solely to primarily prepare a technical workforce whose only purpose is to fulfill a particular labor need and/or consume goods.

As mentioned above, the privatization of the state does not necessarily involve elimination of public services and goods altogether. Rather, it entails a restructuring of

public institutions, goods, and services, so that they are consistent with a free-market capitalist business model. Schram (2014) argues that while neoliberalism is defined in various ways, at the core of each conceptualization is the marketization of the state; that is, neoliberalism involves the restructuring of public policies to operate along market lines and to support market initiatives. This restructuring of social programs implicitly and explicitly transforms social problems into individual flaws. Moreover, many Americans are too consumed with the challenge of surviving at the bottom of the neoliberal hierarchy to consider how they are impacted by this ideology (Giroux, 2014). The most troubling notion associated with neoliberal policies and processes is that they are mostly self-propelling. Neoliberalism involves a form of governmentality that does not require active participation, as would democracy. With its vast web of influence, neoliberal ideology morphs and mimics, adding to the difficulty of naming cause and effect relationships. These are but a few of the characteristics of this ideology; I expand on my description and the economic, social, and political implications of this ideology in Chapter 3 of the dissertation, exploring the work of Noam Chomsky, Michael Apple, Peter McLaren, David Harvey, and Henry and Susan Giroux, among others.

The Challenges of Neoliberalism in Higher Education

As I have been discussing, one of the aims of supporters of neoliberal ideology is to reduce and manipulate the role of the state to support the free market. This manipulation of social programs bears down on the academy in unprecedented ways. A focus on neoliberal values has coincided with new conceptions of both the purpose and performance expectations of public education institutions. It has transformed the

operation and structure of many public institutions and poses serious threats to the overall purpose and mission of the American academy, in part by foreclosing opportunities for students to reinforce skills associated with democratic citizenship and critical thought, while elevating job training above broad liberal arts goals. Concerns over supposed failing standards, violence in schools, and the dissolution and destruction of family values have moved to the forefront of many educational conversations and continue to be the focus of many groups who believe in “traditionalism, standardization, productivity, marketisation, and economic needs” (Apple, 2006, p. 22). These changes can be seen in both K-12 and secondary educational institutions today, both of which increasingly engage in practices that create competition among peers, diminish opportunities for critical thought, center narrowly individualistic benefits of higher education, and subject students to a curriculum that is built around economic needs and demands.

While neoliberalism certainly has long-term consequences associated with societal values, the more direct and immediate impacts of this ideology within higher education are also visible. Over the last 20 years, there has been growing interest among scholars in what Rhoades and Slaughter (1997) refer to as academic capitalism.

Academic capitalism is a term that is used to broadly describe changes and activities within higher education that operate to meet market objectives or to restructure policies and processes within institutions to serve the needs of the private sector. Led by the research of Rhoades and Slaughter (1997), multiple other scholars have contributed to developing the idea of academic capitalism. Hoffman (2012) names many activities associated with direct market practices of institutions that are consistent with a capitalist

vision. These include activities and processes such as industry consulting, patents and the process of patenting research, licensing of products, and self-promotion of faculty through market-like behaviors. Recent research within this field has moved beyond the original inception of academic capitalism and has begun to look at the relationships between higher education institutions and transnational corporations (Cantwell, 2014; Kauppinen, 2013). On a global level, market practices explicitly related to capital gains are still prevalent in higher education, especially in research in the medical fields. Researchers within this area often focus on acquiring research grants and funding, some of which includes incentives by private entities to further research and product development, with the products directly benefiting global corporations. Saunders (2007) argues that the outcomes of such practices transform the core educational functions of higher education institutions “into commodities that are to be sold on the open market, which leads to an emphasis on competition, measurement, assessment, and unyielding focus on money” (p. 2). These types of activities are particularly alarming when we think about the traditional civic mission of higher education, which centers the production and pursuit of knowledge to benefit the greater good and society, rather than knowledge and research which is exclusively tied to private capital and benefits corporations or other private enterprises.

Slaughter and Leslie (1997) argue that a shift toward market-like behaviors within higher education is directly associated with funding declines within English-speaking countries. While I discuss these declines in funding in greater detail in Chapter 3 and 4 of this dissertation, it is important to briefly outline the impacts of higher education

institutions obsessive focus on securing funding, as I argue this is one of the driving forces which has shifted universities away from the democratic promise of higher education. A lack of funding has institutionalized a culture of competition, sometimes ruthless, among colleagues, academic departments, and administrative units. A narrow focus on funding above all else has transformed the culture of higher education.

Decisions at all levels are based on monetary measures, and departments are called on to substantiate the most miniscule of requests with outcomes and assessment data, typically quantitative. This trend is not promising for those departments, services, or processes that cannot be measured quantitatively or those disciplines where it is challenging to secure external funding. This dire outlook is most concerning when we think about the effects of academic capitalism on the civic goals of higher education, which are difficult to assess quantitatively and hard to defend within a neoliberal framework that focuses on a bottom line. These are but a few of the concerns about changes within higher education over the last several decades; I expand upon the challenges discussed within this section and others associated with neoliberal ideology within public higher education in Chapter 4.

Significance of the Study

Neoliberal ideology and the policies associated with it dramatically affect both the function and purpose of public higher education institutions. Declines in public funding, changes in curricula and course offerings, and increasingly complex bureaucratic institutions are now commonplace while values such as critical thought, subjects such as the humanities and arts, and programs to develop civic virtues that have all been traditionally associated with a democratic mission of higher education are fading. Left

unchecked, this ideology has serious implications for American democracy. If we as educators, scholars, and activists do not revisit civic visions and implement strategies to renew the focus of higher education institutions on democratic promises, our democratic way of life, and subsequently the future of our democratic society is at stake.

Throughout most of my formal educational career, I was unfamiliar with neoliberal ideology and while having worked in higher education, I was not intimately aware of the civic mission traditionally associated with college and universities. Many of the changes that have taken place over the last several decades have become so pervasive and deeply embedded that they have come to represent a new common sense. To begin to address the challenges neoliberal ideology poses for higher education institutions, we need to know about the historic democratic mission of education as well as about neoliberal ideology and how it has impacted these institutions. In this dissertation study, I provide administrators and educators with historical overview of neoliberalism and the democratic promises traditionally associated with higher education in order to shed critical light on the policies and procedures within higher education that are now guided by this ideology (often more implicitly than explicitly) and the potential consequences if we continue down this path. Many of the policies and procedures that appear to function to bolster student success, albeit often superficially, have problematic long-term consequences for democracy. Multiple scholars have contributed to exploring the challenges of neoliberalism within K-12 education, but comparatively speaking there is less information examining the implications of neoliberal ideology within higher education. Further, current scholarship pertaining to the effects of neoliberalism in higher

education tends to focus on the impacts to faculty members, with very little if any research explicitly examining the impacts of this ideology within university administration. This study is significant because it can help administrators and educators understand the changes that are happening in higher education, why these changes are dangerous, and how they may be able to respond in ways that keep the democratic promise of higher education alive.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale

In this first introductory chapter, I introduced the problem, purpose of this study, and the research questions that guide my analysis of scholarship. I also briefly introduced readers to several key issues that I will develop throughout this study: the meaning of democracy, the civic goals traditionally associated with higher education, neoliberal ideology, and current policies within higher education institutions that have been shaped by neoliberal ideology. My approach in this dissertation is non-empirical. I bring together existing bodies of literature to make an argument for why and how educators ought to take the challenges of neoliberalism seriously and to provide resources for how they might respond. To develop this argument, after this introductory chapter, I organize the dissertation into four more chapters, each of which are described below.

Chapter 2: The Democratic Promises of Higher Education

In this chapter, I begin by bringing together a range of sources to offer a rich, social-justice oriented vision of democracy. In this chapter, I mainly draw on the work of John Dewey to further develop and discuss the role of democratic education theory in my

study. I also rely on the notions of democratic education from contemporary scholars within the field. I then connect these democratic goals and educational model to the historic and contemporary mission of public higher education institutions. I provide an in-depth analysis of this mission by closely examining the University of North Carolina System. The UNC System is comprised of 17 diverse public multi-campus universities which are “dedicated to the service of North Carolina and its people” (“About Our System,” 2017). I analyze each of the institutional mission statements for themes associated with civic and democratic goals I discuss in the previous section of this chapter. I conclude with an exploration of three initiatives within the UNC System which have the potential to develop habits and dispositions of democracy in students. These are the UNC System initiative to expand access to higher education to traditionally minoritized populations and students in rural areas, an exploration of the student service learning and community outreach units in place throughout the UNC System, and lastly, a brief analysis of the liberal arts and humanities curriculum requirements in place within the UNC System. The goals of this chapter are to offer a rich vision of democracy to guide my analysis, and to show how this vision has been historically relevant and important in higher education. I use evidence from the UNC system to illustrate contemporary iterations of this historical mission. I also describe specific spaces in higher education where the development of democratic habits and sensibilities is central. This chapter correlates with my first research question about the democratic purposes of higher education, which I describe both on a more theoretical level and on the practical level by giving examples of how they play out in the UNC system.

Chapter 3: The Scourge of Neoliberal Ideologies and their Broad Impact on Higher Education

In this chapter, I extend my discussion of neoliberalism, providing a more in-depth understanding of the social, political, and cultural effects of this ideology. I describe the origins of this school of thought, as well as the macro changes within higher education over the past several decades that are associated with the growth of neoliberal ideology. Of these many challenges, the most important to my work are funding cuts to higher education; these cuts affect many of the other processes I explore in this chapter of the dissertation. The first is the lack of funding by state and federal governments which I argue dictates almost all institutional decisions and thrusts the financial burden of higher education on individual students and their families. McDonald (2016) outlines funding cuts within the state North Carolina and the outcomes of such cuts as they relate to students attending UNC System institutions. I draw from a range of scholars who discuss the impacts of neoliberalism on higher education as well as historical funding data at the national and state level and data from The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities to identify changes and trends over the last several years. As part of this analysis, I examine data from the last five years for each of the UNC system schools to further substantiate the trend of increasing costs and assumed risk by students. I also utilize data collected by the Federal government to illustrate the “monetary risk” students assume based on student loan accrument, as well as tuition spikes over the last several decades. I then circle back to the relationship between this assumed risk and the democratic goals of higher education for students currently enrolled in the 17 public universities within NC.

The second of the neoliberal challenges I discuss in this chapter is the rise of for-profit colleges, both nationally and on the state level. In this analysis, I explore the missions of these institutions, the student populations these types of institutions target, as well as ethical dilemmas surrounding these types of organizations. I utilize information at the federal level to trace the myriad of ethical issues that students relying on for-profit institutions have faced. I also analyze the missions of these institutions as they relate to the democratic promises of public higher education in general. I focus on various for-profit institutions within North Carolina and the greater US to illustrate how for-profit institutions have affected enrollment within the UNC System, particularly targeting specific student populations such as adult students (Wilson, 2010).

The last impact of neoliberalism I explore in my work are the curricular changes within the UNC System that impact both the humanities and arts, but also indicate a shift toward technical programs that are more easily associated with economic impacts and away from liberal arts, which are more commonly associated with development democratic habits and dispositions. I begin this analysis by examining the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s to explore the significance of these events in terms of the changing role of the humanities within higher education. I highlight the changes that resulted in the eventual scrutiny and diminishment of the humanities and arts within higher education institutions today. I analyze departmental and program changes within the UNC System to better understand the shifts in curriculum as they relate to these changes. For example, Behrent (2015) outlines a recent program prioritization initiative across the UNC System which resulted in the elimination of 46-degree programs across 17 campuses. I connect

these changes in the UNC system back to the original purpose of this study, which is to identify the challenges that neoliberal thought poses for higher education as a way of determining possible responses to these challenges. These analyses help me to answer my second research question about the changes within higher education that have compromised the democratic promises of higher education institutions. I look at these changes both on a broad ideological level and with specific examples from the UNC system.

Chapter 4: Current Higher Education Initiatives and the Implicit Focus on Neoliberalism

In this chapter, I explore the challenges within higher education on a more micro level, particularly those that I have experienced and noticed during my time as a public education administrator within the UNC System. Here I return to the original impetus for this study, which is my own experiences and unsettlement as a higher education administrator asked to implement practices and policies that often go against my values and what I think should be the purpose of higher education. Unlike many of the broad and systemic changes within higher education I describe in Chapter 3, the changes I explore in this chapter are directly related to processes and policies that supposedly assist and support students and that have been part of my job responsibilities in various roles at three different public universities within North Carolina. Here I trace the more on-the-ground level implications of the broad neoliberal practices and policy changes that I have described earlier in the study, personalizing what are sometimes abstract and totalizing claims. I examine two broad institutional initiatives that I argue perpetuate and are

symptoms of neoliberal ideolog, student success units which often include the OneStop student service model, and current undergraduate academic advising practices.

To begin this chapter, I describe what I refer to as student success service units and their respective processes and policies. I begin with a comparative analysis of these units within the larger institution, each of which are part of the current UNC System. Student success within the public university often comes down to three reductive quantitative measures which are used to assess institutional performance. These measures are admitted student target realizations, retention rate, and graduation rate. Each of these measures is often used to gauge institutional success, as well as institutional funding for operations. My goal in the analysis in this section is to highlight how quantitative measures such as these are used as benchmarks of success nationally, similar to how many corporations assess growth, profitability, and success. Within the UNC System, I illustrate the chilling effects of these performance measures on several campus, focusing most of my attention on the designated public liberal arts institution of the UNC System, UNC Asheville. UNC Asheville has faced a number of significant challenges in recent years. Of these concerns, student enrollment, retention, and demand for “return on investment” by stakeholders at the state level significantly complicate the mission of the university as a liberal arts institution. I discuss the implications of these challenges on educational quality, particularly the lack of resources and more specifically the impacts of a statewide and institutional focus on these reductive metrics which often promote an environment of performance-based incentive model, individualism, and overall greater accountability.

I then analyze advising models within higher education and the UNC System that are at least in part the result of neoliberal visions for higher education. In this section, I analyze various advising models and illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of these models as they relate to the democratic goals of higher education. As part of this analysis, I share my personal experiences within two different academic advising units and discuss the effects of an almost singular focus on student retention and graduation rates which overshadows many of the democratic opportunities associated with the academic advising experience and created a competitive environment at the university, state, and federal level. Analyzing these processes and the impacts of these models is vital to grounding my study in actual examples, something that is often missing in more abstract and theoretical writings about neoliberalism in higher education. It also provides me with an opportunity share my own experiences about how neoliberal ideologies have influenced and shaped one of the most micro-level practices on college campuses – advising students.

Chapter 5: Responding to Challenges – Revitalizing Higher Education for Democracy

In this final chapter, I directly answer my research questions, pulling together some of the key claims I discussed in each of the chapters of my study, and conclude with recommendations for administrators who hope to respond to the challenges posed by neoliberal policies within higher education institutions. I describe the ways in which institutions of higher education have pushed back against neoliberal demands and have created opportunities to support the development of democratic habits and values among their students. I also discuss the importance of democratic hope, building community, and

creating coalitions in addressing institutional policies and procedures as responses to neoliberal challenges. Hytten (2010) argues for the importance of cultivating critical hope and building community among scholars and educators, working alongside, colleagues, school-based practitioners, and local community members to create a more socially just, democratic society. Similarly, Jovanovic (2017) offers much insight about how we might push back on neoliberal ideologies within the campus environment, arguing that organized efforts that include campus members and the greater campus community have been effective at UNC Greensboro. These are but a few of the strategies that I provide for current staff, administrators, and other university community members to more effectively resist neoliberal practices and processes within their respective colleges, universities.

CHAPTER II

THE DEMOCRATIC PROMISES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In the introductory chapter of this study, I briefly discussed the origins of American public education and argued public colleges and universities are one of the last remaining institutions that can effectively introduce and engage students with democratic processes and principles, including community, equity, and inclusivity for all members of society. I expand upon this argument in this chapter, further exploring the role of the public university and the democratic aims of higher education. I begin with an in-depth analysis of Dewey's concept of democracy, looking at issues of community, democracy as a process, democratic learning and education. In the second section, I discuss the democratic promises of public higher education through an analysis of the democratic themes I identified in the missions and programs of the 17 universities that comprise the current UNC System. In the final section, I explore three initiatives in-place at universities within this system, which I argue promote and nurture many of the democratic promises of public higher education.

Before beginning this analysis, I want to briefly note that while I fully believe that higher education institutions are one of the most effective ways to promote and nurture democratic principles and build a more robust democratic society, I also realize that these institutions have and continue to perpetuate certain privileges and hegemonic norms, especially for specific student populations. Many of these privileges have become so

deeply embedded in higher education culture and our society that it is difficult to parse out and recognize many of the damaging outcomes.

One example of these types of occurrences and the privilege that universities reproduce is related to access to postsecondary education. Traditionally speaking, those students who are most likely to access and succeed at a university are those that have benefited from social structures meant to support their success and maintain their privilege. While the population in the United States becomes increasingly diverse, public flagship universities do not reflect this rich diversity. A 2005 study found that not only have low income student access trends decreased from .83 to .63 or 24% from 1992 to 2003, but also that minority student access at these same institutions decreased from .50 to .43 or 14% over the same period of time (Gerald & Haycock, 2006). The formula for these calculations entails measuring Pell Grant recipients as a percentage of the year at flagships and dividing that total by the percent of Pell Grant recipients for the year at all colleges and universities. As I will discuss in the other sections of the chapter, public higher education institutions have a rich tradition in both serving the needs of the community and acting as engine for greater social mobility. While I fully believe that education is the vehicle for change and greater equity, for those students in traditionally minoritized groups, accessing this education can be difficult and, in some cases, may even seem impossible. At the same time, exclusive public and private universities have always existed, using exclusionary admissions criteria and providing graduates with networks of privilege. It's not within the scope of this study to analyze comprehensively the ways higher education institutions perpetuate privilege, however I acknowledge the

tension associated with these practices in my work and contend that more focus on democracy within higher education institutions has the power to lessen, and in some cases erase, practices that further stratify and segregate our society.

Dewey's Concept of Democracy

Of the many different ways in which scholars have defined democracy, I focus on Dewey's work as I am particularly drawn to his conception of democracy. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Dewey saw democracy as a way of life that extends beyond a set of procedures or actions that members of society perform, for example when they vote. Dewey (1939) saw democracy as:

a way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature...That belief is without basis and significance save as it means faith in the potentialities of human nature as that nature is exhibited in every human being irrespective of race, color, sex, birth and family, of material or cultural wealth. (p. 226)

Dewey argues that democracy is more than a simple political process or practice. He visualized democracy as something that happens daily through a variety of actions and interactions with others. Dewey characterized democracy as a way of life in which people feel a sense of social responsibility and are engaged civically, both of which advance and improve human welfare and are grounded in a belief in human potential.

Solving challenging social issues requires deliberation and collective decision-making. Stitzlein (2014) argues that "Dewey's social definition of democracy 'as a mode of associated living' foregrounds the importance of collective decision-making and the building of social intelligence through group problem solving, communication, and the

sharing of experiences” (p. 62). The aim of deliberative processes is to produce more comprehensive and robust solutions to challenges and to provide greater exposure to, and hopefully appreciation of, differing human experiences, which has the potential to bolster greater social intelligence. Unlike many processes and societal norms found throughout the U.S. today, working alongside each other in diverse groups is vital if we are to maintain and further develop as a democratic society.

Community in a Deweyan Sense

Dewey conceptualized democracy as something that is practiced and enacted in everyday life and that is nurtured in communities. He described democracy as a social process in which we as human beings come together to work toward common goods. When I think about individuals coming together in everyday instances and activities, I immediately envision a community working toward a common goal. I define a community as any group of individuals who make a concerted effort to work together to solve social problems and challenges of daily life.

To work together effectively, community members must believe to some degree that their work is meaningful and can make a difference in solving societal issues and challenges. Working toward change can include bringing attention to an issue, lobbying for changes in legislation to address the challenge, or solving the challenge through direct action. Success (which is marked by the existence of a more just, equitable, and democratic society) in the broadest sense is reliant on exchanges between individuals, which according to Dewey includes all of humanity, regardless of age, race, socioeconomic status, sex, religion, or other categories of difference (Dewey, 1939).

Dewey argued that all individuals should have an opportunity to participate in democratic processes; because of this participation, the solutions to problems ideally would reflect the diversity of the participant group and further improve human welfare and advance a democratic way of life.

I see a basic belief in human potential as a driving force behind community, and much like schools, recognizing this potential can lead to imagining other opportunities to build coalitions across lines of difference. Dewey (1939) writes that faith in human potential as

a personal, an individual, way of life involves nothing fundamentally new. But when applied it puts a practical meaning in old ideas. Put into effect it signifies that powerful present enemies of democracy can be successfully met only by the creation of personal attitudes in individual human beings; that we must get over the tendency to think that its defense can be found in any external means whatever, whether military or civil, if they are separated from individual attitudes so deep seated as to constitute personal character. (Dewey, 1939, p. 226)

Succinctly put, when we as individuals within a democracy are willing to learn and engage with others, even if their beliefs are very different from our own, we have the power to reshape society and the world in unimaginable ways. This faith in human potential and equality is not an ideal to be reached, but rather a guide to map our daily actions and behaviors. Democracy as Dewey saw it, can only be achieved when individuals believe in equity, cooperation, and communication, which are to some degree influenced by one's belief in human potential. And, whether or not individuals name this faith in human potential as a democratic characteristic, coming together to solve issues, even with tensions and disagreements is the crux of a Deweyan notion of democracy.

Schools are one of the main vehicles by which community can be nurtured. While both K-12 institutions and universities can offer experiences in deliberation and diversity that help to build communities, universities are unique in that students are adults and thus have more capacity and freedom to discuss the kinds of important issues that can garner student engagement, which is necessary for group deliberation. Over time, the student population within universities has changed and continues to do so. Currently, student populations vary greatly based on race, socioeconomic status, age, gender, and various other markers within most public universities (Espinosa, Turk, Taylor, & Chessman, 2019). This rich diversity of students enriches conversations across lines of difference and if professors and university administrators incorporate students' backgrounds and experiences into the higher education experience, this can help students to develop the democratic habits needed beyond one's college years.

Before I explore the notion of a democratic education, I want to briefly discuss the role of society in terms of public higher educational institutions. Dewey (1939) argued that

The school is the essential distributing agency for whatever values and purposes any social group cherishes. It is not the only means, but it is the first means, the primary means and the most deliberate means by which values that any social group cherishes, the purposes that it wishes to realize, are distributed and brought home to the thought, the observation, judgement and choice of the individual. (p. 296)

According to Dewey, both K-12 and public higher education institutions reflect and shape the interests of our greater society, and unfortunately, much of the focus of our current public education system does not align with many of the democratic goals I argue

for in this study. Much like public K-12 education, within public higher education, increasing emphasis is placed on programs and processes that offer the greatest monetary return on investment. For example, in 2019 the Department of Education prioritized those fields of study in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) through a strategic investment of \$540 million, which was part of a larger directive to expand opportunities for “in-demand career fields” (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). This funding mirrors other national trends where STEM fields of study are prioritized (Carter, 2017) over areas like the humanities, the arts, women’s, and sexuality studies which are being whittled away, and in some cases, eliminated altogether (Cloud, 2018). The absence of democratic processes within public higher education and a growing focus on the outcomes almost exclusively associated with the economy, are not issues to take lightly. These trends are reflective of a greater problem at the national level within the U.S., which I fully unpack in Chapter 3.

Yet, while there are concerns within public higher education, there are also opportunities to encourage democratic behaviors. Within universities, smaller group settings lessen many of the social pressures and dynamics associated with larger exchanges, thus allowing individuals to engage with one another and share their experiences with varying degrees of vulnerability in hopes of learning from and about others. These experiences are integral for opportunities associated with critical conversations where students can learn from each other, especially about issues social issues. Not only do exchanges about societal and social justice issues have the power to reshape how we interact with each other, particularly when we disagree about

fundamental issues, outcomes associated with those issues and the experiences gained at an individual level contribute to the possibility of greater social intelligence, as well as a stronger, more vibrant democracy and by extension, a more equitable society. For example, the intergroup dialogue model developed at the University of Michigan raises awareness about inequalities associated with social groups through sustained dialogue over a set period of time or academic term (Hurtado, 2019; Thompson, 2001; Zuniga et al. 2007).

Earlier, I broadly discussed the relationship between individual faith in human potential to change our society and a sense of community and belonging, I turn here to elaborate on principles of equity, respect, and equality of voice as they relate to community. Dahl (2015) argues democracy involves a system of rights which comprises the essential building blocks of governmental democratic processes. While Dahl posits that democracy entails a system of rights as they pertain to governance, these rights can and should extend into everyday life. While individual faith in human potential should be the driving force behind collective decision making, within communities, principles of equity, equality, and respect are equally important. It's important for me to explain these principles, because traditionally even in democratic societies, specific populations of individuals have been excluded from collective action, decision making, and other processes directly related to our society and daily lives.

In describing democracy, Dewey emphasizes principles of equity, connectedness through community, and inclusion of all individuals in the collective decision-making process. Dewey maintained that we are bound together and that our actions affect those

around us, and vice versa. Coming together as a community and working across lines of difference in a respectful, equitable manner to deliberate issues and create solutions that benefit the greater good is one of the ultimate goals of democracy as a way of life.

Participation is crucial for deliberative processes to take place. Individual participation and an open exchange of ideas and diverse perspectives can result in solutions that represent the greater good and include a diversity of insight and benefit. This participation is vital to healthy, vibrant democratic systems and society; without it, the core tenets of representative democracy, collective participation and representation, and ultimately shared governance will be undermined.

Even within supposedly democratic societies, there are countless examples that illustrate systematic processes which perpetuate discriminatory actions and inequities that prevent specific groups of individuals from participating in decision-making processes. While participation is vital for deliberation, but there are many examples within our society and at universities where conversations are meant to only include specific students and individuals. These conversations can turn into discussions only amongst powerful or privileged members of societal groups, while students in traditionally marginalized groups may feel that their experiences and opinions are not valued or welcome, or that as a minority student they are being tokenized. These types of occurrences not only point to the need for more equitable systematic processes within universities, but also to the more pressing issue of building a more democratic and equitable society beyond the university. Wood (1998) argues that social behavior is learned by doing, through practice. Without democratic experiences within higher

education, one can deduce that there will not only be less knowledge around what a democratic society actually entails, but also a greater likelihood that social responsibility and issues of social justice will become even less of a priority. Over the last fifteen years, there is compelling evidence illustrating growth associated with civic action and protests among young individuals. This kind of democratic engagement should be explored and nurtured. A few of these demonstrations include the Step it Up Middlebury 2007 protests related to global warming started in large part by six students at Middlebury College in Vermont (McKibben, 2007); the Silent Sam protests at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill about the removal of confederate statues on campus (Murphy, 2019); The Million Student March in 2015, which included students from over 100 campuses throughout the United States fighting ever-increasing tuition rates and saddling students with loan debt (Carlton, 2020); and the well-known 2015 protests at the University of Missouri where students organized against racism (Setzer, 2018). Democratic events and experiences such as these illustrate the power of deliberation and collective action through participation which can only add to a more robust, democratic way of life.

Democracy as an Ever-Evolving Process

A democratic way of life is something that is ever evolving, that is, it is both a journey and process with no static solution or ideal to be realized. Traditionally and even now, many people think of democracy as something that is fixed and guaranteed, but Dewey saw democracy very differently. He saw democracy as something that was ever evolving; a process that necessitates participation of citizens who hold an interest in common goods. In an ideal state, democratic processes would be adaptive to the needs of

the society based on the contributions and participation of individuals, which in theory would guarantee a continually democratic way of life that effectively addresses current challenges and issues of concern as reflected by participant interests. An example of this adaptation is how we think about the idea of globalization. Hytten (2009) explores the concept of globalization, and argues that through the notion of adaptability, democracy as a process has the potential to meet and overcome many of the challenges associated with global expansion. One example she highlights is the interconnectedness of different perspectives based on globalization. The exchange of ideas across various lines of difference is an opportunity to learn from other individuals and work together to create a better future for the greater global community. Democratic goals of equity, collaboration, and solutions that are collectively made are not something that can be isolated or achieved by following the same process or specific formula for generations to come. Democracy as Dewey saw it, is also very personal, and as I discussed earlier, it involves the belief in the power of collaborative human efforts, which when guided by principles of equality, communication, and deliberation, can lead to a more socially just society and world. This process of evolution is not possible if individuals within society do not engage in conversations about social issues and work to create solutions for the challenges ahead.

Currently, we face tremendous barriers affecting equitable participative processes and the inclusion of all individuals in decision-making and leadership. Many of our current societal structures and institutions do quite the opposite, further stratifying, sorting and in many cases oppressing certain groups of individuals at the local, regional,

national, and global level. Dewey's concept of democracy provides an impetus for the reconceptualization of our current societal systems and the implementation of processes and structures that more fully include and allow every individual to participate, flourish, and contribute to society in unique ways.

A Deweyan Democratic Education

Dewey often referred to democracy in relation to public education, as he saw schools an essential component of the democratic process. Rather than focus on rote educational processes currently found within many public K-12 schools and arguably, many colleges and universities, Dewey saw education as something vibrant that should allow students to fully experience the present moment (Hyttén, 2006). He argued that schools should “be made a genuine form of active community life; instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons” (p. 11). In other words, Dewey saw public education as the means by which students could and should be introduced to the issues and challenges of today, specifically, social issues that students could work collaboratively to solve. He argued that educational experiences that address contemporary challenges are one of the most valuable aspects of public education and that if schools and universities utilized processes which emphasized principles of cooperation, concern for others, and participation, that democratic societies would not only become more vibrant, but greater social progress, particularly greater social intelligence could be achieved.

When I think of a democratic education at the student level within higher education, I immediately envision students and instructors working in a group setting to solve challenges and propose solutions based on discussion, participation, and

deliberation. Goals of a democratic education might include: empowering students to think about how their actions impact the world; engaging students in conversations and deliberative processes across lines of difference; and developing students' abilities to critically process decisions independently so that as citizens of a democratic society, students can both interact and communicate with others while gauging the weight and impact of their actions and decisions on others. These objectives necessitate learning experiences that foster opportunities for student participation, autonomy, agency in curricular decisions, input in subject matter that stimulates critical thought and decision making on both an individual and group level. While the idea of collaborative and empowering education is not that complicated, exchanging more prescriptive, authoritative models for shared, communal models seems difficult with a focus on standardization, institutional prestige, and performance-based funding which are often assessed by reductive quantitative measures. Much like Dewey, I believe that if students are given an opportunity to participate in decisions about what is being taught, engagement on a macro-level will likely increase, which not only improves performance, but is encouraging when we think about participation and engagement in the democratic sense on a national level.

The ability of students and subsequently citizens of the United States to make informed democratic decisions about social issues requires a personal commitment to active participation, which must be encouraged and readily available for practice throughout one's formal educational experience. Noddings (2013) argues that participation in democratic activities is essential and suggests that instructors and

educators resist reducing or eliminating activities associated with democracy, as these activities are not only important, but essential to the development of deliberative citizens. One example is extracurricular activities such as student government groups which often provide opportunities for dialogue, the election of officers, and goals and plans to achieve proposed outcomes among the group both in K-12 and higher education. Another example is providing students with opportunities to exercise democratic behaviors. This begins with greater diversity of student offerings when it comes to coursework and curricular design, and movement away from the rigid structures and organizational models found in many public schools and universities today. While participation and dialogue are vital to the development of democratic habits, there continues to be growing interest in the rise of performance-based funding, which with a focus on neoliberal processes emphasizing more assessment coupled with the lack of funding for many universities (Favero & Rutherford, 2019), democratic behaviors and learning outcomes which are sometimes not quantifiable or easily assessed are at risk of being deemphasized or eliminated completely.

Providing students with the resources, experiences, and ability to critically assess issues and create their own meaning is problematic for those individuals and groups who benefit from a stratified system of governance. At the same time, public higher education institutions are one of the main environments where students can cultivate critical thinking skills. Public education institutions, particularly colleges and universities are unique because of the number of students these institutions bring together. There are a myriad of options that reflect the importance of dialogue and participation that higher

education institutions have supported historically. Service learning for example, emphasizes collaboration and dialogue while exposing students to new concepts which vary depending on the project. Patterson (2000) highlights a project that was situated within a political science class in which students worked with a refugee resettlement in a nongovernmental organization. Some of the outcomes of this project included opportunities to practice cooperation, tolerance, and compromise while exposing students to different cultures and global citizenship.

Living and learning communities also provide democratic opportunities to students. These communities are often residential housing programs that are based on themes. The goal of this model is to build community and shared learning. A 2007 study conducted by the National Study of Living Learning Programs (LLP's) which included over 600 universities illustrated that LLP's offer multiple democratic benefits to students. In engaging in social and cultural discussions in living and learning centers, students showed significant growth in the areas of critical thinking, application of knowledge, and commitment to civic engagement (Brower & Inkelas, 2014). These are but two of the approaches which can be used within public universities to provide students with opportunities to practice and enhance democratic sensibilities. In the next section of this chapter, I build upon the opportunities for democratic learning within higher education by exploring the historical purposes and development of higher education institutions.

Historic Purposes of Higher Education: The Development of Higher Education

Institutions

There has always been tension associated with the goals of higher education. Over the last three hundred years, higher education institutions have served many purposes including supporting the economy, preparing democratic citizens, providing research, and developing knowledge. For the purposes of my research, I am most interested in the relationship between public higher education and democratic processes inherent to a flourishing democratic society. To better understand the role of education in civic preparation for a democratic way of life, in this section I examine the historic mission of public higher education. One of the most prominent advocates for public education was Horace Mann. Mann (1957), often considered the founder of American public education, maintained that “A republican form of government, without intelligence in the people, must be, on a vast scale, what a mad-house, without superintendent or keepers, would be a small one” (para. 15). Education as Mann saw was a means of informing and providing citizens of a democracy with the skills necessary to make informed decisions about societal issues through a democratic governance model. While Mann focused on K-12 education, it is only logical that higher education institutions should continue and enhance the civic development of citizens.

To function as a democratic citizen, students must be exposed to a variety of experiences which hone the skills necessary to not only function in collaborative ways, but to think for one’s self, stay well informed, participate in deliberative and creative processes, and lastly, to utilize critical thinking processes to fully understand complex

issues, while understanding that one's decisions impact the lives of others. As I mentioned in earlier portions of this chapter, the crux of democracy is participation and deliberation of its members. Glaeser, Ponzetto, and Shleifer (2007) found that there is a causal impact of education on democracy beginning with the connection between education and political participation. This study proposes two distinct roles of education which are in line with the more traditional roles of education as it pertains to democracy. First, those students who have completed participative processes and experienced socialization (both of which are opportunities that can occur within universities) are better able to induce peers in political action. Through greater education, these individuals have the ability to encourage and motivate others to participate politically. Second, those individuals with higher levels of education are better able to understand and reap the benefits of participation.

This empirical evidence aligns with historical research associated with the role of education in democracy that illustrates that higher levels of education not only bolster participation in democratic processes, but also allow members of a democratic society to more fully benefit from democratic processes which are dependent on critical thought and participation. This outcome coupled with greater access to higher education not only creates a stronger more vibrant democratic society it also allows individuals to flourish and benefit from the opportunities public higher education offers. Public education has and continues to extend opportunities for interactions, conversations, and deliberation between diverse groups of students and is one of the few public institutions that has the propensity to provide these types of experiences.

Historically speaking, the United States' first universities and up until the civil war catered to a very elite group, namely upper-class white men (Bok, 2013). This changed to a degree around the time of the civil war when The Morrill Land Grant Act was introduced. Land Grant Acts were passed in 1862 and 1890 and provided each state with an endowment of land for the creation of a public university. At that time, these universities mainly focused on agricultural and mechanical arts (Benson & Boyd, 2015), but as higher education evolved, these universities contributed to the U.S. society in diverse ways. Not only did the passage of these acts lead to a more robust economic sector, but from a democratic perspective, the passage of the acts extended access to higher education to more individuals, particularly those in the working class performing industrial jobs. This was a major shift from the previous notion of higher education which only few could access.

At a university level, public education also catered to both the needs of the economy and the needs of a democratic society. The origins of UNC Chapel Hill, the oldest public university in the country chartered in 1789 and can be traced to North Carolina's Constitution of 1776 (UNC Executive Development, 2014). Leloudis (n.d.) argues that "The constitution's framers, who were heirs of the Enlightenment, believed that the survival of their fledgling democracy depended on the education of future leaders" (p. 1). The aforementioned document reflected the Enlightenment influence. Article Forty-One of the North Carolina Constitution of 1776 states that "all useful Learning shall be duly encouraged and pro moted [sic] in one or more universities" ("The Constitution," 1909, p. 7). Over the last 220 years, the curriculum and offerings of UNC

Chapel Hill have reflected the needs of society which have changed throughout its inception. From a collegiate training academy for NC leaders during the antebellum period, to teacher training programs in the late 1800's, to an emphasis on the liberal arts and science in the 1900s, and presently with over 100 fields of study (Snider, 2006), the university has continued to adapt and contribute to the needs of the state and contributed to the development of democratic habits and practices. However, as I will discuss in the next section of this chapter, the preparation of future leaders and programs that ostensibly served the community, did not actually serve all individuals. Rather, they were primarily for elite white men and served to maintain and reproduce privilege.

For over a century, UNC Chapel Hill was the only campus which was part of the current UNC System. However, during the late 1800's and throughout the 1900's, other institutions secured sponsorship by the state and joined the current system. Much like UNC Chapel Hill, UNC Greensboro's evolution over the last century has varied. UNC Greensboro, which opened in 1892, resulted from the lobbying of Dr. Charles Duncan McIver and others who advocated for the education of women, with UNCG beginning as a women's school for teachers ("The History of UNCG," 2020). When founded, UNC Greensboro opened its doors as the North Carolina State Normal and Industrial School. The purpose and guiding mission of the institution was to train women who could then educate their children which would ultimately raise the level of education and improve literacy rates in North Carolina (Yoon, 2010), which I discuss in greater detail in the subsequent section. The historical purpose of UNCG reflects the strong ties between public education and our democratic way of life. Not only did UNCG in its original

conception extend access to women and working classes, it also contributed to the needs of the community and state by promoting education and expanding the number of teachers within North Carolina. However, as noted above, until these colleges designed specifically for women were established, women, along with African American and other minority groups were denied access to public higher education. Moreover, developing a university specifically for women could be seen as a way to marginalize them from the more valued forms of education offered at other campuses.

As mentioned earlier, the Morrill Land Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890 led to the establishment of universities that would promote a liberal and practical education for the industrial classes. As a result of these acts and the 1891 ratification by the North Carolina General Assembly, what is now known as North Carolina Agricultural & Technical University was established as the “Agricultural and Mechanical College for the Colored Race” (“A&T History,” 2020, p. 1). Its purpose was to “teach practical agriculture and mechanic arts and such branches of learning as relate there to, not excluding academic and classical instruction” (“A&T History,” 2020, p. 1). With the founding of A&T, public higher education was further extended to African American male students and the greater public. Much like the other public institutions examined above, NC A&T not only provided access to students who traditionally had not been able to access or benefit from higher education, it also contributed to the needs of the community and state, offering educational programming related to agriculture and technology of the times.

Similar to UNC Greensboro, East Carolina University (ECU) also started as a teachers’ college. The university is located in Pitt County, where residents initially

offered a significant portion of the land for the institution and a sum of \$100,000 to begin the school (Martin, 2018). The school opened its doors in 1909 as a 2-year institute dedicated to the education and preparation of teachers for classrooms in rural Eastern North Carolina (Weger, n.d.). Robert H. Wright, the first president of the institution who served for over 25 years shared described the democratic vision for the school: “It was built by the people, for the people, and may it ever remain with the people, as a servant of the people” (“About” 2020, para 1).

Much like the university’s described above, Elizabeth City State University was also founded to serve the needs of the region. In 1891 Hugh Cale, an African American NC General Assembly representative sponsored House Bill 383 to establish a teaching school that would train African American teachers who would teach in common schools within the region (“Our History,” 2020). The school began as a two-year institution and transitioned into a four-year teachers’ college which included training school principals who worked in the surrounding area. The university continued to expand offerings throughout the 1900’s and is now dedicated to “preparing its graduates for leadership roles and lifelong learning” (“Elizabeth City State University,” 2018, para. 2).

The inception of public higher education varies greatly based on the state and institution. Within North Carolina, many began as teaching schools to expand educational opportunities and while many are no longer classified as teachers’ colleges, the historical ties between the community, education, and a democratic way of life continue to persist. Like Dewey and many contemporary scholars, I see a democratic education as one of the few ways by which students are introduced to democratic processes such as critical

inquiry that enable them to challenge, assess, and evaluate ideas to form their own opinions and contribute solutions to societal challenges (Dewey, 1916; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Glickman; 2003).

It is not in the scope of this dissertation to analyze the origins of each of the UNC System schools, however, it is important to note that while there are democratic opportunities associated with the inception and history of public higher education within the United States as illustrated above, public universities have also historically participated in and perpetuated exclusionary practices that are undemocratic and oppressive in nature. In the following section, I explore some of the historical events that have resulted in greater inequity both historically and at present.

Institutionalized and Systematic Oppression within American Public Universities

Since the inception of American higher education over three hundred years ago, there have been tensions, disagreements, and general confusion about the historical purposes of public universities. As highlighted above, there are undoubtedly democratic elements and promises associated with public higher education within the United States, but there are also documented practices that are inherently undemocratic and antithetical to a flourishing democratic way of life. These practices vary by institution and in the following section, I shed light on some of the more common practices of public universities that have unfortunately excluded large portions of the population from higher education and in many regards continue to be both evident and pervasive in today's college campuses.

Many of these exclusionary practices, beliefs, and processes support colonization, racism, and gender inequality. Such practices begin with the inception of higher education universities within the United States. As highlighted earlier, these institutions were generally created exclusively for wealthy white men. During the Colonial Era, education was available to only the elite, however religion complicated the social standing and opportunities available to wealthy families. As a response to the narrowing of access to higher education for only religiously pious people, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were founded as an element of the social, religious, and political vision of Puritans who were often dissenters of religion, which meant that their sons were unable to join royal universities (Thelin, 2011). This exclusivity, coupled with the cost associated with obtaining an education during austere times, resulted in a very select group of young men who were being groomed to maintain an elite status socially, politically, and religiously, though the latter was more concerned with philanthropic endeavors rather than the development of clergymen (Sears, 1922).

Philanthropy was essential to many universities during this time and some of the most disastrous and culturally devastating events and practices were the result of college administrators/presidents attempting to maintain campus viability and bolster incoming revenue. One example are the grammar schools and colonial colleges for Native Americans, which were problematic and deeply damaging to Native American culture on multiple levels. Interests in these schools and colleges was not born of concern or expressions of virtue for Native Americans, but rather “the discordant threads of piety, politics, and profit, woven into a fabric of failure” (Wright, 1995, para. 33). These

purposes reflect the pro-colonial beliefs of universities and the degree to which they would go to secure financial stability at the cost of cultural genocide.

Women and African Americans also faced considerable obstacles and barriers when attempting to access public education institutions. During the 1800's, as higher education within the U.S. continued to expand, women's colleges and African American colleges were established, not only for supposed expanded access, but also they served to exclude and maintain the elitism associated with more established male only institutions. The establishment of the institutions for these minority groups is often discussed in tandem with the Morrill Land Grant Acts which occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century. While these acts are monumental when mapping institutional access for greater social groups, their inception was not inherently educationally-based, but rather pointed to the expansion of federal involvement/power in higher education. The Morrill Act of 1862 was driven by three main events which included:

- Increased efficiency of agricultural production (directly correlated with the economy)
- Expanded access to farmers and rural populations
- Expanded Federal power through a complex land grant agreement. (Place, 2019)

While the expansion of access is laudable, African American students, for example, were still excluded from these institutions especially in the South. The second Morrill Act of 1890 was enacted by the Federal government which supported the development of land-grant colleges for African American students ("1890 Land-Grant," 2019). Even after the Morrill Acts, colleges continued segregation and practiced unabashed discrimination as

to whom they chose to admit. However, with the addition of curricula that appealed to a greater populace, colleges and universities were focused on institutional viability, which necessitated selling students on the value of their programming and a ticket to the middle class (Thelin, 2011).

Women were denied access to these institutions until the mid-1800s when women's schools and colleges began to be created. These institutions differed from those of men as conservatives argued that access to higher education "would destroy the role of women in the household as homemakers, wives, and mothers" (Parker, 2015, p.6). The learning/curriculum of women also varied from their male counterparts. Men for example studied Greek and Latin, while women were taught roles related to domestic work: cooking, washing, and cleaning (Tuttle, 2004). The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, for example, was established as a women's college in the late 1800's to train women educators under the assumption that they would then educate their children who would eventually improve literacy rates ("SOE History," 2018). The roles perpetuated by colleges and universities are arguably still present in today's universities with disproportionately low numbers of female students in majors such as business and engineering where female students account for 47% and 22% respectively at the national level for the 2017-2018 academic year ("Undergraduate Degree," 2020).

Unfortunately, the historical barriers described above are still evident in today's universities. Racism is pervasive in modern higher education institutions. In 2012, the affirmative action program at The University of Texas, was under review by the United States Supreme Court based on exclusionary practices (Galan, 2016). Arguably,

contemporary issues of race stem from the foundational racism that was integral to the establishment of public universities. Within North Carolina, UNC Chapel Hill opened its doors to white, male students in 1795, while it would be over 150 years before African American students could enroll and study at the university (Killian, 2019). Slaves and free African American people built multiple buildings that comprised the university, but they were excluded from studying there. Not only did slaves build the physical campus, the NC General Assembly allowed the Board of Trustees to take over the property of individuals who died without heirs. At that time, slaves were considered property and the university made substantial sums of money based on the selling of slaves (Heffernan, 2019). Only recently, UNC Chapel Hill was embroiled in a national debate about the fate of a Confederate monument which displayed on UNC Chapel Hill's campus for over a century (Wamsley, 2020).

These are but a few of the oppressive historic and contemporary initiatives and actions that public higher education institutions have embraced. Many illustrate the persistence of racist, sexist discriminatory policies throughout the inception and development of public higher education institutions within the United States. Ensuring the eradication of discriminatory practices within public universities while balancing the civic mission of public universities with the impacts of neoliberalism is no doubt challenging, however, forsaking the democratic promise of higher education carries significant costs, as the eventual eradication of all democratic elements of public higher education which has the potential to diminish our democratic way of life altogether. With this in mind, I now turn my attention to the more contemporary ways in which

universities within the UNC System are providing students with democratic learning experiences and opportunities that I believe align with the goals of a democratic educational experience within a public higher education institution.

The UNC System’s Contemporary Mission and Democratic Promises

In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I connect the tenets of democracy I outlined earlier in this chapter, to the contemporary mission of higher education through an analysis of the mission statements and programs of the institutions that comprise the UNC System. Before delving into the most common themes I found within the mission statements of the 17 constituent universities, I provide a brief analysis of the UNC System mission since much of the direction given to the schools within the UNC System originates from the System Office. In its simplest form, a mission statement is the foundation for an organization. It is a roadmap to guide the operation, goals, and inspiration for the vision and future of the institution. The mission of this system is as follows:

The University of North Carolina is a public, multi-campus university dedicated to the service of North Carolina and its people. It encompasses the 17 diverse constituent institutions and other educational, research, and public service organizations. Each share in the overall mission of the University. That mission is to discover, create, transmit, and apply knowledge to address the needs of individuals and society. This mission is accomplished through instruction, which communicates the knowledge and values and imparts the skills necessary for individuals to lead responsible, productive, and personally satisfying lives; through research, scholarship, and creative activities, which advance knowledge and enhance the educational process; and through public service, which contributes to the solution of societal problems and enriches the quality of life in the State. (“Our Mission,” 2017)

This mission aligns with many of the characteristics and behaviors associated with Dewey's notion of democracy. Of these, the most directly aligned statement is the commitment to the needs of individuals and society through the process of discovery, creation, transmission, and the application of knowledge to live a more meaningful life. The goals of responsibility, public service as a solution to societal problems, and the application of knowledge to benefit the community and greater society each in some way correlate to what Dewey envisioned as democratic education. In the following sections, I analyze the most prominent reoccurring themes within institutional mission statements and connect them back to the historical and contemporary mission of American higher education. These themes include providing a public service, honoring diversity and inclusion, and fostering critical thought.

Public Service

One of the most prevalent themes in institutional mission statements is a focus on public service and the public good through learning experiences that empower students to make a difference in the lives of others. Each of the 17 institutions name goals to improve the lives of individuals external to the university and while the wording each institution utilizes within the mission statement varies, this overarching goal to improve the lives of NC residents and greater society is evident in all mission statements. In most cases, the mission statements for each of institutions can be broken into different goals, however Appalachian's State University's (ASU) entire mission statement reflects the democratic vision and goals I argue for in this dissertation. On a macro-level, ASU strives to:

prepare students to lead purposeful lives as engaged global citizens who understand their responsibilities in creating a sustainable future for all. We promote a spirit of inclusion that inspires students, faculty, and staff to form relationships extending well beyond graduation. Our students think critically, communicate effectively, make local to global connections, and understand the responsibilities of community engagement. We embrace our obligation to help create healthy, just, and sustainable societies by equipping our students to live with knowledge, compassion, dedication, humility, and dignity. (“ASU Charter,” 2019)

Other institutions’ mission statements include similar language and goals. Rather than include each of those statements verbatim, I highlight various types of institutions within the UNC System to illustrate that the goals I associate with a democratic education are present at each of the institutions within the UNC System. Fayetteville State University (FSU) is a public comprehensive regional university that promotes the educational, social, cultural, and economic transformation of southeastern North Carolina and beyond. The broad goals of the institution include producing “global citizens and leaders as change agents.... the university extends its services and programs to the community, including the military, and other educational institutions throughout North Carolina, the nation, and the world. (“Public Relations”, 2008).

Similarly, North Carolina State University is dedicated to ‘the creation and application of knowledge, and engagement with public and private partners...[and] promotes an integrated approach to problem solving that transforms lives and provides leadership for social, economic, and technological development across North Carolina and around the world” (“University Mission,” 2011). Other institutions within the System: East Carolina University (ECU), University of North Carolina - Asheville (UNCA), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), Elizabeth City State

University(ECSU), Fayetteville State University (FSU), North Carolina Central University (NCCU), University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC), University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), and Western Carolina University (WCU) also name commitments to the community and public in an effort to provide students with opportunities that help students to develop and cultivate habits impacting community involvement and engagement. Some examples of the ways this commitment are expressed are as follows: UNCA – “ Through small class sizes, close collaboration, and high-impact practices, we are preparing the next generation of leaders and productive citizens to serve North Carolina...” (Mission Statement, 2019); FSU – “The primary mission of FSU is to provide students with the highest quality learning experiences that will produce global citizens and leaders as change agents for shaping the future of the state” (“Public Relations,” 2008); and, NCCU – “North Carolina Central University, with a strong tradition of teaching, research, and service, prepares students to become global leaders and practitioners who transform communities” (NCCU, 2020).

This commitment to the public can be traced back to a democratic conception of public higher education. And, while the operational aspects of institutions have changed over the last two centuries, public higher education institutions within NC each ascribe to serve the public in varied ways. In a democratic sense, these universities name guiding values that provide students with an education that not only encourages students to work across lines of difference to achieve goals, but to provide experiences which encourages leadership, multiculturalism, and skills that will further enhance innovation and diversity at the national and global level. However, as I’ve noted in earlier sections of this

dissertation, contributions to society are often entangled and blurred with the needs of the economy.

Westheimer (2015) argues that schools should provide students with opportunities to ask challenging questions, think critically about social assumptions, and analyze and understand multiple diverse perspectives and needs. While he refers to public K-12 curriculum, this focus is also applicable at the post-secondary level. Creating opportunities to interact with fellow classmates as well as local and regional citizens introduces students to experiences which are not prioritized in public K-12 schools. This commitment has the potential to improve the quality of life for the public, while providing students with the opportunities, tools, and knowledge to effectively contribute and maintain a democratic way of life. Byproducts of these types of commitments are critical thinking skills which enable students to question, analyze, and weigh the impact of their actions on others, the future of humanity and the health of planet Earth. To further clarify the goals that are part of a democratic education, I explore another prominent theme within these mission statements which is a commitment to inclusivity.

Diversity and Inclusion

In the previous section, I discussed the missions of schools within the UNC system to contribute to the public, focusing mainly on the goal of improving the lives of individuals and greater society. In this section, I discuss the second most prominent theme in the mission statements, which is a commitment to inclusivity within the university. Fostering a culture of diversity and inclusiveness at the university level is one

of the most important ways to reinforce democratic habits and democracy as a way of life, as these are important democratic social values as well.

Of all the universities within the UNC System, the theme of inclusion was most pronounced at UNCG. UNCG illustrates this commitment to inclusion in two distinct ways. As a public research university, UNCG is driven to foster a culture and community that is “inclusive, collaborative, and responsive,” with goals to promote “A learner-centered, accessible, and inclusive community fostering intellectual inquiry to prepare students for meaningful lives and engaged citizenship” (“The UNCG,” 2018, para. 2).

Creating an inclusive university community is not something that can be accomplished by simply stating that an institution is inclusive. Inclusivity requires a concerted effort at all levels of the institution as well as partnership, communication, and cooperation among all individuals throughout the organization. The theme of inclusivity, particularly from an educational and curricular standpoint, aligns with Bell’s (2007) definition of a social justice education. She argues that “the goal of social justice education is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs;” and, “the process for attaining the goal of social justice...should be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change” (pp. 1-2).

Other universities also include language specific to diversity and inclusion within their mission statements. ASU’s mission statement includes goals to “grow holistically, to act with passion and determination, to embrace diversity and difference...” (“ASU Charter,” 2019). Similarly, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP) alludes

to the importance of diversity as part of their mission, asserting that UNCP “now serves a distinctly diverse student body and encourages inclusion and appreciation for the values of all people” (“Mission Statement,” n.d.). UNC Wilmington’s (UNCW) mission statement also aligns with the theme of diversity and inclusion and affirms that their campus “culture reflects our values of diversity and globalization, ethics and integrity, and excellence and innovation” (“About UNCW,” n.d.). UNC-CH also demonstrates a commitment to an inclusive campus by serving “as a center for research, scholarship, and creativity and to teach a diverse community of undergraduate, graduate, and professional students to become the next generation of leaders” (“Mission and Values,” 2019). By creating a culture of inclusivity on UNC campuses, we not only nurture students’ ability to learn and grow, but also model the democratic principles of cooperation, communication, and diversity in a welcoming environment.

Despite commitments to inclusion, I also acknowledge that graduates of higher education institutions are products of institutions that have traditionally perpetuated privilege. As Dewey argued, in a successful democracy, each member has something valuable that they can contribute, and as human beings, we each have a right to share our opinions, beliefs, and contribute to society in a meaningful way. While higher education institutions have often been associated with privilege, drawing on Dewey’s concept of democracy, specifically within public higher education, is one way to disrupt the reproduction of privilege. When universities focus on serving the public and improving the lives of others, encouraging these behaviors in students, we have the potential to build a more robust democratic system that provides greater opportunities for all individuals.

Critical Thought

The last theme I explore is the theme of knowledge and critical thought. Most of the universities within the UNC System allude to outcomes associated with the transmission of knowledge and the application of critical thinking skills beyond a student's formal education. I highlight a few of these below.

ECU asserts that they are a “national model for student success, public service, and regional transformation.” Their mission includes preparing “students with the knowledge, skills, and values to succeed in a global, multicultural society” (University Mission, 2019). Similarly, NCCU's mission state directly asserts that “NCCU students are engaged problem solvers” who “enhance the quality of life of citizens and the economic development of North Carolina, the nation, and the world” (NCCU, 2020). Lastly, Winston Salem State University refers to the skills and knowledge they impart with students as “innovative...grounded in the tradition of liberal education. Students engage in active and experiential learning offered through flexible delivery modes. The university is dedicated to the holistic development of students...” (“Mission and University,” 2020). Much like the other university mission statements, WSSU's mission includes active and engaged learning processes that allow students to learn by doing in hopes that they will then take this knowledge and use it to improve their lives and society beyond their formal education.

While none of the university mission statements include the word “democracy,” each in one or more ways nods to the idea that education improves the lives of students at that institution, the lives of those living within North Carolina, and the national and

global community. While broad, one of the historical purposes of higher education was to educate a populace so that they could make informed decisions about government and their lives. Each of the universities within the UNC System assert that they provide students with the skills, experiences, knowledge, and opportunities to enhance their own lives through education. This assertion coupled with the dedication to public service and educational access implicitly suggests that to sizeable degree, universities within the UNC System are at least cognizant of the democratic mission of public higher education and according to their mission, are actively pursuing goals that impart students with the sensibilities to live as informed citizens in a democratic society. We can see their efforts to live out these commitments in some of the programs and strategic initiatives currently in place at system campuses.

Democratic Initiatives and University Programs

Aside from the formal missions of universities, there are also programmatic initiatives at the system and university level that are democratic in nature. In the following section, I expand upon the democratic mission of public universities by examining a few of the programs and initiatives within the UNC System. These include expanding access to higher education, student service learning and community outreach units in place at various UNC System schools, and lastly, a brief analysis of the liberal arts and humanities curricular requirements within the System.

Expanding Educational Access

To begin this exploration of strategic initiatives that I associate with Dewey's vision of democracy and education and further substantiate the theme of inclusivity found

in the majority of institutional mission statements above, I explore one of the main tenets of the current five-year strategic plan for the UNC System, expanding educational access. The current strategic plan consists of five initiatives that were chosen based on the feedback and participation of students, faculty, staff, Chancellors, members of the Board of Governors, elected officials, businesses, civic leaders and citizens of North Carolina. These are access, affordability and efficiency, student success, economic impact and community engagement, and excellent and diverse institutions (“Higher Expectations,” 2017).

To begin, I acknowledge that some of the objectives within this agreement may not easily align with Dewey’s conception of democracy, particularly a potentially narrow focus on measures such as efficiency, excellence, and economic impact. In Chapter 3 and 4 of this dissertation, I discuss the macro and micro-level impacts of neoliberalism, specifically the impact of reductive quantitative measures and the unyielding focus on economic output above all else that seem to characterize higher education in some settings. While a narrow focus on economic output and reductive measures are problematic, I find commitments to expand access to those areas of the state in which many students would not otherwise be able to access higher education to be a relatively positive democratic commitment. Meir (2003) argues that the function of public education is to impart the “skills, aptitudes, and habits needed for a democratic way of life” (p. 16), thus, by providing greater access to higher education, including support systems for underserved student populations, the UNC System, to some degree, is

focused on including a more diverse student population and essentially to a more robust democratic society, even if access is being measured in reductive quantitative ways.

Before delving into the actions that the UNC System has taken to bolster access for a range of students, especially in rural counties, I first want to define what is meant by access. Per the UNC System strategic planning committee, access extends beyond helping students gain admission to college. It also includes:

- Providing multiple access points into the University;
- Academic, financial, cultural, and other knowledge-based services to help all students- but particularly those who are underserved for any reason-to aspire to, enroll in, and graduate from institutions that meet their interests and capabilities. (“Higher Expectations,” 2017)

To determine appropriate goals for this objective, the UNC System utilized strategic plans of other state systems with similar interests. These samples included plans from Colorado, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Texas. In each of these states, the state systems focused on changing demographics of the student population, while providing the academic support and resources to reduce attainment gaps among underserved student populations.

Two of the most robust plans from this sample included Virginia and Pennsylvania. The Virginia State System plan provided “state appropriations, financial aid and tuition and fees such that students have broader access to postsecondary education opportunities regardless of ability to pay (“Higher Expectations,” 2017, p. 12). Similarly, the Pennsylvania State System set goals to “Increase access to higher education of low-income and underrepresented minority students by reducing the

difference in the entering class for these groups compared to those of all students graduating from Pennsylvania high schools by half” (“Higher Expectations,” 2017, p. 12). Within NC there is a -9.6% educational access disparity between those students who were identified as low-income compared to those that are not. What this means is that those students who identify as low-income are 10% less likely to access higher education than are those students who are not low income.

In their plan to increase access, the UNC System at present focuses on those students who are identified as low-income students, arguing that many of the other demographic factors are synonymous with this group (other focuses included race/ethnicity and rural location). Two goals were identified to improve access to public higher education institutions within NC to better support underrepresented students: 1. Improve outreach, 2. Increase access. While the enrollment of low-income students for 2018 has not yet been released, the 2017 result was an increase of 2.0% or 1,257 students as compared to the previous year, although 2017 is the first year of this strategic plan and there could be discrepancies in reporting types given a change in strategic goals (“Higher Expectations,” 2017). Currently, no other state data is available. Complications associated with COVID-19, the global health pandemic that came to the United States in early 2020, have prolonged the dissemination of this data on an individual level and data requests have been delayed significantly.

University Support Programs

While it is nearly impossible to determine the specific programs that have been most effective in improving educational access, I do want to highlight two programs

whose goals and objectives align with the UNC System's goal of improving access. The first, and arguably most robust program that serves low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented student populations at the secondary level (synonymous with those students living with rural areas according to the UNC system) is the Carolina College Advising Corps. This program is located on UNC Chapel Hill's campus and is partly funded by the university. The main goals of this program include:

- Increase post-secondary enrollment rates of the schools served
- Create a college going culture within the schools served
- Broaden the range of two- and four-year schools to which students are exposed. ("History," 2019)

The program has been in existence for over a decade and with 57 academic advisors serving 77 high schools within rural counties, when compared to other high schools with no advisers, data has shown a 10-11% higher enrollment in secondary education ("History," 2019). The program targets students who live in rural areas. Many of these students are also low-income and often self-report as a first-generation student; these students often do not have support systems necessary to navigate higher education processes. Having an advisor and system of support during the college application process alleviates much of the pressure and stress associated with completing these processes alone, and based on the quantitative results of this program, bolsters access and enrollment in post-secondary education.

On a state level as of 2015, the student-to-high school counselor ratio is 378:1 (American School Counselor Association, 2017). This ratio is mind boggling to say the least. Imagine being a high school student whose college advising experience was

reduced to a single 20-minute-long appointment that necessitates covering college selection, application, financial aid, and other admission processes. Programs such as these play an integral part in providing marginalized students with greater access to higher education, which as illustrated in this example begins before a student's freshmen year of college.

While this program provides students with advising and exposure to improve access at the post-secondary level, it does not alleviate the monetary challenges associated with the college application process, which are significant. According to a 2019 U.S. News & World Report, the average cost of a college application was \$44 (Kowarski, 2019). This cost, compounded with the College Board's suggestion for students to apply to five to eight different institutions, most of which require not only an application, but a standardized test which is approximately \$60 for either the SAT or the ACT (Dwyer, 2017) is but one of the many barriers low income students face in terms of access to higher education. We still have work to do at the state and national level to ensure that marginalized student populations application ratios reflect access to the resources and support integral to ensuring a student's success.

Being accepted and admitted to a university is only the beginning of the academic journey toward an undergraduate degree. Many low-income students struggle academically once at a college or university; these challenges range from feelings of self-doubt, a lack of a sense of belonging, a lack of preparedness, and inadequate high school preparation, to name a few (Whistle & Hiler, 2018; Moe, 2018). While there are multiple programs within the UNC System that are designed to support students, for the purposes

of this study, I rely on my personal experiences as an assistant director for the TRiO Student Support Services (SSS) Program at UNCG. This program is one of the oldest TRiO programs in the nation and offers first-generation, low-income, and students with disabilities with a robust selection of academic, personal, and extracurricular offerings. TRiO programs date back to 1968 and are partially grant funded at the federal level, while the remaining funding is supplied by the institution. According to federal guidelines, all SSS programs must include academic tutoring, academic advising, financial aid, and economic and financial literacy services while allowing optional services such as personal and career counseling, exposure to “cultural” events, and mentoring programs (“Student Support Services Program,” 2019).

At UNCG, SSS has been effective in not only ensuring students in traditionally marginalized groups persist through their education, but also thrive and continue their education beyond the undergraduate level. According to the most recent federal report for the 2013-2014 academic year, this program had an academic persistence rate (which is a measure of the total number of incoming freshmen students in the program that persist to the next academic year) of 88.0% (“Performance and Efficiency,” 2015). In other words, 88% of all incoming students enrolled in the program continued their education to the next year. This is significant when compared to UNCG’s overall persistence rate of 78.1% for the same academic year (“Office of Assessment,” 2020). There are multiple other measures for this program that illustrate the success of TRiO programs in terms of access and degree completion. I do however want to note that simplistic quantitative measures alone do not reflect the impact of such programs. As a former assistant director

for this program, the lack of qualitative data exploring the impacts of these programs continues to be both worrisome and limiting from a democratic perspective. A more comprehensive macro-level analysis is needed.

While programs such as these can certainly help to close achievement gaps, it's also important to keep in mind that these programs in their current form do not have the funding and institutional support to provide services to the majority of the student population within NC. And while these programs are making progress from a democratic perspective (i.e. providing traditionally minoritized students with the skills, experiences, and resources to access higher education, critically assess material, and create a sense of community within the university), we must be mindful not to overlook the needs of other minoritized student populations with claims that a single program is sufficient for improving the access and attainment ratios for marginalized student populations.

To create and fully realize the benefits of a vibrant democracy, institutional processes must be navigable for all students, as should access to various support systems within the university. Having advising and support programs such as the ones I mention in this section are but a steppingstone toward a democratic education that imparts in students the knowledge, skills, and experiences to prepare students for engaged citizenship beyond their college years. Creating a democratic vision for higher education begins on a macro-level and includes senior level leadership, faculty, and staff to fully offer a wide-range of democratic experiences both inside and outside of the classroom.

Community and Service Learning

Aside from providing more access to underrepresented populations, universities within the UNC system also illustrate democratic commitments to the greater community through a variety of initiatives and programs. For example, many institutions have entire units devoted to community partnerships and service-learning opportunities for students. These units typically emphasize the importance of building relationships, learning from others, and provide an opportunity to grapple with social issues affecting the local area.

Service learning has emerged as a central component that connects disciplinary learning and general education with higher education's commitment to the public good.

Bringle and Hatcher (1995) define service learning as a:

Credit bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (p. 112)

Service-learning experiences occur outside the classroom and the overarching goals include to enhance the level and depth of understanding of course content and to address community issues, develop specific skill sets, and promote responsible citizenship.

There are a number of important outcomes of service-learning projects identified by researchers. These include:

- Encourage students to become more active members of their communities,
- Increase student knowledge and understanding of the community and challenges associated with it,
- Meet the needs of the community and foster relationships between the institution and the local and regional community,

- Encourage altruism and care for others,
- Improve personal and social development
- Teach critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Thomason et al., 2011)

While the goals listed align with those I associate with a democratic action, there are critiques suggesting that service learning benefits the individual student rather than focusing on the community. Similar to the goal of expanding educational access, there is no way to guarantee that a program fully accomplishes democratic learning outcomes. Democratic learning experiences cannot be assessed on a multiple-choice test, nor should they be.

As I've mentioned in other portions of this dissertation, there has always been tension surrounding the myriad goals of higher education. Service learning is yet another example of this tension associated with the competing goals of public universities. My purpose in highlighting some of the programs at various UNC System institutions is twofold: 1. To illustrate that while contentious, there are programs with democratic goals in-place at universities within the NC System. 2. To illustrate that while students can benefit individually from initiatives and learning experiences, these types of programs also expose them to the community and possibility a different way of life. This exposure, even if limited, has the propensity to influence a student's thought processes in ways that other learning experiences may not. They provide students experiences such as working with other students to improve the community, engaging with others in ways that the student wouldn't otherwise, and finally, provide students with an experience associated with civil involvement. The outcomes of service-learning experiences are most effective when coupled with an analysis of the projects upon completion. For example, students in

an environmental science class might work together to cleanup an area in the community and establish a community garden. The post-analysis might include the benefit to the environment, the benefits to community members, and the role of the institution and the work the students completed to the community.

In the following portions of this section, I examine two programs within the UNC System to illustrate the democratic possibilities within public universities. Again, I am not suggesting these programs are without critique, but rather that they can impart students with democratic sensibilities that otherwise might not be available. While there are multiple programs within public universities that extend democratic opportunities to students, I chose these programs because they often involve multiple divisions within the greater university community. The Student Affairs and Academic Affairs divisions comprise academic coursework, extracurricular activities, student support units, curricular initiatives, faculty and student research, and other units that support student development and growth and are essential components of the university. The two examples I share below involve units within both divisions whose missions and goals are usually very closely aligned with the macro-level goals and mission of the institution.

The Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning located at Western Carolina University is one such program and is dedicated to focusing on the “development, promotion, and measurement of programs and initiatives that engage all partners in the mutually beneficial process of community development, with the intention of fostering a sustainable campus culture and the personal habit of community engagement in our students” (“Center for Community,” 2019). This commitment goes

beyond the work of administrators and student staff within the center and extends to the greater university community and beyond, often in the form of service-learning projects.

WCU's Center for Community Engagement and Service-Learning Center not only promotes service learning on behalf of the students, but also supports other staff and faculty members who are interested in planning and implementing service-learning projects. The Center works to develop and guide faculty members who are interested in creating and implementing community experiences that address local and regional issues. This service includes consultations about service-learning projects, a comprehensive website with all documentation requirements, risk management materials, and a complete list of all current nonprofit partnerships. This list ranges from healthcare foundations, parks and recreation, cultural arts, environmental groups, housing assistance groups, and many other local and regional foundations that seek to improve and provide solutions for many of the challenges of the local and regional area. Some of the affiliations and recognitions The Center has been awarded include: Campus in Action Civic Action Planning Initiative, the All in Campus Democracy Challenge, the Campus Election Engagement Project, and Carnegie Foundation Elective Community Engagement Classification ("About the Center," 2020).

Western Carolina University is not the only university to house an entire department dedicated to community engagement and service projects. NC State and NC A&T also have similar programs in place. Both institutions are classified as land grant institutions, which have long been associated with both supporting the local community and greater public good. The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 not only provided land

grants, but also federal funding to establish agricultural and mechanical institutions (Croft, 2019). While it's not in the scope of my research to describe the myriad of aspects of the Morrill Acts, some of the outcomes associated with these acts include greater public funding for higher education, land grants to establish university campuses, greater access for women and African Americans, greater access for the "common man," and lastly, contributions to society and the economy, all of which are commonly associated with the concept of democracy (Veysey, 1992; Brubacher and Rudy, 1976; Scott, 2006).

NC State University's Leadership and Civic Engagement unit (formerly The Center for Student Leadership, Ethics, and Public Service) was created in 1998 and much like WCU's unit, aims to "provide students with the knowledge, tools, and experiences to practice socially responsible leadership. We envision bold and authentic leaders who work collectively to forge a socially just world for all people" (Hammond, 2018). The unit at NC State houses multiple programs and initiatives that closely align with Dewey's concept of a democratic education. One example is the Alternative Service Break. This program provides high-impact learning experiences that allow students opportunities to engage in direct service at the local, regional, or global community level. These projects are led by students, faculty members, and Academic and Student Affairs professionals and include a variety of activities aimed at nourishing the knowledge, skills, and tools that allow students to work with others to create positive impacts and change within communities and the larger society (Hammond, 2018). While there are critiques of this program model, there are also multiple studies illustrating the short and long-term positive effects of these projects. A recent study of 147 alumni who participated in

Alternative Breaks projects revealed that there are multiple benefits both short and long-term. The long-term takeaways included:

- 31.8 % of participants reported connections and interactions with community members
- 27.3 participants reported connections with other participants
- 20.5% of participants reported a change in their perspective
- 13.6% of participants reported participation in additional service experience projects
- 6.8% of participants reported personal rewards. (Johnson & Martin, 2017)

This research coupled with other studies (Barclay, 2010; Rice, Steward, & Hujber, 2000), illustrates that while not all of the benefits of these programs are explicitly democratic in nature, these experiences do to a large degree provide democratic elements that may not otherwise be available to students.

Throughout this chapter, I have referred to the importance of collective action, making connections with others, and building relationships across lines as democratic habits and behaviors that can help develop students as citizens who are committed to developing and sustaining common goods. By encouraging students to interact with one another and the external members associated with the project, opportunities are made available to learn across lines of difference and hopefully, work together to create momentum to complete a goal or change an outcome. Dewey believed that education should prepare students for the changing world; one of the most effective ways to do that is to reinforce agency by providing opportunities for students to take charge of themselves and their ability to exert change in the world (Dewey, 1972). Moreover,

students develop the capacity to make informed decisions, particularly when it comes to social and community issues.

My goal in this section was to illustrate some of the existing programs and initiatives within the UNC System that make available democratic learning experiences and opportunities for students that otherwise might not be available. Either implicitly or explicitly these programs have goals associated with civic involvement, collective action, and working across lines of difference to accomplish goals and create positive changes. As has been the case for higher education since its inception, these programs vary and the personal investments in completing and participating in them vary based on the student. While they may seem arbitrary, these programs represent some of the larger democratic goals and mission of the institution. Having these types of programs in place and the communication, coordination, and collaboration across divisional and departmental lines is an indication that universities to some degree continue to impart students with democratic sensibilities that are necessary for social and political participation and the further development of our democratic way of life. So too are curricular experiences that are well-rounded, holistic, and varied. The collaborative models above and the diversity of employees, students, units, and divisions involved in them are indicative of the larger, macro-level mission and objectives to provide students with the skills and experiences to live a meaningful life through contributions and service to greater society and the global community.

Critical Thinking and The Liberal Arts

As part of public higher education, the call for some degree of liberal arts education has a rich history that spans hundreds of years. While the liberal arts are the entire focus of some colleges and universities, they are typically an important part of all degree programs as reflected in course requirements outside of a student's academic major. In liberal arts courses, students examine important issues, specifically those related to our present world, the societal structures we have in place, and the interdependency of an increasingly diverse global community. A liberal arts education utilizes an interdisciplinary framework to explore a multiplicity of human interactions, as well as social justice issues, including race, class, and gender (Dutt-Ballerstadt, 2019).

Through the exploration of these topics and issues, liberal arts courses help students learn to think critically, creatively, and imaginatively (Nussbaum, 2010). Rather than train for a specific job or career, the focus of a liberal arts education is the holistic development of the student, who learns for in order to develop habits and dispositions useful for future learning, for example, to connect diverse ideas in often unpredictable situations. The skills gained from a liberal arts education can be utilized throughout a student's life and remain relevant regardless of changes in society or the workplace, unlike many technical skills and vocational certifications which can easily become obsolete in an ever-changing world.

A liberal arts education is essential to a thriving democratic society. Nussbaum (1997) and Seifert et al. (2008) argue that the holistic development and approach of the individual that is cultivated in liberal arts disciplines applies to both citizenship and

everyday living. Liberal arts courses aid in self-discovery and helping students to examine complex social issues that necessitate deep thinking and well-crafted solutions. Addressing complex problems requires critical analysis and reflection, understanding various viewpoints, and the ability to see beyond that which is obvious. Glaude Jr. (2018) argues as part of liberal arts education, educators should provide students with the opportunities to ask hard questions, the ability to exercise open-inquiry rather than accept “ready-made clichés,” and to engage one another through imaginative possibilities which have yet to become reality (p. 303). These skills are especially important during times of crisis and turbulence, such as those we currently face where fake-news abounds and science and facts are dismissed and disregarded by uninformed people.

The skills, habits, and dispositions taught as part of a liberal arts education are essential to a thriving democracy, yet interest in the liberal arts has waned over the last several decades as students continue to be drawn and/or pushed to those majors that are occupationally linked. For example, over the course of 8 years, between 2008 -2016, the number of conferred bachelor’s degrees in history and philosophy decreased by 15 percent (Felder, 2018), while the health professions field has more than doubled (Nietzel, 2019). However, even with the challenges such as the one listed above, within the UNC System, institutions continue to offer a liberal arts education in hopes of honing students’ critical thinking abilities, creativity, and the cultivation of democratic sensibilities.

To illustrate the commitment to critical inquiry and the democratic sensibilities associated with this commitment, I examined the general education curricular requirements for undergraduate students within the UNC System. Most of the general

requirements were similar, including varied topical requirements from a broad range of offerings. The most obvious themes associated with these requirements included the ability to engage in thoughtful dialogue, imaginative inquiry, critical inquiry of complex issues, and the ability to examine ethical and societal issues through a globally responsive lens.

Of these themes, one of the most obvious was critical thinking and analysis. For example, UNC Charlotte's general education requirements are based on the traditional meaning of learning the arts and the hope is that this foundational liberal education will provide students with the ability to make critical judgements while living a life dedicated to learning through intellectual and artistic pursuits ("Requirements," 2020). The course requirements include 9-10 credit hours devoted to the development of fundamental skills of inquiry, 10 credit hours associated with inquiry in the sciences, 12 credit hours specific to themes of liberal education for private and public life, and 6-9 credit hours of advanced communication skills. There were also competencies embedded within the curriculum associated with critical thinking and communication, which require students to demonstrate their understanding and comprehension in chosen areas as part of the degree completion process ("Requirements," 2020).

Similarly, NCSU's general requirements are meant to provide students with opportunities for a broad and informed understanding of the world, in part through engaging in logical and creative thinking. According to NCSU, their general education curriculum is based on:

respect for the value of diversity and an understanding of human history and cultures...because effective communication is central to productive engagement in academic, professional, and civic communities...[and the] ability to understand and evaluate the interaction among science, technology, and society is important in a world that is changing. (“Registration & Records Course Catalog,” 2020, p. 69)

NCSU’s general education requirements mirror many of those at UNC Charlotte. These requirements include mathematical science, natural science, social science, writing, health and exercise, and interdisciplinary perspective, and an additional breadth requirement. Additionally, students are required to demonstrate proficiency in a second language and successfully complete competencies linked to the courses mentioned above (“GEP Category Requirements,” 2020).

WCU’s rationale for a liberal educational approach includes goals that provide students with “the ability to think critically, to communicate effectively, to identify and solve problems reflectively” (“CURRENT 2019-2020,” 2020, para. 1). Their educational requirements are similar to many other institutions, including a varied and holistic approach to general requirements. Similar to other institutions, WSSU’s general education requirements are “designed to foster the development of critical skills such as thinking, writing, and speaking” (“2019-2021 Undergraduate Catalog” n.d., p.1). Their general education curriculum, like others in the UNC system schools requires courses in a range of areas, including literature, historical studies, social sciences, mathematics, fine arts, and foreign language or culture.

While universities continue to offer and value classes associated with liberal education, it’s important that universities not forsake or eliminate this model in favor of

additional vocational and career-focused curricula. A 2019 Gallop poll showed that there has been a 70% drop in public support for higher education since 2013 (Marken, 2019), which is startling. The UNC System is not immune to the challenges presented by decreases in public support and funding. The declines in public support for public higher education, and pressure to bend toward vocational demands are significant. According to Harpham (2011) universities are inherently dependent on a number of stakeholders, this dependency is not necessarily a bad thing as it reflects the linkage between the university and society, however he argues that educators must not lose sight of the long-term benefits of a liberal education while finding “balance between a reasonable and rational willingness to adapt...in light of ever changing facts” (p. 57).

Even with the lack of public support and other societal pressures, the UNC System continues to offer liberal arts courses that are unique in that these subjects offer opportunities to develop critical thinking skills, engage in dialogue with other students from varying backgrounds and views, as well as contemplate historical and contemporary issues and possible solutions. Unlike vocational courses, the liberal education approach tends to be broader and more holistic, empowering students through individual exploration and understanding, and by extension, providing them with the ability to approach challenging situations in the future.

The Future of Democracy and Public Universities

In this chapter, I analyzed and explored the elements I argue are essential to a democratic education. In doing so, I argued that higher education has and continues to be an important facet of in developing in students the habits of democratic citizenship,

offering students opportunities for critical thought, community building, and service learning. This analysis also highlights how the UNC System institutional mission statements not only align democratic values, but also guides institutional initiatives and programs that deliver democratic opportunities. University initiatives, departments, and curricular requirements are but a few of the ways that we can expose students to democratic learning experiences which are similar to those of Apple (2011) associates with critical educators. These include, participation in movements to create more critically democratic universities, and, to act as secretaries of these actions, to expand and make visible our successes beyond the university walls.

The examples I highlighted in this chapter are but a few of the many ways that the UNC System provides democratic opportunities for both students and greater society. A few of the more recent developments within the System includes additional practices with democratic dimensions: direct entry admission agreements between universities and community colleges, admission partnership programs with local and rural high schools, and state and federal grants and awards to assist in programming designated for at-risk student populations (Access, 2019). Even with this forward momentum, public universities continue to face a barrage of challenges prompted by neoliberal processes within public higher education and continue to grapple with their own educational policies which cater to a rather elite groups of students. These examples in this section are but some of the ways that public higher education as a system and institution can be used to create greater equity within our society. Moving forward, engaging with the oppressive practices that are also part of the history of higher education and eliminating

contemporary policies that perpetuate inequity will be essential. In the next chapter, I shift my focus from a democratic education, to neoliberalism, specifically the impacts of this ideology on the democratic promise of higher education, which I argue suppress and impede on many of the opportunities associated with a vibrant, socially just democratic society.

CHAPTER III
THE SCOURGE OF NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGIES AND THE BROAD IMPACT ON
HIGHER EDUCATION

In the first chapter of this study I provided a detailed overview of the neoliberal school of thought and how it is important to understanding current changes in higher education. In this chapter, I expand on that analysis and provide a brief synopsis of the origins of this system of thought, as well as the social, political, and cultural effects of this ideology. I analyze neoliberalism as it pertains to higher education, particularly the financial impacts of this ideology on public institutions, focusing on the institutions that make up the UNC System. I discuss three key impacts of neoliberalism on higher education in this chapter. The first are changes in funding at the state and federal level that shift increasing financial burdens on students and their families. I begin this discussion with a broad analysis of funding cuts in higher education at the national and state levels, exploring the impacts of these from the student perspective, paying close attention to the increasing monetary risks that both students and parents are assuming as part of attending college. I rely on national and state level data for this analysis, as well as data specific to the UNC System. I then explore the sharp increases in tuition and fee charges over time, further illustrating the assumed risk that students are taking in order to complete their post-secondary education.

The second impact of neoliberal ideology I discuss is the rise of for-profit institutions, specifically the impacts of these institutions on student populations within North Carolina. I utilize research at various levels to explore concerns with these institutions. I then discuss the impact of for-profit models on public universities comprising the UNC System, and highlight some of the ethical concerns related to marketing plans that target specific student populations.

In the third section, I analyze curricular changes within North Carolina that have been a result of a focus on “best business practices.” Some of these changes include diminished attention to the humanities and arts, which as I discussed in the last chapter are important for the development of democratic habits and dispositions, while others have impacted entire areas of study such as Education Departments. For this analysis, I utilize research specific to program prioritization within the UNC System to illustrate the loss of courses that have been traditionally associated with democratic outcomes either directly or indirectly. I also discuss curricula within UNC System universities to illustrate the overarching emphasis on courses that are closely tied to individual job preparation and more immediate economic stimulation, with little emphasis on courses that have traditionally been associated with democratic sensibilities.

Neoliberalism: An Overview

As I mentioned in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, neoliberalism as an ideology is rooted in liberalism. Neoliberalism as the *new-liberalism* entails a belief in the power of the free market, that is, a market free of government intervention or restriction. Given that I am interested in the democratic promises of higher education, it

seems important to acknowledge that there are some commonalities between neoliberalism and democracy in that both ideologies are interested in the idea of freedom, even as freedom is defined and described in various ways. It is not my goal in this dissertation to fully tease out the commonalities associated with these two theories, but rather to acknowledge that at times the objectives of both liberal democracy and neoliberalism, particularly those related to individual choice/freedom can and do work together; this makes the process of identifying higher education practices and outcomes specifically associated with neoliberal thought and decision-making processes more difficult to pinpoint. While I acknowledge these similarities, particularly those relating to the notion of personal freedom, which has been a mainstay of American society since the inception of the U.S., my study framework is based on Dewey's notion of democracy. Dewey troubled the liberal democratic focus on freedom and individualism without a concurrent commitment to public goods and communal responsibilities. Moreover, he argued for both economic and social interventions to create social, economic, and political justice. Like the critical theorists who came after him, Dewey argued for a social-justice oriented approach to democracy, arguing for interventions to temper an unregulated free market and the focus on individual gain regardless of the implications.

Neoliberalism in its simplest form is a belief in the power of the free market to provide consumers with the most effective and efficient goods and services. This theory rejects any notion of governmental intervention or control in the economy while promoting materialism, consumerism, and the commodification of public goods through the privatization of public programs (Giroux, 2004; Saunders & Ramierz, 2016). In the

United States the market is guided by principles associated with profitability and individual gain rather than social improvement or economic opportunity for all people. With the explicit focus on the free market, this ideology favors larger institutions who have the means and ability to eliminate competition from other smaller companies. Those institutions that most greatly influence the market therefore retain the power to dominate and produce goods as they see fit. Individuals are viewed as consumers, rather than citizens, whose worth is based on purchasing power. Consumers have the “freedom” to purchase available products but have little power to influence the products themselves since much of the production of goods and services comes from larger corporations. A byproduct of this reform is less distribution, competition, and access to a multiplicity of goods and services.

As I noted in Chapter 1, neoliberal ideology does not entail eradicating governmental programs completely, rather reforming these services to operate along free market objectives. As an ideology, neoliberalism has four driving processes which include: privatization, deregulation, financialisation, and globalization (Radice, 2013). Within higher education, faith in this ideology has not only impacted the democratic promises of post-secondary education, but also restructured the field of itself, reinforcing and perpetuating symptoms of racism, classism, and sexism to name a few.

Giroux (2008) argues that neoliberalism has “ordered American society around the discourses of racism, greed, unencumbered individualism, self-interest, and a rationality that recast all aspects of political, cultural, and social life in terms of the calculating logic of the market” (para. 3). The theory of individualism, which is a

hallmark of neoliberalism and corporatization (or more simply put a university's move toward a more corporate/private model), perpetuates a narrative that emphasized individual choice and responsibility in ways that can be used to perpetuate outcomes such as racism, sexism, and colonialism which can appear both in and out of the classroom (Jones & Calafell, 2012). This individualist approach coupled with the elimination of social programs and the restructuring of the few social programs that remain, perpetuates narratives within public higher education that favor white students through both institutionalized and systematic practices that oppress and further stratify American society based on race. Exclusionary practices that produce these types of symptoms make it all the easier and more convenient to blame individuals for their supposed failures, even when circumstances such as systematic social oppression dramatically impacts one's social mobility. This is but one example of what a focus on individualization can produce. When coupled with the deemphasis and elimination of the liberal arts (which I discuss in greater detail in a subsequent section) which offer students opportunities to grapple with social issues such as racism, we are left with policies that inhibit equity within our society and essentially eliminate opportunities for students to even discuss social issues. Instead, a focus on the free market with no emphasis on collaborative responses to complex social issues is prioritized.

Duncan (2017) also argues that contemporary higher education institutions are based on and consist of racist, colonial, and imperial epistemologies. Squire, Williams, and Tuitt (2020) expand upon these epistemologies, describing plantation politics and neoliberal racism, both of which they argue impact modern public higher education

institutions. Some of the similarities and practices between plantation politics and contemporary public higher education include:

Structural elements of knowledge (whites' attitudes about Blacks), sentiment (white domination and paternalism of Blacks), goal (profitability of Black bodies for diversity outcomes), status (hierarchy of decision-makers on campuses), sanction (punishments for not owning "whiteness" and punishment for dissent), and facility (utilization of Black production for white gain) all can be examined through this framework. (p. 14)

Aside from the colonial and racist practices influenced by neoliberalism within public higher education, sexism is also prevalent in many public higher education institutions. As mentioned in earlier parts of this dissertation, neoliberalism has repositioned students as consumers rather than citizens who expect a service (education). Not only are students cast as consumers, but predominantly male senior leadership positions (as of 2016, only 3 out of every 10 chancellors were female, with only 8% of female chancellors leading a doctorate granting institution) ("Women Presidents," 2017), have adopted neoliberal language that describes their role as one that mirrors the private sector to substantiate hefty salaries (Lorenz, 2012).

Within a neoliberal university, individual achievement is privileged over collective action. From a faculty perspective, a neoliberal environment coupled with male privilege and what Connell (2009) refers to as hegemonic masculinity can result in traits such as aggressiveness and assertiveness which are more common in a competitive, individualized business environment and can potentially pit colleagues against each other and further oppress and restrict equitable practices associated with sexism within public universities.

While neoliberalism prioritizes individualism, this ideology, particularly within public higher education, has corporatized or otherwise distorted the definition of social justice and corresponding movements (Duggan, 2014). This is problematic for issues such as those discussed above. Within higher education, neoliberalism's impact on social justice is evident when discourses of individualization, performativity, and standardization (both organizationally and curricular) impede and even discredit the critical or multi-dimensional critiques associated with social exclusion (Grimaldi, 2011) and societal issues that impact social equity and a stronger, more vibrant democratic way of life. The driving mechanism behind the appropriation of "social justice" initiatives within public higher education is an economic rationale which according to Cribb and Gewirtz (2005) contrasts greatly from the distributional, associational, and cultural ideas of social justice. Based on my personal experiences within student programming (I discuss my experiences in greater detail in Chapter 4), this is particularly problematic and is often defined by performative measures that often lack the critical insight needed for a comprehensive solution that isn't only associated with market outcomes. One example is academic recovery programs often facilitated within Student Success units. These programs are often positioned as the "safety net" for students whose academic performance is less than ideal and one of the ways that the university promotes academic inclusion of all students. And, while these programs do help students in some cases, they also sometimes channel some students into less marketable and rigorous majors. For example, I have witnessed career fairs that implicitly push students to change majors due to perceived academic ability, career options, and academic progression, that reinforce a

specific identities on students which often carry high degrees of shame, exclusion, and a lack of connectedness, all under the guise of academic inclusion.

Another issue is that program support and funding is dependent on performative and retention outcomes, while outcomes such as a greater sense of belonging, more familiarity with institutional resources, or greater self-confidence in one's academic abilities are neither considered nor reported. Occurrences such as these illuminate the impetus of social justice efforts (in this case academic inclusion) which much like social programs, have been restructured to operate along market lines, reinforcing a culture of performativity and an identity politics that has serious implications for both students and university employees.

Aside from the neoliberal impacts discussed above, one of the most direct impacts to democratic promises of public higher education in this reform is the call for greater efficiency and effectiveness, or simply put, a focus on fiscal expenditures where return-on-investment is assessed based on economic utility, with little regard for the areas of study and programs that are not directly correlated with economic demand (Braithwaite, 2017). This focus on fiscal expenditures and returns has transformed the operations of universities and greatly impacted the role of faculty, staff, and administration. More specifically, the adoption of neoliberal goals within public higher education has resulted in a changing culture which emphasizes strategic planning, performance indicators, quality assurance, and academic audits to guide all academic work and educational processes (Harris, 2005; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Raaper, 2016). Performance indicators are often individualistic in nature, focusing on productivity. Some examples include the

quantity of research at the faculty level, individual performance of administrative employees, such as academic advisors or admission representative, and larger departmental initiatives that are performance driven and encourage a competitive work environment. This entrepreneurial approach can lead to competition rather than collaboration, where the success and long-term viability of each employee is based on their individual performance, not larger unit achievements. The outcome often results in an explicit and often vacuous focus on the economic utility and output of each individual (Canella, 2014; Canella & Koro-Ljunberg, 2017; Jankowski & Provezis, 2011).

Public higher education institutions are not immune to the pressures of neoliberal ideology. Rather, public higher education institutions within the United States have been particularly susceptible to the effects of this ideology (Tight, 2019), arguably the most obvious being a reduction in public funding for higher education as a result of greater calls for efficiency and effectiveness. In the following section I explore the funding cuts to higher education and analyze the impacts of them from both an institutional and student perspective.

Budget and Funding Cuts

While neoliberal ideology has certainly impacted the social and political arenas of our society, the effects of this system of thought are perhaps most evident in the economic sector through the marketization of the state. What this means is that economic policies related to public social programs have been restructured to operate alongside the market, and thus, serve market purposes. Public education is particularly susceptible and in general is often one the first programs to be cut when economic growth slows (Turner,

2020). This susceptibility has resulted in drastic funding cuts and reduced budgets following a call for greater efficiency within the neoliberal era. Baltodano (2012) argues that “Neoliberalism in the US has transcended the realm of economic policies to become a political rationale that is undermining the major structures, processes, and institutions of liberal democracy, particularly public education” (p. 487). This is concerning on many levels, especially when we think about the relationship between public higher education and democracy.

Cuts in support for public education not only challenge the operation of institutions themselves, but also, thrust the greater financial responsibility on students during a time when students should be able to focus on their education, not worrying over how they will pay for their tuition or in some cases, attend college at all. Kandiko (2010) notes that the large-scale changes associated with neoliberalism directly affect economics of academia, effectively introducing the trend of cost sharing, placing the primary burden of educational costs and risk onto individual students. In a neoliberal sense, higher education institutions often operate based on individual goals where students are seen as consumers of a product, namely education (Read, 2009). In order to stay economically viable, higher education institutions must supply those fields of study that are most in demand, and at the same time supply the product in a reasonably efficient manner. Consistent with neoliberal ideology, education becomes a product purchased to improve an individual’s economic future, with little focus or value placed on the benefits of higher education contribute to greater social wellbeing or the intrinsic processes such as critical thought (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). This restructuring of the public programs has

encouraged competition and privatization within the public sector and has radically impacted funding models for social programs, especially those in public higher education. I discuss this phenomenon in more detail in a later section of this chapter.

Generally speaking, current funding for public higher education at the national level is below that which was available prior to the recession of 2008. Most public universities and colleges are dependent on funding from the state and federal government, and in a period of economic downturn, this funding is likely to be reduced. The economic downturn that occurred in 2008 is a good example. Higher education funding at the state level was cut by almost all state legislators within the United States (Mitchell, Leachman, Masterson, & Waxman, 2019). Like any organization with less operating capital, there is a difficult task of identifying the best strategic path forward in order to ensure continued operation. Some of the effects of declines in state and federal funding include significant tuition increases, the downsizing of faculty and staff, and course and program eliminations.

For the purposes of this study and the sheer amount of funding data available at the federal level, I examine overall funding for postsecondary education, as well as funding allocated for Federal Pell Grants within the last decade. I focus on the total amount of spending to provide a macro-level analysis of the Federal Government's spending for post-secondary education. I also highlight Federal Pell Grant spending because these grants have traditionally been awarded to those students who display significant financial need based on the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). According to a 2017 study completed by The College Board, 47% of Pell recipients

were dependent students, with 73% of dependent students coming from families with combined household incomes of \$40,000 or less (College Board, 2017).

Funding for Pell grants has decreased over the last several decades. In 1981, Pell grants covered close to 60% of average tuition, fees, room, and board for a 4-year public institution. By 2012, this percentage decreased to about 30%, half of that in 1981 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Monetarily speaking, the Federal government appropriation for Pell grants was approximately \$41 million in 2012. This appropriation decreased dramatically from 2012-2015, with the 2015 appropriation of approximately \$27 million, a 34% decrease over only 3 years. Fortunately, this funding slowly increased up to the 2017 fiscal year. From that point, funding has again decreased and Pell funding for the 2019 fiscal year amounted to \$29.9 million, which is \$11.1 million less than 2012, and approximately \$500,000 less than the 2017 appropriation (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). When thinking about educational access, these grants are essential for those students who are either independent and lack the funds to pay for college, or for those dependent students who come from households in lower income brackets. Unlike student loans, grants do not have to be paid back. Considering issues of equitable access that are important for a flourishing democracy, grants benefit the students short and long-term, especially in terms of social mobility post-graduation.

At the state level, funding decreases are also apparent. To illustrate the degree to which public post-secondary funding has been reduced at the state level, I rely on a recent study completed by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in 2018 examining higher education state funding for 49 states. The results of this study include the following:

- Of the 49 states included in the study, 45 spent less on students in 2018 than was spent in 2008
- On average, spending per student is 16% less in 2018 than it was in 2008
- 9 states reduced per student spending by over 30% over the course of 10 years
- 31 states cut funding in 2017 and 2018 academic years
- North Carolina funding for public higher education has fallen by an average of 18.6% over the course of the last decade. (Mitchell, Leachman, Masterson, & Waxman, 2018)

These decreases in funding not only illustrate increased strain on higher education institutions, but also confirm the priority shifts in social programming at the federal and state level. Looking specifically at financial information about funding for higher education within North Carolina, overall funding has decreased 18.6%, which is a decrease in per student spending (inflation adjusted) of \$2,357 over the past decade (Mitchell, Leachman, Masterson, & Waxman, 2019; Zumeta, 2010). Based on this data, NC is in the bottom 33% of the 49 states in terms of student funding. Specifically, NC is 34th out of 49 states when it comes to spending per student and investment in higher education. As a result of the funding decreases and cuts at the state and national level, universities have had to implement various strategies in order to remain fiscally operable. The most obvious of these strategies is an increase in tuition and fees, which I discuss in detail in the next section of this chapter.

Funding Cut Impacts on Student Tuition and Fees

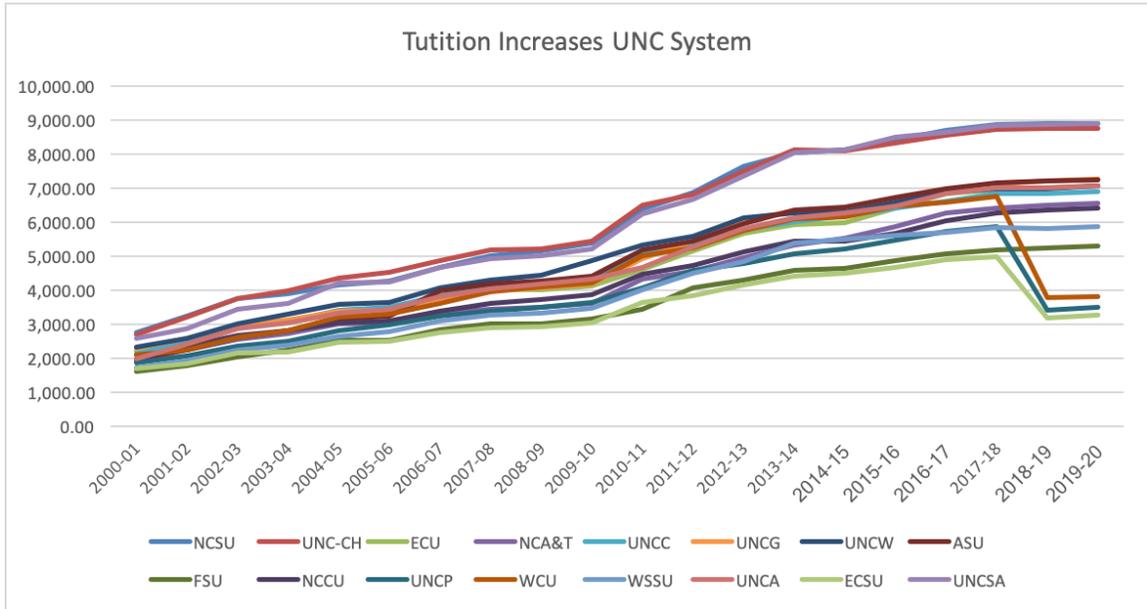
Before examining tuition increases within the UNC System, I want to briefly highlight some trends at the national level. Nationally, the average tuition rate for both public and private higher education institutions within the United States from 2008 - 2018 has risen approximately 36%, while the real median income within the United

States increased by a mere 2.1% within the same period. These rising costs, concurrent with high student loan default rates among students, with an average student loan payment of about \$400 monthly, are reason to take a close look at the cost of higher education. Rising costs mean that students who cannot afford to pay out of pocket to access the necessary education to succeed in an increasingly competitive global marketplace are denied opportunities.

In what follows, I closely examine the increasing cost of tuition and fees over 20 years, beginning in the year 2000, within the UNC System. I chose the year 2000 because this time range provides a fairly comprehensive illustration of recent changes. During this twenty-year time period, there was a stable economy, followed by a recession, an economic recovery period, and now an economy that faces uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather than look at each year individually, I highlight the macro-level percentage increases at each of the 17 schools in the UNC System. In Figure 1 below, the increases for each of the UNC System schools are illustrated. As I noted earlier, tuition and fee rates were somewhat low compared to other states in 2000. The most dramatic increases came during the recession (approximately 2008-2012) when funding was reduced, and universities increased tuition and fees.

Figure 1.

Tuition Increases in the UNC System



The smallest increase across the system is associated with three universities which are part of a program referred to as “NC Promise.” This program reduced tuition to \$500 per semester for in-state undergraduate students, though this rate does not include required fees, which according to trends over the last 15-20 years will continue to increase. Even with this reduction in tuition costs, these three universities (Western Carolina University, UNC Pembroke, and Elizabeth City State University) saw increases of approximately 136%. All other institutions saw increases of at least 200%. Tuition and fees at public institutions have more than doubled in less than 20 years, with many currently 2.5 times more than in 2000. When thinking about the rate of inflation for both operational costs and salary increases, these dramatic surges far surpass any increase to

compensate for inflation, which is approximately 1.8% based on market consensus (Taborda, 2019).

A general lack of funding has necessitated that students who are not able to pay for college out of pocket or live in households that cannot take on the cost for them, assume more of a financial burden to attend and complete an undergraduate degree. For example, the average debt per student at WCU has consistently risen each academic year for at least the last decade. For the 2015-16 (AY) academic year, this amount was \$24,148 for both graduate and undergraduate students, \$24,326 in the 2016-17 (AY), and \$24,958 for the 2017-18 (AY) (Western Carolina University, 2019). The assumption of more debt coupled with dramatic rises in tuition and fees, and various other factors is not only preventing many students from considering secondary education altogether, while leaving many students who do attend with the tremendous burden of student debt. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, nationwide college enrollments in every sector have fallen approximately 11% over the last eight years (Nadworny & Larkin, 2019). High student loan debts impact other major life decisions such as home ownership, which influences professional and upward social mobility.

The dramatic surge in the costs associated with post-secondary education mirror many of the implicit goals, or at least problematic outcomes, of neoliberal ideology. This ideology is far reaching and has encompassed all aspects of daily life. Kleinman, Feinstein, and Downey (2013) argue that neoliberalism has moved beyond a strategy to utilize for struggling public universities and has rather become all-inclusive solution waiting for an opportunity to arrive and for this strategy to be employed. The strategy is

guided by an appreciation and value for the free market, competitiveness, and public/state downsizing. Through this competition and state downsizing comes a subtle shift in individual responsibility. As a result of this lack of access and greater assumed financial burden, society becomes even more stratified and segregated based on education, race, and class, as more and more students are left with thousands of dollars in debt and limited resources to repay these debts. Shifts in public support and the lack of resources for social programming in general, are foregrounded in a capitalist model which has ensnared higher education institutions and effectively whittled away public services and programs that have benefited the public and greater society, resulting in what Giroux (2014) argues is the “near-death of the university as a democratic public sphere” (p. 16). Without financial support, many students are unable to attend college, which adds to an already large gap between the lower and middle and upper classes and further denigrates the democratic promises of public higher education.

The Rise of For-Profit Colleges

Arguably, one of the most contentious topics within the higher education industry is the rise of for-profit colleges. These institutions have been featured in the popular presses, news stories, and academic journals. In this section I analyze the rise of for-profit institutions and follow the development and impact of these institutions on the traditional promises of democracy within higher education over the last twenty years, closely considering the role of these institutions as it pertains to neoliberal ideology. I also explore the impacts of these institutions on students within North Carolina and conclude

with an assessment of how for-profit higher education complicates democracy and the democratic promise of public higher education.

Indicative of the name, for-profit institutions operate in a fashion similar to traditional businesses. Their goal is selling a service – in this case education – and also to generate a profit. This model is certainly controversial when considering the traditional democratic mission of higher education, particularly access and equity of opportunity. For-profit institutions have been around for over three hundred years. While the names of these types of operational units has changed, they initially began as proprietary schools, commonly associated with vocational programs (Morey, 2004). These types of institutions gained greater attention during the 20th century when reformers questioned the legitimacy of these schools, citing various dubious practices commonly associated with these types of institutions (Chung, 2012). Some of these practices include questionable admission strategies, a lack of transparency in operations and oversight, a lack accountability, and low graduation rates, to name a few (Vasquez, 2019; Harris, 2019). These controversies continue to garner attention at a state and national level and past tensions with these practices resulted in the formation for-profit lobbying groups which have pushed for independent accrediting bodies that are not part of regional public education accreditation groups such as SACSCOC (Honick, 1995). At the same time, despite not being held to the same standards as not-for-profit institutions, for-profit institutions lobbied to have access to both state and federal financial aid, thus effectively shifting from a purely market driven model to one that is partially subsidized by the federal government (Clowes 1995; Honick 1995).

Concerns about the practices of for-profit schools continue to present day. Low percentages of students completing degrees, high default student loan rates, and questionable operational practices linked to abuse of federal financial aid by for-profits has necessitated multiple measures to protect students and in theory ensure a greater degree of accountability for these schools. The first of these federal measures, the gainful employment measure, was enacted in mid-2015 because roughly 2,000 of the 8,637 national programs or roughly 25% of for-profit programming did not meet government standards which established debt-to-earnings measures for vocational programs. This measure was put into place to ensure that students assuming debt would not become buried in debt that they could not repay and established more rigorous accountability regulations for for-profits (Kreighbaum, 2018). The second measure is associated with student debt forgiveness if students can prove that they were defrauded by an institution (Associated Press, 2018). Students can file an application to be reviewed by the Department of Education with the allegations against the school, specifically how the school misled or engaged in misconduct that was in violation of state law and was directly related to federal student aid/loans (U.S. Department, 2020). These predatory practices alone are reason enough to scrutinize for-profit institutions currently in operation and reconsider their role, purpose, value, and contributions if any, to a democratic society or the economy for that matter.

Similar to not-for-profit institutions, for-profit institutions receiving federal aid are also evaluated by accreditors. One of the main accreditors of for-profit colleges ACICS, (Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools) has faced intense

scrutiny over their shortcomings. A recent study of this accreditor found that the 80 for-profit and not-for-profit colleges overseen had the lowest graduation rates of any accreditor (Waldman, 2016). Further investigation of the ACICS commissioners revealed that 2/3 of all commissioners had worked in an executive capacity associated with a for-profit institution while serving on the board (Waldman, 2016). Unfortunately, this lack of oversight at the accreditation level coupled with current administration's decision to rescind the gainful employment measure (Kreighbaum, 2019) and side with for-profits has left thousands of students susceptible to fraudulent practices and allows the majority of for-profit institutions to utilize predatory practices at the expense of taxpayers and enrolled students. I describe some of these practices in what follows.

North Carolina is not immune to the questionable practices of for-profits. For-profits within NC have faced numerous legal battles and employ problematic practices that mirror those at the national level. To better understand the number of students attending for-profit colleges within North Carolina, the Center for Responsible Learning (CRL) has published a variety of studies to highlight the scope and reach of for-profit institutions within the state. One of the key problems with for-profit colleges is that they often institute practices targeting the most vulnerable student populations. According to the CRL, for-profits disproportionality target and enroll African American students, low-income families, and women. As of 2018, for-profit institutions enrolled roughly 29% more low-income students than public universities, with 69% of the total student population of for-profit colleges being defined as low-income. This statistic alone might seem positive in terms of providing educational access for historically marginalized

students but given the abysmal completion rates and other statistics associated with student loan debt and default rates, the outcomes are less than ideal. In terms of race/ethnicity, for-profit institutions' student population consist of 54.5% African American students compared to the UNC System rate of 22.9%. These numbers illustrate the predatory practice of targeting certain student populations, which raises concerns, especially when there are multiple Historically Black Universities (HBCU) in North Carolina that have a long history of success for students. Comparatively speaking, the number of African American students at for-profit schools is over double that of the UNC system and when coupled with the poor completion rates and student loan default rates at for-profits, it's apparent that these practices do little to "elevate working adult students positively" which according to Devry University's is one of their main goals ("About Devry," 2020). Alternatively, HBCU's within NC enroll approximately 45 percent of African American students and award 43 percent of all bachelor's degrees awarded to African American students in the state (The University of North Carolina System, 2019; Tornow, 2019).

Within NC, for-profit institutions enroll approximately 17,890 students, while the UNC System enrolls approximately 444,462 students as of 2018 ("The State," 2019). Many of the marketing practices employed at for-profits are based on false claims that are in place seemingly solely to bring revenue through enrollment to the institution. On a national scale, this occurred at Ashford University where counselors were making false claims about requirements for potential jobs post-graduation and job opportunities. Thomason (2017) notes that "Ashford representatives were instructed to find a way to fit

a prospective student's aspirations in the school's programs, even if that program was not a good fit" (para. 6). This is problematic not only for the student in terms of life satisfaction in their chosen career, but also the more immediate desires and the relevancy of this pathway to individual interest. Students who do graduate from a for-profit institution assume greater student debt than those students attending a public NC institution. Undergraduate students at for-profit institutions on average take-out 30.5% more student loans when compared to public school students (Tornow, 2019). The more debt students accumulate, the more likely they are to default on loans. According to the CRL, for-profit graduates are 70% more likely to default on student loans when compared to public school graduates. These large loans reduce social mobility for students who have already been traditionally marginalized and further complicate major life decisions post-graduation.

The marketing practices for-profits employ are but one of the many concerns with educational organizations operating with the goal of bolstering profitability in a neoliberal model. Students attending public universities within NC are 3.5 times as likely to complete an undergraduate degree when compared to for-profit colleges within the state. Currently the UNC System's completion rate is 56.4% and while not ideal, when compared to the 16.1% completion rate at for-profits (Tornow, 2019), the difference is stark. This 16.1% completion rate measure coupled, with the predatory practices targeting students of color, low-income students, women, and veterans is the antithesis of the democratic promises traditionally associated with higher education. Instead, these

practices create additional barriers for students and restrict their abilities to participate and contribute to a democratic society.

At present, for-profit institutions continue to face some scrutiny, though in the current political administration, these concerns seem to have disappeared some from public discourses. The latest tactic that some of these schools have undertaken to sustain business and collect large tuition payments and subsidies from the government includes shifting from a for-profit model to a nonprofit (McIntire, 2015; Kelderman 2016). Rather than adhere to for-profit regulations, entities are shifting to a different business model that would potentially avoid many safeguards in place for students. To do so, these colleges must obtain approval through the Securities and Exchange Commission. While there are guidelines in place to stop for-profits from restructuring to a nonprofit entity and acting as a covert for-profit, some colleges have successfully done so with little recourse (Bidwell, 2015; Shireman & Cochrane, 2017). With this shift to nonprofit entity, comes exemption from taxation and a greater degree of difficulty when the Department of Education or IRS attempts audits. And, while these audits address operational aspects associated with taxation, there are no safeguards to ensure that students are not being targeted and taken advantage of in other ways.

Rather than equalize educational opportunity and provide students with an experience that allows for greater freedom and social mobility, these institutions further institutionalize inequality and inequities. The lack of safeguards in place for for-profits along with marketing schemes catering to specific students has resulted in the commodification of higher education and the exploitation of some of the most vulnerable

students within North Carolina. This is but one example of problematic neoliberal practices at play in the field of higher education. The democratic promise of higher education is currentted by a profit motivation. While for-profits are one reason for concern within the higher education industry right now, changes to curriculum have also impacted the democratic opportunities associated with public higher education, especially when higher education institutions begin to resemble vocational schools. In the final substantive section of this chapter, I explore the changing nature of the curriculum in an era of neoliberalism, and how these changes complicate the traditional promises and democratic dispositions associated with public higher education.

Curricular Changes within the UNC System

In the previous chapter, I discussed the democratic commitments of UNC System universities, particularly themes associated with public service and community involvement, an appreciation and culture of diversity and inclusion, and access for all students, not just those in urban areas. While the UNC system has many admirable goals that support the development of democratic citizens, it's important for universities to not lose sight of the democratic mission of higher education in favor of business practices that are framed as providing greater efficiency and effectiveness. Another aspect of neoliberal ideology that has impacted the democratic promises of higher education is a focus on accountability framed in terms of measurable outcomes, which has resulted in the denigration of some programs of study, and a focus on professional programs that are explicitly related to career paths and preparation. This shift limits the focus of a democratic education and perpetuates a utilitarian approach to education, prioritizing

those programs and areas of study most directly linked to student demand and by extension, high-profile occupations.

The call for greater accountability within higher education is not new. Over the last several decades, as neoliberal ideology has become more pervasive (often at an implicit, more than explicit, level), faith in public education has been undermined and there is public scrutiny as institutions are cast as both ineffective and inefficient. This scrutiny has included attacks on both the humanities and arts, and more recently calls for greater accountability for job-related outcomes, which has resulted in the abandonment of those areas of study that don't lead directly to jobs. The attacks on public education throughout the 1980's and 1990's mirror the more recent strategic moves by the UNC System. Baltodano (2012) argues that "The assaults against public education during the 1980s responded to the allegations of neoliberalism that schools were not responding to the needs of the economy or supporting US efforts to consolidate its leadership in the emergent global market" (p. 494). These sustained attacks have created an almost singular focus on responding to consumer demand by providing additional vocation and occupational offerings while reducing and in some cases eliminating subject areas (the arts, humanities, etc.) not directly linked to a specific occupation, which are imperative to a thriving democratic society.

One of the most obvious examples of these types of attacks was the war on the humanities during the 1980's and 1990's. During this time, political activists on both the left and right shared an interest in the humanities as a critical element of public American higher education. Hartman (2017) argues that the humanities was once considered vital to

higher learning; now it seems like a luxury. What these two groups disagreed about however, was how to define and teach the humanities within the American university - and, while activists disagreed about who should be taught, both those on the left and the right were united in supporting “education philosophies founded on opposition to economic utility” (p. 132).

During the 1990s, the UNC higher education system underwent a “Performance Review” mandated by the General Assembly in 1993. This review process was meant to encourage greater academic quality while ensuring universities were being both efficient and effective in reaching academic goals (Behrent, 2015). This process intensified within NC after the financial crisis when budgets within the UNC System were slashed and new processes were needed to guide and govern system institutions. Thus, a process of program prioritization was put into place to mitigate financial risk at the institutional level and eliminate those courses that were not explicitly linked to occupational opportunities and/or had lower enrollment than others. At the undergraduate level, any underperforming program awarding less than 20 degrees over the last two academic years or 11 degrees in one year with a combined enrollment of 26 or fewer junior or senior students was up for elimination. These stringent goals affect both small and large universities with programs such as NC State’s interdisciplinary programs in Africana Studies, Women’s and Gender Studies, and a student self-designed degree being eliminated (Kroll, 2015).

One possible explanation for the dearth of enrollment in these areas of study is the perception and rationality held by students today and the student consumer model that

many universities have embraced. Faust (2009) posits that since the 1970s there has been a dramatic decline in the number of students seeking degrees in the liberal arts and sciences with an accompanying increase in preprofessional degrees in fields such as business. With students more interested in preprofessional degrees comes the need to invest in those areas and programs of study that are most in demand, coincidentally those linked to high demand jobs, fiscal rewards, and economic utility. With this investment comes marketing. This marketization has created demand for those programs that ostensibly lead to jobs for students, while simultaneously downplaying the areas of study and programs that are more open ended. The focus on neoliberal outcomes within higher education has positioned students as consumers of education situated within a greater marketized system of post-secondary options which has resulted in trends where students are most concerned and directly focused on the utilitarian value of education and the opportunities it provides for employment (Todd et al., 2017; Molesworth, Scullion, & Nixon, 2011).

Three schools in the system were most impacted by this program prioritization process: East Carolina University, Western Carolina University (WCU), and Appalachian State University. At WCU, for example, the following programs were discontinued:

- Women's Studies Minor
- Bachelor of Arts in German
- Master of Arts in Education
- Master of Arts in Teaching/Health and Physical Education
- Master of Arts in Teaching/Mathematics
- Master of Science in Applied Mathematics

- Master of Arts in Education/Music
- Master of Music
- Master of Arts in TESOL (Ruebel, 2013).

While many of these degrees are graduate programs, the majority are teacher preparation programs which is an indication of the erosion of teacher preparation within the liberal arts at the undergraduate level. Over half of the 46 total programs either eliminated or consolidated by the Board of Governors in 2015 contained the word “education” (Kroll, 2015; Schaefer, 2015). These types of occurrences, coupled with a rise in technical programs and certificates that are explicitly linked to economic demand, further reduce democratic opportunities within public universities. These types of programs are vital to a thriving democracy and while not the most popular, each area of study has the potential to offer students democratic experiences that might otherwise not be available if the main focus remains on economic utility with little emphasis on the less tangible learning outcomes such as critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to communicate and understand differing points of view.

Appalachian State University also eliminated multiple programs, while consolidating others. The final report for ASU included the elimination of the following:

- Business Education
- Family and Consumer Sciences, Secondary Education
- Technology Education
- Music Education
- History Education

- Child Development, Birth-Kindergarten
- Romance Languages
- Gerontology
- Criminal Justice and Criminology

Similar to WCU, this list includes mostly education programs with others such as Music and Romantic Languages being eliminated.

Given financial limitations, it is likely that higher education institutions will continue to face pressure to provide preprofessional and vocational programs to meet student demand for those degrees that lead to supposed lucrative career opportunities. This move toward enrollment-based areas of study is common, where the degrees with the most demand are prioritized, while those that with smaller enrollments are at risk of being reduced or eliminated completely. This practice has the potential to completely eliminate courses in the liberal arts, which are associated traditionally associated with democratic learning opportunities and outcomes.

As if eliminating entire programs was not enough, the programs that remain in operation at public universities today are supported and valued in wildly varying ways. Within the United States, many public universities have embraced institutional and structural changes that operate along market lines. A number of scholars argue that many universities have included more institutional differentiation which has necessitated operating along research and teaching lines in collaboration with governmental funding to bolster tangible products linked to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics disciplines (STEM) (Martimianakias & Muzzin, 2015; Gopaul, 2016). The UNC System

mirrors the national phenomenon in many cases, with the most emphasis and value being placed on those departments that can either create a tangible product or whose research is highly sought at a societal or governmental level. At UNC Chapel Hill, a campus wide marketing campaign known as “Arts Everywhere” raised and donated millions to the Ackland Art Museum and PlayMakers Repertory Company while the academic arts department was not included. Students protested this campaign and lack of funding and poor facilities to bring attention to the marketing event which created the perception that the arts were being supported, while the reality was vastly different. The arts department lost two well-regarded faculty members in three years, which has left many students worrying about a lack of class options needed to complete degrees, while working in facilities that are literally falling down around them (Stancill, 2018).

Within the UNC System this focus and the macro-level initiatives contributing to these types of changes are often framed as “wins” for both the System and the university, as they are described as actions that bolster effectiveness and provide more focus and organizational stability. This is part of a national trend where courses associated with democratic behaviors and experience are “treated as an option - much like preparing to be a doctor or a lawyer or a business executive - even though becoming a citizen is not a choice but a status acquired automatically by the vast majority of undergraduates” (Bok, 2017, p. 3). While curriculum reform is an important part of strategic planning in higher education, it’s important that within the higher education system, leaders do not forgo the benefits of higher education that cannot be assessed quantitatively or measured in terms

of economic impact in favor of short-term gains tied to greater enrollment numbers or a short-term gain in operational funding.

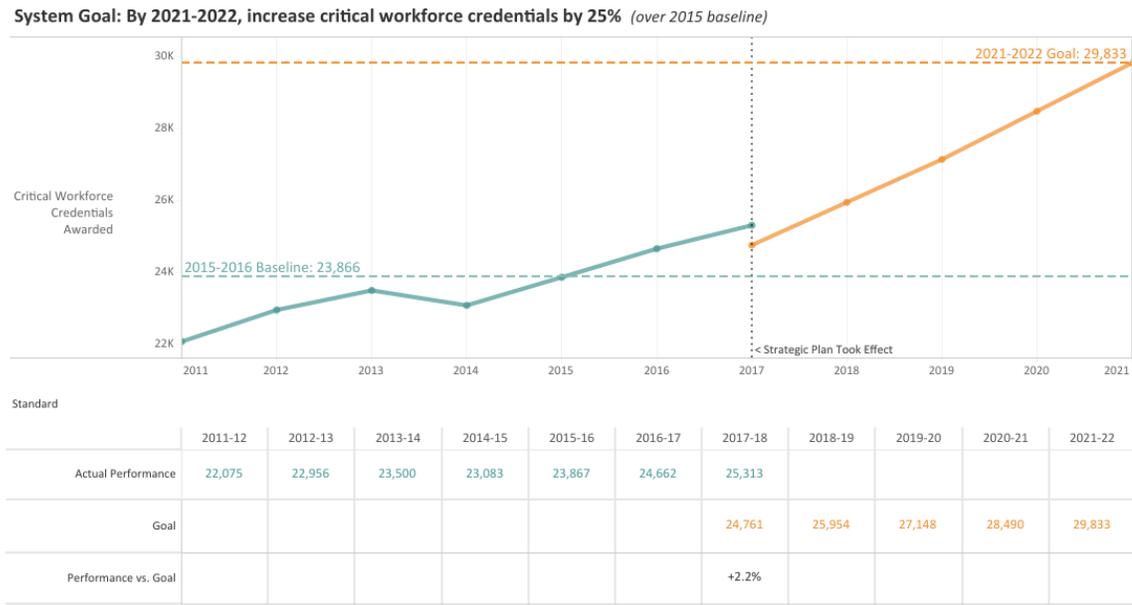
One of the challenges for the liberal arts is that they are increasingly seen as superfluous, despite the important habits and dispositions they help to develop. Within the United States over the last decade, the value of the liberal arts has been questioned by various public figures (including North Carolina's former governor, Pat McCrory) who have pushed for and supported more vocational training and a funding models based on job placement and other performance measures such as graduation rates and degree production (Fain, 2017; Kiley, 2013). Aside from system level neoliberal initiatives across the United States, senior administrators at many universities are also publicly acknowledging and supporting a career/professional marketing and operational framework. The President of the California State University, the largest public university in California with a student population of approximately half-a-million, recently shared that she believed the world is changing, and employers are sharing that they feel college and university graduates are not prepared to enter the workforce, hence, higher education institutions must be more responsive to these concerns (Harrison, 2017). While a vibrant democratic society is closely linked to a robust economy, as well as the needs of the public, from a democratic perspective, public universities must continue to foster strong relationships with the community, moving beyond the often-vacuous focus on the economic impact and greater prestige through reductive quantitative measures that are neoliberal in nature.

In addition to a lack of overall support for many Arts and Humanities Departments, the UNC System plans to increase Critical Workforce Credentials by 25% over the next two academic years. This initiative is part of a larger approach by the System to increase economic impact and community engagement. The established outcomes are part of a customized agreement specific to each UNC System institution outlining current workforce credentials and establishing long-term goals to supply North Carolina's economy by increasing the total number of undergraduate and graduate credentials in STEM, health sciences, and education ("Higher Expectations," 2017). In 2011, the System awarded approximately 22,000 credentials, but by the year 2022, the System goal is approximately 30,000; this is a targeted 27% increase over approximately 10 years. Figure 2 illustrates the proposed plan. While 27% may not sound dramatic, the visual above illustrates the tremendous growth and proposed trajectory at the System level. Of the roughly 28 certificate programs at various UNC System institutions, 25 of the 28, or roughly 90%, are explicitly related to career pathways (Strategic Planning, 2019).

The Critical Workforce Credentials is not problematic in the abstract. Education has long been associated with both the needs of the community and in part the needs of the economy. However, when initiatives such as these are at forefront of strategic plans, with metrics that are each tied to reductive quantitative measures, this focus suggests that the needs of the economy and the university's ability to produce the established number of degrees carries more weight than the actual needs of the community and by extension the greater public good.

Figure 2.

UNC System Critical WorkForce Goals



The language of this initiative is particularly neoliberal, as it includes statements such as “16 signed Performance Agreements,” “Improvement Plans,” “aggressive and realistic agreements,” “metric” and “realizing the objectives” (Strategic Planning, 2019) to describe the initiative and its goals. An analysis of this language suggests that the economic outcomes linked to greater productivity, more assessment, and the restructuring of social programs to operate along market lines are most desirable. Apple (2006) notes that educational reform policies such as this one not only increase and emphasize the ties between education and paid work, but also create “a sense of schools as producers of ‘human capital’ [which] is an equally crucial cultural agenda. It involves radically changing how we think of ourselves and what the goals of schooling should be” (p. 23).

Each of the concerns I highlighted in this chapter illustrate the growing and often implicit ways that neoliberalism as an ideology has encroached and, in some instances, prevented outcomes associated with a democratic education. Overall, the trend toward greater economic impact and a focus on improved effectiveness and efficiency through reductive quantitative assessment measures at the expense of the less tangible learning outcomes such as critical reasoning and thought, is reason to examine the current processes and future trajectory of public higher education, both in North Carolina and the national level. The examples in this chapter are but a few of the challenges we are facing within public higher education right now, in the next chapter I expand on the macro issues I discussed in this chapter and explore some of the micro-level neoliberal practices that I've experienced as an administrator within the UNC System.

As illustrated, casting students as consumers and the continued attacks and scrutinization of the arts and humanities has led to many curricula being reshaped to focus on coursework specific to a vocational field or career tract. Currently, within the UNC System strategic plan there are multiple initiatives related to economic impact and affordability. And, while the economic needs of our country and society have always been associated with public universities, we cannot forgo the many democratic benefits associated with exposure to the liberal arts, humanities, history, or civics courses.

CHAPTER IV
CURRENT HIGHER EDUCATION INITIATIVES AND THE IMPLICIT FOCUS
ON NEOLIBERALISM

In Chapter 2, I provided an in-depth analysis of the meaning of democracy, especially drawing from John Dewey's ideas, with examples of the ways in which various UNC System institutions support the development of democratic habits and sensibilities with students. In Chapter 3, I expanded upon this analysis at the macro-level within the United States and North Carolina. In this chapter, I shift to a more micro-level focus, exploring the day-to-day university operations that chip away at the democratic promises of higher education. As part of this analysis, I begin with an exploration of student success units at multiple universities within the UNC System. I offer a broad overview of the OneStop Student Service model, focusing on the organizational structure, goals, and benefits to both students and institutions. I provide a brief synopsis of 10 of the UNC universities to illustrate the organizational models currently in place, analyzing broad trends within each. I conclude this analysis by sharing my personal experiences as an employee within Student Success departments and the micro-level impacts of the almost sole focus on reductive measures that promote a performance-based environment that encourages individualism and competition. With over six years of combined experience at three UNC System universities, my experiences in these units allow me to

trace the more implicit neoliberal creep present in day-to-day operations throughout these institutions and arguably the larger UNC System.

The student success units I discuss often work closely with undergraduate academic advising and as a former academic advisor, I also examine advising practices within various UNC System institutions; highlighting current advising processes and linking the outcomes associated with current academic advising units to processes which are either neoliberal in nature or symptoms of greater neoliberal buy-in. I also describe my experiences as an academic advisor and the impacts of funding shortages on the undergraduate academic advising student experience. I conclude by linking my experiences back to issues I discussed in Chapter 3 to highlight the reach and breadth of neoliberalism within present-day universities, particularly as evidenced in a narrow focus on performance-based metrics.

OneStop Student Success Centers within the UNC System

At present, most public universities have some variation of what is referred to as a student success center. University student success centers are in place to both organize and structure university resources around common outcomes associated with student success which as I will discuss, are is commonly associated with a few distinct reductive measures which are used at the university and system level to gauge institutional success and effectiveness, as well as influence institutional funding (Resources, 2019). Much like many other processes within higher education, these centers have the potential to simultaneously benefit students democratically, but in their current state often implicitly

contribute to neoliberal outcomes associated with assessment, performance, and efficiency through a stringent focus on easily quantified results.

Student success units are typically organized in relation to the needs of the institution or university. While each unit functions somewhat differently, many centers are based on a centralized organizational model which is commonly referred to as a OneStop Shop (Smith, Baldwin, & Schmidt, 2015). In this model, the actual student success unit is housed in a single location while other departments that work alongside the student success center may be in the same building, though not in the same department. Altieri (2019) argues that these units have grown in demand due to the overwhelming student concerns and dismay associated with complex processes that are often required for students at the university, including financial aid requirements, billing and tuition charges, advising appointments, transcript requests, and registration.

Some commonly shared functions of student success centers include:

- More efficient organizational and communication channels/processes
- Greater collaboration through cross-sector alignment
- More detailed mapping of student success initiatives
- Improved data and metrics for future student success planning
- Additional opportunities for industry research
- More efficient knowledge management
- Greater opportunities to improve student support practices and policies. (Couturier, 2013)

These processes often involve collaboration of multiple departments, which if in the same physical location increases the likelihood of strong communication and collaboration by reducing what is often referred to as silos. Silos result from a lack of collaboration and

cross functional sharing of knowledge which Craig (2017) argues leads to more inefficiency and lower student success. Thus, these collaborative exchanges have the potential to develop into more efficient processes that benefit students, and by extension the institution, which simultaneously contribute to both democratic and neoliberal outcomes.

In addition to the collaborative practices this model encourages, they also impact student experience and more importantly, academic student success. According to Latino (2020), these models provide three distinct advantages to students and universities. One stop locations address student frustrations associated with complex business processes often requiring visits to multiple departments, they are student centered, and they can help to create more efficient processes, reflecting the changing needs and dynamics of current students. This mission is important to my work, because organizational models such as this one help to remove some of the challenging barriers students face when attending and working to complete their undergraduate degree; ideally they improve student persistence long-term (McDaniel, James, & Davis, 2000), as well as provide opportunities for collaboration among staff members, which can result in a more robust sense of community and shared success.

The UNC System defines student success similar to the national definitions based on student retention, graduation rates, and year-to-year persistence (Rummel & MacDonald, 2016). Within the UNC System campuses, there is either an entire division or a department in place to support students and meet the established goals for the aforementioned measures. The support personnel in place within a student success unit

typically include the Registrar's Office, Financial Aid, and Student Accounts which are often responsible for the most popular services offered within these units (Latino, 2020). In the following section, I briefly outline the organization and work of some Student Success Centers within the UNC System. Understanding the structure and processes of these units is vital to my research as these processes affect overall student success and by extension, many of the opportunities I associate with democratic learning within higher education.

The structure and organization of the student support departments I used to categorize Student Success Centers within the UNC System vary from campus to campus. To categorize institutions, I examined the location of the Registrar, Student Accounts, and Financial Aid units which are traditionally associated with a "one stop shop" and are often located within the same physical location/building. Of the 17 institutions in the UNC System, 8 were centralized, 8 were decentralized, and 1 (North Carolina School of Science and Math) which offers a residential program to high school students is a closed campus and operates differently than the other schools. The schools implementing a centralized student success model include Winston Salem State University (WSSU), North Carolina State University (NCSU), Fayetteville State University (FSU), Elizabeth City State University (ECSU), North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NC A&T), University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC), University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP), and the University of North Carolina School of Arts (UNCSA).

The remaining institutions were decentralized, with resources and services located in multiple locations across the campus. These include North Carolina Central University (NCCU), University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), University of North Carolina at Asheville (UNCA), Western Carolina University (WCU), Appalachian State University (ASU), East Carolina University (ECU), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), and University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW). The North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics is a public residential high school and thus operates differently than all other institutions within the UNC System. In the following section of this chapter, I highlight my experiences at two of the OneStop Student Service Centers to shed more light on this type of model on a day-to-day basis, both as an entry level academic advisor within a OneStop unit and a former OneStop director.

UNC Asheville's Student Success Center

I began my career in higher education at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. At UNCA I worked as an advisor within what was then referred to as the "OneStop Student Service Center." When I started at UNCA, the institution focused on improving student retention and as research has shown (Latino, 2020; McDaniel, James, & Davis, 2000; Couturier, 2013), organizational models combining multiple units in one location often bolster collaboration and reduce inefficiencies which can improve student satisfaction and success. During that time, the following departments were located within the same building, Admissions, Financial Aid, Advising, The Registrar's Office, Study Abroad, The Bursar, and the Office of Accessibility Resources. Students were able to

complete many processes in a single location without having to go from office to office to complete student processes necessary to enroll at the institution. Greater access and ease of access are especially important for traditionally minoritized students and first-generation students who may be unfamiliar with the processes required by students at the university level. Navigating processes such as choosing classes, applying for aid, registering, and finding support are difficult enough for even the most astute students who are well versed in academic operations. Navigating these systems is even more complicated for students who must balance the responsibilities of being a student with outside responsibilities such as taking care of siblings, family, or working to cover living expenses.

To provide greater context from the student perspective, an example of a student process that is often very time consuming and complicated is the student withdrawal form. At that time this was a paper form that was located within the Advising Office. The student would need to physically come to that office, pick up the form, then take the form and have it signed by the Financial Aid Office, Advising, Student Accounts, and finally turn the completed form into the Registrar's Office. Having these services in a central location that students are familiar with not only allows students to complete these types of processes more quickly and efficiently but provides students with more timely information as departments are able to more closely communicate with each other given their physical proximity. This type of model and the collaborative culture often associated with it, allows students to more successfully navigate the intricacies of university processes and eliminates the time spent taking forms to various offices in

different locations on campus. The proposed increased collaboration can also lead to discussions among units to simplify and evaluate the processes in place and create more student-centered approaches to student requirements (Piper, 2020). This collaboration can lead to greater comradery and arguably a more pleasant, fulfilling work environment with a greater sense of mutual success.

From my perspective as an academic advisor, this model did make a positive impact to students at UNC Asheville. As an advisor I was able to work more closely with those students at-risk by personally collaborating with the departments that were associated with the business processes at hand to assist students in both navigating and taking responsibility for their educational journey. This was one of the most rewarding aspects of my position as an advisor, because I felt that I was able to make a direct positive impact in the lives of my advisees which would hopefully result in them completing their undergraduate degrees, and by extension, improve the number of future options available to them both personally and professionally. My exchanges with students also aligned with the mission of the unit which was to provide the programs, services, and resources that allow students take responsibility for their own education to become informed decision makers and competent problem solvers, so that they can achieve their personal and professional goals in an increasingly diverse world (“Mission,” 2019).

The departmental mission mentioned above also aligns with many of the democratic goals I’ve discussed in this dissertation, specifically those associated with critical thinking, problem solving, responsibility, and a greater sense of community in a diverse world. While these goals were admirable, the day-to-day operations of the unit

did not always align with the expressed mission. In theory, a mission statement guides the department or institution and provides the framework by which to meet the macro-level goals or purpose of the organization, but unfortunately, at that time, the mission did little to guide the organizational goals of this unit. Instead, state initiatives often took precedence over the less tangible and more difficult to measure goals alluded to in the mission. An example of such an initiative was the creation and funding of my position when I started. While providing institutions with grant funding to add an additional advisor for transfer students has democratic qualities (i.e. providing additional support to at-risk students to bolster equity and access), the funding itself and ultimately the continuation of the position was based on institutional performance measures.

As I've alluded to in other sections of this study, student success is often defined by specific institutional measures used to gauge student performance and to some degree determine university funding. A 2016 University Business survey based on responses of approximately 100 university presidents, chancellors, and provosts showed that the top three measures most commonly associated with student success are: student retention, general academic success, and graduation rates (Rummel & MacDonald, 2016). As an advisor, the pressure to retain students often took precedence over the best interests of the students. Over the course of my time as an advisor, suggestions such as keeping students in classes at least until census day were common, while the emphasis on student retention rates after this day (which is the official census of undergraduate students, which affects funding), paled in comparison. In retrospect, it seems that the university was more concerned with securing funding than actual student success. In each of my advising

appointments, I had to juggle being a representative for the university while acknowledging student needs and providing sound academic advice. This was difficult because as a front-line employee, I saw the personal and academic, as well as physical and mental health struggles students face, many of which often resulted in outcomes that were not in line with the university's performance goals. Ultimately, I worked with students based on their best interests, however, this often meant advising students to withdraw from courses, or change majors and delay graduation, which were solutions that were not in line with the university's focus on institutional performance and not recommended from administration.

At UNCA in my position, the singular focus on measurable results such as those mentioned above seemed to be the driving force within our department. Rather than a collaborative unit focused on student success through process review and improvement (consistent with the supposed benefits associated with the OneStop model), the same academic and student processes were repeated within each department, and the focus continued to be on measurables that were reported to the greater university and state. Some of these processes began with the advising experience. As an advisor, I often worked with transfer students who transferred with over 50 credit hours. These credit hours were articulated in another office and it would have been beneficial for both offices to establish a seamless and transparent experience so that students knew what to expect. Instead, the processes were separate, and students were often left with unanswered questions since the two units worked individually. Another example was the multiple academic policies and forms that both the Advising and Registrar's Office facilitated on a

daily basis. Greater collaboration to implement academic policy processes with greater transparency would have alleviated some of the congestion and confusion for both students and administrators. Alone each process seems insignificant, but for a new student, facing multiple hurdles such as those listed above can prevent a student from succeeding academically and as result, either transfer to another institution or dropout of college altogether.

Ayers (2005) and Kašćák and Pupala (2011) argue that neoliberal processes within higher education have undermined collaborative efforts, which has resulted in diminished civic experiences for students, and based on my experiences within public universities, administrators too. I see the environment I experienced in my past role at UNC Asheville as a symptom of neoliberalism. Rather than consider or actively pursue processes that might improve student success, chasing and achieving established performance metrics reported to the greater university and to the UNC System was the primary focus. I see environments such as this as part of what Ball (2012) describes as a sweeping tide of educational reform which plays “an important part in aligning the public sector organizations with the methods, culture, and ethical systems of the private sector” (p. 216). As part of this reform, universities and individuals are most focused performance and often pressured to become more entrepreneurial in order to maintain competitiveness (Philpott et al., 2011; Raaper 2016).

This focus on performance and the changes facilitated by this buy-in changed the overall mission of student success units within the division and eliminated many opportunities for collaboration. Advising for example was one of the main departments

impacting retention, thus advisors were instructed to focus on retaining students, encouraging students to take courses full-time, and to choose a major and stick with it. Other departments such as the Registrar's office were more focused on productivity, often gauging employee performance on the number of processes completed, the time it took to complete, and resolving student complaints/issues pertaining to academic processes.

One possible reason that university leaders feel pressured to become more entrepreneurial in nature stems from a lack of institutional resources (which I explored in the previous chapter). As part of an entrepreneurial vision, the roles and purposes of educators and administrators change too. Etzkowicz and Leyedsdorff (1997) argue that a shift to entrepreneurialism within the university results in a change in organizational and individual professional values of service and altruism where market-like behaviors such as performance and competition take precedence in an effort to attract students, faculty, private funding, and faculty members. This focus on organizational performance is part of a larger phenomenon on a national and international scale where institutions through entrepreneurial practices distinguish themselves from other institutions in an effort to recruit students (Welch, 2012). The need for positive differentiation mirrors many of the marketing practices of well-known brands and products within the private sector. This approach thus redefines students "as consumers of the services which the university, as an educational corporation, provides. The university has to adopt the mind-set of a commercial provider or retailer, needing above all to attract and retain its 'customers'" (Rustin, 2016, p. 155).

Strategically focusing only on those performance metrics that are selected at the institutional and UNC System levels carries significant risks when thinking about the democratic promise of public higher education. As suggested above, a vacuous focus on performance metrics like retention and graduation rates in a competitive environment has the potential to transform the focus of the institution and prioritize processes and behaviors that can minimize student holistic success in favor of positive institutional performance. This is but one of the ways that neoliberal buy-in within a small public university impacted my role as an employee within a student success unit and how a focus on performance can overshadow opportunities such as greater collaboration among departments, less complex and bureaucratic academic processes, and greater transparency in student business processes.

Western Carolina University's Onestop Student Service Center

I also want to share my experiences as the Director of what was then referred to as the OneStop Student Service Center at Western Carolina University (WCU). This unit opened in 2005 and was part of the Student Success Division which is situated within the Academic Affairs and reports to the Provost. The division is comprised of the following units: Academic Advising, The Registrar's Office, OneStop Student Services, Office of Student Transitions, The Writing and Learning Commons, The Mathematics Tutoring Center, the Office of Accessibility Resources, and Mentoring and Persistence to Academic Success. According to WCU, "The goal of our Office of Student Success is to provide the support needed to ensure each student reaches his or her academic potential,

including identifying the right field of study and completing a degree that will lead to opportunities beyond WCU” (“Student Success,” 2019).

Most of the departments within this division are those that are student focused, providing academic services directly to students in an effort to bolster academic success while at the university. While not reporting to the same division head, both Student Accounts and at that time, Financial Aid were located within the same building, which provided a one stop experience for students. As the director of this unit, my goal was to collaborate with other units to develop and revise processes in an effort to improve efficiency, provide more transparency for students, and ultimately create a more student-centered approach to business processes on-campus.

My hope upon assuming this role was to bring departments together to improve the student experience and simplify the processes that students were required to complete in order to remain enrolled at the institution. This goal aligned with the national models associated with student success which are situated in academic affairs and bridge gaps between the classroom and other university experiences through collaboration with other departments and faculty members (Piper, 2020). As part of the change management approach I took, I established monthly meetings, solicited feedback on the processes and challenges colleagues were facing via anonymous surveys, and created more opportunities to bring key-decision makers together while providing transparency about the decision-making process for front-line employees. While I was able to create and implement changes within my own department during the 1.5 years I served in this role,

larger processes involving multiple departments remained unchanged and my efforts did little to create a more student-centered experience.

Throughout my conversations and meetings with other colleagues, I learned one of the main challenges that is arguably a symptom of neoliberal creep in day-to-day operations was the sheer volume of responsibilities that each unit had assumed, due in part to position eliminations and consolidations. These were a by-product of a rapidly changing funding landscape that is especially difficult for regional comprehensive universities, such as WCU to compete in (Mehaffy, 2010; Suppler, Orphan, and Moreno, 2018), as well as an increasingly competitive environment driven by performance metrics as a means of promoting institutional prestige and securing operational funding. During our meetings, colleagues regularly voiced concerns about an already heavy workload and the hectic daily schedules where they faced an uphill battle while working to provide day-to-day support for their staff. These pressures often took precedence over consideration for changes to student processes that could improve the student experience by eliminating unnecessary steps and creating more direct communicative channels between departments. The demands of a performance focused environment such as this one, coupled with increased efforts for data collection and monitoring systems for said performance, often consume so much time and effort, that it reduces the amount of energy needed to consider or implement improvement inputs (Elliott 1996; Blackmore and Sachs, 1997; Ball, 2003). While continuing to work toward processes that benefited students, I quickly began to understand the concerns of my colleagues, as my own role quickly evolved and grew tremendously.

Over the 18 months I served as the director for this unit, my role consistently expanded as the department and projects I oversaw were in some way all tied to student success linked to the three performative metrics discussed in this chapter. These metrics were student retention, general academic success, and graduation rates. Program effectiveness was assessed based on only a few measures, all of which were either tied to enrollment or student retention measures. For a department of three full-time employees (myself included), these additional projects and the time necessary to complete them in a productive manner took a dramatic toll. Our department handled over 20,000 student inquiries each academic year, while accepting all student payments, assisting with general financial aid questions, and advising students on academic policies and other processes.

Within the university, the other directors and I were regularly asked to do more with less, to continue to improve results each semester with fewer and fewer resources to do so, thus “improving” operational efficiency. The additional projects that I was assigned took me away from the department for long periods of time, which reduced our performance abilities by 33%, or in other words, increased my employees’ workload by 33%. What was once sporadic, soon became the norm and within a few months of being in my role, I was rarely present within my own department. My two employees were now responsible for managing email, telephone, and in-person student interactions for the entire department while balancing other responsibilities and managing their lunch breaks to ensure that there was always coverage for the department.

Slaughter and Rhoades (2000) argue that neoliberal goals linked to greater productivity along market lines have transformed the operations of public universities and the roles of employees by reducing the positive outcomes associated with the public good in favor of greater managerial control, increased productivity which is often linked to revenue (generation), as well as accountability measures associated with individual performance. My experiences as a director and the chilling effects of an inherently neoliberal culture on my employees align with the arguments posed by the scholars mentioned above, I see these changes as precipitants of the growing expectations for return-on-investment, cultural changes associated with greater control and supervision of employees, and the macro-level challenges associated with reduced resources. These factors coupled with increasing calls for efficiency and effectiveness at the state and federal levels have restructured operations within universities, while also impacting the quality of life for university employees through a performative organizational culture.

As a director, I was often held personally responsible for the success or failure of the programming I oversaw. I was reminded that I worked at the behest of the chancellor and that the fate of the role I filled and that of the department I oversaw was directly linked to the effectiveness of our programming. This culture of performance and personal accountability not only complicate employees' work lives, but similar to corporations, values and rewards greater performance, efficiency, and effectiveness, regardless of the impacts on students and employees. Crowley and Hodson (2014) and Fourcade and Healy (2007) posit that buy-in for these types of neoliberal work practices as a means of optimizing organizational and individual performance result in increased employee

turnover, reductions in peer training, and decreases in overall effort in job quality. The focus on these performative measures over the last several decades has created a culture that resembles many private corporate environments and as a result has discouraged democratic opportunities among employees as well as students. These new norms related to fear and performativity have become so deeply embedded in the organizational cultures of higher education that even identifying, let alone responding to them seems out of reach.

In addition to the performative norms neoliberal buy-in has created within institutions, the narrow focus on efficiency also carries significant costs for public higher education institutions. In my role as director, I was tasked with completing annual reports that were directly aligned with the top-down strategic plan created by senior administration. In these reports, I was expected to demonstrate departmental efficiency by illustrating how department funds were used to meet established objectives and metrics, each of which were in some way related to student retention, student success, and graduation rates. Department outcomes and initiatives that were not part of these objectives were not funded. Some of these initiatives within our department were democratic in nature and were designed around creating a sense of community through peer mentorship and student focus groups to improve student processes and gain greater student insight. To be clear, I am not disputing the need to substantiate spending of public funds, but rather to highlight how a narrow focus on efficiency can to some degree undermine a more comprehensive sense of student success. Newfield (2016) writes about how high stakes, shortsighted fiscal and financial decisions have impacted pedagogy and

student learning from a faculty perspective, and arguably, the same can be said for student success programs that are a vital piece of a successful academic experience.

This divestment in student success programs initiatives not explicitly linked to established university metrics mirrors the cost-saving trends on the faculty side. According to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) over 50% of faculty appointments are part-time and 70% of all instructional appointments are non-tenure track. As of 2011, the number of non-contingent appointments within American higher education had increased 55% since 1975 (“Background Facts,” n.d.). Much like the call for greater efficiency, doing more with less, the dramatic rise in non-contingent faculty has affected the quality of pedagogy as unreasonable demands are placed on the contingent workforce. These demands are exacerbated by a lack of employment benefits and institutional resources (laptop, dedicated office space, regular communication with colleagues), and cumbersome teaching schedules (Del Gandio, 2014). While the constraints are different for administrators, the never-ending calls for greater and greater efficiency coupled with less resources undoubtedly takes its toll on the student experience and the quality of programming provided. These are but a couple of the ways that neoliberal buy-in and the processes that ensue have impacted the day-to-day operations of two OneStop departments within the UNC System. In the next section, I highlight the impacts of neoliberal ideology based on my experiences as an academic advisor, providing greater insight on the impacts of neoliberalism and current student expectations and perceptions of public higher education throughout the academic advising process.

Undergraduate Academic Advising

Before analyzing the neoliberal challenges associated with advising processes within the UNC System, I want to briefly highlight the theoretical aspects of advising models within higher education that aim to instill in students a sense of fulfillment and encourage some of the behaviors I associate with democratic citizenship as they pertain to higher education. I begin at a macro-level by examining the most predominant and influential organization within Academic Advising, the National Academic Advising Association, or NACADA. NACADA is a well-respected organization that provides various resources and professional opportunities for advisors within the field. According to their website:

NACADA promotes and supports quality academic advising in institutions of higher education to enhance the educational development of students. NACADA provides a forum for discussion, debate, and the exchange of ideas pertaining to academic advising through numerous activities and publications. NACADA also serves as an advocate for effective academic advising by providing a Consulting and Speaker Service and funding for Research related to academic advising. (“About Us,” 2019)

I want to expand on a phrase in the statement above to better define what is meant by quality advising and illustrate what advising means within the UNC System schools. For this synopsis, I rely on research within the field of advising, specifically the theoretical research outlining the purpose and overarching goals of academic advising. I also share my own knowledge in the field, relying on personal and professional experiences as both a student and administrator at various UNC System schools.

Within the UNC System, there are two models of advising that are most common in general undergraduate advising offices. Of the 16 universities, 10 either have a developmental or appreciative advising model. Of the remaining six, methodologies for interacting with undergraduate students are varied; two of the remaining institutions employ more traditional approaches, focusing on coursework completion and requirements, while others offer intrusive and proactive practices aimed at building trust between the advisor and advisee to increase student motivation and persistence. Before taking a closer look at the day-to-day operations from an advisor perspective, I define what developmental and appreciative advising interactions entail, since the majority of the UNC System has adopted one of these theoretical frameworks.

The Developmental Advising approach is premised on the agreement that both advisor and student are partners, that is, both have a stake in the advising process and hold responsibility for the advising experience. Crockett (1985) defines this approach to advising as a developmental process that helps students clarify their personal and professional goals and develop educational plans for to realize these goals. This approach entails a decision-making process that can help students reach their maximum educational potential and involves communication, learning experiences with academic personnel, and access to campus resources.

This model, if implemented carefully with adequate numbers of advisors, has the potential to not only improve the student's educational experience, but also assist students as they navigate their future beyond college. This holistic approach is important

because advisors have the ability to help students complete their degrees, while also modeling collaborative relationships which can help students with the following:

- Help students identify and create the logic of their education,
- Help students to piece together any disconnected pieces of the curriculum as parts of a whole that make sense to the student and that they can learn from and by,
- Assist in educational choices that enhance and develop a greater sense of an edifice being self-built, and
- Teach students how to connect previous knowledge and experiences with current learning. (Lowenstein, 2005)

Similar to developmental advising, appreciative advising also values the relationship between advisor and advisee, however, the process differs in that intentional questioning on behalf of the advisor is the main objective of this approach. “Appreciative advising is the intentional collaborative practice of asking positive, open-ended questions that help students optimize their educational experiences and achieve their dreams, goals, and potential. It is perhaps the best example of a fully-student centered approach to student development” (Appreciative Advising, 2018). This model includes six phases which include disarming, discovering, dreaming, designing, delivering, and not settling (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2008). During these phases’, advisors ask positive open-ended questions to discover more about students with the ultimate goal of empowering the student to do that which they are most excited about to optimize a student’s educational experience and help them achieve their goals.

Much like course objectives and learning at the university level, the academic advising experience should also have objectives that relate to the democratic behaviors and sensibilities that I have been advocating for throughout this dissertation. Miller and

Alberts (1994) argue that meaningful academic advising experiences can contribute to: “Lifelong skills such as decision making, critical thinking, responsibility and appreciation for education” (p. 44). As best practices, these outcomes could and should be extended to building relationships across diverse audiences, navigating conversations that require negotiation and critical thought, as well as helping students to develop a greater appreciation for others and their experiences. Both of these models have the potential to provide students and advisors with opportunities to learn from each other, build relationships, and develop social responsibility and autonomy throughout the educational process. Each approach is also characterized by an emphasis on the relationship between the academic advisor and student, which from a democratic perspective is desirable because it provides opportunities for collaborative work toward a common objective.

While these advising approaches emphasize relationships, critical thought, self-development, and personal empowerment, the ever-increasing call for return-on-investment and performance in an already competitive environment has resulted in an almost singular focus on easily quantified metrics to gauge advisor effectiveness, departmental progress, and institutional performance. This phenomenon mirrors what Cannizzo (2018, 2015) refers to as performative pragmatics or public employee evaluation efforts based on performance. Before examining the ways in which neoliberal values have crept into, and complicated, the role of academic advising processes, I want to reiterate that similar to many of the examples I share within this dissertation, the focus on quantitative measures such as graduation and retention rates has both pros and cons when thinking about democracy, thus there is no one size fits all.

The institutional measures I've introduced thus far are not inherently negative. However, a performance-based culture driven by processes that focus almost exclusively on reductive institutional metrics is concerning in a number of ways. My interest in analyzing these outcomes is not to dispute the value of assessment, but rather to highlight how a singular focus on these types of metrics can downplay and diminish outcomes that are not easily quantifiable, many of which I associate with a democratic education. My hope is that sharing my experiences will shed some light on neoliberal challenges and will encourage other administrators within public higher education to begin conversations about the pressure and practices in-place that focus primarily on metrics which shift the focus from student success to institutional success.

Advising at UNC Asheville

When I transitioned from the private sector into higher education, my first position at UNC Asheville was an advising role that was a temporary position funded by limited grant funding at the state level. As mentioned in the earlier section, this position was written to assist with advising transfer and non-traditional students transferring from community colleges and universities. While the State's response to the lack of support systems in place for transfer students was hopeful (providing grant funding for positions), the possibilities for meaningful changes associated with democratic opportunities were overshadowed by excessive pressure to improve retention rates at all costs, which illuminates the priorities of the State and the great emphasis placed on return-on-investment. This instance aligns with what Tight (2018) argues is an explicit focus on performance precipitated by the adoption of neoliberal goals by education policy makers.

In this role I was charged with advising all continuing and undeclared transfer students, while working with the Office of Admission to visit community colleges and to garner interest in our academic programs. I quickly began to realize that while there was a commitment by the state to assist transfer students, the structure of the position and the objectives I needed to fulfill were in part driven by reductive metrics that could be used to substantiate the State's investment. In this role, I was responsible for advising all incoming transfer students, as well as undeclared continuing transfer students. This advising load ranged from 450-600 advisees each academic year. This advising load alone, with an average appointment of 30 minutes, would take roughly eight weeks of advising for 8 hours a day to simply visit once with each student. With this large advising load, I was able to only provide students with a very brief amount of time to discuss the direction of their college career. With this urgency, advising experiences that could have included meaningful conversations between student and advisor were forgone, while my performance and ultimately institutional success became the priority. While some students were not fazed by the limited supported, many needed additional guidance that due to time constraints, I was unable to provide. Administration made the goals of my position clear: improve retention rates for students as quickly as possible, forgoing information gathering processes that could have provided more insight about the needs of these students and the poor retention rates associated with this cohort.

At that time, I was disappointed and failed to connect the expectations associated with my role and the sense of despair I felt with a larger phenomenon. Much like the experiences I shared at Western Carolina University, the demands for effectiveness and

efficiency in an overtly performative environment were clear. As I discussed earlier, a lack of support and resources compounded with a hypersensitive focus on performance impacted the quality and effectiveness of the advising experience for students. Given the sheer needs of these students, a single position was not enough to even begin to assist students adequately. According to Arnowitz (2000) and Rhoades and Slaughter (1997), state and federal funding for higher education has steadily decreased over the last 30 years. This has not only affected tuition and fees, but as can be seen in this example, also impacts the overall quality of student programming within universities. Cuts to state funding also encourage greater competition among universities. For example, the funding for this role required applicants to enter a competitive grant application process for a chance to secure funds to provide additional support to students. While the grant funding available to selected institutions was provided by the state, the competitive process in place to secure this funding reflects competition and performance-based values that are substantiated by often narrowly defined efficiency measures that have damaging long-term effects.

Aside from meeting with roughly half of the incoming class for the university each year, my role also involved working with the Admissions Department to provide prospective students advising before they actually applied and were admitted to the school. This partnership was developed as part of a new marketing and recruitment plan at the university level. A dedicated admission representative and academic advisor would work together to increase the number of transfer applicants. As a small liberal arts institution, the university was and still is dependent on the admitted students in order to

remain financially operable. Without adequate numbers of admitted students, the fiscal operations of the institution would no longer be viable and the lack of funding by the federal and state government compounded with a lack of incoming students would further complicate an already dire situation.

Because of the desperate need to enroll students, transfer student applications were accepted after published deadlines, sometimes until the last day of the drop/add period. However, students who are admitted very close to the beginning of a term or during add/drop week, typically perform poorly and thus often either withdraw or do not return for their secondary year (“New Clues About” 2016). There are fewer class offerings and the acclimation and orientation process is overwhelming for even the most prepared. I expressed my concerns about this process since many of the students I worked with were not able to acclimate to the university in a positive manner, nor were they able to build a robust schedule with courses that aligned with their degree pathway.

This pressure to meet enrollment goals due to funding needs further complicated the democratic opportunities associated with the advising process by a sustained and often overwhelming focus on admissions numbers, which in this instance severely disadvantaged students academically, socially, and financially (especially because I was focused on recruiting more students, not helping those who had enrolled). This occurrence is part of a larger process at the institutional level which I argue is an outcome of neoliberal buy-in at the state and federal level. Saunders (2010) and Levin (2005) argue that presently all types of higher education institutions are focused on revenue generation and an institutional orientation toward entrepreneurialism. To briefly highlight

how day-to-day processes in offices like this one are influenced by performance-based practices associated with revenue generation, I briefly outline the funding process within the UNC System below.

While there are currently conversations about possible changes to the UNC System funding model, the current funding formula used within the UNC System is referred to as the 12-cell matrix model the Student Credit Hour Model (SCH). This model is based on the total number of FTE (Full Time Equivalent) and the costs associated with degree programs (“UNC Enrollment,” 2019). This model is based only on those students who are considered full-time at the institutional level. On census day, the institution reports the total number of full-time freshmen and this measure coupled with pre-determined departmental funding is used to determine the total amount of funding for the institution. If a university does not meet their enrollment goal, there are cuts to funding; over the last few decades declines in enrollment often result in dire consequences for institutions.

On a macro-level, the decreases in social programming funding evident within higher education carry significant challenges to both educators and students and put the future of our democratic way of life at risk. Performance based models coupled with decreases in overall funding are among the many symptoms of neoliberal ideology within public higher education (Ball, 2012; Callan, 2001; Cox & Sallee, 2018). These processes govern day-to-day operations at the university level and often neglect the needs and role of the student. In the case of advising, these cuts result in inadequate support systems and

resources to support currently enrolled students, alongside strong pressures to admit ever more new students.

Advising at UNC Greensboro

Aside from UNC Asheville and Western Carolina University, I also worked as a graduate assistant and assistant director for UNC Greensboro's Student Support Services. UNC Greensboro has one of the longest running TRIO programs in the United States. In this unit, I had the opportunity to work with over 200 students who were either first-generation (the first in their family to attend college) or low-income (Pell grant recipients). TRIO programs are designed to serve underprivileged students:

Through a grant competition, funds are awarded to institutions of higher education to provide opportunities for academic development, assist students with basic college requirements, and to motivate students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education. Student Support Services (SSS) projects also may provide grant aid to current SSS participants who are receiving Federal Pell Grants (# 84.063). The goal of SSS is to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants. ("Student Support Services," 2019)

The program at UNCG has a robust support system and is well established and I can personally attest to the difference these services make in the lives of students. My former colleagues and I worked diligently to provide students with the resources, support, and opportunities to flourish during their undergraduate education. And, while we were able to offer opportunities that in many cases imparted in students skills such as critical thinking, conversations with other students across lines of difference, and social events that contributed to a greater sense of community, similar to other challenges faced in

higher education, the reporting and funding process in place at the federal level prioritizes reductive metrics to gauge departmental success.

While the TRiO department at UNC Greensboro has to a large degree been able to provide students with democratic opportunities, the department must still adhere to the performance-based application process at the federal level to secure funding. This process is based on student retention and graduation rates, effectively sorting and selecting the highest performing programs, which can ultimately lead to unhealthy forms of competition. The current federal grant application process for TRiO programs is not only competitive, it favors the highest performing programs who either met or exceeded their agreed upon targets and objectives by granting PE (Prior Experience) points during the application review process (Dortch, 2018).

While I am not arguing against transparency and effectiveness when it comes to public funding, stringent processes such as this severely disadvantage institutions that would likely benefit from these types of programs the most. Community colleges and regional comprehensive universities, for example, often have more accessible admission policies and more affordable tuition rates (Suppler, Orphan, and Moreno, 2018) which can draw a diversity of students with varied backgrounds. This diversity of students includes those students whose academic performance may not have been sufficient for admission to larger, research or flagship university, as well as who may have academically qualified for a research institution but were unable to afford higher tuition and fee rates. According to Chetty (2017), regional comprehensive universities are more effective at promoting upward social mobility for low-income students than are private or

flagship institutions. Application processes such as this, favor those institutions with students whose academic performance is highest, thus limiting social mobility opportunities for students who might struggle academically and would benefit most from additional academic support programming and resources.

Even though the program supports students from traditionally minoritized groups, the reporting aspects of the program lack a focus or emphasis on democratic opportunities. For example, as the assistant director for tutoring, I was charged with providing tutoring services that bolstered academic success, improved retention rates, and contributed to higher graduation rates for traditionally marginalized students. Focusing on these measures is not necessarily negative, however, federal government reporting templates illustrate the vacuous focus on achieving quantifiable results that fully determine the funding of the department. To provide a better idea of the reporting process at this level, I share a small portion of the semester report for the services I oversaw.

Table 1.

Federal Reporting Sample for TRiO Programs

GOAL/OBJECTIVE	ACCOMPLISHMENT
<p>FALL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet 70% of requests in eligible courses • Conduct check-in meetings with 50% of new SSS students • Number of students out of (total #) in academic distress as indicated by a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or lower that completed an academic progress appointment with the Assistant Director of Tutoring Services • Number of students in academic distress that utilized tutoring Services upon completing an academic progress appointment with the Assistant Director for Tutoring Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 85% of SSS participants received a passing grade in courses tutored • ~41% of SSS participants involved in tutoring received a B or higher • 2 SSS students were hired as tutors
<p>SPRING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet 70% of requests in eligible courses • Conduct check-in meetings with 50% of new SSS students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 83.55% of all eligible tutoring requests were met. • Check-in meetings were conducted with 22.55% of students who submitted tutoring requests.
<p>SUMMER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet 70% of requests in eligible courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 57% of all eligible tutoring requests were met. • ~67% of SSS participants involved in tutoring received a B- or higher

This stringent application process coupled with reductive performance metrics aligns with what Amsler and Shore (2017) describe as the “responsibilisation of the

university,” which is an authoritarian approach based on low trust of employees and greater monitorization. Outcomes and objectives are structured, planned, and monitored to mitigate risks and employees have very little autonomy in how to operate, teach, or evaluate teaching and programming which results in a “non-democratically developed matrix of standards, strategies, and objectives that determine what is ‘recognisable’ (expected) academic activity” (p. 135). This is problematic because as it stands, the objectives and metrics in place within the evaluation and assessment process for these types of programs do not include democratic measures. Learning outcomes such as the ability to critically analyze and understand multiple perspectives or clearly communicate ideas to others are not included. Reliant upon maintaining funding for the program, and ultimately each of the positions within the program, administrators are coerced to focus on the metrics that influence program performance while others, such as those mentioned above are left to chance. This of course leaves students vastly underprepared to participate in processes that are vital to a democratic way of life and puts the health and future of our democracy at risk.

This is just one example of the practices within Academic Affairs that both bolsters student success, while promoting habits and outcomes that align with neoliberal ideology. While TriO programs offer various benefits for students from an academic perspective, more overt democratic outcomes such as critical thought, a sense of belonging, the ability to interact and communicate one’s thoughts in an effective manner, need to be added to provide students with a more holistic support experience. Additionally, modifications to the application and award process that take into account

the student population of the university or institution applying for funding need to be added to prevent those schools that are often most accessible for traditionally minoritized student populations an opportunity to procure additional resources that can help their students succeed personally and professionally.

Looking Ahead – Challenging Neoliberal Policies within Public Higher Education

Within this chapter, I've discussed some of the implications of neoliberal policies on academic and student support programs, university employees, and the culture and environment within public higher education institutions in North Carolina. As I've shared, my experiences are part of a larger narrative that reflects neoliberal ideology associated with greater managerialism, performativity, and a narrow focus on efficiency that impacts the overall quality of academic programming and student success. On a national level, many scholars have shared possible responses and ways of pushing back on the impacts of neoliberalism within public higher education. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I explore some of these recommendations and argue that critical hope, greater collaboration, and other varied strategies can help educators to respond to neoliberal policies while promoting opportunities and conversations for democratic sensibilities within students and the greater university community.

CHAPTER V
RESPONDING TO NEOLIBERAL CHALLENGES – REVITALIZING HIGHER
EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

In the previous chapters, I have written about and examined the historical and contemporary missions of public higher education institutions, the ways that neoliberalism has affected these missions, and the micro-level implications of neoliberal practices from an administrative perspective within the UNC System. In this final chapter, I shift my attention back to the impetus of this dissertation, which entailed bringing together literature associated with the democratic mission of higher education, neoliberal ideology, and some of the common academic/student processes within public higher education and the UNC System, as a way of rethinking and identifying spaces to revitalize the democratic visions of higher education. In what follows, I offer some key findings from my study and answer my research questions. I then examine some of the approaches that have been used to push back on neoliberal ideology and reclaim some of the democratic benefits of higher education and share my reflections about these approaches. I conclude with recommendations for future research, as well as some of the most personally significant things I've learned from this dissertation process.

Key Findings

Throughout this dissertation, I have presented various examples of both democratic and neoliberal approaches to higher education, which in some cases occur

simultaneously. As part of this analysis, I examined the historical and contemporary purposes of public higher education. While there have been significant changes in university operational processes, many of the tensions that occurred historically are still present and relevant. Public universities continue to some degree at least to offer students opportunities to cultivate and practice democratic habits in both their personal and professional lives, as well as learn to work with others collaboratively, ideally toward the betterment of society. Much like the historical democratic mission of public universities, modern public institutions also contribute to the greater community and public good (Benson & Boyd, 2015), whether by expanding educational opportunities to marginalized populations, producing research and knowledge to improve living conditions, or through localized partnerships to improve the quality of life within the community.

While there has always been tension associated with the myriad goals of public higher education, neoliberal policies precipitating deep budget cuts to social programs, increases in student tuition and fees, the rise of for-profit colleges, and significant attacks on the value of the humanities and liberal arts present unique contemporary challenges for public higher education. Many of the student policies and processes within modern public universities are the result of increased accountability pressures, including an emphasis on greater return-on-investment, individualism, and the restructuring and defunding of social programs to operate along free-market lines. These practices continue to encroach on the democratic promises of public education (Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Neoliberal ideology not only the backdrop to many of the macro-level operations of public higher education institutions, but it also affects the

micro day-to-day operations of universities. In some ways, this pervasive ideology has created greater division and stratification within universities, polarizing entire departments who are forced to compete for scarce resources, while contributing to a culture of individualism and personal responsibility for success or failure (Crowley & Hodson, 2014). As part of the greater call for measurable and quantifiable return-on-investment (through metrics such as retention and graduation rates, and post-graduation employment and salaries), a culture of performance and stringent accountability measured by reductive metrics is emphasized, which has created an increasingly competitive work environment and affected how employees do their jobs, as well as why they do them. Aside from these byproducts, other inequities associated with racism, classism, and sexism are perpetuated by the prioritization of individualism and the competitive environments created by neoliberal policies. This narrow focus on accountability and performance creates even greater tension as college educators deal with high levels of pressure to perform while attempting to support and prioritize student needs with less time and resources and create sustainable, long-term solutions that address the historical and modern institutionalized oppression that public universities perpetuate.

These day-to-day impacts coupled with the invasive nature of this ideology and the difficulty associated with isolating and pushing-back on the effects of neoliberal processes necessitates an organized and well-informed populace to reinvigorate and reimagine the democratic possibilities for public higher education. In the subsequent portions of this chapter, I first answer my research questions. I then highlight and discuss

recommendations for identifying and pushing-back on processes that chip away at our democratic way of life as a means of creating a more equitable, socially just democratic society and future. The approaches I discuss are meant to contribute to a larger conversation about the urgency and importance of democratic citizenship within public higher education. And, given our current circumstances, these conversations and the approaches scholars suggest to reclaim some of the democratic promises of public higher education are incredibly important not only for the future of democratic learning within universities, but also for the long-term viability of our democratic way of life and the future of the United States.

Research Questions

To identify the spaces where we as educators might interject and create opportunities for democratic habits that reinvigorate the democratic promises of public higher education, my research was guided by three research questions:

- What are the democratic goals associated with the mission of public American higher education institutions, both historically and presently?
- How have the changes within public American higher education precipitated by societal changes and demands for “return on investment” compromised the democratic promises that have historically been part of higher education?
- How can public higher education administrators respond to the challenges posed by neoliberal policies within higher education institutions?

My first research question helped me narrow the focus of my analysis of the historical and contemporary democratic goals of public higher education. Through this

analysis, I found that in many ways, public universities continue to strive for the same or very similar outcomes associated with a democratic way of life as was part of the founding of colleges and universities over 300 years ago. While the ways that universities contribute to the public good have changed, the relationship between public higher education and the public is still apparent. I was surprised by my findings because my assumption was that the ways that universities promote democratic sensibilities in students would have changed over the last 300 years, but in general, opportunities for democratic educational practices resemble many of the same historical practices established in the first public universities. Within both the historical and contemporary missions of public universities, I identified a commitment to the public good which as I illustrated in Chapter 2, is both relevant and present in modern universities within the UNC System. A commitment to the greater public good is most evident in the call for teaching, research, and service that provides opportunities for collaboration, critical thought, and service all coalesced around the hope for a higher quality of life for both students and the greater society.

Through my review and analysis of the historic and contemporary mission of higher education as it relates to democracy, I identified multiple predominant democratic goals that public universities are well poised to deliver. The first of these goals from a historical and contemporary perspective is associated with access to higher education and greater opportunities for social mobility. Through greater access to public higher education (though I realize access then and at present is still not equitable for all people), individuals were to larger degrees able advance their learning and improve their social

mobility as a citizen in a democratic society. As was evident in my historical analysis of the UNC System, many universities began as teaching colleges that extended public higher education opportunities to the working classes, including women and African American students. These teachers taught in their regional and local communities to educate others who previously did not have access to a formal education.

Today, we still have work to do when it comes to higher education access, however, public higher education institutions do provide greater access to more people than would private institutions alone. Moving forward, focusing on the educational policies that attend to and minimize the systematic oppression of traditionally minoritized populations is of paramount importance. Ensuring access to higher education is not enough. As was illustrated in the 19th century, access to public higher education is not enough if the experiences are not equitable among all students; we need to be ever vigilant about educational policies that simply focus on access alone, instead focusing not only on greater access, but policies within the university that support all students equitably.

Another of the goals that was most predominant both historically and contemporarily was the importance of students developing the capacity to think for themselves and to think critically about the world around them. In my analysis of the UNC System, each of the individual institutions alluded to cultivation of critical thought skills in students. Critical thought is vital to informed citizenship in a democratic society and directly impacts the ability to have dialogue with others, act creatively, and problem solve, all of which on a macro-level affect the overall health and vibrancy of a

democracy. The third goal that is both present in both the historical and contemporary missions of public higher education is the emphasis placed on shared success through a sense of belonging and community. Public higher education institutions have the ability through teaching, programming, and organizational methods to illustrate how and why we must work together to create a brighter future for everyone, how our individual fates are tied to those of our fellow citizens. In historical universities, some programs were organized around community needs while others were politically and socially driven. Presently, universities have tremendous opportunities to support local communities through the creation and production of research and knowledge that can be used to not only build stronger school and community partnerships, but to dissolve barriers between the university and the local community while enriching our greater societal knowledge base.

Through my second question, my goal was to better understand and, in some cases, uncover the ways that decreasing public support and greater calls for efficiency and accountability have impacted the democratic promises of public higher education. In this analysis, I found that state appropriations to public higher education have dropped precipitously over the past several decades, placing increased financial burdens on individuals and in some cases, crippling public universities. This lack of sufficient funding impacts student tuition and fee rates which have dramatically surged over the last 30 years (Boyington & Kerr, 2019; Turner, 2008).

Not only has the price of a public education increased, for-profit colleges have emerged and further encroached on the democratic promises of higher education. These

for-profit models tend to focus on technical training programs that ostensibly provide job skills for students, but there is little evidence that they also teach democratic habits or broader social commitments. Moreover, these institutions typically target the most vulnerable student populations, saddling many students with loan debt that actually restricts personal and professional upward mobility and overall quality of life for many (Angulo, 2017; Phillips, 2017). Along with a growing vocational focus in higher education there has been significant scrutiny of subjects that don't lead to easily measurable outcomes and that are not related to job skills, especially programs in the humanities and liberal arts. Courses in these areas have traditionally been associated with the holistic development of individuals and the cultivation of democratic habits, such as deliberation, critical thought, and imagination. This scrutiny of traditional general education requirements, coupled with the shift toward more technical, skill-based programs reduces and, in many cases, eliminates educational opportunities vital to a healthy and vibrant democratic society.

The third and final question that guided my research has to do with the ways that educators and administrators can respond to the challenges created by neoliberal ideology and policies that focus on neoliberal outcomes. In latter portions of this chapter, I build on my analysis of problems and answer this question, presenting multiple approaches for responding to current neoliberal challenges. The first, democratic hope, is a prerequisite of the strategies I suggest. Following democratic hope as a precursor to the reclamation of the democratic promise of public higher education are strategies which start with building collations through a more intentional focus on a shared sense of fate and

community. By building coalitions, educators can utilize strategies that address larger more systemic issues such as the divestment in higher education, curricular changes, a performance-based culture, and higher education as a sellable product.

Strategies that address these macro-level challenges include the re-envisioning the funding of public higher education, where public higher education is public and private good which can be accessed by everyone, not just those who can afford it. The second strategy involves improving and building public trust in higher education institutions by becoming more actively involved and accessible to local communities. I see this as a starting point that can be used to push-back on the performative, product-based environment that most public universities are currently mired in. The last of the strategies I recommend is the reorganization and restructuring of the non-democratic operational apparatuses that are marked by greater managerialism and have reduced the quality of programming, learning, and the sense of purpose and work satisfaction for educators. However, before exploring these strategies in detail, in the following section I highlight my main conclusions based on the research presented in this dissertation.

Discussion and Conclusions

As mentioned above, I had three research questions at the outset of this project. In the previous section, I briefly responded to each question. In this section, I present some of the broader conclusions of my dissertation research more substantively. My goal in doing is to bring together some of the ideas I have been discussing throughout this dissertation related to the dangers that neoliberalism poses in terms of democracy as well as offer tangible, pragmatic strategies that higher education faculty and administrators

can utilize to pushback and reclaim some of the democratic opportunities associated with public universities.

Public institutions and universities have existed for over three hundred years and in the course of that time, have served students, local communities, and greater society in many ways (Harkavy, 2006; Kahlenberg & Janey, 2016). Some of the outcomes associated with formal education include, improved literacy and overall general knowledge, both of which increase citizen participation in self-governance and the development of societal solutions to challenges, enable economic gains and workforce development, and contribute to research and development that impacts the global community. Many of these outcomes are democratic in nature and directly impact the vibrancy and future of a democratic society. However, as illustrated in Chapter 2, the history of public higher education is fraught with exclusionary practices that have served to maintain and perpetuate privileges afforded to a small group of the most elite. At present, we also face similar issues of systematic oppression, however, I see the oppressive practices that have plagued higher education as a unique opportunity to utilize the institutional system of public higher education to create substantive, equitable, socially just educational policies that can create a stronger, more vibrant democracy.

Public universities offer a distinctive opportunity for students to come together in a single location to not only study academically, but to learn from each other, to hone critical thinking skills, and examine their own beliefs and philosophies. Dewey (1939) argued that schools are uniquely positioned to provide opportunities that develop and reinforce democratic values and practices. Dewey saw schools as one of the few ways to

provide students with opportunities that enhance social equity, connectedness, a shared sense of purpose and fate, and social engagement as it relates to a more socially just society.

The critical democratic model I argue for in this dissertation is not self-propelling and we must continue to focus on revitalizing the promises of public higher education in order to cultivate the habits and dispositions of engaged, informed democratic citizens who are committed to improving our society and creating equitable structures and policies. For our democratic way of life to continue and further develop, citizens must participate in processes that are sometimes time and labor intensive, uncomfortable, and deliberative. Democracy as a way of life is only as strong as those that participate. And, to participate effectively citizens need to develop the critical thinking skills needed to work through complicated situations and cultivate the ability to hear and respect others whose views differ. Democratic opportunities within higher education must not only continue to be made available but moving forward we as educators and citizens must refocus and revitalize these opportunities, making them a priority. In this dissertation, I have advocated for the critical democratic model commonly associated with John Dewey (Crowley & Apple, 2009). This process is in no way guaranteed or fixed and our current democratic way of life, including the potential for a more equitable society that meets the needs of more individuals, not just those in dominant groups, is directly enhanced by democratic habits commonly associated with public higher education.

In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, I examined the origins of neoliberalism, the values behind this ideology, and some of the impacts of neoliberal processes within

public higher education institutions. Public universities are not immune to the pressures of neoliberalism, nor have they resisted the neoliberal processes that cast students as consumers and contribute to a culture of individualism and economic merits above other goals often associated with public higher education (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Saunders, 2010). The adoption of neoliberal policies cannot be traced to a single cause or individual; chancellors, for example, are not directly responsible for university processes that emphasize neoliberal values. These policies are a result of various factors, most notably the pressure to stay economically viable in a context where state support has diminished. Gray (2016) argues that that economic forces outside of the university are but one of the many factors that have contributed to the reshaping of academic life for both students and the employees of public higher education institutions.

In Chapter 4, I discussed some of the more micro-level, day-to-day neoliberal changes in higher education from an administrative perspective; the impact of this ideology on both employees and students is significant. Many of the examples I shared were specific to either Advising or Student Success. Lockford (2017) highlights many of the effects of neoliberalism on a macro-level within the university in a parody of a university admission letter, and while comical and exaggerated, the letter echoes many of the challenges that this ideology creates for public institutions.

We are on the cutting edge of what's new in the modern university. *You* wouldn't buy something that was useless, so *we* don't want to sell you anything that can't be monetized... These times make obsolete the passé model of having viable programs across a range of disciplines. The performance-based budgeting models newly instated ensures low-yielding programs will be eliminated. (p. 362)

This satirical admission letter points to increasingly commonplace practices within public higher education. As I examined in previous chapters of this dissertation, neoliberal ideology is pervasive in modern public universities. Some of the effects of neoliberalism include the divestment in funding and support for public higher education, a culture of performativity within many universities that emphasizes quantity over quality in many spheres, and a trend toward creating more vocational and technical programs while at the same time paying diminished attention to the humanities and liberal arts. To reinvigorate or even maintain the democratic promises of higher education, educators must not only critically analyze everyday practices, but also challenge the status quo. One of the most difficult aspects of pushing back on neoliberal processes is the invasive and pervasive nature of this ideology. While this invasive nature at points seems overwhelming, we must find ways to move beyond simply accepting changes as inevitable and instead establish collaborative processes and coalitions that enhance and encourage the democratic elements of public higher education. A possible starting place begins with an examination of daily processes through a critical democratic lens. While external processes are often out of the control of educators and even administrators, analyzing our own actions and responses to situations is within our control. Through critical reflection we can build grassroots approaches to challenging neoliberalism that have the potential to reinvigorate democratic outcomes within public education institutions. I discuss some of these possibilities in the next section.

Recommendations for Practice

Throughout this dissertation I've discussed troubling issues that affect not only higher education institutions, but our daily lives and democratic ways of living. The effects of these neoliberal practices extend far beyond the walls of any institution – and, as illustrated the breadth and reach of neoliberal ideology, the processes that result cannot be easily discerned or traced. The result of this macro-level invasiveness can leave even the most optimistic person feeling overwhelmed and not sure of where to begin when thinking about ways to approach inequitable processes that emphasize neoliberal values and educational outcomes, in contrast to more democratic ones. However, even with the seemingly bleak outlook, there are multiple ways that we can push back on pervasive neoliberalism within the university and in turn, create more opportunities for democratic learning and habits in both students and our organizational culture.

The recommendations I suggest for practice are not all encompassing, nor are they one size fits all. Instead, these recommendations reflect a pragmatic approach to challenges of neoliberalism and can be implemented as a way to shift the trajectory of higher education while we imagine even more substantive changes. The first of my suggestions, cultivating democratic hope, is a precursor to the other strategies I recommend and involves a concerted effort to identify, promote, and implement processes that cultivate a greater sense of democratic hope. The first of the strategies I recommend is an intentional focus on building an organizational culture of collaborative practices which encourage critical inquiry, participation and feedback of all employees and students, and as well as a sense of shared success. Other strategies follow from

creating a culture conducive to collaboration and community. These include making public higher education more accessible by changing public education funding; being more intentional about collaboration across divisional and organizational lines and re-envisioning the performative, competitive based culture that has become the norm within the majority of public universities through changes in curriculum that promote critical inquiry and reflection, and which create opportunities to regain public trust in public higher education through service learning.

Democratic Hope

Merriam-Webster defines hope as “to cherish a desire with anticipation: to want something to happen or be true” (Merriam-Webster, 2020), or more simply put a longing or want for something to come to fruition. However, the definition above does not imply action or effort, rather hope when defined as a simple want is just that – a desire for something, but no effort made to obtain whatever it is an individual might want. When referring to hope in this way, the concept is a lot like wishing, in that both are characterized by a lack of action for the desired outcome. Much like democracy, hope itself isn’t self-propelling. To be hopeful is to not only believe up to a certain point that something is possible, but that the individual or group is willing to exert effort to obtain the desired outcome. And, when thinking about the democratic promises of higher education, those processes that cultivate and reinvigorate democratic habits within both educators and students, an intentional willingness to act and participate in the shaping of a better tomorrow is essential to fully realize a more vibrant, socially just democratic organization and society.

John Dewey's approach to democracy was pragmatist. He believed that through cultivating democratic habits, people have that have the power to reshape the world to work for all of us, not just dominant groups (Dewey, 1939). These habits include critical thinking, deliberation, collaboration, and action that is analyzed through a democratic lens. Hytten (2019) argues that our everyday actions associated with democratic habits and dispositions have the potential to create new and different ways to not only transform our world, but to reconceptualize ways of living and being together. She refers to these concerted actions as part of building democratic hope and similarly, I see this disposition as the precursor to more pragmatic strategies that can be used within public universities to revitalize the democratic promises of public higher education. Given the potential opportunities to develop and reinvigorate democratic habits within universities, the disposition of hope is necessary to guide our efforts as we continue to shape our democracy.

My definition of democratic hope reflects critical intersections. Using a critical lens coupled with a thorough understanding of what a rich socially just democratic model entails not only helps us uncover areas in which change is possible, but the critical elements can help us to identify the impacts of our own actions through thoughtful reflection. Bishundat, Phillip and Gore (2018), Dugan (2017), and Duncan-Andrade (2009) argue that critical hope involves an individual's ability to assess their environment through a lens of equity and justice, while maintaining possibilities for a more equitable, socially-just future. Similarly, Dinerstein (2015) and Monticelli (2020) also allude to the power of hope from a critical perspective. They posit that critical hope or hope that

examines alternative ways of organization, production, and reproduction opens up doors for affirmative and creative action. This critical hope aligns with democratic hope in that both offer new ways of being and doing that are based on examining current circumstances and using socially just lenses to create a more-equitable society. While Dinerstein's (2015) research responds to the challenges of capitalism, the re-organization and reproduction of solutions that challenge capitalist outcomes could be used to push back on the inherently neoliberal processes and policies currently found within public higher education.

Our critical realizations when shared with others may disrupt the "norm," and as educators we have to be prepared and aware that pursuing democratic outcomes and revitalizing habits and behaviors associated with a socially just democratic way of life is not only challenging but, at times extremely overwhelming on an individual level. To minimize feelings of defeat and improve our effectiveness we must work together, with other faculty members, educators, and administrators to support each other and foster a culture of inclusivity and communal success (McGee & Stovall, 2015). A belief in human potential is important when creating a greater sense of community through collaboration. In the next section of this chapter, I discuss the importance of collaborative processes and illustrate a few of the ways that faculty members, students, administrators, and community members have worked collaboratively to effect positive changes within public universities.

Collaborative Practices within the University

While democratic hope is a necessary prerequisite for administrators to reclaim the democratic promises of higher education, collaboration is also equally important. Collaboration coupled with organized action is and continues to be one of the most powerful ways that administrators and higher education practitioners can speak back to neoliberalism within public higher education. The process of working together to achieve a common goal/s with a sense of shared success rather than individual achievement is the crux of a socially just vision of democracy. In what follows, I illustrate some of pragmatic strategies that are both collaborative in nature and focus on creating a more socially just, democratic university environment and by extension, more democratically robust national society by which change has been accomplished through concerted efforts coalesced around a sense of community and shared action.

A core component of both the historical and contemporary mission of public higher education is the commitment to community and public service (Rosenburg, 2019). Yet even with this commitment, partnerships with corporations and private entities seems to be predominant and Bok (2003) contends that if corporate influence and interests in public higher education is not brought under control, the overall of mission of public higher education is at risk of being lost completely. Sustaining the public mission and vision of higher education necessitates organized, timely strategies to reclaim public interest in public higher education. One of these strategies is to promote greater collaboration both internally and externally as a way to gain momentum and bring attention to privatization of public higher education.

The performative environment I described in Chapter 4 is not uncommon in many public universities today, as institutions are met with increasing pressure to gain greater public visibility through conspicuous, quantitative measures of performance. This leaves democratic opportunities to chance, which Thomas (2010) argues has resulted in misconceptions and dearth of opportunities within public higher education and has created a *nation of spectators*, especially in terms of communication skills, collaborative processes, and civic literacy. He proposes two broad recommendations to ground higher education institutions more civically: dialogue among faculty, staff, and students aimed at promoting deliberative democracy within higher education, and, more modeling of democracy within higher education institutions with the realization that universities are not democracies, but the representation and power dynamics within the institution must be redesigned in a way that not only resembles a thriving democratic society, but is also where power is distributed in a more equitable manner.

Giroux (2006) argues that while dialogue that draws attention to the market-based values of the university is a start, on a macro-level our critical analysis and collaboration should be directed at critically analyzing and highlighting the relationship between public and corporate interests, while prioritizing citizen rights over consumerism. To accomplish this goal, our collaborative efforts must move beyond the university. One example of the internal and external efforts faculty members, other university individuals, and the external community members was at UNC Greensboro, where faculty members called attention to a sizeable shift in the operational and managerial aspects of the institution. Jovanovic (2017) highlights one example of the power of the faculty voice at the

university level. She illustrates how faculty members at her campus worked together to organize “against this injustice by mobilizing the passions, concerns, and love for the university that we saw slipping away from our hearts and minds” (p. 330). This mobilization was in response to years of corporate practices within the university, a newly launched academic review process that had no safeguards to ensure academic quality or public interests. Coupled with a long running history of neoliberal practices was the resignation or termination of over 60% of the communications department staff at the behest of a newly appointed head of communications. These employees communicated concerns about a hostile work environment to Human Resources and following this report, three employees were charged with felony criminal charges and one employee was even led out in handcuffs. These actions, according to Jovanovic, who was the faculty chair at the time, lead to a breaking point.

In response, faculty members worked together communicating concerns and disapproval to senior administration, UNC System representatives, and state legislatures. They also raised money for attorneys, started petitions that were signed by hundreds of campus and community members, and passed multiple Faculty Senate Resolutions. This example illustrates the power of collaborative efforts within the university and greater community and illustrates the unified action can create positive change. What began as a faculty call to action soon included the larger campus community, and eventually the local community, bringing greater attention to an issue of injustice that resulted in the charges for each of these employees being dropped and over the course of 9 months the termination, resignation, and retirements of senior administrators. It was through this

collective action that the efforts of faculty and community members brought to light an issue of injustice at the university level. While administrative roles differ greatly from those of faculty, there is strength in numbers. By working together, administrators can begin by creating a more collaborative work environment within departments, which not only speaks back to the demands of neoliberalism, but also open up doors for greater dialogue, collaboration, and shared success among colleagues and beyond. Jovanovic (2012) argues that by speaking out and calling attention to issues of concern and injustice, we awaken individual critical awareness and reflection and encourage collective action, which illustrates the power of organized action and collective voice as a response to the neoliberalism. I see this example as one of the ways that administrators can model their responses to neoliberal practices to create attention and urgency around issues of inequity that are commonplace in many Academic and Student Affairs units.

Internally, there are multiple ways that campus community members can work together to effect change. One possibility from a faculty perspective includes expanding and collectively envisioning scholarly circles. According to Museus (2019), organizing spaces which can be used to “envision more humanized scholarly communities...can allow us to foster a collective consciousness of the ways in which we might minimize horizontal violence through our advocacy and provide opportunities to model healthier ways of engaging that cultivate greater solidarity” (p. 147). Providing opportunities for dialogue and the development of a more collective consciousness has many benefits. First, in doing so, educators and community members are proactively restructuring their environments and work culture by establishing goals that are not directly aligned with the

free market. In Chapter 4, I shared my experiences in performative work settings that were organized based on competition and productivity. By simply creating spaces for greater collaboration and collective solutions among fellow administrators and beyond we are pushing back on the performative and competitive cultures that pervade many public education institutions today. At the same time, we are instead establishing a work culture that values collectivism, critical inquiry and reflection, and more intentional comprehensive solutions as a result of this more intentional environment that establishes greater appreciation for quality over quantity.

Allowing ourselves time to think, to work with others and ponder ideas, and develop strategies and knowledge to pushback on neoliberalism also aligns with Hytten's (2017) call for slowing down the pace of scholarly and academic work. She contends that by slowing down (her argument relates in particular to faculty publications), we might instead engage in activities that develop ethical relationships with colleagues, students, and the greater campus community. Some of her recommendations for more ethical use of time include:

meeting with students and helping them work through their ideas, updating teaching materials so we stay current and relevant, taking service responsibilities seriously, and sharing our research with broader publics, reading scholarship that is not directly related to our own, participating in social movements, and providing feedback on other's work. (p. 156)

The strategies and activities that both Museus and Hytten suggest introduce an alternative to the performative work culture that currently pervades many college campuses. While these strategies are not specific to academic administration, they can be

used as models to develop administrative responses to the challenges that neoliberalism poses. A more democratic culture is not inherently tied to individual productivity and creates greater opportunities for collaboration and ethical, comprehensive solutions that are based on dialogue and careful critical analysis. These changes are especially important for non-tenured instructors and other employees (e.g., administrators, especially in mid-management positions which are typically at-will and offer no job protection) for whom dissent, or critique can be met with possible disciplinary action and/or termination. While Museus (2019) highlights the importance of positionality, specifically referring to junior faculty, non-tenure-track faculty, and graduate students, I believe that to create the momentum needed for wide organizational changes, we must move beyond scholarly critique among faculty members, and create collaborative dialogue across organizational lines, branching out to administrators, undergraduate students, and local community members. Administrators could begin by forming collaborative circles mirroring the scholarly circles mentioned above where conversations and critical reflection about academic policies, work environments, and more equitable changes in day-to-day operations within respective units could take place.

One place that we could start might be within student success centers such as those I highlighted in Chapter 4. Often administrators within these roles see students daily and are very attuned to the challenges associated with the competitive culture many public universities have adopted. However, as mentioned earlier, many of these employees have little job protection, which can impact their autonomy and ability to publicly pushback on neoliberal practices within the university. Collaborating within

larger more diversified critique circles (including tenured faculty) creates opportunities for partnerships which can be shared collectively. The support of a collective can encourage greater participation and candor from employees who lack the job protections of others within the university community. Thus, it is imperative that administrators relationships with broader constituencies. The responses illustrated earlier highlight how faculty have worked to speak back to issues of injustice and with knowledge of pragmatic approaches such as those mentioned previously, administrators are poised to proactively begin these conversations and expand collaborative efforts to include faculty members.

Educators can also learn from their students. Student protests and movements have a long history of success and include transformative events such as The Kent State Protest (1970), the Racism Lives Here Protest (2015), and the Occupy Wall Street Protest in (2011) (Writers, 2020). While the actions and outcomes of each vary, these movements garnered the attention of thousands of individuals in the United States and abroad. Movements such as these offer faculty, students, administrators, and community members opportunities to effect positive social change while collectively resisting the pressures of neoliberalism within public higher education. Including students on campus committees and in dialogue groups diversifies critical exchanges and provides faculty and university administration with the unique perspective of students which is all too often absent from educational policy debates and changes. As many Student Affairs units interact with students on a daily basis, including students in the development of educational policies (something which is usually within any administrator's abilities) is essential to a more democratic and equitable education experience for students. This

inclusion can also be expanded to the scholarly/administrative circles highlighted above. Doing so would not only pushback on the performative competitive environment that neoliberal practices create, but also establish new norms within higher education, where students' insight and collaboration are actually valued and included in the educational policy decision process.

Over the last six years I've spent working in various universities, I've noticed that there are sometimes what seem to be sharp divides between faculty members and university administration. To move beyond this divisiveness and achieve the momentum needed to challenge neoliberal processes on a broad scale, we must work together to revitalize democratic opportunities within public universities. This begins with candid conversations about the barriers dividing the greater university community. Kaufman (2016) highlights how, through an assessment of De Anza College's equity and social justice initiatives, the college was able to facilitate important conversations about concerns and needs of students and the democratic and civic engagement values within the classroom. As the Director of the Institute of Community and Civic Engagement at De Anza College, Kaufman was intentional about engaging faculty as a whole, as many of the projects she oversaw lacked the faculty perspective. She showed how faculty members were initially hesitant to discuss political issues within the classroom for many reasons, was all of which related to fear. Faculty members expressed fear of imposing their values inappropriately on students, fear of engaging in political discourse for legal reasons, fear of teaching or engaging in civic discussions would get them in trouble, and worried discussions could become violent or lead to turmoil (Kaufman, 2016). Based on

these findings, she worked to implement opportunities for administration and faculty to have explicit discussions about political engagement in the classroom. She also established workshops discussing civic activities and opportunities to model democracy within the university and worked individually to answer questions and provide support to faculty, hopeful that these events and resources would strengthen the bond between democracy and education at De Anza College and between colleagues.

In Chapter 4, I shared my experiences about the lack of collaboration and performative environments within which administrators work. Assessment practices that are used to gauge the democratic and critical aspects of a department unit could be utilized to determine areas to expand upon the democratic elements of a department, while simultaneously identifying challenges posed by a competitive neoliberal approach within a unit or division. Following a similar path of that implemented at De Anza College, I believe that administrators can build stronger relationships with colleagues within the department, but also dissolve and break-down barriers that inhibit communication with other employees of the university. Doing so would ultimately result in a more collaborative approach to university issues.

By refocusing our democratic efforts through collaborative processes, public universities can foster and develop a greater sense of community and create a more equitable educational environment for all students to thrive. Such a shift on a large scale could not only redefine the public higher education sector, but also reconceptualize the student experience. Collaborative practices such as the ones explored above, can enhance democratic and civic participation. A few byproducts of these collaborative practices

include greater mutual engagement, a willingness to hear the differences of others, an openness to the expansion of one's truths, communal values of diversity and unity, and finally, continuous learning associated with the development of student attitudes and relationships rather than a static curriculum (McLachlan et al., 2017). Conversations and changes such as the ones I have discussed are never easy, but with democratic hope and a focus on collaborative processes that promote equity among all students, educators can begin the process of chipping away at the injustices neoliberal processes perpetuate and create a more equitable future through the revitalization of the democratic promise of public higher education.

Re-Envisioning Public Access

In my role as a university administrator, the largest challenge that was shared with me by students was the cost of attending and completing an undergraduate degree. I am hard-pressed to recall a single day in my 6-year career within public education that I did not hear or directly engage with a student who shared concerns about their ability to either pay for, or continue to complete their degree, because of the cost. This compounded with other responsibilities such as full-time jobs, caring for kids/family, or other life-situations severely limited options for these students. Access to, and the cost of, public higher education continue to be problematic when analyzed through a democratic lens. Now more than ever, many students who go to college are taking on large financial risks to complete their education. But, what if public higher education were available to all? Primary and secondary public education is readily accessible, even as we still have work to do when it comes to equity of opportunity and resources within public education.

However, public primary and secondary education, much like public higher education, offers students democratic opportunities that might not otherwise be available. Why after primary and secondary education, should we not provide individuals with access to post-secondary education?

The idea of free access to higher education is far from radical. Multiple countries and even states within the United States provide students with greater access to post-secondary education than is currently offered within the U.S. writ large. Subsidizing higher education would not require restructuring the organization and operation of public institutions, rather, much like current subsidies provided by the federal and state government, this funding could readily be made available through similar processes. As of 2019, 24 states have enacted programs that offer students “free college,” which are more formally referred to as College Promise Programs (Powell & Kerr, 2019).

More accessible college options vary from state-to-state and institution-to-institution. The state of New York, for example, has The Excelsior Scholarship which began in the fall 2017 and has assisted close to 1 million students with annual incomes of less than \$125,000. Currently, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Be residents of New York State
- Attend a SUNY or CUNY two- or four-year degree program
- Take 30 credits per calendar year (including January and Summer sessions)
- Plan to live and work in New York following graduation for the length of time they participate in the scholarship program. (“Excelsior Scholarship Program,” 2020, para. 2)

This program is one of the very few to offer students who qualify an option to attend either a community college or university; many others around the country stipulate that students must attend a community college.

Another example of a Promise Program is Maryland State's Community College Promise Scholarship Program. This is a need-based program that provides selected applicants with up to \$5,000 annually to cover the cost of tuition and fees at a Maryland community college. A few of the requirements of this program include attendance at the community college within the student's home county (with exceptions based on program availability), applicants must enroll in at least 12 credit hours per semester (full-time), and for any student completing courses that are part of a sequence, the student must enroll in the next sequence at the community college ("Community College Promise Scholarship," 2020).

Other states have also adopted Promise programs with varying requirements. California's Promise Program provides tuition assistance based on need for students who attend an in-state community college or university, but the tuition waiver is limited to one academic year ("The California Promise," 2020). Oregon's Promise Program covers the cost of tuition at public two-year colleges and pays for tuition up to 12 credit hours per semester ("Oregon Promise," 2020). Rhode Island, on the other hand, offers every student finishing high school the opportunity to pursue an associate degree, tuition free, regardless of income and those wishing to pursue a degree beyond the associate level can transfer to two different state universities through a joint admission agreement ("Rhode Island Promise," 2020).

While tuition free opportunities for post-secondary education are a step forward democratically speaking, the lack of programs that apply to universities and the fact that the requirements can change year-to-year, can discourage and confuse students from seeking this assistance. Limiting a student's options to community college is also problematic as it hampers equitable access to opportunities and encourages students who might academically qualify for a more selective university, to attend a community college where course and degree offerings typically differ from a traditional public university, as does its mission. Additionally, many of these programs have stipulations and requirements which can further complicate the process, especially for non-traditional and/or low-income students whose non-academic responsibilities typically differ from traditional students. Tennessee's Promise Scholarship, for example, requires that to remain eligible for the award, all students must attend mandatory meetings, participate in a mentorship program, attend full-time, and perform 8 hours of community service prior to each semester that the award is provided ("Tennessee Promise Scholarship" (n.d.).

This trend toward tuition free post-secondary education, however, is promising. Moving forward, as policymakers and state legislators considering Promise programs to reduce and hopefully eliminate the burden of students encumbering debt, there are various factors to consider. Programs should avoid merit requirements, which have led to unequitable state aid packages; include nontraditional and undocumented students, who currently face additional access barriers when compared to other student groups; and reduce eligibility requirements such as post-graduate residency and GPA requirements (Mishory, 2018). Another important change is to reduce student loan debt upon

graduation. One starting point is to consider something like a graduate tax system that could replace the current student loan model. Rustin (2016) suggests that such a tax (e.g. 1 percent) of a graduate's total income for a specified period of time could replace loan repayments. He argues that this tax could be progressive (incrementally increasing as does one's income) and that the idea is not total repayment of a student's loans, but a small contribution to societal resources. Ideally, greater collaborative processes involving instructors, students, administrators, community members and policymakers could be used to create a holistic and equitable solution to the current barriers many college students face. As highlighted in other portions of this dissertation, access to higher education is only a beginning. We must also work to make public higher education institutions more equitable so that the systematic oppression and inequity are diminished. This requires collaborative practices such as those that I examined earlier in this chapter. Ideally, such efforts will one day result in an equitable educational experience that can be accessed by all students, not just a select few.

A Liberal Arts Education and Service Learning

Collaboration and greater access are two important strategies that challenge neoliberalism within public universities, but educators must also actively develop democratic habits and dispositions. Giroux and Giroux (2004) posit that our modern democracy has roots in the Enlightenment classical liberal tradition which has been evident in the work of multiple scholars, including John Dewey, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Jane Addams, each of who recognized that a healthy democratic society cannot function without an educated populace. In Chapter 2, I highlighted the benefits on a liberal arts

education and in Chapter 3, I discussed the impacts of neoliberalism on the liberal arts. To speak back to problematic aspects of neoliberalism in higher education, we need a renewed attention to the liberal arts. Moreover, coupling service learning with a liberal arts education can provide students with opportunities to experience engaged learning associated with actual social situations and challenges, which include working with others to solve problems.

A pedagogy that encourages civic action, and that requires students to critically analyze complex situations and develop relationships through collaboration and dialogue with others, is one of the most beneficial ways to ensure that the next generation of citizens can continue the work of democracy. Brown (2011) argues that a liberal arts education imbues students with what Aristotle referred to as “the good life,” which is entails more than mere survival, and instead “the capacity for human pursuits beyond toiling for survival” (p. 27). The skills and experiences needed for a flourishing life are not static, instead they vary depending upon the student population, their needs, goals, and life dreams. Yet all students need an education that helps them to think about their contributions to the world and their responsibilities to others.

In arguing for the democratic value of the liberal arts, Schonberg (2019) argues that courses in this area benefit not only individuals, but also the greater society as they model rigorous dialogue and the exchange of ideas. While exchanges within the classroom are important, engaging students with actual social issues taking place in their local and regional areas can further expose students to situations they will encounter beyond their formal education. Service learning is an important pedagogical strategy that

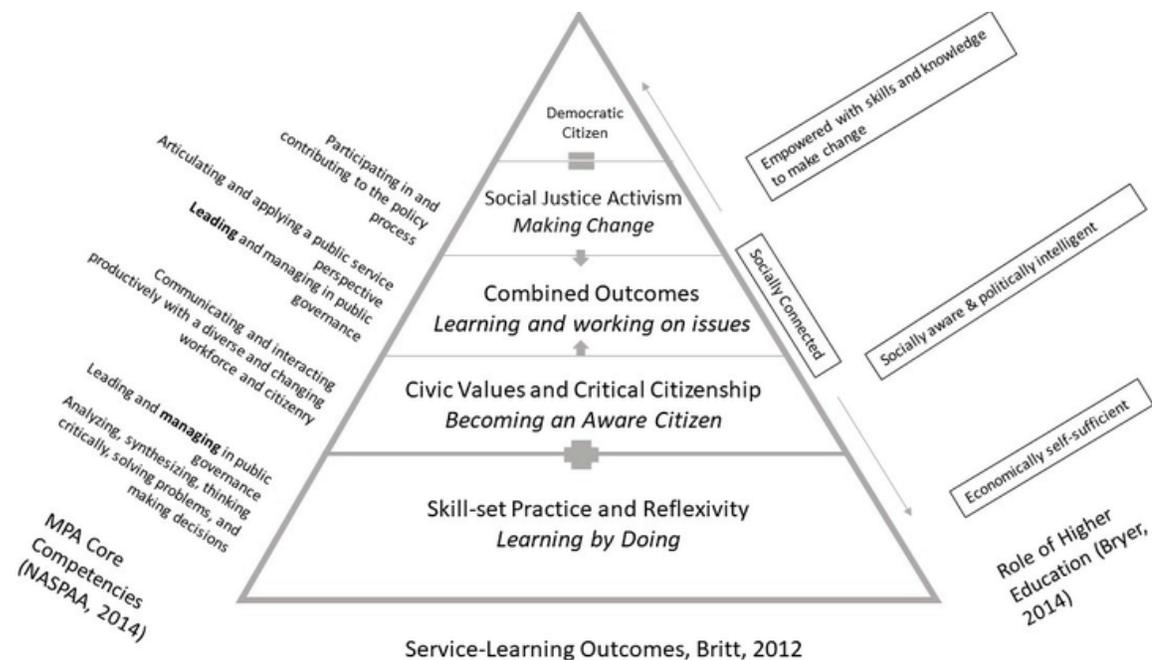
not only encourages civic action within universities, but in select projects, prioritizes public benefits of higher education which at present have been overshadowed by individualistic learning outcomes (Bunds & Giardina, 2016).

Embedding service learning within a liberal arts education not only provides students with opportunities to develop habits of citizenship (Fiske, 2002), but also provides additional opportunities to exercise and further develop critical thinking skills and capabilities associated with real-life issues, often those at the local or regional level. Rather than what could be viewed as one dimensional classroom learning, service-learning projects encourage experiential learning outside the classroom with others. Stepping outside the classroom literally opens up doors for a range of learning possibilities. One thing that a liberal arts education helps us to understand is the political nature of education; no curriculum is simply neutral. Poulos et al. (2015) argue that educators must recognize the political nature of research, service-learning and community engagement projects. As I highlighted in Chapter 3, a large percentage of the American public no longer sees a benefit in public education aside from the benefits an education provides to highly desirable jobs. To counteract this perception, higher education institutions need to create more meaningful pedagogical bonds in the community. Rather than simplistic, singular project that only benefit the university, we need more sustained, longstanding community partnerships that are built through well thought out service-learning experiences and involve an understanding of the needs and interests of both stakeholders (community and university), as well as recognition of the vastly different worlds that these stakeholders operate within (Sandy & Holland, 2006).

Lebovits and Bharath (2019) propose a conceptual framework for democratic service-learning projects which simplifies the development of these projects and identify valuable outcomes for service-learning partnerships. Through their framework, they bring together service-learning outcomes with community behaviors and public administration competencies. While they offer their model for a master level program, I see the outcomes of the model as both relevant and achievable for undergraduate students too.

Figure 3.

A Conceptual Framework for Democratic Service-Learning



Using the framework above in collaboration with community members creates opportunities for partners to learn from one another and to exchange and share experiences. Additionally, service-learning projects such as those developed in this model provide participants with skills such as public speaking, writing, group projects, and

interacting with others. According to a study completed by Ellerton et al. (2016), competency in these skills are more pronounced in service-learner participants than non-participants.

The possibilities that can be imagined for service-learning projects vary depending upon the area of study, needs of the community, and culture of the university. To illustrate the creativity and vast opportunities associated with service learning and the potential positive impact on community partnerships, I highlight a few different projects which have taken place throughout the United States. One project known as the Banneker History Project (BHP) was completed as part of an Honors Seminar course for preservice teachers of color in a mid-western town. This project reconstructed the history of a local school which was segregated and served African American students from 1915-1951 (Boyle-Baise, 2005). Through the BHP, the instructor for the course and her students were able to hear and learn directly from the community members who had traditionally been silenced about the injustices within the community. Other benefits included greater community orientation toward learning, enhanced support for schools in marginalized communities, and the actualization of social justice learning (learning about segregation for the individuals who lived through it) (Boyle-Baise, 2005).

Another service-learning project that has been in place since 1990 is the Neighborhood Planning Workshop at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This project involves partnering with civic leaders in many of the most distressed urban communities within East St. Louis to design, outline, and implement plans to improve some of the city's poorest communities. Since it was established, the project has

generated over \$40 million dollars in new development in East St. Louis. Aside from the capital raised through this partnership, student evaluations indicate a positive student experience with the project and a greater sense of civic commitment (Reardon, 2000).

One of the service learning projects at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte) involved students joining a community initiative to provide shelter to the homeless during the colder winter months. In 2008, the campus partnered with the community organization overseeing this community initiative and a year later, students formed a student organization named the Niner Neighbors to institutionalize the project and receive funding/support for it (Buch & Harden, 2011). As a result of continued interest and student leadership within the student organization, the program added additional sites to host homeless individuals and in the first three years of operation, over 400 students have participated in the project. Aside from providing housing sites for homeless neighbors during the winter months, the project also changed student attitudes and stereotypes toward homelessness, raised awareness about societal inequities contributing to homelessness, and promoted positive civic attitudes according to data collected from students who have participated in the project (Buch & Harden, 2011).

These projects also provide students with unique opportunities to grapple with complex social issues and work with others to create solutions to real-world issues. While these projects include mostly faculty, much like many of the other examples discussed in this chapter, I see these projects as blueprints that can be used to construct service-learning experiences that either include university administrators or are led by university

administrators. The recommendations for building collations and stronger collaborative processes between faculty and staff is an ideal place to begin conversations that can lead to service-learning projects that involve both faculty and administration.

The examples I describe above are just a few of the ways that universities have partnered with the community to build strong relationships and more directly participate and contribute to addressing the needs of local and regional neighbors. By working together to create and design service-learning projects using frameworks like the one I described, we can build stronger community and university coalitions, create spaces for greater dialogue among more diverse audiences within a public space, and re-establish many of the public “goods” of higher education. These benefits, coupled with those of a liberal arts education, provide students with the ability to learn from others, further develop critical capacities, and participate in projects and issues that are relevant to the present society, all while breaking down barriers to welcome additional community members into the university as a public space.

Limitations

While I see the strategies highlighted in the previous section as an effective way to begin to reclaim the democratic promise of public higher education while concurrently pushing back against the dominance of neoliberal ideologies, they are not without limits. I am not suggesting that these solutions work for each and every situation. Rather, given the complex and invasive nature of neoliberal policies and procedures and the difficulty associated with identifying neoliberal effects, these strategies are a starting place to a complex and arduous journey. This complexity coupled with the need for pragmatic

strategies that can be implemented to respond to university challenges limit the impacts of the strategies I call for in this chapter. When I began this research project, I approached the challenges that educators face as either democratic or neoliberal, not both. However, I quickly noticed that neoliberal processes can also include democratic outcomes, and vice versa. Democracy and neoliberalism are more entangled than I originally thought. This in itself is not a limitation to my study, but it did initially limit my approach to this research in some ways.

Additionally, the two key terms in my study, neoliberalism and democracy, are defined loosely and in some cases greatly contested. Similarly, there is much debate about the topics I explore in this study. One example is the traditional mission of public higher education. Historians and scholars having differing views about the historical aims and development of public higher education within the United States. One of my primary interests in this study was to explore the democratic elements of public higher education while analyzing the impacts of neoliberalism on democratic possibilities. Greater detail and context, especially historical examples, would more provide a more comprehensive understanding of the development of higher education within the United States.

Similarly, the neoliberal impacts I discussed in this study are somewhat narrow. Neoliberalism includes a very large body of literature and affects multiple aspects of daily life. While I chose to include the neoliberal impacts most closely associated with Student and Academic Affairs, a more comprehensive exploration of neoliberalism from

a racial, gender, and sociological lens would add greater complexity and understanding to the breadth and reach of neoliberalism within daily life.

My goal in this study was never to solve the issues neoliberal policies pose, but rather shed light and draw attention to the administrative day-to-day operations that have changed the nature of higher education to provide openings for possible transformation. My hope is that this project is only the beginning of a larger more substantial conversation about the complex entanglements of neoliberalism and democracy within the context of higher education. Only through showing how neoliberal ideology is increasingly infused in everyday practices within higher education at both the macro and micro level can we begin to challenge those practices and create and sustaining more democratic alternatives

Recommendations for Future Research

Currently, higher education as a whole has been dramatically impacted by the challenges precipitated by the health pandemic of COVID-19, which caused almost all US colleges and universities to all classes, student activities, and administrative functions online for the second half of the spring semester. These challenges have not only restructured the daily practices and modes of operation associated with higher education, but also the long-term viability of both private and public higher education institutions. Moving forward, it will be important to not only respond to these challenges swiftly, but to also be thoughtful about our responses as they likely carry long-term impacts that will determine the future of public higher education within the United States.

One possibility for further research could start with a historical analysis of the development and progression of public higher education, focus exclusively on the political and social rationale for the major educational policies and reform over the last three centuries. One example is the Morrill Land Grant Acts, which did extend access to greater populations. Yet they also were economically driven by the study of agriculture and mechanics, which were two of the most important economic products/skills at that time. These acts also provided states with 30,000 acres of western land whose distribution was contested at the federal level. These factors, coupled with the need to expand the federal government's power after the civil war, are but of a few of the factors that influenced the creation and eventual passage of these monumental acts (Florer, 1968). A more comprehensive study that is organized chronologically could provide additional depth and complexity to the field and this study. This is but one example of the more detailed historical research that could be conducted to add greater diversity to the fields of democracy, public higher education, neoliberalism.

More recently, research associated with the challenges precipitated by COVID-19 and their relationship to both neoliberalism and democracy will be important in revitalizing the democratic aims of public higher education. This research is also important because pragmatic strategies such as those mentioned in this dissertation may be especially valuable during one of the most pivotal and turbulent times in public higher education's history; the disruption of higher education as we know it can allow us space to rewrite and redefine what public higher education entails. My hope is that during these surreal times, we as educators, administrators, students, and community members can

work collectively to not only bring the longstanding challenges public education has faced to the forefront, but also use this unique opportunity to revitalize public higher education in a way that creates more equitable experiences, while overtly opposing changes that only further perpetuate the individualism and corporate managerialism found within public universities today.

One possible place to start is to use the unique position that COVID-19 has created for the public higher education industry to re-envision what higher education might look like and entail. This could start with conversations that enhance and expand the relationships with colleagues as a response to the individualism perpetuated by neoliberalism within higher education. These conversations could include discussions about new operational and organizational models where collaboration, respect for differing opinions, and the impacts of educational policies on students are emphasized and prioritized over market values. This conversation could begin with departments and expand beyond to entire divisions and the greater university. Departments that operate based on equitable educational policies and processes not only enhance the chances of student success for all students, but these practices open up new possibilities for higher education as a whole, which I believe as a system on a national scale can be used to create a strong democratic, socially-just society.

Earlier in this chapter I explored the expansion efforts of multiple states to provide greater access to public education. These examples were only a start. Ideally, students should be able to attend public universities at no expense. Assuming debts that equal the price of a home or exceed a student's ability to repay should be eliminated. All

too often when I was an administrator, students shared with me information about the tough choices they made to attend college. Moving forward, access to public education that is governed by equitable democratic policies is essential. Additionally, all students choosing to attend public education should be provided with universal income so that they can actually focus on their academic work, not work 2-3 jobs to support themselves and then use the remaining time and energy on their academic work.

In a democratically-oriented university, administrators would be able to voice their opinions without fear of being terminated. Greater employee protection for both administration and faculty is essential. Along with these protections should come additional funding to adequately support the department and the positions within units. A concerted effort by the university should be taken to move away from contingent positions that do not offer employee benefits and steady living wage. Student success programs should also be based on collective student success, not practices and outcomes that are solely market based. Administration plays a key role in the development of such policies since they have first-hand insight about the struggles students face.

Finally, greater diversity of academic departments is needed. As discussed in Chapter 4, multiple departments associated with the Liberal Arts are being slowly eliminated based on performative metrics. The Liberal Arts are essential to a thriving democratic populace. Moving forward, academic departments associated with the Liberal Arts should be provided adequate funding equal to those departments currently prioritized because of their economic value. Decisions regarding the elimination and addition of academic programs should be based on additional factors that are not

exclusively related to university funding and are part of a collective decision-making process. More broadly, my hope is that one day, public higher education will be seen and understood as public good that fully supports all students and greater society.

Neoliberalism as an ideology is far-reaching and my research only highlights some of the prevailing ways in which neoliberalism has blossomed in higher education. Given this invasiveness, there are still many things we do not know. From an administrative perspective, we know very little about how neoliberalism continues to negatively impact student programs and student success, to which there is little research when compared to the availability of research associated with the impacts of neoliberalism on faculty members. While I believe that each of the above goals is both realistic and possible, as someone who is pragmatic, I see the most important step that we can begin today, at this very moment is to begin local conversations with colleagues or coworkers. These conversations can lead to discussions about the impacts of neoliberalism on a personal/position level and potentially, the strategies that colleagues and/or other departments and universities use or implement to in an attempt to reclaim some of the democratic promises of public higher education. I am hopeful that as we begin to share personal experiences and strategies for working within the university to pushback and overcome some of the impacts of neoliberalism in an administrative role, that these conversations will build momentum that contributes to greater collaboration within departments and beyond. Creating opportunities to learn from others who recognize that our current model of public higher education has been impacted greatly by a culture of performativity and productivity that carries significant risks for students,

administrators, instructors, and the future of democracy is but a small beginning, but as illustrated in multiple examples in this dissertation, a conversation can turn into an entire movement and dramatically reshape entire organizations.

Final Thoughts

As someone who likes an organized linear process with predictable outcomes, this dissertation was both rewarding and incredibly frustrating. In the initial proposal stage, as I worked with my advisor to identify research questions to guide my research, I carefully mapped out each of the chapters and the expectations for my final chapter, even including recommendations, before I had even done the research. At that time, I had preconceived notions about the contributions and outcome of my research, and in retrospect realize that I started out wanting to prove what I already thought I knew about the impact of neoliberal ideology on higher education. Surprisingly, most of the objectives, goals, and thought processes that impacted by attitude toward my work and this dissertation changed. Throughout this research, I not only learned more about the unique, opaque relationship between neoliberalism and democracy, but also about myself.

Initially, I attempted to isolate neoliberal and democratic processes into two distinct categories. However, as I have shared, the two are closely linked and for the foreseeable future at least, understanding this complex relationship will be vital to refocusing our efforts on democratic opportunities within higher education. Through my desire for a clear cut, concise, and “neat” study that organized democracy into one box, neoliberalism into another, and solutions to push back on the impacts of neoliberalism within higher education into another, I realized that at my core I am more of an idealist

than I was previously aware. This realization, however, was not one that I became aware of immediately in this project. It was in the final stages of this dissertation after conversations with my chair and committee that I fully realized that much of my work in this dissertation focused on the democratic possibilities associated with public higher education, rather than the shortcomings and reality of public universities. This realization was important both personally and within my academic work because in reflection, I am now aware how my desire and longing for a dichotomous classification of neoliberalism, along with the tendency to view and examine the democratic aspects of public higher education can overshadow the more nuanced relationship between the two.

As someone who is pragmatic, realistic, and analytical my attempts to clearly disentangle the two and my tendency to view public higher education in its ideal state lead to an often-frustrating experience where accepting the impossibility of disentangling neoliberalism from democracy and vice versa within public higher education was almost maddening. Throughout my academic career I have focused on pragmatic solutions to issues that can be developed and implemented immediately, however throughout this study and in conversations with my committee I have also realized that my desire for a straightforward, easily understood solution, that is almost “formulaic” in structure and organization is on one hand a strength, but in some instances can undermine or oversimplify my argument and analysis. This personal realization was and continues to be one of my most significant takeaways from this study and allows me to be more aware of this tendency in my scholarly work moving forward.

When I started this program, one of the first courses I enrolled in was the Philosophy of Education course. I can still vividly recall how overwhelming that course was and how incredibly frustrated I became because I couldn't organize or categorize the content into a neat, easily digestible formula or equation. Thankfully, I was able to survive the class and at that time, I'm not certain I fully understood my attempts to simplify issues that in some cases can't be simplified. Much like the very first course I took in this program in Fall 2016, this dissertation has encouraged and pushed my critical inquiry skills beyond that which I was comfortable, even if that means forsaking analyses that are "neat" or solutions that are formulaic.

One example in this study that was particularly difficult for me was the excerpt and background information presented prior to the historical missions of higher education. In my initial historical portion, I focused on the democratic elements of higher education in order to maintain my primary focus. However, with feedback from my committee and chair, and a careful read of my work post-completion, I realized that in my attempts to solely focus on the democratic elements of public higher education, other important events that shaped and impacted higher education were missing, and from a critical perspective, these missing parts were essential to the creation and history of public higher education. As a scholar and educator I have struggled to balance a clear focused argument with the appropriate amount of details to provide readers with the most a robust study that is both focused, but includes the intricate details associated with the often-complex social issues discussed in the critical theory field.

Though I continue to face challenges in this area, I am now much more aware of my own biases toward idealism and in this study have added additional details associated with the history of higher education as well as additional insight and research from critical scholars who write about the manifestation of neoliberalism within public higher education to provide greater context and critical complexity to my arguments. These additions provide more insight from a critical perspective and while not explicitly associated with the challenges I discuss in Chapter 4, they are essential for my work, as many of the oppressive practices I discuss in both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 are foundational elements of public higher education within the United States.

Additionally, through these critical additions, I was able to continue to grapple with the complex relationship between neoliberalism and democracy which has also been one of the most important takeaways from this experience. Throughout the history of public higher education, democracy and liberalism, and eventually what is now referred to as neoliberalism have been entwined. Historically speaking public universities were established to educate a specific populace as leaders for communities, the state, and country. As I highlighted in Chapter 2, entire populations were denied access to higher education as “individual freedom” only pertained to a specific set of individuals. This individualism which has been an inherent part of public higher education since its inception also aligns with one of the core components of democracy. While now, this commonality seems simplistic, coming to terms with this was not easy process for me. When compared to my initial thoughts about the relationship between democracy and neoliberalism, I now understand that both emphasize and are based on individual freedom

and rights. Neoliberalism perpetuates free market ideals that are strictly economical, while democracy (generally speaking) is based on, promotes, and ensures human rights and individual freedoms. Of course, as was discussed in my study, these human rights and individual freedoms continue to apply for a select few as a means of maintaining power and privilege achieved through institutionalized exclusionary processes.

Aside from the individualism and individual freedom that has defined public higher education and neoliberalism, public institutions have been used since they were created to shape and create a societal order that reflects individual freedom. This outcome applies to both neoliberalism and democracy and is a result of the exclusionary and oppressive practices that have been an inherent part of public higher education for over three hundred. As discussed in Chapter 2, public higher education is rooted in practices such as racism, classism, sexism, etc. and the creation of these institutions was in part a means to perpetuating individual freedoms to a select few in order to maintain privilege, power, and other resources. Both neoliberalism and democracy are reliant upon “citizens” though in a neoliberal model, students are cast as consumers, whereas in a democratic model, students are classified as “citizens.” Both models assert that individuals to “cast” their votes as a form of representation. In a neoliberal system of governance, consumers cast their votes based on their spending power, while in a democratic model, citizens cast their votes based on citizenship. While neoliberalism favors and effectively undoes democracy in favor of an economic marketplace, both of these systems are based on individual rights and are perpetuated through the system of public higher education.

Additionally, both neoliberalism and democracy only available to “citizens and consumers” of said system/society where financial ability and citizenship are used to determine one’s ability to participate and/or “vote.” Unfortunately, this means that as public higher education stands right now, the interests and solutions that are often results of either democratic or neoliberal practices include only those participants that can access and/or attend higher education as a result of the institutionalized and systematic practices implemented within these institutions. The impetus of these practices both historically and contemporarily being the preservation of personal freedom/individualism that I refer to throughout this study which at present favors a select group.

Sadly, outcomes such as those I discuss above are not new. When I began this study, I was under the assumption that over the last 50 years, the oppressive practices within higher education had grown enormously, and while they have intensified in the last 50 years, a focus on individualism at the expense of exclusion of others has always been present within public higher education institutions. More specifically, after a closer analysis of the history of public higher education and the United States, liberalism succinctly put was the major philosophical position within the West during the inception of public higher education and during the founding of this country where language specific to this philosophy is broadly derived and inspired by individual rights theory of John Locke (Stephens, 2016). With the founding focus of the United States being individual freedom, it is easy to surmise how institutions, particularly public social institutions were developed and implemented to not only ensure individual freedom, but

to maintain privileges of the elite, which to a great extent are still very much a part of public higher education.

While my understanding of the complexity and similarities between the two has grown immensely, identifying and recognizing entanglements of these ideologies continues to be a difficult process given the broad definitions of both democracy and neoliberalism and the lack of specificity for each, which has further complicated my research. I believe that one of the larger challenges associated with the ideas I've discussed in this dissertation is that there is no clear consensus about what neoliberalism is and what democracy entails. There are no simple or agreed upon definitions of either construct, and there is significant contention about their meanings. This significantly complicates offering possible solutions to neoliberal challenges that affect democracy within public higher education. However, I also now understand that to simplify these matters would be to omit valuable details that are pertinent to my arguments.

In many ways, I have been intentional about trying to make both of these ideas accessible, perhaps at the risk of sometimes over-simplifying them. I have worked to provide examples that are easily understood and are commonplace within higher education units. I see my straightforward writing style to this dissertation as a kind of democratic act and hope that my efforts to make accessible some complex arguments may allow individuals outside of academia to not only understand these two concepts, but to organize and enact solutions that create a better tomorrow for all of us. The eclipsing of democracy by neoliberal ideology is a challenge that cannot be solved by university

employees and scholars alone; we must bring others to the table in a way that builds unity and a stronger sense of inclusivity and purpose for the challenges ahead.

If there is one thing I would have college administrators take away from this study, my hope is that this research can be used as a launching point for conversations about democratic possibilities and the reimagination of public higher education. Within my career as an administrator, the environments I worked in often left me feeling alone and isolated which immobilized me as an employee, educator, and activist. These effects impacted me professionally, personally, and spiritually. It was after taking a step back from the daily events that led to these feelings, that I was able to take a deep breath and reassess the situation. My hope is that after reading this study, any administrator or university employee who feels overwhelmed or isolated do the same. Take 5 minutes for a walk or grab a coffee and spend that time dreaming about what the perfect day might entail for your professionally. Would you change educational policies so that the oppressive practices within universities today are minimized and hopefully eliminated? Or, would you lead community events and learning experiences that stretch across multiple divisions? Or even, start or join a social movement that lobbies for equitable educational processes within the university and free access for all students? These are but a few of the possibilities and one day soon I hope, realities, that are possible with a sustained belief and sense of democratic hope and a willingness to start a conversation with a colleague in an attempt to create a more equitable tomorrow.

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