

A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS: HOW SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE
PREVAILED OVER INSTITUTIONAL CLOSURE

by

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Running Head: How Sweet Briar College Prevailed Over Institutional Closure

A Case Study Analysis: How Sweet Briar College Prevailed Over Institutional Closure

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies at George Mason University

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Sweet Briar College's Pink and Green Army: the students, staff, faculty and fierce alumnae who fought and successfully saved their school – you are a true testament that anything can be accomplished through passion and perseverance; and to the strong and powerful women around the world who create change, demand equality, and never give up in fighting for what they believe in.

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ABSTRACT

A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS: HOW SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE PREVAILED OVER INSTITUTIONAL CLOSURE

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This qualitative case study was conducted in order to better understand how grassroots efforts and campus culture influenced the decision to reverse the closing of Sweet Briar College in 2015. This study allowed for an in-depth analysis of how Sweet Briar College was saved, provided data for other small institutions that face the potential of closing, and offered examples of successful grassroots efforts. Using interviews and document review as data sources, four categories emerged from the findings: a culture of empowerment and responsibility, wide social network, sustained activism, and legal influences. The culture of empowerment and responsibility, together with the wide social network of Sweet Briar College's alumnae are the categories that revealed and supported the influence that grassroots efforts and campus culture had on the saving of Sweet Briar College. This study suggests that the campus culture before the closing announcement at Sweet Briar College created an atmosphere among students and alumnae that supported

grassroots efforts and sustained activism, which when paired with the legal proceedings surrounding this case were the ultimate contributors in the decision to reverse Sweet Briar College's closing.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine how grassroots efforts and campus culture influenced the decision to reverse the closing of Sweet Briar College (Sweet Briar).

Problem Statement

Higher education in the United States was originally intended for White, wealthy men (Thelin, 2011), but over the last 300 years there has been a significant increase in the diversity among college students (Miller-Bernal, 2004). This increase in student diversity has influenced all institutional types, but has specifically impacted same-sex institutions. According to the Women's College Coalition (2016) in the 1960s there were around 230 all-women's institutions compared to the 39 all-women's colleges in the United States today. Even more drastic, all-men's colleges have dropped from over 300 same-sex institutions in the late 1960s to three remaining all-men's colleges (Miller-Bernal, 2004). The reason for the significantly lower number of all-men's colleges is mostly a result of the coeducational movement that began in the late 1800s. According to Miller-Bernal (2004), a contributing factor in all-men colleges becoming coeducational is that "almost all women's rights and advocates favored coeducation over single-sex education because they believed that women's colleges provided inferior education" (p. 4). The push for women's access to traditional, all-men's institutions, and the potential

threat of university closure due to decreased enrollment and institutional dependability on tuition, forced the majority of men's colleges to become coeducational in order to remain open. The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 also pressured all-men institutions to become coeducational because the land grant legislation created by the Morrill Act specified that public land would be donated in each state for colleges to be built; in order for institutions to be eligible for federal funding they were required to be coeducational (Poulson and Miller-Bernal, 2004).

In response, all-female institutions have suffered a decline in numbers as eighty-three percent of women's colleges have either closed or become coeducational institutions in the last 53 years. According to Miller-Bernal (2006), the decrease in women's colleges is due to attempts to keep schools afloat by becoming coeducational or merging with other institutions in order to bolster enrollment and remain open. The majority of women's colleges facing financial hardship or enrollment deficiencies have been forced to close if they were unwilling or unable to become coeducational, or merge with other institutions (Miller-Bernal, 2006). From this study, I hoped to discover how grassroots efforts and campus culture influenced the decision to reverse the closing of Sweet Briar – how did alumnae respond to Sweet Briar's closure announcement? How were they able to keep Sweet Briar open and remain a same-sex college when so many other schools had been unable to do the same?

Background and Context

Sweet Briar College was established in 1901 by the will of Indiana Fletcher Williams (Stohlman, 1956). Williams inherited the Sweet Briar plantation from her

parents, and chose to establish the school as a “perpetual memorial” for her daughter, Daisy, who died at the age of 16 (Virginia v. Sweet Briar Institute, 2015). Williams’ will not only dedicated property to build a women’s college, it also specified that the property is never to be used for anything besides educating women (Stohlman, 1956). These conditions in her will ended up being leading factors that kept Sweet Briar open, and gave alumnae the hope they needed during the court proceedings that followed the school’s closing announcement.

On March 3, 2015, Sweet Briar’s interim President, James Jones, officially announced the school’s closing during two in-person meetings on campus. A press release was issued at 1pm and later that day an online announcement was published on both Sweet Briar’s website and Facebook page, and a phone conference with alumnae was scheduled for that night. President Jones and the Chair of the Board of Directors, Paul Rice, issued a video message as well. The video and transition websites have been taken down, but through website archives I was able to find the video transcript and closing announcement originally posted by Sweet Briar College. In the initial online announcement, Sweet Briar wrote that the Board of Directors “voted to close Sweet Briar College as a result of insurmountable financial challenges” (Sweet Briar College, 2015a, para. 1). All announcements quoted “insurmountable financial challenges” throughout recent years as the prominent reason behind the Board of Director’s decision to close the school (Sweet Briar College, 2015a; Sweet Briar College, 2015b; Sweet Briar College, 2015c). President Jones stated that the decrease in enrollment and therefore financial hardship at Sweet Briar was because “all-women’s education is anachronistic and out-of-

date” (Virginia v. Sweet Briar Institute, 2015, p. 4). In Jones’ and Rice’s video message, Rice highlighted two additional reasons behind the school’s closing: the decline in students choosing to attend “small, rural private liberal arts colleges,” and the decrease in women choosing same-sex education (Sweet Briar College, 2015b, para. 7).

In the video message, Paul Rice briefly mentioned enrollment initiatives, budget cuts, and deferred maintenance as a part of the “multiple strategies” taken by Sweet Briar’s interim President and Board of Directors in an effort to keep the college open (Sweet Briar College, 2015b, para. 5). Rice also confirmed that Sweet Briar’s interim President had discussed merging or collaborating with other institutions, as well as considering a coeducation option. Though Jones did not mention these strategies in the video message, he did confirm that these discussions took place during an interview with the *News and Advance*, a local newspaper (Pounds, 2015a; Pounds, 2015b). In Pound’s interview (2015a), Jones did not discuss coeducation, but clarified that discussions of institutional mergers or the absorption of Sweet Briar began in November 2014, with only himself and “a small working group of the board” being aware of the negotiations taking place (para. 20). The interview also revealed that the Board of Directors were all required to sign nondisclosure agreements, and due to the executive sessions of their meetings were not legally required to disclose any of their meeting minutes (Pounds, 2015b).

Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. is a non-profit organization that was founded by Sweet Briar alumnae one day after the closing announcement and dedicated to keeping the school open. Within three days of President Jones’ closing announcement, Saving Sweet

Briar, Inc. had raised over \$1 million in pledges and retained a high profile lawyer to fight the closure (Saving Sweet Briar, 2015). The Virginia v. Sweet Briar Complaint (2015) was filed on April 17, 2015 by Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. in hopes that the court would “grant a preliminary injunction requiring defendants Jones and Sweet Briar to comply with the terms of their contract, and continue to operate Sweet Briar as a college while this case is pending” (p. 14). The estimated endowment of Sweet Briar College at the time of the closing announcement was around \$95 million (Virginia v. Sweet Briar Institute, 2015, p. 9), which Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. used as evidence, stating that the “financial hardship” of the college was not a justifiable reason for the school to be closed (Saving Sweet Briar, 2015). Saving Sweet Briar, Inc.’s main goal was to reverse the school’s closing (Saving Sweet Briar, 2015), which they did by fundraising millions of dollars and hiring a lawyer who fought for the college to be recognized as a trust based on Indiana Fletcher William’s will (Saving Sweet Briar, 2015), meaning that Sweet Briar could use Virginia trust laws to stop the selling of Sweet Briar’s property.

As the alumnae, students, faculty, and staff of Sweet Briar fought to keep the school open, Amherst County Attorney, Ellen Bowyer, filed a lawsuit against the college on behalf of the Commonwealth of Virginia in an attempt to stop the closing of Sweet Briar and to force the removal and replacement of the President and Board of Directors (Jaschik, 2015; Saving Sweet Briar, 2015). After three months of legal battles, a settlement was announced on June 20, 2015 to keep Sweet Briar open, and to establish an entirely new Board of Directors and appointed President (Virginia v. Sweet Briar Institute, 2015).

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because examining what Sweet Briar alumnae did when faced with the threat of closing and how they were able to keep their college open, as well as the legal decision to reverse Sweet Briar's closing offers an example of and direction to subsequent grassroots efforts. I chose to examine Sweet Briar College for multiple reasons: the closing announcement was recent; it was a complete surprise to the alumnae, students, faculty, and staff of the college, and it received a large amount of media attention considering that Sweet Briar has on average a total enrollment under 1,000 students. I chose Sweet Briar because it exemplifies the current problem of increased school closings in higher education, especially at same-sex institutions, and because the closing announcement changed lives. During Sweet Briar's closing announcement Virginia was home to three women's colleges: Mary Baldwin University, Hollins University, and Sweet Briar College, and one of the three men's colleges still open today: Hampden-Sydney College. The announcement of Sweet Briar's closing thereby greatly impacted the higher education world in my home state of Virginia, and with Mary Baldwin University becoming coeducational in fall 2017, the desire to save same-sex colleges is at an all-time high (Crosier, 2016). Outside of Virginia, the announcement of Sweet Briar's closing also increased questions throughout the United States about the future of women's colleges and the implication of financial difficulties that other small, private schools may face.

The final significant factor behind why I chose to study Sweet Briar is because it is the only college, besides Wilson College, in the history of higher education that was

able to stay open and remain a same-sex institution after an announced closing. Sweet Briar's alumnae's grassroots efforts led the fight to keep the school open, and the campus culture that Sweet Briar stakeholders embrace surprised the world of higher education with their dedication and commitment to keeping Sweet Briar open. This case study focused on the time period between Sweet Briar's closing announcement in March 2015, through September 2015 when Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. delivered the final settlement payment to Sweet Briar College (Saving Sweet Briar, 2015). This timeframe was important to research and document because it could potentially benefit other small colleges facing the possibility of closure due to enrollment and financial difficulties.

Definitions

Throughout this case study of Sweet Briar College the following terms were used in a higher education context. Same-sex institutions refer to both all-female and all-male colleges and universities; any institution of higher education that only admits and enrolls one sex. Coeducation and coeducational institutions refer to colleges and universities that have both male and female students. The word institution is used interchangeably with colleges and universities of higher education. In the United States, the majority of colleges and universities have a governing board that oversees major institutional decisions (Association of Governing Boards, 2015). Sweet Briar College's governing board is known as their Board of Directors, and throughout this study is referenced to as such. Based on my research and for the point of this study, I have defined grassroots efforts as collective actions that increase the publicity and support for a cause by gathering individuals negatively affected and organizing them to create change. In this

case, grassroots efforts were self-organized by women with no institutional power to create institutional change at Sweet Briar. Campus culture refers to the traditions, values, celebrations, and rituals that made Sweet Briar's saga and unity for their school so strong; what it means to be a Sweet Briar woman, and why these women bonded together to save Sweet Briar (Kuh and Whitt, 1988).

In the next chapter I will provide a review of literature that coincides with the above listed problem statement and establishes the contextual background for this case study. The literature discussed below supported the need for an in-depth examination into Sweet Briar College's closing, as well as justified further study into how grassroots efforts and campus culture directly influenced the reversal of Sweet Briar's closing decision.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this case study was to examine how grassroots efforts and campus culture influenced the decision to reverse the closing of Sweet Briar College. This chapter will cover general information about women's colleges in the United States, the coeducation movement, the increase in college closings, and other colleges that successfully reversed closing decisions. Moreover, I reviewed studies conducted in the last ten years and national databases to provide evidence of the advantages of an educational system that includes diverse institutional types of higher education. This chapter also provides an overview of the current literature surrounding grassroots effort and campus culture in relation to higher education.

History of Women's Colleges in the United States

The start of higher education for women in the United States began with the recognition that women needed to be properly educated so they could academically influence the next generations of citizens: their sons (Nash, 2005). Prior to traditional colleges and universities becoming coeducational, academies, institutes, and seminaries created a higher learning opportunity for women. Seminary schools were private educational institutions for young women that promoted education and literacy, in hopes to prepare women to become wives and mothers (Nash, 2005). As seminaries grew throughout the United States, so did their effort to include additional academic options

for women, such as teaching. Catherine Beecher's Hartford Theological Seminary, Emma Willard's Troy Female Seminary, and Mary Lyon's Mount Holyoke Female Seminary were all major contributors to the women's academic movement at the end of the 18th century (Nash, 2005). Though these seminary schools were an influential part in the foundation of women's higher education, they did not offer academic degrees (Madigan, 2009; Nash, 2005). It was not until the 19th century that women's colleges were founded in an effort to provide higher education opportunities for women during a time where coeducation was almost nonexistent (Harwarth, DeBra, & Maline, 1997).

Scholars have assumed that the problem all-women's institutions faced during their 19th century founding was society's judgment that women were not academically equal to men, and that women's institutions were intellectually inferior (Nash, 2005). Women's education in the mid-19th century was primarily focused on educating women for "appropriate roles" such as teaching, nursing, and secretarial work, while still providing instruction on how to be a good wife and mother (Women's College Coalition, 2016, para. 6). The end of the 19th century brought about normal schools that were dedicated to training teachers in an all-women educational setting. Though initially developed as certificate and license granting institutions, in time normal schools became co-educational state funded comprehensive schools (Thelin, 2011).

Between 1837 and 1889 the "seven sisters" colleges: Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Radcliffe, Smith, Vassar, and Wellesley, were founded in an attempt to establish all-women's institutions that were academically equal to the prestigious universities that only enrolled men (Miller-Bernal, 2006; Women's College Coalition,

2016). According to Harwarth et al. (1997), while other all-women institutions struggled financially and with establishing rigorous academic programs, the seven sisters “signified a new era because of [their] unprecedented high admissions standards and academic programs...compared favorably to men’s colleges” (p. 6). The successes of the seven sisters’ colleges led to an increase in all-women institutions, as well as curriculum expansion for women leading into the 20th century.

Perhaps one of the most successful all-women’s colleges in America’s history is Spelman College (Spelman) in Atlanta, Georgia (Graham and Poulson, 2006). Spelman opened in 1881 and was one of the only private, same-sex colleges for Black women. According to Graham and Poulson (2006), while other women’s colleges have struggled to survive, Spelman has thrived in continuing to maintain their original goal of educating “African American undergraduate residential students” (p. 234). As the only remaining all-women’s Historically Black College (HBCU) today, Spelman has successfully continued to increase enrollment and improve the academic requirements of its students (Graham and Poulson, 2006).

Another women’s college that has had a strong influence in the history of women’s colleges is Mills College (Mills) in Oakland, California. Mills was founded in 1852 and is one of only three all-women’s colleges in California (Sheldon, 2006). Though different than Sweet Briar’s Board of Directors’ closure announcement, in 1990 Mill’s Board of Trustees announced that the school would become coeducational the following year (Sheldon, 2006). Following this announcement, students and staff went

on strike and after two weeks of peaceful protests their Board of Trustees reconsidered making Mills coeducational and reversed their decision (Sheldon, 2006).

It wasn't until the end of the 20th century that coeducation increased nationally, with significantly more coeducation institutions being established throughout the country (Harwarth et al., 1997). The 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause made denying admission on the basis of gender unconstitutional at any institution receiving federal funding (Diamond and Kimmel, 2004). Section one of the Equal Protection Clause stated that:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws (U.S. Const. Am. 14; Cornell University Law School, n.d.).

This influenced same-sex, public institutions to become coeducational in order to continue receiving federal funding, and has therefore resulted in no public, same-sex colleges existing today. During this time, many private women's colleges also became coeducational, merged with other institutions, or closed due to enrollment and financial difficulties (Harwarth et al., 1997).

Though not legally considered so, there are two public institutions that currently identify themselves as women's colleges: Texas Women's University (TWU) and

Rutgers' Douglass Residential College (Douglass) (Harwarth et al., 1997). TWU is a public university that is known as the "nation's largest university primarily for women" (Texas Women's University, 2016, p.1). Though the university's name and academic mission are centered on women's education, men are accepted into all academic programs (Texas Women's University, 2016). Douglass is a residential, undergraduate campus that enrolls any female student admitted into Rutgers University-New Brunswick (Douglass Residential College, 2016). While Douglass is a small all-women's college, it is a part of Rutgers' university system, which is a coeducational, research institution (Rutgers, 2016). Though Douglass classifies itself as an all-female, public college, it is a branch of Rutgers – the coeducational, state university of New Jersey (Rutgers, 2016), and thereby justifies its program by specifying that it is a "residential entity that provides...programs specifically for women" (Harwarth et al., 1997, p.12).

All-women's colleges today are private institutions, with the majority of them also being small, liberal-arts, and four-year colleges. The 2015 Digest of Education Statistics shows that 12,014 bachelor's degrees were awarded in the 2013-2014 academic year by all-women's colleges (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016), even though enrollment at women's colleges make up less than 1% of total students enrolled in higher education today (Harwarth et al., 1997; Snyder et al., 2016). Though women's enrollment and graduation rates are increasing at institutions of higher education, the diverse and large number of institutional options has led to a decrease in all-women's colleges by 83% in the last 53 years (Women's College Coalition, 2016).

As of 2016, five of the seven sisters' colleges remained all-women institutions, and thirty-nine institutions were solely committed to enrolling and educating women throughout the country (Women's College Coalition, 2016). While women's colleges have a memorable history, additional research "would not only help to further and clarify our understanding of these institutions and their impact on students in higher education in general, it would also provide valuable information to the entire field of education" (Harwarth et al., 1997, p. 80).

Benefits and Oppositions to Women's Colleges

The number of studies comparing women's college experiences at all-women's colleges versus coeducational institutions is extremely limited, and therefore there are conflicting reports on the positive and negative outcomes of same-sex education. Initial opposition to women's colleges represented the public opinion that women were not academically equal to men, and that "women's colleges [were not] a wise investment or worthwhile educational endeavor" (Harwarth et al., 1997, p. 4). In today's society, the question of all-women's colleges has less to do with women's academic abilities and more to do with the educational debate between the benefits of same-sex versus coeducational education. Is there truly a need for all-women's higher education opportunities in today's society?

Less than 5% of female college students chose to attend all-women's colleges in 2015 (Women's College Coalition, 2016), and while that number is small, research surrounding same-sex education shows a significant benefit to the academic environment women's colleges offer (Hu and Kuh, 2002). According to Harwarth et al. (1997),

students at women's colleges were less involved on campus compared to coeducational institutions, but more likely to hold leadership positions and graduate.

Coeducation Movement

While the coeducation movement at the end of the 19th century focused on the idea of coeducation across both gender and race, for the point of this study I reviewed research relevant only to the coeducation of men and women. According to Thelin (2011), the increase in coeducational opportunities in the late 1800s was a direct result of “the American public becom[ing] fascinated with undergraduate life” (p. 157), and the new mindset that attending college was “fashionable and prestigious” (p. 156). Along with the increased interest in attending college, the 19th century was also a turning point in the women's movement when one of the main equal right's goals was focused on education (Diamond and Kimmel, 2004).

As the coeducation movement moved into the 20th century, there was a stable rate of about 75% of institutions that were operating as coeducational through the 1950's (Miller-Bernal, 2004). Though this was seen as a success, the most prestigious colleges only allowed men to enroll: Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, Williams, Amherst, and Dartmouth (Miller-Bernal, 2004). According to Thelin (2011), in the 1950's the seven sisters colleges were considered “distinctive and effective” (p. 98), with nationally increased interest and funding in the 20th century. While there was a push for coeducation at all-men's colleges, the same pressure was not placed on all-women's colleges.

In 1975 Congress passed important legislation that required all federal military institutions to be coeducational (Miller-Bernal, 2004). This legislation resulted in all public universities throughout the country being required to admit both male and female students. Virginia was the last state to mandate a coeducational admission requirement for all public universities after Supreme Court case *United States v. Virginia* (1996), when the United States Department of Justice fought for coeducation at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) on the basis that it was a federally funded institution. The United States Department of Justice referenced two key legal reasons behind why VMI's all male admissions policy violated female students' rights: the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause, and the Title IX portion of the United States Education Amendments of 1972 (*United States v. Virginia*, 1996).

The 14th Amendment has been used since its ratification in 1868 as a defining factor in providing equal rights for all United States citizens. Cited in several Supreme Court cases, the 14th Amendment was the justification used in *United States v. Virginia* (1996), in that if no women's program offered the same benefits as VMI, there was no legal ground in allowing VMI to maintain their males-only admissions policy. Title IX of the United States Education Amendment of 1972 stated that: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (Title IX, 1972, para. 1). Seen as another factor in *United States v. Virginia*, Title IX specifically stated that no public institution receiving federal financing can exclude any participant from educational opportunity due to discriminative

reasoning. Hence, as a public institution, VMI had an obligation to all United States students to accept applications regardless of the gender of the applicant. While VMI was legally required to operate as a coeducational institution and admitted their first female student in 1997, the male students continued to struggle with the admittance of women into VMI through the end of the 20th century and viewed female students as a collective, an unwanted group (Diamond and Kimmel, 2004). Women at VMI are now seen as individuals (Diamond and Kimmel, 2004), resulting in the successful final coeducation movement at a public institution.

Colleges that Successfully Reversed Closing Decisions

The only known case of a college board announcing an institutional closure and then being legally forced to reverse that decision, besides Sweet Briar, was Wilson College in 1979 (Miller-Bernal, 2006; Zehner et al. v. Alexander, et al., 1979). Wilson College was originally founded in 1869 as a private, all-women's college located in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania (Wilson College, 2016). Wilson College's Board of Trustees voted and announced the college's closure in 1979, but a lawsuit organized by students, faculty, and alumnae successfully kept the school open (Miller-Bernal, 2006). Like Sweet Briar, Wilson (an all-women's college at the time) attributed the Board's decision to declining enrollment and financial hardship (Zehner et al. v. Alexander, et al., 1979). Students, faculty, and alumnae sued the school claiming that the decision to close Wilson College was based on mismanagement by the school's president and board of trustees, and not because the school was financially unable to stay open (Zehner et al. v. Alexander, et al., 1979). In Zehner et al. v. Alexander, et al. (1979), Judge John Keller

ruled in favor of keeping Wilson College open, and thereby set the precedent for potential future cases: "...the charter purposes are neither impossible nor impractical though in jeopardy as a result of the improvident and precipitous decision of the Board of Trustees on February 17, 1979" (p. 85). Wilson College remains open to this day, and as of fall 2014 became a coeducational institution (Wilson College, 2016).

Though a very different situation, Antioch College in Ohio can also be categorized as an institution that successfully remained open following a closing announcement. Antioch College was founded in 1852 as a private, coeducational college (Antioch College, 2013). Antioch College faced financial problems throughout its first years, and in 1862 the college was officially closed due to financial hardship (Antioch College, 2013). In 1865 the college reopened under the American Unitarian Association, but was forced to close for the 1881-1882 academic year due to the long depression (Antioch College, 2013). In 1919 the college was taken over by the Young Men's Christian Association and served as the national college of the YMCA, but in 1920 the school shut down for a third time for a curriculum redesign that would focus on a cooperative education (co-op) program (Antioch College, 2013). Co-op programs are designed to offer students professional experience where they can apply what they are learning in the classroom through practicums and internships, meaning that students would not enroll in courses for one-two semesters in order to focus on gaining work experiences, and then return to school after their enrollment break to finish their academics and graduate. In 1921 the college reopened with a cooperative education program and throughout the mid-late 20th century Antioch remained open but faced

several leadership and mission changes (Antioch College, 2013). In 2007 Antioch's Board of Trustees announced that the college would close indefinitely at the end of the 2008 academic year due to financial hardship (Antioch College, 2013). This time, faculty fought back and sued the school in an effort to keep it open, and though initially successful in their attempt to stop the closure, the college suspended operations in summer 2008 (Antioch College, 2013). In 2009, the Antioch College Continuation Corporation (ACCC) agreed to operate the college as an independent corporation and Antioch was reopened in 2011 (Antioch College, 2013). Antioch College still remains open today, and as of June 2016 is an accredited institution by the Higher Learning Commission (Antioch College, 2016). The Higher Learning Commission is an independent corporation that is one of six regional accreditors for degree-granting, post-secondary educational institution in the United States (Higher Learning Commission, 2016).

History of Sweet Briar College

Martha Lou Lemmon Stohlman wrote *The Story of Sweet Briar College* in 1956, a book that established the history of Sweet Briar. Sweet Briar College is a historic 3,250 acre, all-women's college located in rural Virginia (Sweet Briar College, 2016a). The college was established in 1901 as the Sweet Briar Institute, but its history started eight years prior in 1893 when Indiana Fletcher Williams revised her will for the last time (Stohlman, 1956). Prior to being a college, Sweet Briar was a plantation owned by Williams, and in her will she specified that the property be turned into "a school to educate girls to be useful members of society," stipulating that the school be committed

to White girls and young women (Stohlman, 1956, p. 39). In 1906, Sweet Briar College officially opened with “51 students, 36 boarders from twelve states, and 15 day-students” (Stohlman, 1956, p. 77). According to Stohlman (1956), in Sweet Briar’s first year students began raising money for an endowment and by 1914 an Association of Alumnae and Former Students of Sweet Briar College had been formed. In regards to the start of the endowment fund, Stohlman (1956) stated that it is “touching in its revelation of loyalty and of persistent faith that small contributions multiplied many times have their worth” (p. 111). This is a fundraising mindset that was reclaimed in the 2015 Saving Sweet Briar Campaign.

In the 1920’s Sweet Briar expanded by adding additional buildings to its campus, as well as the donated gift of the Georgian Library (Stohlman, 1956). In the 1930’s Sweet Briar added ten additional major options, and by 1942 revised the curriculum to strengthen academic offerings in five different departments (Stohlman, 1956). By 1946 Sweet Briar’s endowment was just under a million dollars and on its fiftieth anniversary in 1956 more than \$1,600,000 had been given (Stohlman, 1956). As Sweet Briar grew, so did its educational obligations. In 1964 Sweet Briar filed a bill of complaint with the Amherst County Circuit Court in hopes to remove "white" from their charter and establish Sweet Briar as a college for all women (*Sweet Briar Institute v. Robert Y. Button, et al.*, 1966). *Sweet Briar Institute v. Robert Y. Button, et al.* (1966) was ultimately reviewed by the Supreme Court of the United States in 1966, and resulted in the desegregation of Sweet Briar that same year (*Sweet Briar Institute v. Robert Y. Button, et al.*, 1966).

Reliable data regarding Sweet Briar during the 21st century is missing in the literature, but it is known that the school successfully remained open as an all-women's college during that time. In the spring of 2015 Sweet Briar's Board of Directors announced that the college would be closing at the end of the semester (Virginia v. Sweet Briar Institute, 2015). The literature from the period immediately after the announcement was reviewed in detail during data collection, and the findings are presented in chapter four. It is important to note that Sweet Briar College (2016a) described this event as a time when their alumnae "fought a legal battle and raised more than \$12 million in less than six months to preserve Sweet Briar's 114-year-old tradition of educating women who get things done" (p. 1).

Now that I have described the history of Sweet Briar College, I will discuss concepts from the literature that guide my understanding of the grassroots efforts that took place at Sweet Briar. These concepts include grassroots efforts, power, campus culture, and campus saga.

Grassroots Efforts

Grassroots efforts are actions made by everyday people who do not have positions of authority or coercive power, but whose contributions shape society (Kezar and Lester, 2011). According to Kezar and Lester (2011), grassroots efforts are characterized by "unique strategies, tactics, and approaches to navigate power" in order to overcome challenging obstacles and conditions (p. 25). Grassroots efforts, which are also described as grassroots activism in the literature, have mostly been studied at an organizational level with lobbying and movements for change by employees (McCarthy, 2005). While

this study is focused on alumnae who do not have the same relationship with campus administrators as employees would, the necessity of developing strategies, tactics and approaches to power remain the same.

Power. A major component of grassroots efforts are the approaches to navigating power (Kezar and Lester, 2011). In order to navigate power, it is important to understand the definition and types of power. According to Birnbaum (1988), power in relation to higher education is:

The ability to produce intended change in others, to influence them so that they will be more likely to act in accordance with one's own preferences. Power is essential to coordinate and control the activities of people and groups in universities, as it is in other organizations (p. 12-13).

A leading classification of power was developed in 1959 by French and Raven; they initially identified five bases of power in social groups: coercive power, reward power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power. French and Raven later incorporated the concept of informational power as an additional base of power in social groups (Raven, 2008).

Coercive power relies on control and having the ability to discipline those who do not change when urged to do so from an authority (Birnbaum, 1988). Reward power allows for positive and negative reinforcement to influence behavior (Birnbaum, 1988). Legitimate power is common among utilitarian organizations, where one source is given the power of influence based on a shared set of standards; a creation of hierarchy (Birnbaum, 1988). Referent and expert power are both products of committed

participants; where referent power results from a willingness to be influenced based on similarities, and expert power is formed around individuals with special knowledge or experiences (Birnbaum, 1988). Informational power is only influential when it is being transferred; what starts out as expert power is given to the individual being influenced once they understand the reasoning behind change (Raven, 2008).

According to Birnbaum (1988), colleges and university leaders tend to use referent and expert power due to faculty members being more likely influenced “by internalized principles of academic freedom and ethical behavior, and by communication from colleagues who are seen as sharing their values” (p. 14). Both Birnbaum (1988), and Kezar and Lester (2011) focused their research on faculty, staff, and administrative influences, whereas Raven (2008) discussed the bases of powers for social groups as a whole. The type of power is the foundation in how to approach and navigate influencing and controlling a group of people. For grassroots efforts to be successful, one must understand the type of power the group is trying to overcome, as well as the type of power behind the grassroots group (Kezar and Lester, 2011).

Campus Culture

Campus culture is a concentration of organizational culture which is rooted in organizational theory (Masland, 1985). According to Masland (1985), organizational culture is the purpose, commitment, and order of an organization. Masland (1985) also stated that an organization’s culture is influenced by the people within in it. In higher education, students are influenced by their campus culture: the traditions, values, celebrations, and rituals that create a saga (defined below) and potential for unity for their

institution (Kuh and Whitt, 1988). In the literature, the concept of campus culture has been described using different terms such as academic culture and institutional culture. In contemporary literature and for the point of this study, I will refer to it as campus culture. According to Clark (1980), the strength of a college's campus culture depends on several factors: size, tightness, age, history, and the founding characteristics. Smaller colleges tend to have stronger cultures, and the tightness of an organization exceedingly impacts its campus culture when a shared "ideology" is strong among interdependent parts, such as academic units, administrative offices, and student organizations (Clark, 1980). The older a university is, the stronger its culture is because "culture develops over time and an institution with a long history simply has a larger foundation upon which to build its culture" (Masland, 1985, p. 159). Like a long history, an institution's founding can also strengthen campus culture depending on how it was created, or any major transformations that have occurred throughout its history (Masland, 1985).

While Clark's (1980) studies add to the criteria to determine the strength of a campus' culture, there is not a clear method on how to determine what an institution's culture is (Masland, 1985). There are however categories of cultures that can be explored when establishing cultural patterns at an institution: heroes, symbols, rituals, and sagas (Masland, 1985). Heroes are individuals within an organization who represent the ideals and values of an institution, set standards, and act as a role model on campus (Masland, 1985). Heroes can be historical figures who impacted the history of the college, or a current college stakeholder who is identified as an embodiment of the organizational culture. Symbols are tangible items that represent certain beliefs or values (Masland,

1985). Whereas heroes and rituals are known throughout an organization, symbols can be identified by outsiders as a representation of an organization (Masland, 1985). Rituals are also used to represent values and ideals at an institution by providing evidence of culture (Masland, 1985). Rituals can be daily interactions, ceremonies, as well as traditions at a college. Saga is based off of an organization's historical roots and experiences (Masland, 1985). Campus saga is the final category used when exploring cultural patterns and will be discussed further below.

Campus saga. The concept of organizational saga, also referred to as campus saga in the literature, was developed by Clark (1980) to encompass extreme cases of strong institutional culture. Where campus culture refers to the traditions, values, celebrations, and rituals of a college (Kuh and Whitt, 1988), campus saga is a “collective understanding of unique accomplishment in a formally established group” (Clark, 1972, p. 178).

A good share of the faculty, the students, the administration, and the alumni came to hold in common a credible story of uncommon effort and achievement. The story was not always accurate, since it was highly selective and exaggerated. But it had important ingredients of truth and was based on a historical reality (Clark, 1980, p. 12).

When a strong campus culture creates a campus saga, it turns an organization into a community where stakeholders feel loyalty, commitment, and devotion to their university (Clark, 1972; Clark, 1980). A campus saga is developed through two stages: initiation and fulfilment (Clark, 1972).

There are three settings for an initiation of a campus saga: a new organization, an organizational crisis, or an organization ready for change (Clark, 1972). When initiating a new organization, the saga starts with a strong purpose and an individual or group willing to focus on a specific effort (Clark, 1972). The advantage of initiating a new organization is that the leader has the ability to build an organization from the top down, without being limited by pre-existing practices (Clark, 1972). In an initiation of an organizational crisis setting, those in charge realize “that they must either give up established ways or have the organization fail” (Clark, 1972, p. 180). Choosing to have their organization survive, power goes to the individual or group “proposing a plan that promises revival and later strength” (Clark, 1972, p. 180). The last setting for initiation would be an established organization that is not going through a crisis, but is ready for change (Clark, 1972). While leaders can initiate change, if they do not have the subsequent support of saga fulfilment then the unity of a campus saga will be non-existent. According to Clark (1972), as campus stakeholders develop and invest in a campus saga, their connection to the university creates a “foundation for trust and for extreme loyalty” (p.183).

Saga fulfilment is how a “unified sense of a special history is expressed” (Clark, 1972, p. 181). The special history expression can come from personnel, programs, an external social base, student subculture, and/or the imagery of the saga; all of which develops saga fulfilment. There are three levels of personal groups that create saga fulfilment: personnel, an external social base, and the student subculture. Personnel refers to the faculty of a university, and the commitment that these powerful members of

the campus must have in order for an initiation of a saga to be successful and enduring (Clark, 1972). An external social base is the “outside believers devoted to the organization” (Clark, 1972, p. 182), primarily being alumni. Though alumni focus on their past experiences, they can relate to the unique campus culture and accomplishments of the institution that are still relevant today (Clark, 1972). The student subculture is the student body’s support of the saga; in order for a saga to develop and remain as part of the campus, it must be supported through the student culture throughout the decades (Clark, 1972).

The two factors that adhere to saga fulfilment that are not individually influenced are academic programs and the imagery of the saga (traditions and rituals). An academic program creates visible practices, such as distinctive courses, requirements, and/or methods of teaching that are unique to an institution and highlights a campus’ culture (Clark, 1972). Imagery of saga is upheld by faculty, alumni, and students, and is expressed through traditions (Clark, 1972). These traditions can be generalized through statues, ceremonies, and the unique history of a university; they create saga fulfilment through memories and symbolism (Clark, 1972).

Weaknesses in the Literature

One of the benefits of the current literature surrounding coeducation and same-sex institutions is the historical context that surrounds higher education in the United States. The history of higher education is covered in several texts, so school closings throughout the country have been documented. Furthermore, the internet allows for effortless access to this information on institution, national media, and association websites. Due to the

great reach of information available, it is important to note that it also causes a weakness in the literature. This literature reviewed is limited by the specific contexts of this case study: all-women's colleges, coeducational movements, and literature dedicated directly to Sweet Briar.

Stohlman's 1956 book was written based on personal stories that hold both fact and fiction; therefore there is no way to truly confirm the accuracy of *The Story of Sweet Briar College* (Stohlman, 1956). Stohlman's book is the one source that details Sweet Briar's history, and predominantly covers Sweet Briar's story through 1956, but scholarly research on Sweet Briar's history from 1957-2015 is missing.

There is also a dearth of scholarly research regarding grassroots efforts in the situational context of institutional closings. The deficiency of information is most likely due to only two colleges having been able to remain open after a closing announcement; thereby restricting researchers' ability to study grassroots efforts and campus culture in higher education during the reversal of a school's closing announcement.

Additionally, though the study of grassroots efforts in higher education is a more recent phenomenon, other important concepts as noted above (i.e., power, campus culture, campus saga) are older concepts not widely used in current literature.

Nonetheless, I believe this literature is informative and offers guidance in addressing the purpose of my study. The next chapter offers the specific methodology and method that I implemented.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of my case study was to examine how grassroots efforts and campus culture influenced the decision to reverse the closing of Sweet Briar College. In this chapter I explain how I planned to conduct my qualitative case study, collect and analyze data, and create trustworthiness. I also comment on the theoretical constructs and identify the limitations of my study.

Thesis Description

In order to better understand how Sweet Briar was saved and how grassroots efforts and campus culture influenced their successful saving, I used a qualitative case study methodology. As described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the goal of qualitative research is to “achieve an understanding of how” (p. 15) and to specifically look into “how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (p. 24). My research focused on the Sweet Briar community during the six month time period between Sweet Briar’s closing announcement in March through September 2015 when Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. delivered the final settlement payment to Sweet Briar College (Saving Sweet Briar, 2015), which made a qualitative case study the most appropriate methodology to use.

This qualitative study, which used a case study approach focusing on one specific case, person or program, allows for an in-depth analysis of how Sweet Briar was saved,

and provides data for other small institutions that face the potential of closing and offer examples of successful grassroots efforts. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined data analysis as “the process of making sense out of the data,” and the “process used to answer your research questions” (p. 202). By analyzing interview and document data I create a perspective on how alumnae grassroots efforts during this six month time period reversed the closing decision, and what campus culture factors contributed to the successful saving of Sweet Briar. My data source chart is attached as Appendix A.

Methodology

My qualitative case study used an approach that focused on a six month time period at Sweet Briar College in 2015. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a case study “is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 37) using multiple sources to gather information; meaning that the researcher has the ability to choose what they want to study, and focus on one specific phenomenon (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The true identifier of a case study compared to other qualitative approaches is that case studies are defined by their unit of analysis, not the focus of study that is often evaluated in other qualitative research methods (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The unit of analysis for my study was Sweet Briar College alumnae who were specifically involved with the saving of Sweet Briar. The two data sources I used in this case study were interviews and document review with purposeful sampling in order to “discover, understand, and gain insight...therefore [selecting] a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). I interviewed alumnae of Sweet Briar, as well as explored the legal documents and news articles surrounding this

case in hopes to learn what events, people, and community factors led to Sweet Briar effectively reversing their closing decision.

When interviewing alumnae I used a semistructured interview approach that allowed for question flexibility, modifications based on situational changes, and room for topic exploration, while still focusing in on specific factors I hoped to gain information about (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). I used a purposeful sampling strategy and found participants based on convenience and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling is when researchers select a sample based on accessibility, time, location, and other availability factors (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Snowball sampling is used after researchers have established their first participants, who are asked for subsequent suggestions for additional participants (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

The benefit of document review in case studies is that documents are “ready-made sources of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 162). In this study I collected and analyzed public records, which are defined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as “the official, ongoing records of a society’s activities” (p. 164). Because I reviewed public record court documents using the courthouse database, their authenticity was well established. The news articles I used were also considered public records, and while many are opinion pieces, by reviewing multiple news avenues, the combined information gathered created authenticity through consistency in data. These documents were used to create a story line and highlight what alumnae did to save Sweet Briar. While interviews provided a firsthand experience on the Saving Sweet Briar campaign, news articles and legal

documents added to these stories and contributed to the missing data during the six month time period that was the focus of this study. I analyzed the documents by searching for patterns and consistency among stories, and used interview data as a reference. News articles allowed me to develop a timeline of change at Sweet Briar College, and identified any grassroots efforts and campus culture that influenced the decision to keep Sweet Briar open.

By conducting a qualitative case study analysis of Sweet Briar College during a six month period in 2015, I was able to carry out an in-depth research study for this specific phenomenon. While my interviews created insight into individual perspectives of this case, document review allowed me to “develop understanding and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 189). Interviews gave me personal experiences, while document review provided broader perspectives.

Data Collection

I used purposeful sampling when conducting interviews for my case study analysis of Sweet Briar in order to learn about specific examples of grassroots efforts during the saving Sweet Briar movement (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). My sampling strategy for all interviews was to conduct semi-structured interviews of alumnae who either self-identified, or were identified by snowball sampling as grassroots leaders.

I attempted to interview six alumnae who were heavily involved with the Saving Sweet Briar campaign and planned to determine those alumnae by reaching out to the Saving Sweet Briar, Inc.’s Board of Directors, as well as Sweet Briar’s Office of

Alumnae Relations and Development. Using the alumnae suggestions I received, I emailed them an interview request (Appendix B), and followed up with individual alumnae using purposeful sampling. All alumnae interviewed were required to sign a consent form (Appendix C) prior to the start of their interview, and had the same interview protocol (Appendix D). I identified the majority of participants using snowball sampling from alumnae interviews conducted beforehand. While conducting interviews I audio recorded all meetings, with participant approval. Following each interview I transcribed verbatim all interview data collected within one week to increase familiarity with my data (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

The second component of my data collection was document review, specifically using a systematic approach to gain access to and review news articles and documents that surrounded this case. As public records, gaining access to these documents was accomplished by using an online search for news articles. I reviewed news articles that were written during the six month time period that is the focus of my study, and by reviewing these articles I hoped to identify key grassroots efforts and the campus culture of Sweet Briar that led to the saga surrounding the campus, as well as campus culture during the time frame of my study. Documents that I reviewed that are not publically available will be cited throughout this study as personal communication. These personal communications are private letters, emails, and email attachments that were provided to me by interview participants.

Data Analysis

I analyzed and collected data simultaneously throughout this case study, though a final analysis was not conducted until all of the data had been collected. According to Merriam (2009), data analysis is “the process of making sense out of the data...[by] consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read” (p. 176). I began my interview data analysis by reviewing and coding all transcribed interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined coding as “some sort of short-hand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of data” (p. 199). When transcribing and reading my interview transcripts, I coded by highlighting, taking notes, and writing observations in the margins. I used these coding techniques as a way to identify “interesting, potentially relevant or important” data for my study (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). After my initial coding, I analytically coded my transcripts using a color-code tagging system to organize my findings based on reoccurring patterns that related and appeared throughout the data (Merriam, 2009). These patterns became categories, which developed the best answers to my research questions (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), categories are exhaustive, meaning “you should be able to place all data that you [decide is] important or relevant to the study in a category” (p. 212). Any commonly mentioned influencing factors that were used to highlight grassroots efforts and campus culture were designated under one of my categories as a factor in the saving of Sweet Briar.

I began document analysis by gaining copies of all legal proceedings relevant to the Sweet Briar case. Using these legal documents, I planned on putting together a

timeline of events from the first filing, through the settlement agreement that kept the school open. Once I completed coding all interview transcripts I added those findings along with findings from relevant news articles to my timeline of events by including any additional data that I found as relevant to the six month time period of my focus. By combining both interview and document data into a timeline of progression, I hoped to identify key grassroots efforts and campus cultures that contributed to the movements behind how the college stayed open. The goal of this segment of my data analysis was to develop a “case study database” where all data from the study was brought together in order to be “easily retrievable” during in-depth analyses (Merriam, 2009, p. 203).

The data collected through interviews and document review was analyzed to determine if specific grassroots efforts and campus culture were apparent throughout the six month time period being studied. I explored the data for influencing factors directly affected by grassroots efforts and the campus culture of Sweet Briar College.

Theoretical Frame

I used the classifications of grassroots efforts and campus culture as a guide while collecting and analyzing my data. Grassroots leaders are everyday people who do not have positions of authority or coercive power, but whose contributions shape society (Kezar and Lester, 2011). Grassroots leaders create “unique strategies, tactics, and approaches to navigate power and experience unique obstacles and conditions” (Kezar and Lester, 2011, p. 25). For this specific case study, I examined the perspectives and behaviors of alumnae of Sweet Briar who were actively engaged in the Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. campaign by leading, motivating, or demonstrating activism against the

school's closing, and who created as well as demonstrated strategies, tactics, and approaches. Grassroots efforts are the actions taken by grassroots leaders that directly influenced the successful saving of Sweet Briar. I examined these efforts and determined if and how they impacted the saving of Sweet Briar.

Campus culture refers to the traditions, values, celebrations, and rituals that made Sweet Briar's saga and unity for their school so strong, especially during challenging times (Kuh and Whitt, 1988). According to Kuh and Whitt (1988) "individuals often look larger than life in the making of an organizational saga and sustaining campus culture" (p. 87), meaning that the culture of an organization is made up of multiple individuals with lasting traditions and stories that unite them together under one campus culture (Kuh and Whitt, 1988). For this specific study, campus culture focused on what it means to be a Sweet Briar woman, why these women bonded together to fight the closing announcement, and what ties them to Sweet Briar even after graduation. I specifically looked for the relationship between traditions, values, celebrations, and rituals at Sweet Briar and the grassroots efforts used to save it.

Trustworthiness

Using Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) discussion on trustworthiness as a guide, I planned on creating trustworthiness by establishing credibility. I created credibility by using a peer examiner to review my data and findings (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), and by sharing my draft findings with other higher education professionals to solicit feedback or suggestions for recommendations, implications, and additional/future studies (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). I also established credibility by sharing my findings with study

participants through member checks, in which I asked for feedback on my emerging findings in order to determine if my interview interpretations are recognizable through the participants' experiences (Merriam, 2009; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Limitations

There are two limitations to this study. The first is that there are factors that influenced the school's closing that were missing or not discovered during data collection and analysis. The second is that this case study focuses on a single situation: the closing of Sweet Briar College. By only focusing on one school: a small, all-women's college in rural Virginia, this study is not generalizable to other institutions facing closure.

Conclusion

Though the purpose of this study was to analyze Sweet Briar College's specific closing case, the main advantage of this case study was that the data collected were recent and relevant to the ongoing issue of institutional closures in higher education. The lack of research pertaining to all-women's colleges and the reversal of closings demonstrated the need for this study. This research and its findings were important to document because they could potentially benefit other small colleges facing enrollment and financial difficulties with the possibility of closure, as well as exhibits how grassroots efforts and campus culture can create institutional change.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine how grassroots efforts and campus culture influenced the decision to reverse the closing of Sweet Briar College. The findings that emerged from my research include four categories: a culture of empowerment and responsibility, wide social network, sustained activism, and legal influences. The culture of empowerment and responsibility among Sweet Briar women, as well as a wide social network whose grassroots efforts developed through sustained activist movements ultimately kept Sweet Briar open. In this chapter I will discuss Sweet Briar's data demographics and participant profiles, closing context, and the categories that emerged from my findings.

Data Demographics and Analysis

In case study inquiry, researchers typically use both interview and document review as data sources. These were my data collection methods for this study. For this case study, I explored how the alumnae of Sweet Briar actively engaged in the saving of Sweet Briar College by leading, motivating, or demonstrating against the school's closing. Interviews were conducted in order to comprehend personal experiences, while document review provided a source of broader perspectives. It was my goal through data collection to create a timeline of what led to the closing of Sweet Briar and the response

that followed, as well as to identify grassroots efforts and campus culture that influenced the decision to keep Sweet Briar open.

Interviews. I conducted all of my interviews using a semi-structured interview protocol, initially using purposeful sampling to find alumnae who either self-identified, or were identified by snowball sampling as grassroots leaders. The participant criteria for this study included women who have graduated from Sweet Briar College and who were involved in the saving Sweet Briar campaign. I specifically chose participants based on their involvement and continued passion for the saving of Sweet Briar. Using convenient sampling I also selected participants based on their availability to meet for an interview.

The data demographics of my interview participants include a total of six women, five of whom are alumnae, and one faculty member. Each of the participants in this study met the criteria of being a grassroots leader as defined in chapter one. They were all identified as integral members in the saving Sweet Briar movement through document review or by an already selected participant. While my initial intent was to only interview alumnae who were directly involved with Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. immediately following the closing announcement, through snowball and purposeful sampling I decided to interview a current alumna who was a student during the closing announcement, and a faculty member who was highly involved with on-campus efforts to save the college. I chose to interview those two participants based on the subsequent suggestions during my initial interviews with alumnae participants. I deemed these non-alumnae interviews as necessary in order for my study to be well rounded with

supplementary significant viewpoints. Each participant had different roles, responsibilities, and influences on the saving of Sweet Briar, and therefore I was able to gain a wide spectrum of perspectives and stories from each interview.

All interviews were transcribed and coded following completion. I coded my transcripts using a strategy of highlighting, taking notes, and writing observations in the margins. This coding technique was successful in helping me identify “interesting, potentially relevant or important” data for my study (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). After my initial coding, I analytically coded my transcripts using a color-code tagging system to organize my findings based on reoccurring categories that directly impacted the saving of Sweet Briar.

Participant profiles. I interviewed six women between the ages of 22-75 who will be referred to as participants A-F throughout this study. Each participant provided different insights and stories about their experiences in the fight to save Sweet Briar. These diverse perspectives allowed for a well-rounded understanding of the grassroots efforts and campus culture at Sweet Briar that influenced the decision to keep the school open.

Participant A. Participant A is an older alumna who has been actively involved with Sweet Briar College for over 50 years. She held various offices and leadership positions while she was a student at Sweet Briar and after graduation served on both the Sweet Briar Alumnae Board and on their Board of Directors. Out of all of my participants, Participant A was the most involved prior to the closing announcement. She was actively engaged with the school, its students and faculty members, and had a well-

developed network of alumnae with whom she stayed connected with. When Sweet Briar announced its closing she was not surprised, but angry. Participant A was a leader in Saving Sweet Briar, Inc., a trailblazer for alumnae engagement across the decades, and worked closely with the legal team and alumnae on developing the case that kept Sweet Briar open.

Participant B. Participant B is a fellow active alumna who also previously served on Sweet Briar's Board of Directors. Prior to Sweet Briar's closing announcement she was involved in an out of state alumnae group, and continued that involvement throughout the fight to save Sweet Briar. Due to her career, Participant B was very informed about organization development and organizational leadership, and therefore was the most outspoken participant about the mismanagement of the school by the Board of Directors and Interim President. Participant B was a leader in Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. Participant B worked with the legal team, drove communication outreach, participated in social media groups, and assisted in establishing Sweet Briar's new Board of Directors after the decision reversal.

Participant C. Participant C is one of the lead alumnae who focused on the communication efforts in the saving Sweet Briar movement. The communication initiatives started out as an outreach effort to inform other alumnae about what was happening at Sweet Briar, and to let them know women were fighting to keep the college open. These outreach efforts brought together the large network of Sweet Briar alumnae and ended up being the leading tactic used during the fundraising campaign. Participant C organized volunteers around the country and internationally for the mailing and calling

campaigns. She created strategies, contact lists, and letters with other alumnae leaders. Participant C was different from my other participants because she had the ability to commit between twelve and sixteen hours per day to helping save Sweet Briar. She described her experience as having been her “biggest philanthropy opportunity.”

Participant D. A former class president, student government vice president and active campus leader, participant D remained involved after graduation as the president of her class in which she was tasked with keeping her fellow classmates informed and leading fundraising efforts. Though Participant D was an active alumna, she had no idea that Sweet Briar was in trouble prior to its closing announcement. Participant D was a leader in Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. in that she worked closely with the legal team, spearheaded communications through social media, and established leaders for the fundraising campaigns. Participant D provided insight on how the fight to save Sweet Briar looked for the majority of alumnae: balancing a full-time job, family, children and long after hours dedicated to saving the college.

Participant E. This is the one participant who is not an alumna of Sweet Briar. Participant E was recommended as a grassroots leader based on her on-campus involvement in the fight to save Sweet Briar by two other participants. As a faculty member who has been at Sweet Briar for over a decade and has lived on campus for a majority of that time, Participant E is passionate about the school and has had the opportunity to work closely with both students and alumnae throughout her time teaching there. During the saving Sweet Briar movement, Participant E worked with the Saving Sweet Briar, Inc.’s Board of Directors on local petitions and doing “whatever needed to

be done.” As a faculty member on campus every day she was able to help organize on-campus initiatives and attended all but one of the court proceedings. While Participant E did not attend Sweet Briar, her personal narrative of the saving Sweet Briar movement undoubtedly enhanced my study. Her firsthand experience in working with students and alumnae, her in person attendance to both on-campus closing announcements, and her involvement with saving Sweet Briar provided a stronger understanding of the on-campus reactions and efforts.

Participant F. Participant F was a junior student at the time of the closing announcement. She served as a leader in student government, was actively involved on campus, and participated in summer internships provided by Sweet Briar alumnae. The benefit of interviewing a participant who was a student during the closing was the first-hand experiences she was able to share. As an involved student, she was aware of the happenings at the college and the efforts being made on-campus to save the school. While Participant F supported the saving Sweet Briar movement, she was not as informed as the other participants about the actions being taken to stop the school’s closure. While the alumnae fought to save the school, Participant F and her fellow classmates were focused on trying to figure out where they would transfer to for the following year and how the closing of Sweet Briar would affect their long term plans and goals.

Document review. My document review took me through a multitude of news and social media platforms, legal proceeding overviews, and individual emails and letters written by alumnae during the saving Sweet Briar movement. I reviewed Sweet Briar’s closing announcements, Saving Sweet Briar Inc.’s website, and media reports

surrounding the closing. While reviewing and analyzing my data, I categorized data by categories that were related and appeared throughout the interviews and document review. As with my interview transcripts, I coded my documents using a strategy of highlighting, taking notes, and writing observations in the margins. Because I coded my transcripts and documents after conducting my interviews, I was able to use a color-code tagging method to organize my findings based on the initial patterns that emerged during my interviews. After creating a “case study database” (Merriam, 2009, p. 203), I was able to identify key categories that directly influenced the closing reversal of Sweet Briar College.

Closing Context

For this study I specifically looked at grassroots efforts, campus culture, and the decision reversal process. During data review and analysis I found a multitude of reoccurring patterns that I think are important to include as research findings. These patterns were all focused around Sweet Briar’s closing, and establish an understanding of why community stakeholders were shocked when the closing of Sweet Briar was announced. The important closing context that emerged during my study included the closing announcements, information about Sweet Briar’s President and Board, empty positions at the school, and the unanswered questions that the students, faculty, staff, and alumnae faced when the closing was announced.

Sweet Briar demographics. It is important to note the student and campus demographics prior to the closing announcement in spring 2015. According to Sweet Briar’s 2014-2015 Fact Sheet (2015) there were 700 enrolled students in the fall 2014

semester. 71% of the students were white and 92% lived on campus (Sweet Briar College, 2015d). 100% of the incoming freshmen were under 21, full-time students (Sweet Briar College, 2015d). At the end of the 2014 fiscal year, Sweet Briar's endowment was \$94 million with an operating budget of \$35.4 million (Sweet Briar College, 2015d). According to the 2014-2015 Fact Sheet (2015), 99% of Sweet Briar's students were receiving institutional grants and scholarships, with 30% receiving federal grant aid (Sweet Briar College, 2015d). For the 2014 fiscal year, the college had accepted \$11.8 million in fundraising donations with an alumnae giving rate of 30% (Sweet Briar College, 2015d).

Closing announcements. The Sweet Briar closing announcement on March 3, 2015 “shocked higher education” and came with no warning or call to university stakeholders for help (Locke, 2015, p. 22). According to my findings, the first person to find out about the closing after the decision was made by the University President and Board of Directors was the Dean of Students; all of whom were aware of the closing prior to March 3, 2015. The Dean of Students asked that the President inform the Student Body President and Junior Class President of the closing in a 10am meeting prior to making the campus wide announcements. That did occur. The next announcement went out via email to former members of Sweet Briar's Board of Directors at 11:50am. The college announced that morning that there would be two on-campus announcements at noon, the first for faculty and staff in the school's chapel, and the second for all students in the auditorium. The college also had sent out an embargoed press release to the media, which was set to be published at 1pm.

It is important to note that none of the faculty, staff, students, parents or alumnae had any idea that these meetings were scheduled to announce that Sweet Briar was closing. According to Participant E, the faculty and staff may have known that enrollment was dropping and that the draw on Sweet Briar's endowment was becoming unsustainable, but no one had any idea that the college administration was considering closing the school. The student meeting that was to start at noon had audio technical difficulties and did not start until almost 1pm, when media releases started going out and students started seeing notifications on their phones through social media that the school was closing. There were news trucks and media already on campus and waiting when students were released from the announcement. Participant F described the experience as having no space for any kind of grief or adjustment.

The alumnae found out in a variety of ways. An email was sent out by the college to alumnae at 12:56pm, followed by a mailed letter received later that week. Some alumnae, like Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. leader, Tracy Stuart, found out on Facebook and through other social media platforms (Participant D). Other alumnae found out from phone calls from other alumna, former classmates, or current students; all trying to find out what was going on and if the closing announcement was really true.

Sweet Briar Interim President and Governing Board. While the actions and reasonings behind Sweet Briar's President and the Board of Directors' decision to close the school do not directly relate to my research, it is important to note the various concerns of mismanagement and accountability of Sweet Briar's leadership expressed by participants and alumnae. Interim President Jones was at Sweet Briar for only eight

months before announcing its closure, a closure that one news interview claimed was “because key people in positions of power poorly governed the school” (Patrick, 2015, p. 3). *The Roanoke Times* (2015a) described the Sweet Briar closing as “yet here is a case where there is no accountability. The Sweet Briar Board is self-appointed, self-perpetuating. There’s no particular membership that elects them; they just are” (p. 2).

Former Board member Maggie Saylor Patrick wrote in an article that members were “discouraged from speaking out publically against decisions which we dissented...that ‘the role of the board is to govern, not manage’ a mantra we were told” (Patrick, 2015, p. 2). Certain important matters were decided upon and discussed by the Interim President and Executive Committee without any transparency or input from the rest of the board. Richard Leslie, another former Board member who claimed to have been asked to step down by Chairman Paul Rice, wrote a June, 2014 letter that specified how dissenting opinions were stifled by leadership, and that the current directors were unable or unwilling to tackle the college’s challenges or think creatively about ways to address them (The Editorial Board, 2015).

Empty positions. Primarily linked to a time when Jo Ellen Parker was the President at Sweet Briar from 2009-2014, the college had recently witnessed almost a complete turnover, and then a drastic reduction of faculty and staff in the years prior to its closing announcement (Patrick, 2015). Key senior staff and other critical administrative positions were left open for over two years with no plans in place to fill those positions (Patrick, 2015; The Editorial Board, 2015). At the time of Sweet Briar’s closing announcement, the following positions were either vacant or held by interim staff: Dean

of Enrollment, Vice President of Development, Director of Marketing, Director of Alumnae Relations, and Director of the Annual Giving Fund (Locke, 2015; Patrick, 2015; The Editorial Board, 2015). Along with these unfilled positions, Sweet Briar had an outdated development strategy and a non-existent marketing strategy, all major contributors to the college's revenue (Locke, 2015).

Unanswered questions. When Sweet Briar announced that it was closing on March 3, 2015, there were several questions beyond “why?” The main question from underclass students was where were they going to go? While the school assured them that they were working with other institutions to set up transfer agreements, nothing had been formally decided or established. All transfer deadlines had passed, so there was no guarantee schools would be willing or would have room to accept Sweet Briar students, and the chances of students receiving financial aid were slim to none (G. M. Oates, personal communication, 2015). The other issue with transferring was that not all credits earned through Sweet Briar would transfer due to different schools' programs and residency requirements, especially for juniors (G. M. Oates, personal communication, 2015). Where students could request transcripts after the summer had not been decided, as Sweet Briar worked to decide who would house those records after the school's closing. The fact sheet provided to students stated: “we will communicate how to access your transcripts once this arrangement has been finalized” (Sweet Briar College, personal communication, March 3, 2015a, p. 18). When asked if the email addresses that students traditionally kept after graduation would be accessible, the college responded: “at this point in the process, we do not know” (Sweet Briar College, personal communication,

March 3, 2015a, p. 18). Participant F, a student at the time of the closing announcement said that she couldn't believe "that a place that prides themselves on providing education for women wouldn't create a plan for them to finish an education."

Along with sharing student concerns, faculty and staff were left with unanswered questions of their own. How would their benefits be handled? When would they be released from their employment contracts? For most faculty members, it was too late for them to find other jobs before the fall semester started. Some faculty members had children and spouses at reciprocal institutions using tuition benefits provided by Sweet Briar. When asked what would happen with those benefits the college told them that: "you will receive information later this month about next steps" (Sweet Briar College, personal communication, March 3, 2015a).

Sweet Briar College is unique in that a large number of faculty live on campus. Faculty have the option to rent or own houses on campus – so faculty found themselves faced with the fact that while they owned the houses, they did not own the land underneath them (G. M. Oates, personal communication, 2015). Sweet Briar responded to those individuals with the following statement: "for employees that own homes, you will be contacted individually during the month of April to talk through details and options" (Sweet Briar College, personal communication, March 3, 2015a, p. 14). Having spent years living on campus, one faculty member stated that she and her husband never had any intention of leaving their home on campus, that if the college had successfully closed they would have "just bought a shotgun and squatted" (G. M. Oates, personal communication, 2015, p. 2).

Summary. The above mentioned findings are important because they establish a broader understanding of what happened when Sweet Briar announced its closing and the myriad of issues it created. How students, faculty, staff, and alumnae found out about the closing caused them to be angry and resulted in them questioning the legality behind the decision. Community stakeholders having no confidence in the Interim President and Board created an environment of accountability; stakeholders expected the Interim President and Board to justify their decisions and be responsible for their choices. The level of unknown is an important concept because it demonstrated that the decision to close Sweet Briar had not been fully contemplated. The questions surrounding the closing proved that not all options had been considered, and that well thought out strategies had not been developed.

Data Categories

The findings that emerged from my research include four categories: a culture of empowerment and responsibility, wide social network, sustained activism, and legal influences. The culture of empowerment and responsibility, together with the wide social network of Sweet Briar's alumnae are the categories that reveal and support the influence that grassroots efforts and campus culture had on the saving of Sweet Briar. My study suggests that the campus culture at Sweet Briar before the closing announcement created an atmosphere among students that supported sustained activism. Activism through grassroots efforts and the legal proceedings surrounding this case were the ultimate contributors in the decision to reverse Sweet Briar's closing. The activism demonstrated by the women of Sweet Briar incorporates all aspects of the above mentioned categories,

as well as legal proceedings. While I will further discuss my findings in chapter five, it is important to note how these categories interrelate as influencing factors in the saving of Sweet Briar.

Culture of Empowerment and Responsibility

One of the reoccurring patterns that appeared when reviewing and analyzing my data was the influence for high motivation at Sweet Briar. The category of culture of empowerment and responsibility is made up of the college's ability to empower students, develop successful alumnae, and cultivate a culture of responsibility.

Current students. What students learn at Sweet Briar consistently creates a passion and loyalty to the institution among its alumnae. The passion is made from strong emotional connections that develop among students, faculty, staff, and alumnae, and their commitment to Sweet Briar. That passion is what persuaded so many alumnae to fight to save Sweet Briar, and what committed them to saving the college so that other women could have those same experiences. According to Participant E, Sweet Briar creates a desire for knowledge, with students who strive for excellence and take advantage of the educational opportunities they experience. Based on my data, Sweet Briar is committed to both the value of a women's college education and the empowerment of women. Sweet Briar empowers its students by promoting intellectualism, confidence, and passion about their own lives and their abilities to be successful.

In the classroom Sweet Briar "has trained women to be exemplary scholars" (Taylor and Schmidt, 2015, p. 9). Alumna Diana Robin reminisced in *The New York*

Times (Green, 2015) about “having dinner with her professors and being told how important her work was to their own research...When I left Sweet Briar, there was no question that I would go on to graduate school” (p. 4). All of my participants, as well as the alumnae who were interviewed in media sources throughout my document review described Sweet Briar as a place where women could grow into their own persons. Participant C described Sweet Briar as a place with endless opportunities for leadership, a place where there are always discussions, and always questions being asked. The faculty encourages students to think, to ask why – “every women there was respected and taught to have strong opinions” (Green, 2015, p. 8). All of my participants described alumnae as being passionate about saving Sweet Briar because of the lessons that they were taught there, and the desire they had for future generations to have that same experience.

According to Participant B, every class, every experience at Sweet Briar was built and “designed to inspire in each student a bigger sense of personal self.” Students were given the opportunity to fully explore what they want to do. Participant F stated that Sweet Briar prided itself on its ability to develop leaders – not just teaching students about their fields, but teaching them to be leaders within those fields. A consistent experience former students articulated across media articles was having faculty do more than show them the answer to their questions, but rather having professors ask how they want to pursue their educational objectives themselves. Participant B described it as “connect[ing] your interests with how you see yourself in the world, and then [acting] on it.”

At Sweet Briar students do not have opportunity to be invisible in the classroom, meaning that they are put in situations that allow them to develop “critical thinking skills and debate techniques” (Green, 2015, p. 9). Students learned to raise their hands and to keep them up, and they learned a sense of their own capabilities (Green, 2015). Once students attend a women’s college “you become that kind of independent, ‘I can do anything’ kind of person... [you learn how to] speak and write quite well and you are not afraid to speak and write” (Participant A). Students were taught to think things through, how to write and communicate. Accordingly, “at Sweet Briar we were always encouraged to speak out if there’s something we want, then to find a way to get it” (Participant C).

Perhaps one of the paramount stories that emerged demonstrating student empowerment during my study was shared by Participant F and was the final request of the 2015 graduating senior class. A majority of the senior students signed a petition and brought it to the attention of the Student Class President that they did not want President Jones at their graduation, and that they did not want him to present them with their diplomas. The Student Body President then sent a survey out to the entire senior class asking for their opinion and suggestions on who they would prefer to present their diplomas. The survey received 100% participation, and while the seniors were not unanimous in their decision, the majority of the senior class did not want President Jones to offer them their diploma. The senior class was empowered by the lessons they had learned at Sweet Briar which they demonstrated by their willingness to ask for what they

wanted and their ability to successfully obtain their desired results – President Jones not attending graduation.

Attorney Ellen Bowyer started working at Sweet Briar as an adjunct professor in the fall 2015 semester, teaching a course that detailed the legal proceedings of the saving Sweet Briar case, and she described students as having a “great resilience and absolutely infectious optimism and energy” (McManamay, 2016, p. 1). Participant F described her experience at Sweet Briar as being in this “environment with these fabulously crazy, passionate, energetic young women...there’s something about education, there’s something about educating young women to be strong and empowered that has made our community what it is.” Sweet Briar has always been known for “unique nurturing of young women, giving them the self-confidence to meet challenges and set goals” (Taylor and Schmidt, 2015, p. 9). According to participants, when officials at Sweet Briar College announced its closure, students asked questions, brainstormed strategies, and used the skills they gained at Sweet Briar in an effort to save their school.

Successful graduates. Saving Sweet Briar, Inc., the non-profit organization created by alumnae that led the fight to save Sweet Briar, specified that one of the reasons saving Sweet Briar was so important was because of the thousands of alumnae who have gone on to have successful personal and professional lives (Saving Sweet Briar, Inc., personal communication, May 1, 2015). Graduates include Jo Ann Kramer, the first woman to receive a master’s degree in engineering from the University of Virginia, Marshalyn Yeargin-Allsopp who along with being the first Black student to attend Sweet Briar, was also the first Black woman at Emory University’s School of

Medicine, and Frances Morse who was hired by MIT to work on the Apollo program; are just a few of the successful graduates from Sweet Briar (Green, 2015). Along with developing a culture of influencing students into post-graduate studies, Sweet Briar's acceptance rate into "health and veterinary professional schools is more than twice the national average" (Taylor and Schmidt, 2015, p. 8) – meaning that Sweet Briar is not only building up graduates to attend graduate school, but are also producing successful applicants for some of the most competitive graduate programs. Participant E described Sweet Briar as "this tiny place [that] commits itself to academic excellence, which ends up propelling people to greater heights than they ever expected to achieve."

Sweet Briar has "nurtured generations of feisty professionals" (Green, 2015, p. 1-2), who are often referred to as fierce, driven alumnae. The success in the saving of Sweet Briar can be directly related to the success of the leaders that Sweet Briar has produced (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015b). Brooke Linville, Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. board member said it best: "I think Sweet Briar itself has character to it that makes it a college that women will fight to save...How amazing is it that this college gave us the skills to save it?" (Pounds, 2015c, p. 3). The alumnae of Sweet Briar had the professional skills, legal strategy, and money to assemble together around one common cause – the saving of Sweet Briar (Pounds, 2015c). All of my interview participants explained that the experiences they had at Sweet Briar made them dedicated to saving the school and gave them the confidence that they could do it.

The "Pink and Green Army." The "Pink and Green Army" is mentioned in a letter written by an alumna Grace Mary Garry Oates to her alumnae sisters in a plea to

stay involved and become aware of Sweet Briar's needs following the court decision to reverse the closure (G. M. Oates, personal communication, 2015). With this analogy she is referring to the women who fought to save Sweet Briar College, the driven and focused women who "exceeded fundraising goals, took legal action and ultimately reached a settlement that enabled the college to remain open" (Elfman, 2015, p. 1). Pink and green are Sweet Briar's school colors, and were used as motivating insignia throughout the entire saving Sweet Briar movement. Banners and posters were made in pink and green, letters were sent on pink paper, and women went to saving Sweet Briar events dressed in pink and green clothing. Throughout my data review, all efforts made by alumnae to save Sweet Briar included some form of pink and green insignia.

All of my interview participants told stories and emphasized the impact that saving Sweet Briar will have on the rest of their lives. This movement was really a story of alumnae who believed in Sweet Briar when their President and Board did not (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015b). Participant D indicated that "everyone involved in the beginning took a huge leap of faith – not knowing if their money, time and efforts would result in a successful outcome for the college." The spirit of alumnae was inspired by their founder, Indiana Fletcher Williams whose will established Sweet Briar College and would eventually be the reason it was legally required to stay open. Former attorney and retired Bridgewater College President Phillip Stone replaced Sweet Briar's President Jones on July 2, 2015. As part of the June 20, 2015 settlement that kept Sweet Briar open, President Jones was given one week to resign (Saving Sweet Briar, 2015). President Stone returned from retirement to help Sweet Briar reorganize, restructure, and

reenergize in hopes to increase the college's chances of long term success. President Stone looked to alumnae for support stating "that energy, that passion, that love for their institution is so obvious and so continuing, I want to facilitate it and enable it" (Elfman, 2015, p. 1). With support of the new administration the alumnae fundraising efforts took off and the long term fight to keep Sweet Briar open strengthened.

Thanks to the support of their families, alumnae were able to commit their time and energy to the saving of Sweet Briar. In her letter, Grace Mary Garry Oates (G. M. Oates, personal communication, 2015) wrote that "many, many women have worked long and hard, neglecting almost every other aspect of their lives, in order to save Sweet Briar" (p. 1). Participant D described how "people literally put their life on hold to dedicate their time to saving Sweet Briar...it was a good thing that it was only three months, I don't think any of us could have gone that much longer." As mentioned previously, people dedicated hours of their time. For example, participant C admitted she spent as much as twelve to sixteen hours per day fighting to save Sweet Briar when the initial campaign started. All participants explained their passion for Sweet Briar as the primary motivator behind doing what needed to be done, and also specifically thanked their families, partners, and friends for taking on additional responsibilities such as household chores, child care, and financial responsibilities so that alumnae could commit their time to saving the college.

The Pink and Green Army fought for future generations of Sweet Briar women, wanting them to have opportunities for the same special and unique experiences. Participant B said that "every single person involved was a leader in the fight to save

Sweet Briar...the level of effort that went into this on behalf of literally every person involved was unprecedented.” Sweet Briar taught its students to be creative and resourceful. The bond that the alumnae share and the “hard work and determination that really came through during [their] college years has paid off, in our hard work and determination to help save the school” (Participant C).

Wide Social Network

Sweet Briar is home to a broad network of highly influential members. Sweet Briar’s wide social network expands across current students, alumnae, faculty, staff, parents, and key stakeholders – hence, it was truly a large community effort that kept Sweet Briar open. Alumnae engagement through communication strategies that included social media was a tool that brought the wide network together. Even ten years prior, the chances of successfully reversing the closing decision would have been significantly lower because social media was not so advanced or prevalent, and the alumnae’s efforts to communicate would have been less effective. The communication among alumnae “made a huge difference. It was word of mouth, it was friends talking to friends, it was classmates talking to classmates – it was like nothing that has ever happened before at any institution” (Participant A). Participant C described Sweet Briar as being a “sisterhood,” where students support each other in whatever way possible. The financial support and support of current students were two other objectives that alumnae focused in on; with the alumnae network surrounding those two causes.

Alumna status. According to Sweet Briar, “all graduating seniors will enter the ranks of Sweet Briar alumnae, and following tradition, all women who attend Sweet Briar

College for at least a semester are considered alumnae and become part of the alumnae network” (personal communication, March 3, 2015a). Unique to Sweet Briar, any student who attends Sweet Briar for at least one semester is considered an alumna after leaving – there is no graduation requirement. While other institutions might have stricter requirements for students who join their alumni network, this special consideration directly influenced the amount of Sweet Briar alumnae, and the amount of women who fought to save the college. Brooke Linville is a perfect example. She attended Sweet Briar for just two years (2000-2002) before transferring to George Washington University (Pounds, 2015c). An alumna in Idaho, Linville was the one who bought the domain name and ran savingsweetbriar.com (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015b), and she was selected to serve as a board member for Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. Linville contributed tremendously, and some would even say she led the social media and communication efforts in the fight to save Sweet Briar.

Alumnae engagement. Sweet Briar College would never have been saved without their alumnae. My study shows that alumnae engagement was a critical factor in the court’s decision to reverse the closing. While all of my participants discussed alumnae engagement after March 3, 2015; two of my participants emphasized how it was lacking before then. Participant F described a “large, huge alumnae group who had honestly become very disconnected from the school.” Participant A also reiterated the fact that alumnae had not been engaged properly before the closing announcement. And though that might be true, the school painted an even more drastic picture: a picture of alumnae who were out of touch, distant, and not supportive. No one would have thought

that these alumnae scattered across the country would prevail, especially considering that one of the reports used to justify the closing stated that alumnae were too disengaged to even bother to be asked for money (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015b), but the closing announcement engaged alumnae like never before.

According to Participant B, “You didn’t tell us? Nobody sent a letter saying we needed to boost our endowment.” In a letter written by Jo Ann Kramer to her fellow classmates (personal communication, June 26, 2016), she described the alumnae atmosphere after Sweet Briar’s closing announcement: “thousands of alumnae became outraged, engaged, paying attention every day, giving as much as they could afford, over and over. For Sweet Briar to flourish we must keep these thousands engaged, all of them, all of you, me.” In the fight to save Sweet Briar, leaders were put in charge of organizing fundraising efforts, working with major donors, increasing the alumnae network through social events, communication plans, and Sweet Briar 2.0. Sweet Briar 2.0 was an online think tank dedicated as an open forum for community stakeholders to discuss what Sweet Briar should look like going forward and what alumnae should be focusing on in their efforts; it was a “collection of thoughts and ideas across the spectrum” (Participant A).

This is a “demonstration of what such institutions say they offer: confidence, savvy, and, perhaps above all, a network of well-connected people who can be called upon in a pinch” (Kolowich, 2015, p. 3). And in Sweet Briar’s case, their alumnae answered the call. Alumnae were working together virtually with people they had never met in person, connected primarily through Facebook. With one exception, Tracy Stuart had never met any of the other members on the Saving Sweet Briar Board of Directors,

but chose women from across the generations for what they could bring to the table (Pounds, 2015c). Participant A explained her experience as a time when “none of us had ever texted, been on the phone, or on social media so much in our lives.” They had to change their cellphone plans to unlimited data.

Participant F explained, “I hope that one of the greatest things that other higher education institutions can take away from [this] is that as an alum you have the ability to make a difference.” After the court decision to reverse the closing *The Roanoke Times* (2015c) explained that “right now, Sweet Briar College is the most famous college in the country, with what is surely now the most engaged alumnae” (p. 2).

Social media. Without social media Sweet Briar may never have survived. Every document I read and each interview I conducted all unanimously supported the statement that social media was a major, if not the most important influence in the fight to save Sweet Briar (Locke, 2015; *The Roanoke Times*, 2015b). *The Roanoke Times* (2015b) noted that “the effort to save Sweet Briar is a testament to the power of social media – to connect people who had never met before and then spread their message around the country” (p. 2). Facebook was the main platform used for communication and organization with Facebook groups popping up overnight. Participants A and B both credited Facebook groups for organizing people geographically, around shared interests – as the source where information was consumed quickly. Participant F described the instant communication as “you put something on Facebook and the next thing you know you’ve got 2,500 people who know about it, and then you’ve raised a million dollars.”

Alumna Stacey Sickels Locke published an article in *Currents*, the magazine of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), where she said that “what stood out were the emails and social media messages – personal and professional – filled with passion, determination, and indignation” (2015, p. 22). Throughout the entire campaign there were pictures, member highlights, and social events among alumnae shared across social media daily to energize alumnae involvement and promote the fight to save Sweet Briar (Locke, 2015). Participant A noted “even with the alumnae engagement, the successful raising of money and everything else, the biggest thing that aided in the fight to save Sweet Briar was the whole wide range of social media.” To this day, Sweet Briar College is still updating live information through social media – announcing their new President Meredith Woo through a live stream announcement in February, 2017.

Communication strategies. Participants B and C were both identified in the data as leaders in the fight to save Sweet Briar and both shared experiences with the communication strategies that followed the closing announcement of Sweet Briar. Alumnae all over the world committed their time to saving Sweet Briar through communication efforts including phone and email outreach, networking events at Sweet Briar and other alumnae heavy cities, and by developing strategic plans on how to communicate, create positive institutional change, and fight to save Sweet Briar (Taylor and Schmidt, 2015). The communication efforts were focused on how to reach a wide audience, which started a mass media campaign dedicated to reaching every single alumna they could, especially those who did not have internet and social media. Sweet

Briar College had sent out the closing announcement via email and followed up that announcement with a mailed letter. According to Participant C, the goal of the alumnae letter campaign was for those same alumnae to receive a “secondary letter saying that we’re fighting this, we don’t think the school should close.”

The mass media campaign started with emails as the main method of communication outside of social media. A Facebook group suggested a letter campaign, realizing that there were many alumnae who were not online. Participant B described the group as a:

group of people that came together and simply said ‘[we] were going to be responsible for all the people that are not online. We’re going to track every single one of them!’ and they did, we found a person from the class of ’35!

Since Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. had already created an email letter, alumnae organizers worked with Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. to create letters specific for each state with a fact sheet that could be mailed out to all alumnae. Participant C worked closely with the mailing campaign, posting on Facebook in search of volunteers to complete mailings. Almost 150 people were designated as state representatives for the letter campaign, from across the United States and overseas – creating a very broad and extensive network of volunteers. There was no money dedicated to the letter campaign, so the leaders set up in each state organized work groups of alumnae and hosted envelope stuffing parties. Volunteers donated their time by putting these together; they donated paper, envelopes, shipping labels, and stamps. Volunteers, who could not donate money, donated their

time. It took a month to organize volunteers, put together the letters, and create a mailing list of alumnae.

The alumnae contact list was created through networking, at first reaching out to class officers who in turn could reach out to their classmates. Alumna Stacey Sickels Locke described in her *Currents* article the communication efforts made in which each state had an alumnae representative, as well as a class representative who would be in charge of spreading news within their network of volunteers (Locke, 2015). It took two weeks alone to organize the alumnae contact list with deleting duplicates and correcting data. An alumna who worked as a database manager maintained a master contact list. The list was broken down by region and sent to state representatives for outreach. Participant C made a point to emphasize that while they worked on the letter writing campaign, there were precautions taken to protect people's personal information. The campaign leaders were very selective in what was sent out and to whom, and they never shared full contact information.

According to Participant C, the letter campaign then turned into a phone call campaign for monetary pledges. Teleconferences were held to give the alumnae making calls phone scripts, fact sheets, and to share frequently asked questions and answers. After the court's announcement that Sweet Briar would remain open, those calls for pledges became calls for donations. Alumna Stacey Sickels Locke also said in her *Currents* article that in the six month time period following Sweet Briar's closing announcement, she made 188 phone, email, and in person contacts (Locke, 2015). Along with the mass media campaign, several personal letters were written by alumnae and

shared with other alumnae and news networks. These letters were sent as motivation for alumnae to donate, but also to stay involved with current students and the ongoing fight to save Sweet Briar. Individual websites were established, as well as Facebook pages – all in an effort to communicate and spread information among alumnae.

Pledges and fundraising. Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. the nonprofit organization formed to lead the saving Sweet Briar alumnae efforts, announced that by “using the power of the internet and social media, our grassroots movement has pledged over \$3 million in two weeks with nearly 4,000 participants” (Saving Sweet Briar, personal communication, May 1, 2015, p. 2). The wide network of Sweet Briar alumnae came together to successfully fundraise the money needed to save Sweet Briar. Alumna Stacey Sickels Locke (Locke, 2015) described her focus as primarily on fundraising. With no alumnae records and no annual or major gift donations data, the alumnae working to save Sweet Briar had to be creative in finding alumnae contacts. They used donor rolls from past issues of alumnae magazines, and old catering seating charts from past alumnae networking events to maximize their alumnae database. After completing the mailing campaign, a phone call campaign followed in which alumnae reached out to other alumnae throughout the country for monetary pledges. According to Stacey Sickels Locke (Locke, 2015) the “first step was picking up the phone” (p. 23). Participant B explained that when alumnae “realized how they could get involved and how money was going to play a part in it, they gave money. It was great.” Stacey Sickels Locke had one donor who made a six-figure commitment, promising to double it when the legal battle was successful” (Locke, 2015, p. 24). Many donors who had initially declined to

contribute changed their mind later on, one specifically writing to Locke (2015): “I don’t want to be on the wrong side of history! I think we are going to WIN!” (p. 24). The major donors’ group reached out to all of the wealthy alumnae and were upfront with what they needed: \$12 million, and then they got to work. According to both Participants B and C, multiple alumnae used their wills and their trusts to accelerate their gifts. Classes worked together to raise class donations, many of them giving over \$1 million at their reunion.

Support of current students. Sweet Briar’s closing announcement was made the week before spring break, meaning that students reportedly left campus with unanswered questions and no idea what would happen if and when they returned. On March 15, 2015, the day students returned from break, hundreds of alumnae hosted big rallies on campus, lining the campus drive with support posters, and handing out flowers. The alumnae showed up to offer an outpouring of support for students and Sweet Briar. Three of my interview participants were on campus that day and all of them described the experience as alumnae coming together with current students who felt empowered by their support. Participant D justified her decision to attend:

I am going to go down on March 15 when they are coming back onto campus after being away for that week, and their whole lives just flopped in front of them, and I’m going to stand there with a poster and wave my arms and smile at them and say ‘we’re here to help you as alum.’

While undergraduate students were trying to figure out how and where to transfer, a program was created through Facebook connecting alumnae from all over the country

to students looking at and visiting different colleges. Alumnae opened their doors to students. Participant F described the alumnae's response as: "whenever you need to come...I will pick you up at the airport. I will take you to this other college. I'll be wearing my Sweet Briar gear the whole time, but I will take you there and I will help you" because if alumnae could not financially help students, they would open their doors to them. Alumnae tried to help make sure that these young women had a plan. Even if Sweet Briar did not stay open the students still needed an education. The three month time period between Sweet Briar's closing announcement and the court ruling to keep it open was a time of confusion and chaos for the underclass women at Sweet Briar.

I didn't know where I was going to graduate from. It was the weirdest thing in the world – trying to explain to people that you didn't lose your faith just because you recognized that one of the greatest things that Sweet Briar gave you was the ability to help with saving Sweet Briar and do things to make a difference and to hopefully save your college, but also to have a plan just in case it failed
(Participant F).

While a number of alumnae had been involved with students as mentors on campus prior to March 3, 2015; the closing announcement connected them even more to current students. As alumnae, they presented a unified front to the students that "we are here to support you, to help you, to cry with you, and do whatever we need to do"
(Participant E). Alumnae formed an organization called Adopt a Vixen, where each alumna "adopted" a student and sent them treats throughout the year. Participant A even bought her student a Sweet Briar school ring after her parent refused to buy one for her.

Even now, three years after the closing announcement, Adopt a Vixen is an ongoing program in which each student has an assigned alumna.

Alumnae also supported students after the court ruling by financially helping students remain at Sweet Briar. The majority of students had arranged funds to attend elsewhere, so when they decided to stay at Sweet Briar there were a multitude of financial implications that students faced. Alumnae stepped up and gave them money, creating the Alumnae Angels program dedicated to helping students pay their deposit in order to stay at Sweet Briar. Alumnae also supported students through AlumniFire, an application and online program in which alumnae can post jobs and offer resume reviews and career advice specifically for Sweet Briar applicants.

After the court decision to reverse the closing on June 20, 2015, Sweet Briar College had to reassemble before the students returned for the fall semester. Sweet Briar hosted “Sweet Work Weeks” when over 60 volunteers from across the country came to Sweet Briar to “beautify the campus” (Locke, 2015, p. 26; Elfman, 2015). Tom Conners, the Vice President of Finance estimated that these “volunteers donated 4,200 man-hours [sic], saving the college \$60,000 in maintenance costs” (Locke, 2015, p. 26). Students felt genuinely supported and cared for by the alumnae, and in return alumnae were “astonished at how appreciative the students [are] to have alumnae interest and support” (G. M. Oates, personal communication, 2015). Participant A described her student connection as having always been there, “but nothing compared to that last year and what will more than likely continue in the years to come.”

Summary. The wide social network of Sweet Briar was the primary reason alumnae were able to reverse the closing decision. While the majority of colleges have an alumni network, the passion surrounding Sweet Briar and their influential members who were able to donate money made the Sweet Briar network different than others. The closing announcement brought together thousands of women from across the world who all shared the same passion for Sweet Briar and willingness to fight to keep it open. Social media also played a key role in the saving of Sweet Briar, as alumnae and college stakeholders were able to communicate and share information quickly across multiple social media platforms. Social media was the primary source for alumnae engagement, communication, and outreach. As alumnae learned about the closing of Sweet Briar, their social network and engagement grew.

Sustained Activism

Unlike the findings discussed above, sustained activism is not an individual category, but rather incorporates all of the above mentioned categories together. The tactics used in the fight to save Sweet Briar range from writing news articles, establishing social media networks, writing personal letters, taking legal action, and requesting donations. The sustained activism in this case went beyond protesting Sweet Briar's closure, and instead it encompassed multiple tactics that were put into action in order to demand answers and make changes to sustain Sweet Briar. Stacey Sickels Locke (2015) described in her *Currents* article this effort as a time where "alumnae gave money, held protests, attended legal proceedings and launched perhaps one of the most successful – and creative – takeover efforts in higher education history" (p. 23). The women of Sweet

Briar were able to pull themselves together quickly. They were fast to connect through social media networks, to coordinate websites, working groups, and to find legal counsel. Participants described it as happening so fast that it gave people the motivation and momentum needed to continue.

Fundraising and donations. During the closing announcements, emails were sent to both former governing board members and alumnae. In the announcement emails alumnae were invited to participate in a conference call that evening (Sweet Briar College, personal communication, March 3, 2015a), and former board members were given talking points by the board's chairman at the time, Paul Rice (Sweet Briar College, personal communication, March 3, 2015b). The talking points were provided in effort to have former board members "publically speak accurately and with one voice during this time" (Sweet Briar College, personal communication, March 3, 2015a). The importance of the talking points is that they specifically addressed "why the college's problems couldn't be solved through fundraising" and specifically listed that \$10-\$12 million dollars would have been needed for the next academic year to remain open (Sweet Briar College, personal communication, March 3, 2015b). However, during the alumnae conference call, President Jones stated that the endowment would need to reach \$250 million in order for the school to remain open, with an additional \$29 million needed in deferred maintenance costs and \$25 million to pay off bonds. Later on during that same call, the \$250 million needed turned into only \$10-15 million over a ten year span in order to build up the endowment (Orsi, 2015). With thousands of shocked alumnae on the call – they used their anger and these numbers as motivation to set fundraising goals.

Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. officially set a short-term \$5 million dollar goal on their website, and through social media had over \$3 million pledged with nearly 4,000 participants (personal communication, May 1, 2015) within two weeks.

Several fundraising campaigns were started as a result of Sweet Briar's closing announcement. Sarah Clement, a member of Saving Sweet Briar, Inc.'s Board of Directors testified during court proceedings that if she had known Sweet Briar was in trouble she would have reached into her "cow money" (Locke, 2015) – a saying that inspired an entire crowdfunding campaign. Clement owned a dairy farm and had money set aside that she referred to as her "cow money" in case there was a farm emergency (Participant C); in Clement's statement she insinuated that if she had known Sweet Briar was in trouble she would have used that money and donated it to the school. The "cow money" campaign inspired alumnae to reach into their savings and give whatever money they could to save Sweet Briar. A Starbucks campaign was also started as a result of President Jones' closing announcement in which along with highlighting the financial reasonings behind closing the school, he also commented about students not being interested in attending rural colleges; that students did not want to have to drive thirty minutes to the nearest Starbucks. Some alumnae chose to skip Starbucks for a month and sent that money in to Saving Sweet Briar, Inc.; others used Starbucks as a way to get the word out, having #savesweetbriar written on their cups and posting pictures across social media platforms.

Financial pledges were important during the beginning of the fight to save Sweet Briar because they were used to show the court the alumnae's willingness to donate.

When alumnae reached out asking what needed to be done, Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. was to the point in saying they needed money – money to help with the legal battle and money to save the school. With working groups focused on acquiring pledges and donations, alumnae started reaching out to motivate their peers to give; Participant F shared her belief that “you have to make a commitment, and sometimes the biggest way that you can make a commitment is give a financial commitment.” Three other participants reiterated the message that alumnae needed to do everything that they could, to give as much money and time as they could to the fight.

A major movement in the fundraising efforts of Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. was the pro-bono work provided by Alexander Hass, Inc. in Atlanta, Georgia. Alexander Hass, Inc. is managed by the husband of a Sweet Briar alumna, and because of that the firm donated their time and efforts to help save Sweet Briar. Alexander Hass, Inc. came on as a source to streamline pledges and donations (Saving Sweet Briar, personal communication, May 1, 2015), and to help with coordinating campaign strategies for major donors. At first Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. had set up a PayPal account, then a bank account for all donations, which quickly became overwhelmed with how quickly and how much money was coming in; so Alexander Hass, Inc. became the fundraising campaign center. No one on the Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. Board of Directors had experience with professional fundraising, so according to Participant C the pro bono work provided by Alexander Hass, Inc. had a huge impact on the alumnae’s ability to successfully fundraise. It took almost a year for all of the pledges, donations, and other funds that had been sent in to truly be organized.

On May 19, 2015 Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. was granted 501(c)(3) status, with tax exemption status applying to all donations received since March 9, 2015 (Saving Sweet Briar, 2015). According to Participant C this status was a game changer and resulted in an increase of donations. At this point the previous campaigns for pledges turned into calls for donations. After the successful ruling to keep Sweet Briar open, Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. added a “keep your promise” link to their website to start the conversion of \$21 million in total pledges into cash (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015c, p. 2; *The Roanoke Times*, 2015b). Alumnae who consultants had determined were not even worth asking for donations (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015b) were able to raise and pay over \$12 million in settlement payments to keep Sweet Briar open.

Aside from receiving support from students, faculty, staff, and alumnae, Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. also received support from other institutions. Hampton Sydney College is an all-male college in Virginia, whose students and alumni raised over \$100,000 for Sweet Briar (Participant B). Sweet Briar was also supported by her sister schools: Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, Bryn Mawr, Mary Baldwin, Agnes Scott, and Hollins, who all aided with fundraising efforts and brought awareness to the fight to save Sweet Briar through social media. Wilson College alumnae also spoke out and hosted events to support and raise funds for Sweet Briar. These are just a few of the institutions and alumni networks that made major efforts in the fight to save Sweet Briar. Schools also showed their support by allowing and refunding students who had enrolled to withdraw once it was announced that Sweet Briar would remain open.

Vote of no confidence. Along with fundraising, an important characteristic of the saving Sweet Briar movement was having a unified front. Alumnae from all over the world were dedicated to keeping Sweet Briar open, and therefore had no confidence in the people who chose to shut it down: Sweet Briar's very own President and Board of Directors. Alumna Samantha Britell wrote a formal letter to the Board of Directors on March 10, 2015 proclaiming that the board broke Sweet Briar's Honor Code by infringing on the rights of the Sweet Briar College community (S. Britell, personal communication, March 10, 2015). My participants as well as other alumnae focused in on the idea that people had to be held accountable – that every decision being made by the Board should be transparent and ethical. Participant B emphasized the Board's inability to commit to the level of effort necessary for the college to prosper. She believed that Sweet Briar “was not in trouble, but [the Board wasn't] doing anything to make it amazing.”

According to Participant B, the Board knew what “necessary actions were not being taken to simply continue the school.” Other participants described the Board's actions as intolerable, that “these people should not be making the decisions for the whole college without any other input” (Participant D) and did not understand how “they had been allowing the school to not be managed properly, alumni not to be engaged properly, and a whole host of other things” (Participant A).

Along with alumnae's discontent of the Board, faculty members and former board members also released statements of no confidence in the Board. The entire Sweet Briar faculty joined forces with Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. and unanimously voted in favor of the

following statement: “Therefore, be it resolved that we the faculty of Sweet Briar College hereby register a vote of no confidence in the Board of Directors of the Sweet Briar Institute and the President of the College, and we respectfully ask that the Directors and President resign” (Saving Sweet Briar, personal communication, May 1, 2015, p. 1). Former board members Richard Leslie, Jo Ann Kramer, and Maggie Saylor Patrick all wrote public letters emphasizing their lack of confidence in the Board, explaining why they left. Patrick spoke on behalf of herself and other former members saying that “many of us now wish we had pushed harder for answers, and have joined the fight to save Sweet Briar in an attempt to make up for our prior silence...I urge other current and former board members to join me” (2015, p. 2).

After the court ruling. In an open letter to other alumnae, Jo Ann Kramer stated: “you know this is the worst thing ever to happen to Sweet Briar but it will turn out to be the best thing that ever happened to Sweet Briar” (personal communication, June 26, 2016). While the closing announcement shocked and enraged alumnae, it also brought together a group of women to commit to one cause. The closing announcement empowered change and reengaged alumnae. After the final court decision that kept Sweet Briar open, alumnae were asked to stay involved with the college in new ways by “attending college fairs, visiting high schools, hosting events, funding student activities, mentoring students, supporting camps and open houses for middle and high school girls, and more” (Locke, 2015, p. 27). Alumna Teresa Tomlinson (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015c) highlighted the “thousands of dollars of free marketing” (p.2) that the school had received from the court cases and media coverage. A time in Sweet Briar’s history that was

devastating now demonstrated a story of perseverance. She wondered what student wouldn't want to be a part of Sweet Briar's network and sisterhood? Look at what Sweet Briar alumnae can do. Participant E put the closing experience into this perspective: "You can't ever underestimate the power of educated women. I really believe that. Women have the remarkable ability to love passionately, to love wholly, and to also fight like hell when they're threatened."

Legal Influences

While the campus culture, large social network, and sustained activism by alumnae were influencers on the fight to save Sweet Briar, the legal case was the necessity to keep the school open. As the closing of Sweet Briar was already in motion, alumnae had to respond legally in order to change the college's impending closure. Interestingly enough, this is not the first time Sweet Briar has had to take legal action in order to create change at the college. In 1966 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Sweet Briar's request to desegregate their college. The Sweet Briar Board of Directors in 1964 did not hesitate going to court in order to change Sweet Briar's admissions policy of only admitting White women, a policy that was directly related to Indiana Fletcher William's will. Contrarily, the Board of Directors that decided to close Sweet Briar in 2015 did so without "seeking judicial guidance on voiding the very essence of [that same] will: the creation and preservation of a college for women in the hills of the Virginia heartland" (Schapiro, 2015, p. 3). It is the will of Indiana Fletcher Williams that established Sweet Briar College, and her will that ended up saving it. Below I describe

the legal processes and the representatives that were involved in the court proceedings that led to Sweet Briar remaining open.

Lawyers for Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. is a non-profit organization started by alumna Tracy Stuart whose goal was to stop the college from closing. With tremendously valuable land and substantial amount of money in its endowment, Tracy Stuart and other alumnae agreed that something was not right with the justifications behind Sweet Briar's closing. Stuart therefore jump started the fight to save Sweet Briar by hiring lawyers to sue the College. Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. ended up choosing William Hurd and Ashley Taylor Jr., two Virginia lawyers with the Richmond office of Troutman Sanders (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015b). Tracy Stuart paid the retainer fee herself – putting \$10,000 down as a personal investment to save Sweet Briar.

Told by the law firm to form a seven person Board of Directors from across the decades for Saving Sweet Briar, Inc., the website announced on March 11th, 2015 that the following alumnae would serve as board members: Tracy Stuart, Jo Ann Kramer, Sarah Clement, Sally Freeman, Christine Boulware, Ellen Pitera, and Brooke Linville. The newly appointed board members were ready to commit their time and were chosen based on what they could contribute to the fight to Save Sweet Briar. Savingsweetbriar.com had already been established and donations started immediately. The Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. Board of Directors worked directly with their lawyers and were tasked with identifying new potential board members and a president for the college. According to Participant B, while the legal strategy was up to the lawyers, the Board was consulted for insight and advice. The Board also delegated tasks to alumnae around the country to

work on various projects. Board members were seen as a powerhouse, women who kept going until they didn't have to, until they saved Sweet Briar.

Troutman Sanders was not sure if alumnae actually had legal standing to sue Sweet Briar, so they approached Amherst County Attorney, Ellen Bowyer (who had previously worked at Troutman Sanders) to see if she would challenge the closing. Believing the group had legal standing; Ellen Bowyer was able to file a complaint against Sweet Briar and brought on Troutman Sanders as co-counsel. According to Saving Sweet Briar, Inc., it was apparent that they had hired competent people and that those lawyers could successfully save Sweet Briar.

Ellen Bowyer. As most alumnae would describe her, Ellen Bowyer was the champion who saved Sweet Briar. Ellen Bowyer had no direct connection to Sweet Briar, though she is now considered an honorary member of the class of 1957 (McManamay, 2016). On March 30, 2015 Ellen Bowyer, who is the attorney for Amherst County, filed a complaint against Sweet Briar College on behalf of the state of Virginia (Saving Sweet Briar, 2015). Bowyer sued to stop the closure, arguing that it violated the terms of Indiana Fletcher Williams' will which established the college. In order to establish standing to sue, Bowyer referred to the Virginia Charitable Solicitations Act and Uniform Trust Code (Pounds, 2015c) which lists County Attorneys as officials who have the power to take action when charitable contributions are being misused (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015b). If in the governance of a non-profit organization there is misrepresentation of the assets of the non-profit, county attorneys have the right to take legal action (Participant B). In her filing, Bowyer alleged violations by the Board of

Directors of its own bylaws and operating procedures as well as the state laws regarding the solicitation of charitable donations (*The Editorial Board*, 2015). Sweet Briar had been soliciting donations weeks and days before closure (*The Editorial Board*, 2015); in fact two weeks before the closing announcement a \$1 million dollar bequest will donation by 1987 alumna Teresa Pike Tomlinson had been finalized, and she had received a hand written thank you note from President Jones (*The Editorial Board*, 2015). Judge Jim Updike supported Bowyer's motion of legal standing, and the legal case against Sweet Briar College began.

Mark Herring. Mark Herring is the Attorney General of Virginia who was forced to partake in the Sweet Briar court case. As mentioned above, Ellen Bowyer sued Sweet Briar on the grounds that she had standing due to Virginia's Charitable Solicitations Act and Uniform Trust Code. Herring did not support Bowyer's authority to intervene, and publically shared his opinion that it was Sweet Briar's Board's responsibility to decide whether or not to close the school and implied that he may use the power of his office to shield Sweet Briar's financial assets from being reviewed in the case (Schapiro, 2015). Herring even filed a friend of the court brief on behalf of the college arguing that as a county attorney, Bowyer should not be granted legal standing to pursue the case (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015d). Luckily for Saving Sweet Briar, Inc., Judge Updike granted Bowyer permission to continue on with the case.

Alumnae tracked down Herring after the first court hearing when he did not support Ellen Bowyer's standing to sue, determined to change his mind, and encouraged him support the fight to keep Sweet Briar open. Herring would not take alumnae calls,

refused to meet with them, so according to multiple participants, alumnae “stalked him” on Facebook, on Twitter, and in person. Alumnae showed up at a speech Herring was giving in Northern Virginia and cornered him, videotaping his responses which in turn went viral across the saving Sweet Briar community. Tracy Stuart was quoted saying that “he definitely felt the Vixen breath on the back of his neck” (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015b, p. 2). While Herring never publically spoke out in support of Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. prior to the final ruling, the constant pressure from alumnae changed his stance from non-supportive to willingly setting up mediations between Sweet Briar College and Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. in an effort to keep the school open. He negotiated and presented the final settlement that kept Sweet Briar open (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015d). Herring later spoke to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, stating that the alumnae’s “ability to do that – to raise the money, to be organized, to be serious and credible and to bring in new leadership convinced me that they should be given the opportunity to try to make a go in the long term” (Kolowich, 2015, p. 2).

Judge Jim Updike. Jim Updike is a Bedford County Judge who reviewed and decided on all legal issues involving Sweet Briar College. Three different law suits from three different plaintiffs (current faculty, a collection of current students, parents and alumnae, and Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. (Pounds, 2015c)) came before Judge Updike, and he refused to do anything that would result in directly shutting down the college (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015e). According to *The Roanoke Times* (2015e) the main consideration in the court case was whether or not the will of Indiana Fletcher Williams was still in force, and if Sweet Briar should thereby be considered a trust. Judge Updike

initially determined that Sweet Briar was not a trust, and the case was sent to the Supreme Court of Virginia.

At the Supreme Court hearing, three legal briefs written by expert professors in trust law (one of which was by Judge Updike's former law professor at the College of William and Mary) were presented in support of Sweet Briar College being considered a trust. The Supreme Court remanded the case back to the lower court where Judge Updike reversed his decision, admitting that he had ruled in error previously. The Supreme Court hearing and Judge Updike's ultimate decision to deem Sweet Briar as a trust was a significant triumph in the fight to save Sweet Briar. Though the legal case ended in settlement, Judge Updike's final words in the courtroom are remembered by all of the women who were there; inspired by the words of novelist William Faulkner, he stated "Sweet Briar will not just endure, it will prevail" (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015c; G. M. Oates, personal communication, 2015).

Final settlement. On June 20, 2015 a final settlement was reached which kept Sweet Briar College open. As a part of the settlement, Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. agreed to make three payments totaling \$12 million to the college by September 2, 2015 (Pounds, 2015c) and Herring released \$16 million from the endowment to be used for operating the institution (Locke, 2015). Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. delivered \$5 million by June 30, 2015, and exceeded the \$12 million minimum payment prior to September 2, 2015. The entire case relied on and was successful because of "an iron clad will written by a very smart lady at the end of the 19th century" (Participant A). Indiana's will gave Sweet Briar

the ability to legally be considered a trust and a corporation, which in turn sparked the settlement that resulted in Sweet Briar remaining open.

When the settlement was announced, it was broadcasted to a courtroom overflowing with Sweet Briar women. Participant E who was there explained the experience as “an explosion of Sweet Briar energy in the place. It was such an important moment in the history of the college.” In a letter written to other alumnae, *The Roanoke Times* (2015c) wrote that:

judges normally don't like outbursts in their courtroom...yet here was an outburst unlike any other seen in the Bedford County Circuit Court Room. A courtroom full of Sweet Briar College supporters in their pink-and-green school colors first applauding, then rising to a standing ovation, then spontaneously breaking into their now-famous 'holla holla holla' cheer (p. 1).

According to Sweet Briar's website (2016b) the cheer is sang by students whenever a person or group on campus has done something noteworthy:

Here's to (insert name), Holla, Holla, Holla, nothing that you cannot do...here's to (insert name), Holla, Holla, Holla, nothing that you cannot do...work for the good and work for the right...always doing something and doing it right...so here's to (insert name) Holla, Holla, Holla, nothing that you cannot do.

The “holla holla holla” cheer was sung in the courtroom as a way to commemorate and congratulate the alumnae's accomplishment in keeping Sweet Briar open. After everything alumnae had done, all the time and effort dedicated to saving Sweet Briar – they had won. Participant E reflected:

I do not believe, at all, that the people that tried to close us had any idea what they had started. They never did get it. I think they were as shocked over the ferociousness of the fight as we were shocked of the audacity of the closure, and the way it was done. I'm glad we won.

Now that the legal battle to keep Sweet Briar open has been won, a new battle has begun: the fight to keep Sweet Briar open (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015c).

Summary

The findings that emerged from my research include identifying a culture of empowerment and responsibility among Sweet Briar women, as well as a wide social network whose grassroots efforts developed through sustained activist movements ultimately kept Sweet Briar open. The pink and green army of alumnae who saved Sweet Briar knew what educated women were capable of doing, and knew the importance behind what they were fighting for. The legal case that resulted in the reversal of Sweet Briar's closing merged from alumnae activism and resulted in a positive outcome for the college.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine how grassroots efforts and campus culture influenced the decision to reverse the closing of Sweet Briar College. In this chapter I will give an overview of my study and its findings, and answer my research question based on my collected data and completed analysis. I will describe the implications this study has on the existing literature, practice, and I will offer suggestions and recommendations for future research.

Study Overview

All-women's institutions have suffered a decline in numbers by 83% in the last 53 years. The decrease in women's colleges is primarily due to financial hardships and enrollment deficiencies which have resulted in women's colleges closing, become coeducational, or forced to merge with other institutions (Miller-Bernal, 2006). Using a qualitative case study approach I was able to learn how and what alumnae did to successfully prevent Sweet Briar's closure. My study focused on a six month time period at Sweet Briar College in 2015. The unit of analysis for this study was Sweet Briar College alumnae who were involved with the saving of Sweet Briar. I used interviews and document review with purposeful sampling as my two data sources. I interviewed six women between the ages of 22-75. Each participant provided different insights and stories about their experiences in the fight to save Sweet Briar, which allowed for a well-

rounded understanding of the grassroots efforts and campus culture that influenced the decision to keep the school open. I used document review to further develop my interview findings on grassroots efforts and campus culture, as well as to gain deeper knowledge about the legal proceedings surrounding this case.

When conducting my study, I found four major categories that directly influenced the closing reversal of Sweet Briar College. These were: a culture of empowerment and responsibility developed among students, the creation of a wide social network, sustained activism, and legal proceedings that together resulted in Sweet Briar remaining open. During my interviews, I asked my participants to list the top influencing factors in the saving of Sweet Briar, and I found that the number one response was the alumnae's ability to prevail legally. The legal efforts behind this case were necessary for the alumnae to be successful in saving their school. Outside of the legal battle, the passion that alumnae had for each other and Sweet Briar was also a contributing factor in this case's success as the motivators behind their grassroots efforts. The passion and community that makes Sweet Briar's campus culture resulted in the college's ability to remain open, and the continued support around the efforts for it to remain so.

Research Question Overview

In this study I examined grassroots efforts, campus culture, and the decision reversal process that saved Sweet Briar. While focusing on grassroots efforts and campus culture, I found that both were present due to the empowerment and responsibility in Sweet Briar's students and alumnae culture. This group of empowered women reignited through social networking and developed a form of sustained activism in fighting for

Sweet Briar. The alumnae activism and the legal battle are the reasons that Sweet Briar's closing was reversed. My research question asks: how did grassroots efforts and campus culture influence the decision to reverse the closure of Sweet Briar College? I will discuss how my findings answered my research question below.

Grassroots efforts. In my literature review, I described how grassroots leaders create “unique strategies, tactics, and approaches to navigate power and experience unique obstacles and conditions” (Kezar and Lester, 2011, p. 25). In this case study I examined the perspectives and behaviors of Sweet Briar alumnae who were actively engaged in the Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. campaign, and who were leaders, motivators, and activists against the school's closing. My findings were consistent with grassroots efforts that entailed tactics, unique approaches, and strategic efforts that directly influenced the successful saving of Sweet Briar. I interviewed leaders in the saving Sweet Briar movement who actively engaged in leading, motivating, and demonstrating activism against the school's closing. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, the culture of empowerment and responsibility at Sweet Briar, along with its wide social network created an environment that supported sustained activism among alumnae, students, faculty and staff. The grassroots efforts made by Sweet Briar alumnae to save the school started with social outreach. Alumnae reached out to each other through phone calls, social media and mailings; they started organizing themselves through Facebook groups dedicated to specific causes, and created in-person alumnae groups based on their location. The establishment of Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. was a centralized way to bring grassroots efforts together and to consolidate strategies.

Alumnae expanded their network and increased engagement by organizing communication strategies. By having involved alumnae reach out to others through phone calls, emails, social media, and mailings, Sweet Briar alumnae were able to increase awareness and support in their fight to save the school. Alumnae who had failed to be engaged before were included on volunteer lists and were donating their time and money. Communication strategies turned into fundraising initiatives, where instead of communicating awareness, alumnae were now asking for pledges and donations. While communication strategies were used to reach alumnae across the country, on-campus gatherings and protests were the local means of grassroots efforts. Though students, faculty, and staff were the main leaders of the on-campus movement, alumnae flocked to campus in order to offer their support to current students. Alumnae lined the school drive with posters in hand and distributed roses when the students returned from spring break after the closing announcement; they made their presence on campus known by rallying their pink and green troops together around a single mission: to save Sweet Briar.

In regards to how Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. navigated power, Kezar and Lester (2011) highlighted in their research that in order for grassroots efforts to be successful, the group fighting for change must understand the type of power they are trying to overcome, and the type of power being held by the grassroots group. As mentioned in my findings, one news article claimed that the Sweet Briar administrators who were in positions of power “poorly governed the school” prior to the closing announcement (Patrick, 2015, p.3). According to Patrick (2015), the Sweet Briar Board was “self-appointed and self-perpetuating” (p.2) with no accountability behind the decisions they

made. In comparison with French and Raven's concepts of power (Raven, 2008), I think the President and Board at Sweet Briar during the time of the closing announcement demonstrated legitimate power as they were given the power of influence over the college based on what was supposed to be a shared set of values for the school. Based on my findings, the alumnae's grassroots efforts did not fit into one of French and Raven's six classifications (Raven, 2008), as the power given to alumnae did not include the ability to discipline, reward, or develop a hierarchy. While Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. was a result of committed participants, I do not think these grassroots efforts related to a singular person or group controlling the power (Raven, 2008). The alumnae who saved the school did not fit into one of the six classifications; however I do believe that they developed a type of group momentum. The fight to save Sweet Briar relied on every participant involved. Without the stakeholders working to save the school, there would not have been a success in the saving of Sweet Briar.

The three separate lawsuits brought against Sweet Briar by students, parents, faculty, staff and alumnae were all major grassroots efforts. Ultimately the alumnae's Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. lawsuit was brought to court by Amherst County Attorney, Ellen Bowyer. By legally justifying their grassroots approach, alumnae were successful in reversing the closing decision. As part of the settlement to keep Sweet Briar open, a new President was appointed: Phillip Stone. Instead of fighting to keep their college open, alumnae were now forced to focus on how they were going to keep it operational. With President Stone legitimate power was developed as he was given the power of influence over Sweet Briar stakeholders based on a shared set of standards. President Stone

invested in Sweet Briar's alumnae and used their newfound engagement with the college as a means to broaden their reach. Alumnae were tasked with attending college fairs and recruiting for Sweet Briar throughout the country. Key administrative positions that were once vacant were filled, and the new leadership reinvigorated Sweet Briar. Alumnae came from across the country to clean the campus prior to the students' return in the fall. Volunteers donated their time to help clean, paint, garden and fix up the campus, which saved Sweet Briar thousands of dollars in maintenance costs.

While the alumnae's grassroots efforts are no longer focused on saving Sweet Briar, the alumnae are still committed to creating change at the college. Moving forward Sweet Briar still has to maintain enrollment. Sweet Briar's endowment is another long term focus. To remain open the college will need to continue increasing their fundraising efforts and push for unrestricted donations that can help the college where it is most needed. New development, marketing, and fundraising strategies have been implemented, and a new permanent president has been appointed. Though the months that followed Sweet Briar's closing announcement were a grave time at the college, it was also a blessing. It allowed students, alumnae, faculty, and staff to come together, it increased alumnae engagement, and provided marketing across all media platforms for the college – who wouldn't want to be a part of the group of women who fought and successfully saved their school? Who wouldn't be motivated by the grassroots efforts whose contribution helped shape the future of Sweet Briar?

Campus culture. Campus culture refers to the traditions, values, celebrations, and rituals that made Sweet Briar's saga and unity for their school so strong (Kuh and

Whitt, 1988). Sweet Briar's campus culture unites and ignites its alumnae by validating what it means to be a Sweet Briar woman, and justifying why these women bonded together to save Sweet Briar. According to Masland (1985), there are four categories of cultures that can be explored when establishing cultural patterns at an institution: heroes, symbols, rituals, and sagas. The main hero at Sweet Briar is Indiana Fletcher Williams, the important historical figure whose will left the property on which Sweet Briar was built. That same hero or heroine was prominent in the lawsuit to keep Sweet Briar open. All of my participants mentioned Williams in one way or another, and her commitment to educating women initiated the culture of Sweet Briar.

Sweet Briar has a culture that highlights sisterhood, which is a common symbol of all-women's colleges. As a college with historical traditions, women across its history share an understanding of what life at Sweet Briar is like. The experience of attending an all-women's college in rural Virginia creates an explicit campus culture that focuses on empowering and educating women. My findings revealed an environment of high expectations among Sweet Briar students. Interviews with faculty and alumnae support the notion that Sweetbriar provided students with a culture that supported and expected academic success. While success can be measured in a variety of ways, at Sweet Briar women are encouraged to actively participate and shape their educational experiences. Students are offered a wide variety of opportunities to create their own knowledge by asking questions and challenging what and how they learn.

Sweet Briar women are taught to be leaders through campus rituals and other means of involvement and subsequently are able to develop their leadership skills while

still in college – an ability that generates successes among alumnae. By providing students with the opportunity to create knowledge and learn to lead, Sweet Briar is able to empower women. The culture of empowerment has and continues to develop passion in its students, which in turn creates an atmosphere that encourages students to be outspoken leaders. As students continue to develop their sense of empowerment and self, they recognize that they are responsible for their education, actions and future. Campus culture influenced the decision to reverse the closure of Sweet Briar by first teaching students how to be empowered, responsible leaders who are willing to take action, and then by providing a saga that its students and alumnae were willing to fight for.

According to Clark (1980), campus saga encompasses extreme cases of strong institutional culture and loyalty which surrounds traditions, values, and celebrations. All of my participants expressed that the culture they experienced at Sweet Briar prompted them to be dedicated to saving the college, and hopeful that future generations would be able to share in those same experiences. One of Sweet Briar's greatest values is educating strong women. Participant F described the Sweet Briar experience as "there's something about education young women to be strong and empowered that has made our community what it is." The sisterhood of Sweet Briar is made up of all students, faculty and alumnae – a sisterhood that developed the large network that saved the college from closing. As my findings showed, a special characteristic of this sisterhood is the alumnae classification the college holds: any student who has attended at least one semester at Sweet Briar is considered an alumna of the school. My findings also indicated a strong connection to the school's colors: pink and green. Each of my interviews and news

articles surrounding alumnae involvement mentioned the school colors and how proud the students and alumnae were wearing those colors as representations of support.

Another tradition that was mentioned in chapter four was the use of the “holla, holla, holla” cheer. The cheer is used as a celebration chant when something noteworthy is accomplished by the college or its stakeholders. “Holla, holla, holla” created a stronger bond in the court room as it was chanted amongst all the women present as a celebration of Sweet Briar staying open. Decades of traditions, values, and celebrations, generated loyalty.

Clark’s (1980) campus saga is developed through two stages: initiation and fulfilment. I believe the findings of this case study illustrated a campus saga with the saving of Sweet Briar through an organizational crisis, where in order for the college to survive, power had to be created (i.e., initiated) by those who wanted to revive and later strengthen it. Fulfilment of campus saga in this case study was met through all of Clark’s (1980) expressions: faculty, students, alumnae, programs, and the imagery of traditions and symbolism. My findings show that faculty, students, and alumnae endorsed and believed in the institutional change necessary to keep the school open and acted on it. The organizational crisis brought intuitional stakeholders together which in turn developed a stronger campus saga by the end of the six month period of my study. The programs being offered were already unique as an all-women’s institution, but became even more distinctive as Sweet Briar women worked to keep it open.

Summary. Sweet Briar’s campus culture justified and motivated alumnae grassroots efforts. While the campus culture encouraged the development of skills

alumnae needed to be successful, their grassroots efforts established tactics and strategies that created change and spread awareness in the fight to keep Sweet Briar open. The campus culture and alumnae grassroots efforts enabled sustained activism among alumnae in the fight to keep Sweet Briar and its' saga alive. The activism among alumnae inspired them to file a legal complaint against the closing of Sweet Briar. This legal case was the supporting factor that along with grassroots efforts and campus culture influenced the closing decision reversal. Without attorney Ellen Bowyer's legal standing to sue Sweet Briar, the decision to close the school would have never been reversed. The final settlement on June 20, 2015 kept Sweet Briar open, replaced its President and allowed for new appointments to the Board of Directors. The culture of empowerment and responsibility at Sweet Briar enabled sustained activism through its alumnae, and that in turn fueled the legal battle that saved the college. My findings also successfully exhibit how grassroots efforts and campus culture can create institutional change.

Significance to Literature

When initially conducting my literature review for this study, I found a sufficient amount of scholarly work around the history of women's colleges and the coeducation movement. I used this pre-existing literature to create a context and to justify the importance of my study. There was limited literature about the weaknesses and benefits of same-sex higher education, as well as limited research on the history of Sweet Briar. While my study found benefits of same-sex higher education and additional stories of Sweet Briar's history, my research does not add to the pre-existing scholarly literature on the history of women's colleges or the coeducation movement due to the focus of this

case study. My research is however significant to current literature because it further enhances the understanding and comparison of other colleges that successfully reversed closing decisions, and demonstrated how an institution's culture can influence grassroots efforts to accomplish significant goals.

As soon as Sweet Briar's closing announcement was publicized, alumnae started searching for answers and found that a situation similar to Sweet Briar's had happened before. Wilson College, a women's college at the time, is the only other college in the history of higher education whose Board of Directors tried to close them down until a judge ruled to keep them open (Saving Sweet Briar, personal communication, May 1, 2015). Like Sweet Briar, the community stakeholders at Wilson had no idea that conditions were bad enough to justify closing, in fact two weeks before the announcement was made the faculty had voted to ask for a raise (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015a). The faculty, students, and alumnae of Wilson sued to keep the school open and won.

On May 25, 1979 Judge John Keller ruled that Wilson could not close without the court's permission, marking the first and only time a court stepped in to stop an institution of higher education from closing. During the proceedings, Judge Keller "acknowledged [that] it might not be possible to save Wilson College, but the board simply hadn't done enough to try" (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015a). Attorney Ellen Bowyer connected the Sweet Briar case both "legally and inspirationally" to the Wilson College court case (*The Roanoke Times*, 2015c, p. 2), and acknowledged the influence and legal precedent that was provided because of Wilson.

I did not find any reference of Antioch College during my document review. All of my participants mentioned Wilson during their interviews, but only Participant A mentioned Antioch. All three colleges were announced closed due to “financial hardships” and all three were able to reverse their closing decisions. Though Antioch has these similarities with Wilson and Sweet Briar, the changing of institutional purpose and management makes its case very different from Wilson and Sweet Briar. Antioch most recently stayed open in 2009 when the Antioch College Continuation Corporation (ACCC) agreed to operate the college as an independent corporation, whereas Wilson and Sweet Briar remained open due to court rulings.

Implications for Practice

My findings demonstrate how campus culture can influence post-graduate engagement. While these findings are significant in relation to my study, I believe the most important outcome of this study is highlighting an example of a grassroots effort influenced by campus culture that stopped an action by a group of appointed leaders with official power. For example, the fundraising of this grassroots effort was more successful than the more typical means of institutional fundraising had been. The fundraising success that Sweet Briar alumnae had has the potential to influence the implication of practice in fundraising strategies across college campuses in the future.

Alumni engagement in higher education fluctuates across campuses. While some institutions are successful at encouraging alumni engagement following graduation, there is often a lack of alumni involvement. While this study does not demonstrate how to increase alumni engagement, it does show how an institutional crisis can spark grassroots

efforts and stakeholder involvement; displaying the power and influence both engaged and unengaged alumni can have on a college campus. In the context of my study, alumni engagement related directly to the campus culture and sage of Sweet Briar. It is important that institutions of higher education work to develop a stronger sense of unity among its students prior to graduation. The more connected students are to their university and campus culture, the more likely they are to become and stay involved as alumni.

The finding that impacted me the most personally was the importance behind fundraising strategies in higher education. While major donors are honored across college campuses, small scale donors are usually not publically thanked. Though major donors have the ability to greatly impact a university by donating scholarship funding, buildings, and other large gifts; it is important to understand the amount of money that can be fundraised through small donations by a large amount of people. Sweet Briar had major donors, but the majority of alumnae fighting to keep the school open gave what extra money they could. Major donor fundraising is extremely important in higher education (Drezner, 2011), but universities can also find fundraising success by broadening their outreach and creating initiatives that show what a large amount of small donations can do.

My findings on fundraising also highlighted the significant of donation types. Often students and alumnae chose to donate to specific initiatives such as library renovations, scholarships, organizations, or specific programs. What I learned from this study is that though an endowment might be large, the funds can be restricted and

unusable for any university need outside of what the donor specified. It is important to bring awareness about restricted donations to students and alumni who may not be aware that they are regulating their donation to fund a specific cause, and that their restricted donation is unable to be used by the university to fund institutionally prioritized problems. While I understand that fundraising is traditionally more effective when donors have a direct tie to the cause, it is my hope that donors are able to relate directly to an institution instead of choosing to support a subcategory effort.

Suggestions for Future Research

In this section I will share my research suggestions in hopes to inspire future studies. There are three categories of topics that I would recommend for future research: Sweet Briar College, grassroots efforts and campus culture, and social media.

Sweet Briar College. It is important to note that this case study highlights only a small part of the saving Sweet Briar movement. There are additional perspectives and influences whose research could greatly impact other colleges and universities across the country. This study focused on alumnae efforts, but as my findings showed – students, staff, faculty, parents, and other community stakeholders also fought to save the school. The research opportunities surrounding this case offer a variety of events and factors to consider as well: financial standing and the importance of endowments, governing board accountability, institutional transparency, on-campus activism, faculty rights, administrative change, transfer admissions, and fundraising strategies. Beyond Sweet Briar, these are also topics that can be studied at other universities, across multiple colleges for a comparative sample, and at different types of educational institutions.

I think it is important that the history of the Sweet Briar following 1956 be documented. While this type of study would most likely need to be supported by the college, as Martha Lou Lemmon's book was by the Alumni Association; based on my study I believe that alumnae would be willing to contribute. With the amount of people who were involved in the saving of Sweet Briar, and the vast amount of factors that went into saving it – it would be beneficial to conduct a large scale interview collection for the institution's archives. Researchers should document specific details about the saving Sweet Briar movement, find contributing factors that led to the school's initial closing, and what the new administration did after the decision reversal to successfully keep the school open.

Grassroots efforts and campus culture. Additional scholarly research surrounding grassroots efforts and campus culture is needed in the higher education context. While organizational culture theories can be used when analyzing a college campus, a focus on campus culture research has been primarily nonexistent since the late 1980s. This study proves the importance of campus culture and the saga surrounding institutions of higher education and how stakeholder engagement can directly affect the success or failure of a university. Additional research into campus culture and campus saga can provide insight into how and why colleges are successful, how to gauge student contentment, how to encourage student empowerment, how to measure alumni success and involvement, and how to determine whether university sagas are created and maintained.

Grassroots efforts in higher education have been studied predominantly at the faculty level, where a sense of expert power already exists. For future research I would recommend an in-depth analysis of grassroots efforts in higher education in relation to the concept of power. In what way can grassroots leaders and participants gain power and momentum in their movement without having a preexisting sense of power? While faculty and staff at the university level may not agree that they have power, Birnbaum's (1988) descriptions of a variety of types of power demonstrate that they could marshal the ability to create change and influence decisions. In particular, additional research is needed to explore how alumnae and students' grassroots efforts can be successful in creating change and demonstrating the ability to create their own referent power.

Social media. As social media continues its prevalence in social movements and grassroots efforts, it is important that researchers conduct studies around its benefits, capabilities, disadvantages, and outcomes. While social media is widely used in today's society, the scholarly research around its practices and influences is severely lacking in regards to higher education. Reuben (2008) is a higher education consultant who wrote a guide for the University of Fullerton on the use of social media in higher education, an outline that highlighted the main social media platforms and how to best approach their users for communication and marketing (Reuben, 2008). Davis et al. (2012) wrote a literature review on social media in higher education for the University of Southern California which discussed the use of social media technology, which focuses on connecting individuals and organizations. There were several articles I found that described the use of social media for marketing purposes and communication in higher

education, but based on my research a limited amount of studies focused outside of how to communicate with students.

Social media is used in a variety of ways; it is used as a networking platform, a place to facilitate engagement, and as a stage for awareness. Future research in social media should be conducted on how it is being used in social movements and its effectiveness in higher education. One of the primary areas of focus should be on communication and connections – how do people use social media for prompting action in higher education? This can be studied at the individual level and at the organizational level with an emphasis on interactions. Studies specific to higher education can research social media use and its impact on campus culture, campus involvement, admissions, retention, and transparency.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine how grassroots efforts and campus culture influenced the decision to reverse the closing of Sweet Briar College. I chose to study this case due to the increase of women's colleges closing or becoming coeducational or merging with other institutions across the United States. Examining Sweet Briar and their alumnae efforts to keep the college open was significant because it is the only college, besides Wilson College, in the history of higher education that has been able to stay open and remain a same-sex institution after an announced closing. Like the majority of other college closings, Sweet Briar's President and Board of Directors linked the decision to close to financial hardships and enrollment deficiencies at the college; the difference in this case was that alumnae were able to prove them wrong

through networking, fundraising, and legal efforts. Using alumnae interviews and document review as my data sources I was able to connect four categories to the successful saving of Sweet Briar: a culture of empowerment and responsibility, a wide social network, sustained activism, and legal influences.

My initial intent for this study was to provide insight on what other small colleges facing enrollment and financial difficulties could do when faced with the possibility of closure; but instead my findings indicated an established culture at Sweet Briar that ultimately led to the alumnae's success at keeping the college open. While my findings offered a variety of influencing factors in the saving of Sweet Briar, they were all rooted by the connection women have to the college. The campus culture at Sweet Briar develops the values of empowerment and responsibility in Sweet Briar students, which ultimately led to alumnae engagement and activism. Using grassroots efforts, university stakeholders have the ability to create and use power to develop strategies and tactics as collective actions to increase support in the fight for change. In this study, grassroots efforts were successfully self-organized by women with limited coercive power but who were willing to intercede to stop the school from closing.

APPENDIX A

Data Source Chart

Sources	Campus Culture	Campus Influences	Grassroots Efforts
Interview Questions:			
How did you find out about Sweet Briar's closing? What was your initial reaction?	✓		
What is it about Sweet Briar that made you feel inclined to help save the school? An experience, tradition, something you learned?	✓	✓	
What inspired you and how did you get involved in Saving Sweet Briar, Inc.?	✓	✓	
What do you think inspired so many alumnae to get involved and donate to the Saving Sweet Briar campaign?	✓	✓	✓
Who would you consider to be the leaders in the saving of Sweet Briar? Why?	✓	✓	✓
- How did they make decisions?	✓	✓	✓
- What were unique strategies and tactics that they used? Be specific. How did these tactics relate to what you learned and experienced as a student?			✓
- Who lead the Saving Sweet Briar initiatives?			✓
Was there anything specific that Saving Sweet Briar based their plan of action against the school closing on?	✓	✓	✓
How did you feel about the ruling to keep the school open?	✓	✓	✓
What is your most poignant memory from the saving of Sweet Briar?	✓	✓	✓
Document Review:			
Closing Announcements			
Facebook Posts	✓	✓	✓
News Articles	✓	✓	✓

News Interviews with Alumnae	✓	✓	✓
News Interviews with President Jones			✓
Wilson College Comparison			✓
Saving Sweet Briar, Inc.'s Website	✓	✓	✓
Legal Documents			✓
Richmond Law Review			✓
Ellen Bowyer (Attorney) Interview and Case Presentation	✓	✓	✓

APPENDIX B

Interview Request Email Template

Subject Line: Interview Request – Saving Sweet Briar

Dear Ms. _____,

My name is Amanda Ennis and I am a graduate student working on my thesis at George Mason University. I am emailing you today in hopes that you would be willing to let me interview you for my study. I am conducting a case study analysis on Sweet Briar College and what alumnae did in your fight to keep the school open.

I am researching this case in order to provide insight for what other all-women colleges can potentially do when faced with the threat of closing. More specifically, I'm trying to determine what made Sweet Briar different: how was Sweet Briar able to keep their doors open and remain a same-sex college when so many other schools have been unable to do the same?

My interview will take one to two hours, and I will be asking questions ranging from:

- How did you find out about Sweet Briar's closing?
- What is it about Sweet Briar that made you feel inclined to help save the school?
- What do you think inspired so many alumnae to get involved and donate to the Saving Sweet Briar campaign?
- What were unique strategies and tactics that alumnae used to keep the school open?

I live in northern Virginia, but would be more than willing to travel to speak with you in person, or conduct our interview over skype. I am hoping to schedule a time in January or early February – I can arrange my calendar to accommodate for whatever is the best time for you.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns, or if you would like additional information about my study.

Sincerely,

Amanda Ray Ennis
aennis2@gmu.edu
(804) 241-4169

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS: HOW SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE PREVAILED OVER INSTITUTIONAL CLOSURE

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to examine how grassroots efforts and campus culture influenced the decision to reverse the closing of Sweet Briar College. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to partake in an interview where though anonymous, your statements will be used and analyzed with other collected data. I will be asking questions related to Alumnae involvement and strategic efforts used to keep Sweet Briar College open. The interview will take approximately 1-2 hours and will be audio recorded.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in small college closings, and grassroots efforts and campus culture.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. All participants will be referred to using a pseudonym throughout the study. Only the researcher will have access to the identification key which will be used to link the participant's interview responses to the participant's identity. All audio recordings will be deleted upon completion of the study.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Amanda Ray Ennis, masters student in MAIS'

Higher Education Program at George Mason University. She may be reached at 804-241-4169 for questions or to report a research-related problem. The faculty advisor working with Amanda is Dr. Jan Armino, who can be reached at 703-993-2064. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity & Assurance at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed and approved according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study.

Signature

Date of Signature

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol - Alumnae

I will be interviewing six Sweet Briar College alumnae. The purpose of this interview is to learn about alumnae experiences during the Sweet Briar College closing, information on the fight to keep Sweet Briar's doors open, and how grassroots efforts and campus culture directly influenced the decision to reverse Sweet Briar's closing. This information is important for further research in small college closings, and for understanding grassroots efforts and campus culture.

- Check the proper functioning of all recording equipment prior to the interview.
 - Introduce myself to the alumna and thank her for taking the time to participate.
 - Begin the interview:
 - “The purpose of this interview is to learn about alumnae experiences during the Sweet Briar College closing, information on the fight to keep Sweet Briar's doors open, and how grassroots efforts and campus culture directly influenced the decision to reverse Sweet Briar's closing. If I ask you anything that you do not feel comfortable answering please feel free to tell me that you do not want to answer that question. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?”
 - Explain the process of recording the interview:
 - “To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to digitally record our conversation today. Only I will be privy to the recordings, which will be stored in a secure file until they are transcribed and destroyed.”
 - Begin recording.
-

Interviewee (A):

Date of Interview (A):

The following questions will be used as a guide. Some may not be asked if the answer is gleaned from a previous response. Follow-up probes may be used in the context of each interview to elicit greater detail and information.

- How did you find out about Sweet Briar's closing?

- What was your initial reaction?
- What is it about Sweet Briar that made you feel inclined to help save the school? An experience, tradition, something you learned?
- What inspired you and how did you get involved in Saving Sweet Briar, Inc.?
- What do you think inspired so many alumnae to get involved and donate to the Saving Sweet Briar campaign?
- Who would you consider to be the leaders in the saving of Sweet Briar? Why?
 - How did they make decisions?
 - What were unique strategies and tactics that they used? Be specific. How did these tactics relate to what you learned and experienced as a student?
 - Who lead the Saving Sweet Briar initiatives?
- Was there anything specific that Saving Sweet Briar based their plan of action against the school closing on?
- How did you feel about the ruling to keep the school open?
- What is your most poignant memory from the saving of Sweet Briar?
- Final Question: Anything you would like to add that you think was an influencing factor on the saving of Sweet Briar that we did not cover in this interview?

End interview – and thank participant for time and insight. Stop recoding.

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