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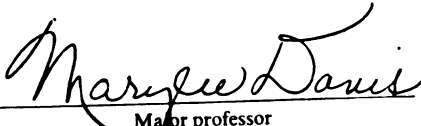
The Effect of the Electoral Process on the  
Decision Making of the MSU Board of Trustees

presented by

Allyn Radcliffe Shaw

has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in HALE

  
Major professor

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**THE EFFECTS OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS ON THE DECISION-MAKING  
OF THE MSU BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**By**

**Allyn Radcliffe Shaw**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **The Effect of the Electoral Process on the Decision-Making of the MSU Board of Trustees**

**By**

**Allyn Radcliffe Shaw**

The purpose of this study was to examine how the electoral process effects the decision making of the Michigan State University Board of Trustees. The goals were to identify how trustees made decisions and what influenced the outcomes. Eight Michigan State University trustee emeriti, from each dominant political party representing the last four decades, were interviewed.

The research and theoretical foundation included stage theory discussing decision making styles and influences on the process. This study was conducted with qualitative methodologies. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews after completing an examination of previous board minutes. The interview questions were guided by the research questions, the literature review, the theoretical foundations and the official minutes of the Michigan State University Board.

Analysis of the data revealed several key findings that included a life cycle for the board of trustees' tenure. The stage theory includes how the electoral process effects how decisions by and influences to trustees are made over time. The pattern demonstrates a specific decision making system utilized by the trustee emeriti. The outcomes strengthen the existing literature.

The research discovered that six of the eight trustee emeriti strongly agreed that the election process is the best method for selection to the Michigan State University Board of Trustees. Most of the trustee emeriti stressed the importance that citizens in the state of Michigan elect the individuals who represent them at the three public research universities.

The research found that the orientation to the MSU Board of Trustees has changed dramatically over the last forty years from a lunch meeting to a two day workshop with a notebook on policies and procedures. The trustee emeriti discussed and appreciated the more in-depth orientation workshop format which enabled them to quickly assimilate with the current board members.

The research demonstrated that MSU Board of Trustees members follow a specific pattern of decision making over the life cycle of their tenure as board members. This is important when understanding how and why individuals make decisions. The March and Cohen Garbage Can Theory (1986) in which decisions are made by oversight, flight, or resolution techniques and the political frameworks suggested by Morgan (1986), and Bolman and Deal (1991) represent a foundation from which the board members operate.

The electoral process was found to have direct and subverted effects on the decision making of the individual trustees and with the entire board. The structure of the electoral process inherently creates a political environment for selection to the board and for subsequent decision making of the members. Internal and external influences also were discovered to effect how the trustee emeriti made decisions over time.

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background of the Problem**

It is virtually impossible to escape contact with boards. We either are on boards, work with them, or are effected by their decisions. Boards sit atop almost all corporate forms of organization--profit and non-profit--and often over governmental agencies as well. The elected forums of our political jurisdictions are board like structures.

John Carver

Houle (1989) cites the existence of approximately 4.5 million governing boards in the United States. This number includes non-profit, governmental (including local legislative), and business boards. Drucker estimated that non-profit organizations "may now employ more people than federal, state and local governments put together" (1978) and that "half the personal income of the United States (and of most other developed countries) is spent on public service institutions" (1977, p. 17).

"The fields of public policy and policy analysis largely worship objectivity and determinate rules. They aim to drive rules of behavior that will automatically lead to the objectively 'best' results," claims Deborah Stone in Public Policy (1988, p. xi). "If one reads or talks very much about policy in academic settings, one cannot help but notice a profound rejection of politics in favor of rational analysis. By and large, academic writings disparage politics as unfortunate obstacles to good policy" (Ibid, 1988, p. x). Many political scientists have contributed to this literature of disparagement by demonstrating how actual policy making 'deviates' from pure rational analysis. Stone continues to say that people are all political creatures in our daily lives as well as in our governance. It is argued that each of the analytic

standards used to set goals, define problems, and judge policy solutions is politically constructed. There is no “gold standard” of equality, efficiency, social measurement, causation and effectiveness.

### **Purpose of the Study**

**The purpose of this research is to study the effect of the electoral process on the decision-making techniques of the Michigan State University Board of Trustees members.** Some of the issues explored include the effect of political clout on an elected trustee’s decision-making, concern for personal gain or retention of his or her seat, and an individual’s influence on a decision that the board makes.

Michigan State University’s academic governing board selection process is considered one of the most divisive in the nation (Healy, 1996, p. A43). The board members are selected by Michigan’s major political parties to run on a state wide ballot and then elected by the citizens of the state. Michigan is one of few states to govern the three state research universities by this means.

The quality of trustees’ decisions is dependent upon the degree of independence the trustees insist upon and exert, regardless of political affiliations, professional loyalties or predilections, ethnic or religious ties. Elected trustees are sometimes unduly sensitive to the constituencies that elected them; appointed ones are equally sensitive to the political figures or bodies responsible for their appointment. Both vitiate their contributions to the progress of the university and endanger the university’s integrity when they allow it to be compromised by their own lack of independence (Perkins, 1973, p. 223)

The more than 20,000 American citizens who serve on college and university boards of control as regents or trustees have contributed immeasurably to the interpretation and support of higher education, explaining significantly the phenomenal growth of the American system (Morrill, 1960, p. 42). Most trustee members hold a full time job in addition to representing the particular institution, allowing them significant contact with outside constituents. The institutions, as well, are in need of products to function and conduct major research for the world. In addition, many philosophical and monetary desires are wanted by people within companies, political action and religious groups who are trying to influence campus operations.

A trustee inevitably brings to the board a body of valuable knowledge originating in his own experience. He may be a labor union official, a member of a minority group, a banker, a medical doctor, or a social worker. While having several roles both personally and professionally, a trustee should not serve as a representative of any of these groups. A trustee's responsibility is rather to make decisions that are in the best interests of the university that further strengthens the educational process. When a trustee operates otherwise, he weakens the university and raises doubts about its intentions. Additionally, when the trustee interprets the role of representation narrowly, it fosters an attitude of interference with institutional objectives. Such an attitude often contributes to divisiveness among trustees and sharply limits the scope of their interests and concern. (Paltridge, 1973, p. 223)

Each campus has internal influences such as the president's agenda, the faculty agenda, staff and student desires that could effect how a member votes for an

outcome. How does this influence manifest itself to the trustees and how do they respond to the pressure? Is this influence different from an external influence, such as an interest group or union, and if so what happens between conflicting forces?

Trustees must feel free to seek information from sources they deem appropriate. The sources may be both inside and outside the university community. Under ordinary circumstances, the university staff can supply the data trustees need. However, in the event, that a trustee needs to augment such information with their own, research should be carried on with the president's full knowledge; otherwise, dangerous political situations can develop—dangerous in that they destroy normal channels of communications and encourage doubts about the validity of the staff work (Perkins, 1973, p. 222).

Since trustees are the ultimate decision makers on policy matters in any university, it is important to identify the ways in which they can enhance the quality of their decisions. Hasty, incorrect, or undocumented judgments will lead to a weakening within the institution. The outcomes can also lead to antagonism both in and outside of the university, culminating in a loss of support. A certain amount of human error in judgment is inevitable in any enterprise. A preponderance of error, however, quickly destroys the reputation of a board and does irreparable harm to the institution the board legally governs (Ibid, p. 221)

It is axiomatic that the quality of board decisions is in direct ratio to that of the staff work provided by the president through his office and other administrative offices under his direction (Ibid, p. 221)

Several social scientists use metaphors to explain how decisions are made. The researcher will utilize several authors' theories and analogies to explain themes within the data collected concerning how decisions were completed over time. The theories and themes will help explain the effects of the political process on decision-making.

### **Research Question**

**How does the electoral process affect the decision-making practices of the Michigan State University Board of Trustees' members?**

- A. What is the effect of political clout on elected trustees' decision-making?
- B. What is the effect of concern for personal gain?
- C. What is the effect of concern for retention of the trustees' board positions?
- D. How does a person desiring an appointment to the board of trustees alter his or her behavior to influence being nominated by a political party?
- E. Where does the balance of power lie regarding the board member and the political party?

### **Beginnings of U.S. Higher Education, the Morrill Act, and Land grant Colleges**

Harvard (1636), Yale University (1701) and The College of William and Mary (1693) were the only colleges chartered until 1745 and their missions were combined to be both "theological seminaries and schools of higher culture for laymen" (Brubacher and Rudy, 1976, p. 6). "They maintained that college was a religious society whose basic and chief duty was to train its students to be religious and moral men...religious instruction was to be emphasized" (McAnear, 1972, p.465). Therefore, the boards of trustees, presidents and faculty were comprised of ministers who created and carried out the academic curriculum and student services. There was not a visible division between work and labor for the faculty.

Even though the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 set aside public land for the creation of universities, it was not until the early 1800's that these laws would be supported. The Dartmouth College Case of 1819 changed higher education funding and created the availability for the first state-supported institution. In this case, "The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that an institution of higher education chartered by the state but not supported from public funds could not unwillingly be taken over or controlled by the state, because this would constitute unilateral violation of contract" (Brubacher and Rudy, 1976, p. 145). Because "whoever pays the piper calls the tune," signaled the end of the use of public funds for private colleges and universities, it was now apparent and certain that the states would develop and support colleges and universities controlled by and for public purposes (Delworth, 1984, p. 7).

Thomas Jefferson tried to gain control of The College of William and Mary and a New Hampshire institution as he believed that when necessary, the state could and should gain control of a higher education institution's finances and governance because it comprised a public trust whatever the terms of the charter. In 1825, Jefferson established the University of Virginia, the first state-supported university in the United States. Three significant changes appeared with the University of Virginia. First, the institution was secular and non-denominational; second, it was a completely public-enterprise in its finance and governing structure; and, third, it not only gave more advanced instruction than other existing colleges, but also offered several curricular choices to its students. This was a major shift from the traditional, private religious institutions and considered quite radical for students to have choices in classes.

The Yale Report of 1828 was produced after the founding of the University of Virginia and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and after President George Ticknor's unsuccessful attempt to reform and liberalize the classical curriculum at Harvard in 1825. This document was a backlash to all of the liberalizing ideas that were presented over the last decade. "This document, which was supported by nearly all of the influential church-related colleges of that era, was one of the principal factors in the retarding of the development of secular, publicly supported institutions of higher education for nearly forty years" (Fenske, 1988, p. 8). The Yale Report offered support for the traditional religious institutions to continue in their old steadfast methods and resulted in strong opposition for the creation of secular, public institutions. The Yale Report further helped fuel these arguments about the growth of the secular movement and slowed this expansion until the end of the Civil War.

In 1862, for the first time, the federal government intervened into higher education legislation with the Morrill Land Grant Act. The federal legislature was responding to pressures from the public about the lack of accessible public higher education and created the first phase of agricultural and mechanical institutions in all states. Veysey (1965, p. 15) claims that despite the Morrill Act, "legislatures were always ready to interfere with or curtail the operations of state institutions (as, for example, at Michigan in 1877, when faculty salaries were reduced.)" It was not until 1900 that the states were able to capitalize on the Act and follow the leads of Michigan, California and Wisconsin in creating strong state systems (Delworth, p. 1984, p.9).

At the same time, there was a tremendous growth in the following of the characteristics of German research universities. One major concept of the German philosophy included the idea that students should be free of administrative or faculty supervision of their academic and social affairs (Cowley, 1949, p. 19). With the movement towards secular education and campuses, the growth of the German research university followings, and coeducational institutions, the prototypes for the Dean of Students positions were being created.

By the 1920's, the frames for our current higher education system were in place. Most states had strong public systems and most private institutions were moving away from the religious philosophies on which they were founded. The number of junior colleges, precursors to the community college systems, was growing at a rapid rate. The first junior college opened in 1901 in Joliet, Illinois (Delworth, 1984, p.10).

Along with the GI Bill, the President's Commission on Higher Education (Truman Commission) created the first comprehensive plan for opening post secondary instruction to all people. The elimination of racial, ethnic and financial barriers was recommended in the 1947 report as well as the creation of financial aid for all students. The report also recommended creating a network of low-cost commuter colleges (Ibid, p.10).

The 1960's and the 1970's experienced a tornado of activity on the college campuses—first with the onslaught of new students, second with the requirement for building, third with the intervention of laws by the federal government, including the National Defense Education Act to strengthen math and science programs, and fourth



the increasing inequity between and amongst the students (Ibid, p. 11). The availability of opportunities for all students was apparent, but not always appreciated. Colleges and universities were slowly moving into a multicultural environment from a traditionally strong homogeneous culture. Students in the 1960's protested social inequalities, the Vietnam War, American imperialism and continued limited rights of students. With the rise of diversity among college students, much new and different learning has been needed and produced. Today, we are just now starting to understand the diverse and multicultural multiversity.

This history of higher education is included to demonstrate that governing boards have directly affected the growth of the United States system over the last 300 years. The governing boards started with Harvard University and are utilized on almost every campus in the country. The history explains the interdependence between the governing board and the institution as well as the challenges each faces daily. The trustees' role is critical to higher education

### **Land Grant College Growth**

Justin Smith Morrill was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from 1854 until 1867 and to the U.S. Senate from 1867 to 1898 representing Vermont. Morrill believed "that a new and vigorous type of education was necessary because of certain conditions that existed in the United States where public land was being sold at a rapid rate. Morrill desired the English education method where agricultural and mechanical curricula existed to teach the "common" man practical methods. Morrill was concerned with the lack of agrarian methods to preserve soil and remove waste.

In addition, several states could not afford adequate educational facilities (Eddy, 1957, pp. 27-29).

In 1862, the Morrill Act was passed by both Houses of Congress and signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln. The Act, which evolved from a bill first introduced in 1857, provided that public lands could be granted by the states to existing or to-be-established trustees bodies for the use or founding of higher education institutions. These institutions became designated “land grant” colleges. (Anderton, 1996, p.5)

The new type of populist-oriented education legislative action began in 1862. It was “an educational revolution, but not of the kind to happen overnight and would take almost one hundred years to complete” (Eddy, 1957, p. 46). Land grant institutions would experience great change during this time. Abraham Flexner described the initial character as an “organism” where the parts and the whole are inextricably bound together (Kerr, 1982, p. 20) in one community. This organism depiction evolved into what Flexner labeled “a federation” (Kerr, 1982, p. 6), a union of organisms. As these institutions continued to grow in size and complexity, they evolved into “the really modern university—the multiversity...[where] many parts can be added and subtracted with little effect on the whole...It is more a mechanism...held together by administrative rules and powered by money” (Kerr, 1982, p. 6, 20).

The Hatch Act of 1887 and the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 enhanced the land grant act and its effectiveness. By providing for experiment stations and extension services, this ‘three-legged stool’ of legislation ensured that knowledge coming from

these colleges and universities could be tested in a real-world setting and effectively transmitted to a public beyond enrolled students (Anderton 1996, p. 7). The new colleges faced immediate governance issues that began with the need to use or dispose of the 30,000 acres of national land that every state was granted for each U.S. Senator and Representative it had. Each state was to create an endowment from the sales of the land from which income would support the operations of its land grant college.

The land grants have grown to be some of the largest and most important universities in the world. This has been possible because of the continued assistance of federal moneys; the addition of state moneys; and room, board, tuition, grants and endowment provided by students, alumni/ae, parents and friends (Anderton, 1996, p. 7). Individual campuses can have more than 40,000 students from more than 100 countries, 4000 faculty members, and programs ranging from agriculture to zoology located on each of the earth's continents. The undergraduate student body educates the qualified masses while the elite graduate research and applied sciences programs at the land grants involve many of the brightest minds whose work and discoveries have impact around the world.

### **Governing Boards of Land Grants**

The land grants' early governance chartered under the 1862 Morrill Act can be described as erratic.

The typical governing board was almost as ineffective in financial management as in educational direction. Selection by governor, legislature, or in a few cases by popular vote, brevity and uncertainty, legislative

interference—at times to the point of abolition or reorganization--and local and group pressure all worked against administrative competence” (Ross, 1942, p. 99-100).

Since the beginning, state legislatures have developed governing boards of these institutions composed primarily of individuals selected or elected through statutory procedures and informal processes. Accordingly, these land grant governing boards are established with individuals serving by appointment, election, or serving on an ex-officio basis because of their special office or position (Anderton, 1996, p. 10).

Those appointed are typically selected by the governor and/or the state legislators in which they serve. In 47 states (94 percent), governors, and/or legislatures make the appointments (Trustee Selection, 1980, p. 15). The others utilize self-perpetuating boards or elections—statewide or district.

Trustees are inevitably the court of last appeal in matters related to university independence and integrity. They must understand that their reactions to external pressure inevitably influence the ability of an institution to function effectively. There is ample documentation in the history of American higher education to support the validity of this point (Bargh, 1996, p. 224).

The question regarding election or appointment of university board members is most often asked at election time. It is clear that the states and their politicians, political parties, and political processes control the power and procedures for land grant trustees’ selection (Anderton, 1996, p.13). Many of these appointed and elected trustees are political rewards. “Far too often, political cronies are selected by governors to serve on these boards,” (Weiss, 1995, p. A30).

Election of trustees on a nonpartisan statewide basis would produce other complications. Leading representatives of the type desired would not be interested in becoming candidates. Those who would run for office would be likely to reflect the positions of whatever organizations provided the funds for their candidates. Furthermore, it would be almost impossible to expect that such trustees would achieve the desired balance of commitment and representation (Heilbron, 1973, p. 10).

Statistics indicate land grant governance is now big business. Land grant institutions represent 105 of the 181 public research, state and territorial colleges and universities that comprise the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (Anderton, 1996, p. 13). These institutions “enroll more than 2.9 million students and claim upwards of 20 million alumni...award approximately a half million degrees annually, including about one-third of all bachelors and masters degrees, 60 percent of all U.S. doctoral degrees and 70 percent of the engineering degrees” (NASULGC, March, 1995, p. 2). The annual operating budgets of the land grant institutions were \$24 billion in the fiscal year ending June 30, 1994 (Minter, J.W. & Associates, 1996, 94).

Thus, as trustees carry on their role as representatives of the larger community, the strength, clarity, and honesty with which they adhere to the principles of independent action become paramount in importance. Part of the role of advocacy is to interpret academic, social, and structural changes within the university in terms of the independence necessary to being then about. This is one major way to bring about understanding and acceptance of what the university does. Support of the

university, including its continuing stability, depends on the success of this kind of interpretation (Bargh, 1996).

The governing body representative holds something valuable in trust—the classrooms, the libraries, the laboratories, the dormitories, the complex interrelationship of students and faculty, the institution itself—for high purposes and benefits, not for himself, but for others (Heilbron, 1973, p.3). Magrath (1990, p. 3) states, “all trustees share a basic responsibility, to hold in trust the college or university, making sure that its fundamental mission...is fulfilled to the greatest possible degree.” Similarly, Nason writes that a prime responsibility of trustees is “to preserve institutional autonomy” (1980, p. 8-9).

It should be noted that the U.S. population has a special character. The citizen taxpayers believe that they are entitled, as trustees supporting the institution, to voice their views to the trustees on the conduct of the institution and to expect that proper attention will be paid to them. Faculty and students may demand that the trustees protect the “independence” of the institution against the pressures of the public. Are public trustees committed to the town or to the gown? The answer is that they have obligations to both. They must be concerned with their respective protests. If the trustees can persuade the institution to be true to its purposes and the town to honor these purposes, they will be acting in the interests of both parties. In a tense situation this is more easily said than done (Heilbron, 1973, p. 5).

### **Significance of the Study**

The last major research concerning the MSU Board of Trustees and decision-making was completed twenty years ago and the politics, the issues and the outcomes

have changed. Michael Born (1974) completed the last doctoral dissertation concerning the MSU Board of Trustees. The research demonstrates that the private schools had “people buy their way onto the board” and that party politics effected who was elected to the boards of the public institutions. With this background, specific groups controlled the decisions. As legislation and ideologies have changed, board demographics have varied.

Federal legislation and ideological changes continue to alter who is influencing the decisions. “Big business” and unions have greater influence as they have the money to help fund major projects. The public action groups have their agendas heard in a much easier fashion as they are in the public limelight. The comparisons are important for understanding the differences in external influences and patterns in a large public institution

Using the state of Michigan as an example can highlight the above problems. “If [a trustee] sounds more like a politician than a university regent, it’s because, in Michigan, a person must have the skills of the former to become the latter.... Michigan’s selection process [is] the nation’s most politically divisive method of choosing state-university regents.... Each party makes two nominations for each university; the top two vote getters on the November ballot win.... in recent years, nominations have come down to litmus tests: republicans must be ‘pro-life,’ democrats ‘pro-labor’” (Healy, 1996, p. A43). Because of these circumstances, Michigan’s Governor, John Engler, “has proposed ending direct election of the regents at the state’s three largest public universities, making them gubernatorial appointees instead...Given our diminishing public resources, more attention to the

process of selecting trustees and to the problems created by current procedures clearly seems warranted” (Haro, 1995, p. B1).

The trustees of the big state universities and the boards of trustees of the most famous private universities have much in common. Both must contend with powerful academic guilds that they cannot afford to offend, because there is as active a market for big-hitting professors as there is for football or baseball stars (Duryea, 2000, p. 164). They are drawn from similar political, business and professional elites. As such, much of their lobbying effort is directed to influencing the policies of the hydra-headed federal government. Many of the most divisive issues, such as affirmative action, political correctness and sexual harassment, arise from legal obligations that effect public and private universities equally. It is not surprising, therefore, that in practice their governance cultures are broadly similar. Size, not legal status, is the most significant discriminator. Many state universities are multi-campus institutions with hundreds of thousands of students; most private institutions are single-site institutions much closer in scale to ‘old’ universities in Britain (Ibid, p.164).

### **The Conceptual Model**

The conceptual model (Table 1A) is constructed to explain a path for decisions to follow. The concept describes how a decision tracks through the board and what influences are evident. The model should make apparent themes within the decision-making processes.

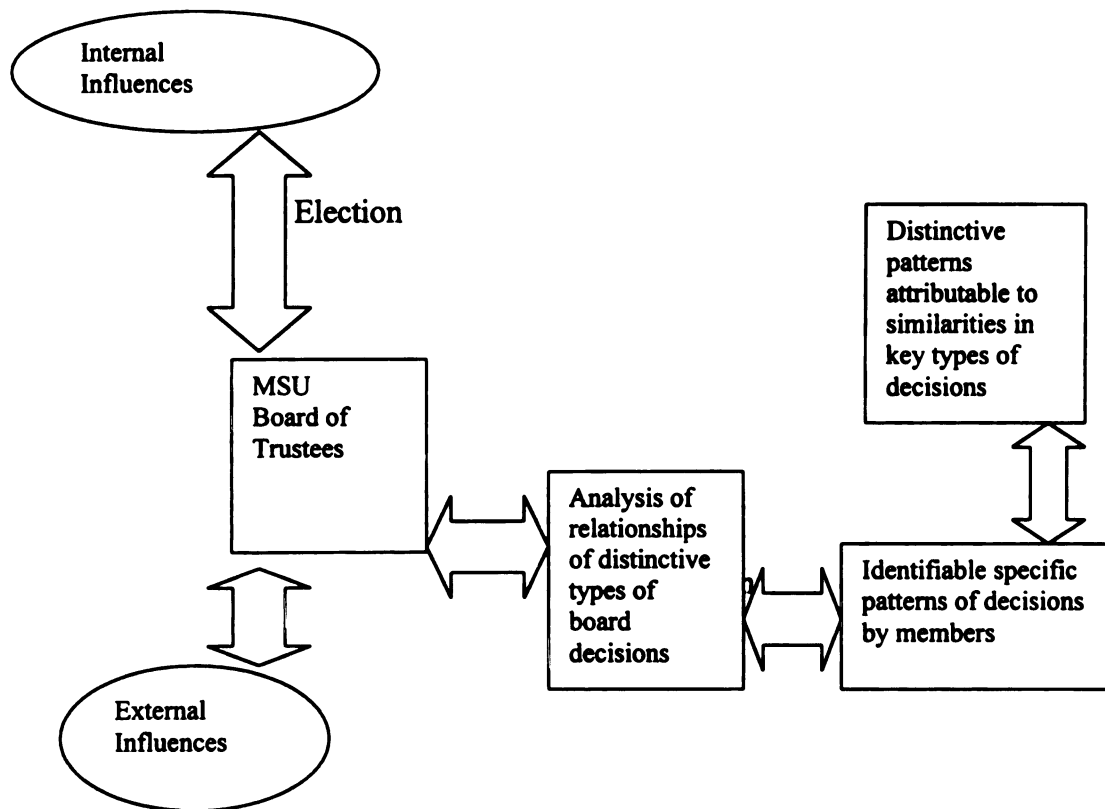
The model offered a tool to navigate through the qualitative study and offered suggestions on how to proceed through each section of the research. Creswell (1994,



p. 11) discusses the need for a conceptual framework within qualitative studies. The researcher used this design to learn more about the MSU Board of Trustees, trustee emeriti, and influences upon the members to learn how to devise an interview survey. From the interviews, transcriptions took place and the constant comparisons methods created trends and themes within in the different interviews. The developmental and decision-making theory offered grounding for themes that then helped decipher and explain different patterns.

**Table 1A**

**Design of the Study of Decision Making Patterns of MSU Board of Trustees Members**



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

This literature review represents what is known and written about elected boards and decision-making described in the Introduction (Chapter I). The chapter offers definitions and histories where appropriate and details published recommendations from earlier research. It concludes with a critique of what is written and what additional research could be done as a next step in addressing the problem.

#### **Definitions**

Richman and Farmer (1974, p.5) describe a university “as a set of interdependent parts that together make up a whole because each contributes something and receives something from the whole which, in turn, is interdependent with some larger environment.” Working in student development over the last fifteen years, the researcher utilized organizational and decision-making theories in this study. Developmental culture (Bergquist, 1992, p.5) finds meaning primarily in the creation of programs and activities furthering the personal and professional growth of all members of the collegiate community. The members value personal openness and services to others, as well as systematic institutional research and curricular planning. They hold untested assumptions about the inherent desire of all men and women to attain their own personal maturation, while helping others in the institution become more mature. The developmental culture conceives of the institution’s enterprise as

the encouragement of potential for cognitive, effective, and behavioral maturation among all students, staff, faculty and administrators (Ibid, 1992).

“One of the strengths of the developmental culture is its reliance on basic behavioral sciences principles...the developmental culture provides a clear and coherent theory that can readily be articulated by most members of the culture” (Ibid, p. 103). Using Max Weber’s analysis of power and authority (1947), one can postulate that the developmental leader makes use of “expert” power, rather than “rational-legal” or “power from position,” as the board member researches and is involved with the university organizational culture. Organizational culture thus provides that context for identifying authority in higher education.

...A public board performs in a glass bowl, conducting most discussions and taking actions in the public arena and before the press...it is important that the trustees bear in mind their public posture...one consideration is whether the board appears to be an effective instrument of governance. Does it seem to know what it is doing? Does it seem informed about the problems and personnel of the institution? Does it give the impression of groping for solutions? More affirmatively, does the board show leadership, a willingness to grapple with issues, an understanding of the factors that underlie a policy determination, a dedication to the welfare of the university? (Heilbron, 1973, p. 31)

## **Governance Definition**

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (1981) defines govern as “to make and administer public policy; to control, direct, or exercise sovereign authority actions and conduct of a person or group.” The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary (1993) defines govern as to “rule with authority, conduct the policy, actions, and affairs of a subject; direct and control, have under protective guardianship.” Common to both definitions are the words ‘control’ and ‘direct’. With respect to governance of higher education and land grant institutions, key concepts embodied in these definitions are ‘policy’, ‘influence’, and ‘guardianship’ (Anderton, 1996, p. 28).

## **Governance Responsibility**

The critical rationale and responsibility of higher education institutions governance is ‘the function of guardianship’ (Kerr and Gade, 1989, p. 12). “The role of trustees and governing board members in representing institutional interests in the fact of increasing external involvement has become more important” (Hines, 1988, p. 13). Higher education governing board researchers Nason (1982), Ingram and Associates (1988), Kerr and Gade (1989) explain that there is common understanding of 12 trustee responsibilities which have received wide acceptance and endorsement in the literature. Included in these responsibilities is the task “to preserve institutional autonomy” (Nason, 1980, revised 1989, p. 8). Given the politically driven conflicting representation matters associated with land grant trustees, institutional autonomy can be perceived as existing in a fluid state that is influenced

by the forces of and relationships with many competing constituencies and stakeholders (Anderton, 1996, p.29)

### **Land Grant Governance**

Beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, land grant governing boards were constructed through diverse methods such as selection by the Governor of the state in which the institution is located, selection by the legislature of the state, elections within the state involved, or the use of appointment by position to select them. Most states use a combination of the preceding. However, in five states (Delaware, Massachusetts, New York, South Carolina, and Vermont); boards are selected, in part, by self-perpetuating methodologies (Ibid, p.30).

Kerr and Gade (1989) explained that every land grant institution has a governing board and that the overall quality is suspect. Inferior board appointments have led to poor leadership, which, in turn, has made these appointments unwanted to many able, potential candidates. "This downward spiral leads to more interference by the states because of perceived lack of leadership" (Kerr and Gade, 1989, p. 106).

Callan and Honetschager are also concerned with the quality of those serving and add that "there is virtual consensus of those who have examined the issues since 1980 that the overall effectiveness of education governing boards is declining...Who makes up the board makes a difference...The major factor to which all of these analyses attribute the weakening of public governing boards is quality of board appointments" (Callan & Honetschager, 1992, p. 3-4).

In the Michigan institutions, the elected boards are chosen for eight-year terms, and two members are subject to election every two years.

Political party caucuses nominate trustees. Traditionally both parties have nominated able and distinguished men for regents of the University of Michigan, but apparently the other two universities have not fared so well. Michigan State trustees are reported to be in a constant state of partisan and ideological debate... Obviously, unless the political parties act as conscientious screening agencies, the representation on a statewide elective board will be uneven and unsatisfactory. (Heilbron, 1973, p. 9-10)

### **Board Composition and Selection**

Public institution governing boards average nine trustee members while those of independent institutions average 28 trustees (Anderton, 1996, p.33). The number of members can affect the board's ability to perform as groups increase in size, it becomes more difficult to be focused and goal oriented (Kreeger, 1975). "Moreover, as group size exceeds about twelve members, attaining consensus decreases dramatically" (Reddy, 1994, p. 32). Larger groups are also less content and have less pleasure and satisfaction derived from their work (Kerr, 1989, pp. 287-313).

Thirteen percent of public institution trustees are alumni of the institution they serve while the comparative figure for independent colleges and universities is 31 percent (Anderton, 1996, p. 34). In 1985, approximately 90 percent of board members were white and six percent were African-Americans. Hispanics, Asian, and Native Americans composed the remaining percentages (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1986, p. 3-12). Minority representation on governing boards has increased between the 1985 study and Grigsby's 1995 article;

governing boards continue to be less diverse than the populations represented (Anderton, 1996, p. 34). This lessens the “insight and ability to respond to increasingly diverse educational needs” It is noted that in a “recent survey of public higher education trustees in one state...71 percent of those currently serving on governing boards are male, and 51 percent are over 60 years old” (Callan & Honetschager, 1992, p.4).

The National Commission on College and University Trustee Selection writes that, “One manifestation of improper governmental intrusion is what seems to be the priority given to political rather than qualitative criteria in trustee selection processes.... The lack of diversity and balance in age, sex, minority status, geographic coverage, and professional expertise in board membership limits board perspective and seriously damages the board’s legitimacy and credibility.” (National Commission on College and University Trustee Selection, 1980, p. 14)

#### **Land Grant Board Member Selection Processes**

Governors appoint approximately 75 percent of all public university board members. The pool of potential trustees is smaller since each of these trustees must be a citizen of the state in which they serve (Kerr and Gade, 1989, p. 40). Each of the land grant institutions designated under the Morrill Act of 1862 incorporates the use of political processes to select some or all of their trustees (Anderton, 1996, p.36). The states of Colorado, Michigan, Nebraska, and Nevada select their trustees through district and statewide elections (National Commission on College Trustee Selection, 1980, p. 15).



Callan and Honetschlager (1992, p. 5-6) list problems associated with the state political processes for trustee selections as: governors pressured to use board appointments to reward individuals and organizations for political support; no systematic process exists for recruiting and screening potential appointees; board appointments are considered politically sensitive, but unimportant; lack of explicit criteria and reviewing process for qualifications or nominees. The literature makes it apparent that political elections and appointments at public institutions are heavily influenced by allegiances to politicians and/or parties and not necessarily to the needs of the institution being served (Anderton, 1996, p. 40).

Some land grant universities have a number of board members selected through self-perpetuating procedures. In these instances, “trustees often are selected because they have the same educational, business, or social background as other members of the board.... In such cases, board members tend to ‘clone’ themselves” (Haro, December 8, 1995, p. 81).

### **Loyalties are Created Through These Processes**

Loyalties held by individuals can and do effect their decision-making thought processes (Kerr and Gade, 1989, p. 43). The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1993) defines the root of loyalty, i.e., ‘loyal’, as “faithful or steadfast in allegiance; true or faithful to the obligations of duty, life, friendship...” Implicit in any subjective selection procedure is the sense of loyalty or allegiance by those chosen to the individuals or bodies doing the selecting. For those trustees selected through political processes, their political loyalties can frequently conflict with those served. (Anderton, 1996, p. 41)

Several examples are found when governors are trying to reduce spending, but state-supported institutions of higher education need more funds just to keep current operations viable. “Typically, trustees and governors have understood that trustees are intended to be above politics... [They are to] maintain an unfettered ability to advocate for institutional needs. Whenever trustees seek to implement a political agenda...they place higher education on the slippery slope to permanent politicization” (Marcus, January/February, 1997, pp. 15-16). This indicates that if the selection process works against establishment of trust, it also has negative impact on commitment, loyalty, and productivity. Gardner states that loyalty, by itself, does not represent “sufficient qualifications. I emphasize the point because more than one recent President of the United States has had aides who possess no other qualifications” (Gardner, 1990, p. 10).

Some disadvantages associated with the impact of differing loyalties on decision-making can be resolved through mandating trustee disclosure statements (Ingram, 1994, p. 5-7). Ingram formally defines fiduciary responsibilities before having the individual list conflicts of interests, emphasizes, “all decisions...are to be made solely on the basis of a desire to promote the best interests of the institution” (Ibid, p. 5). In spite of this effort to prioritize responsibilities and disclose conflicts of interests, Ingram (1993, p. 9-35) writes, “Tensions between elected political leaders and the academy remain high...The dangers attendant to preoccupation with political party affiliations in the boardroom are also very real—an unfortunate phenomenon more commonly found in elected boards than appointed boards.... [The] factions

within the board that are based on politics or personalities rather than honest differences on issues [are frequent.]

### **Selection Procedures Influence Board Members' Sense of Representation**

The literature relating to trustee selection procedures' impact on representation and decision-making is essentially non-existent. Criticism exists, however, with respect to political and government involvement in the process. "It must be recognized that politics cannot be taken out of political appointments." (Kerr and Gade, 1989, p. 43) This decline of legitimacy and credibility has resulted in a lessening of independence for public institution governing boards (Ibid, p. 106).

Former land grant presidents John DiBiaggio and Gordon Haaland and Steven Sample, former president of SUNY-Buffalo, write that, "As a result [of the politically-based selection process], many individual trustees come to the board with a political agenda or feel compelled to represent a particular constituency.... At private universities, the board... pays much less attention to the media and the demands of various special-interest groups.... And as a general rule, it is possible to attract people of much greater stature to private boards" (DiBiaggio, Sample, and Haaland, 1996, p. 8-9).

### **Literature Recommendations for Selection**

"It is time for a serious look at how public colleges and universities are governed, including how trustee selection can be reformed. The gap in expectations between and among elected political leaders, trustees, presidents, and faculty leaders is widening dangerously" (Educational Record, Spring/Summer 1996, p. 51).

Kerr and Gade (1989, p. 41) note, “Among public boards ...appointment is a better means than election of selecting board members.” They state that many qualified individuals will not involve themselves in an election process and individuals that do run frequently make commitments to special interest groups to finance their campaigns. They note that another drawback of an elected board is it almost necessarily mandates a relatively small board [because of costs] (Kerr and Gade, 1989).

Another method of improving the selection procedure and quality of board members is to have individuals appointed by interested community representatives as it is believed a diversity of viewpoints is important and links more constituencies and stakeholders to the board (Schick, 1995, p. 19). Callan and Honetschlager provide recommendations to include: meeting the needs of the institution; a non-partisan screening process, which seeks diversity in representation; explicit statements of qualifications; and on-going orientation programs (Callan & Honetschlager, 1982, p. 8-11). They also advocate inclusion of alumni associations in the screening, nominating, and selection processes (Ibid, 1992, p. 6).

Ingram & Associates (1993, p. 378-379) presents responsibilities and desirable qualifications for board members that include “defending the autonomy and the independence of the university [and] to maintain an overriding loyalty to the entire university rather than to any part of it or constituency within it.” With respect to qualifications, Ingram & Associates seek board members that possess “independence.... The capability and willingness to function as a member of a diverse group in an atmosphere of collegiality and selflessness... [and

on]...overriding loyalty to the university and to the public interest rather than to any region or to constituency” (Ibid, p. 379).

“Policies need not be solely in the educational field; indeed, it has been reliably determined that only 15 percent of trustees’ decisions are in this area. Many other decisions are more in the realm of management or important procedural regulation...Rules governing institutional conduct are matters of policy” (Heilbron, 1973, p. 33-34).

The literature includes concerns for lay governing boards. Minnesota, Montana and Oklahoma had failed referendums that attempted to replace education boards with gubernatorial appointments. “These developments in Montana and Oklahoma inject a disturbing element—a vastly reduced role for lay governance... These two proposals...suggest higher education would be more responsive to state needs if its authority was consolidated under closer control of the government” (AGB, 1995, p. 6). In March 1995, Governor Jim Edgar of Illinois signed legislation eliminating the Illinois Board of Regents, the two multi-campus system boards, and the Board of Governors for Universities and replaced them with gubernatorial appointees. If all of these initiatives were enacted into law, they would lessen the autonomy and independence of land grant institutions advocated in the literature (Anderton, 1996, p. 51).

In 1988, the state of Minnesota formed a Regent Candidate Advisory Council (RCAC) that found good governance demands, “The selection process favor qualification over partisanship...the board and its electors recognize the essential difference between a governance role...and political representation...the board must

concentrate on policy development and reduce the time spent on administrative detail,” and that the regents primary responsibility is governance, not representation. The study also found that the legislative election process handicaps candidates who are not affiliated with a particular political group or party (Ibid, pp.52-3).

### **Michigan State University Composition and Organization**

“Michigan State University is the land-grant university for the State of Michigan, designated in 1863 by the Michigan Legislature to be the beneficiary of the endowment provided by the Morrill Act...it shares with its sister universities the legal responsibility to provide a liberal and practical education for the agricultural and industrial classes and all others, to prepare them for the various pursuits and professions of life,” explains the Preamble of the Michigan State University Board of Trustees’ Bylaws (January, 1980, p.1).

“The Constitution confers upon the Board of Trustees the freedom, power, and responsibility to develop a free and distinguished university and to promote the welfare of mankind through teaching, research and public service,” states the Preamble of the Michigan State University Board of Trustees’ Bylaws (Ibid).

The Michigan State University Board of Trustees supervises the institution and controls and directs the institution’s expenditures (Ibid). As outlined in Article Four of the Bylaws, the Board consists of eight members elected for eight-year terms. The officers and organization of the Board include a chairperson and a vice chairperson where all trustees will be chair and vice chair during their term as a system of rotation is in place. The President is an *ex officio* member.

The board meets monthly in East Lansing for official business meetings where quorum or majority of trustees is required. A smaller group of trustees may come together to research and learn more about issues. The Board organizational meeting structure, as outlined in the Preamble's Article Two, state that the board meetings shall be open to the public.

Committees are defined in Article Five where it says, "The Board may appoint committees and prescribe their duties and functions. All resolutions and all committee reports offered which involved matters for record in the minutes shall be made in writing."

"The business which the board may perform shall be conducted in compliance with Act No. 267 of the Public Acts of 1976, being sections 15.261 to 15.725 of the Michigan Compiled Laws, otherwise known as the 'Open Meetings Act.' Public notice of the time, date, and place of the meeting shall be given in the manner required by Act No. 267 of the Public Acts of 1976," explains Act 269 of 1909 in M.S.A. 15.1124. The state law and the university bylaws are congruent to allow four or fewer Board members to meet in working meetings that are not open to the public, but if quorum is met, the meeting becomes open. |

### **Theoretical Concept**

"When we look at universities as they struggle with problems of reorganization, reform, choice, and survival, we are struck by one consistent theme: Decision opportunities are fundamentally ambiguous stimuli" (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972. p. 81). Although organizations can often be viewed as vehicles for solving well-defined problems and as structures within which conflict is resolved

through bargaining, they also have sets of procedures through which organizational participants arrive at an interpretation of what they are doing and what they have done while doing it. From this point of view, an organization is a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer and decision makers look for work (Cohen & March, 1986).

Cohen and March, two social scientists who have studied decision-making within organizations, offer a specific metaphor in their research. Some other researchers who study decision-making processes include Yukl (1981), Birnbaum (1988), Morgan (1986), Bolman and Deal (1991), Schein (1980), Chaffee (1983, 1988), Bennis and Nanus (1985), and Westmeyer (1990). Metaphors or analogies are most often used to explain how boards operate within organizations, and most explanations include a political framework to explain completed decisions. The political aspect of the aforementioned theories will be most utilized within this study, as the electoral process of the board members is believed to be instrumental in determining how decisions will be completed. The common thread running through the concepts is that resources, whether human, conceptual, or tangible, will increase in one area and be depreciated in another—that there is a finite pool of allocations, and power lies within increasing the capital.

Morgan (1986) emphasizes a “way of thinking” within his metaphors for explaining organizational functions within which decision making is a primary aspect and they include: Machine, Organisms, Brains, Cultures, Political systems, Psychic prisons, Flux, and Transformation. Each concept looks at organizations in different



ways with emphasis on how ideas and communication travel thus creating power conduits. The information may flow in one specific path or in several continuous directions thus creating different believed power levels.

The political metaphor can be used to unravel the politics of day-to-day organizational life. Most people working in an organization readily admit in private that forms of “wheeling and dealing” through which different people attempt to advance specific interests surround them (Morgan, 1986, p. 142). However, this kind of activity is rarely discussed in public. The idea that organizations are supposed to be rational enterprises in which their members seek common goals tends to discourage discussion or attribution of political motive. Politics, in short, is seen as a dirty word (Ibid, p. 142).

Morgan’s (1986) theory recognizes that politics and politicking may be an essential aspect of organizational life affecting decision-making, and not necessarily an optional and dysfunctional extra. In this regard it is useful to remember that in its original meaning, the idea of politics stems from the view that, where interests are divergent, society should provide a means of allowing individuals to reconcile their differences through consultation and negotiation. This provides a means of creating order out of diversity while avoiding forms of totalitarian rule, thus creating a non-coercive form of social order (Ibid, p. 142).

Bolman and Deal (1991) utilize frames for the metaphors in their organizational and decision-making theory and they include: Structural, Human Resource, Symbolic, and Political. The Political framework asserts that, in the face of enduring differences and scarce resources, conflict among members of a coalition

is inevitable and power becomes a key resource. If resources are scarce, trade-offs have to be made (Ibid, p. 187). This theory emphasizes that organizational goals arise not from fiat at the top, but from an ongoing process of negotiation and interaction among the key players in any system.

The political frame views organizations as “alive and screaming” (Ibid, p.185) arenas that house a complex variety of individual and group interests. The following five propositions summarize the political perspective.

1. Organizations are coalitions composed of varied individuals and interest groups.
2. There are enduring differences among individuals and groups in their values, preferences, beliefs, information, and perceptions of reality. Such differences change slowly, if at all.
3. Most of the important decisions in organizations involve the allocation of scarce resources: they are decisions about who gets what.
4. Because of scarce resources and enduring differences, conflict is central to organizational dynamics, and power is the most important resource.
5. Organizational goals and decisions emerge from bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying from position among members of different coalitions. (Ibid. p.186)

The political frame views authority as only one among a number of other powers. It also acknowledges the existence and importance of human (and group) needs but focuses on the situations of scarce resources and incompatible preferences where different needs collide. The political theorist is more likely to view divergent interests and conflict over scarce resources as an enduring fact of organizational life

and is less likely to be optimistic about distinguishing among better and worse solutions (Ibid, p.193).

Gamson's (1969) analysis of political processes focuses on two major players in the social system: authorities and partisans. Authorities are defined essentially as the people who are entitled to make binding decisions. Gamson describes the relationship between authorities and partisans in this way: "Authorities are the recipients or targets of influence, and the agents or initiators of social control. Potential partisans have the opposite roles—as agents or initiators of influence, and targets or recipients of social control" (Gamson, 1969, p. 76). Social control is essential to those in formal positions because their authority depends on it. Officeholders, in this case, trustees, retain authority only if the system remains viable.

Even though partisans do not have authority, they do have a number of potential sources of power. A number of social scientists (French and Raven, 1959; Baldrige, 1971; Kanter, 1977) have tried to address the question, what must individuals and groups have in order to be powerful? The most significant forms of power include the following: 1. Position power (authority); 2. Information and expertise; 3. Control of information; 4. Coercive power; 5. Alliances and networks; 6. Access to and control of agendas; 7. Control and meaning of symbols; and 8. Personal power (Ibid pp.196-7).

The presence of multiple forms of power constrains the capacity of authorities to make decisions. People who rely solely on their authority often undermine their own power; they generate resistance and are outflanked, outmaneuvered, or overrun by individuals and groups who are more versatile in the exercise of power. Expertise,

rewards, coercion, allies and personal power all help to close the gap (Ibid, p. 197).

Does the board rely on its own power or authorities to make decisions or do they reach out to other information centers?

Cohen and March's (1986) metaphor for decision making consists of a garbage can, which focuses attention on the ways in which meaning changes over time. It calls attention to the strategic effects of timing (in the introduction of choices and problems), the time pattern of available energy, and the impact of organizational structure on these. A key to understanding the processes within organizations is to view a choice opportunity as a garbage can into which participants dump various problems and solutions. The mix of garbage in a single can depends partly on the labels attached to the alternative cans; but it also depends on what garbage is being produced at the moment, on the mix of cans available, and on the speed with which garbage is collected and removed from the scene (Cohen and March, 1986, p. 81). A decision is an outcome (or an interpretation) of several relatively independent "streams" within an organization. The four streams include problems, solutions, participants and choice opportunities.

Within a garbage can process, decisions are made in three different ways:

1. By oversight. If a choice is activated when problems are attached to other choices and if there is energy available to make the new choice quickly, it will be made without any attention to existing problems and with a minimum of time and energy.
2. By flight. In some cases, choices are associated with problems (unsuccessfully) for some time until a choice "more attractive" to the

problems comes along. The problems leave the choice, and thereby make it possible to make the decision. The decision resolves no problems (they having now attached themselves to a new choice.)

3. By resolution. Some choices resolve problems after some period of working on them. The length of time may vary greatly (depending on the number of problems). This is the familiar case that is implicit in most discussion of choice within organizations. (Ibid, p. 83)

This summary information also includes examining problem activity, problem latency, decision-maker activity, and decision difficulty.

Cohen and March found eight major properties of garbage can processes:

1. Resolution of problems is not the most common style for making decisions except under conditions where flight is severely restricted or under a few conditions of light load.
2. The process is thoroughly and generally sensitive to variations in load.
3. Decision makers and problems tend to track each other through choices.
4. There are some important interconnections among three key aspects of “efficiency” of the decisions processes specified.
5. The decision making process is frequently sharply interactive.
6. Important problems are more likely to be solved faster than unimportant ones.
7. Important choices are much less likely to resolve problems than are unimportant choices. Important choices are made by oversight and flight. Unimportant choices are made by resolution.

8. Although a large proportion of the choices are made, the choice failures that do occur are concentrated among the most important and least important choices. Choices of intermediate importance are virtually always made. (Ibid, pp.84-6)

The decision-making theories have common threads used for formatting interview questions in the study and for analyzing the data. The study also reinforces the change or the similarities in the style of decision making of the board over the last forty years. The concepts are the basis for explaining how the decisions are made so one can then interpret the effects of the selection processes.

### **Limitations of the Literature**

There is little literature written about governing boards. The public and land grant institutions governing board selection processes are authored by a small number of prolific authors causing there to be little literature. Most researchers are connected with or work for the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges headquartered in Washington, D.C. Chait, Holland, and Taylor (1993) write, “most of these works, however, are ‘armchair studies’ or prescriptive exhortations by seasoned practitioners” (Anderton, 1996, p. 53).

The material concerning the selection processes and the implications of conflicts of loyalty on decision-making matters is politically influenced. This literature cautions against using only political processes for creating governing boards and describes several consequences resulting from abuse. The literature does not compare politically selected boards with self-perpetuating governing boards. The researcher could find little documentation in the literature relating specific troubles

caused by mixed loyalties, although accounts indicate that the autonomy and independence of land grant institutions is brought into question almost daily because of trustees' loyalties that are rooted in their political lives (Ibid, p. 54). Questions relating to these issues are a major focus of this study and the focus of participant and researcher thoughts about governing boards and decision-making.

### **Summary**

Further research including previous and present board members and senior administrators at other land grant institutions would add significantly to the body of knowledge on governing board selections. More studies including these matters could be addressed in state legislatures and by a committee within the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.

The literature demonstrates a paucity of recent materials about governing boards and their purposes. The materials also have a limited amount of information about group decision-making. "At some level, boards and executives are well aware of the historical deficiencies. An explosion of popular interest in management issues beginning in the 1970's sharpened the perception that governance is not all that it can be," claims John Carver (1998, p. 11)

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Research Design and Methods**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter three contains a description of the research procedures that were used in this study. The topics addressed in this chapter include the rationale for qualitative research, preliminary study, procedure, instrumentation, confidentiality, validity, sample, data analysis, and limitations.

How does the electoral process affect the decisions that board members make on a daily basis? Can an individual help influence a decision that a trustee makes? The purpose of this research was to study the effect of the electoral process on the decision-making techniques of the Michigan State University Board of Trustee members. The selection process for MSU trustees is considered one of the most divisive in the nation (Perkins, 1973, p. 9). The qualitative study will showcase the history of decision-making over four decades.

#### **Methodology and Research Design**

This was a triangulated qualitative study that included interviews and reading primary data. Triangulating multiple sources of data enhances the study's generalizability (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Triangulation is based on the assumption that any bias inherent in particular data sources, investigator, and method would be neutralized when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators, and methods (Jick, 1979, p. 602). The researcher used multiple methods of data collection and analysis, which included interviews and data analysis. Eight previous MSU trustees' members were interviewed. The eight trustee emeriti were selected



representing the four previous decades and included equal numbers of members of opposing political parties—republican and democrat. After reading board minutes surrounding a specific topic in each selected decade, the researcher chose individuals with opposing positions so viewpoints concerning how consensus, if reached or not, could be learned. The process involved one in-depth semi-structured interview with each member. The interview addressed how board members made decisions concerning a specific topic. The data were tape-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by manual techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The study consisted of the reading of documents, studying the board of trustees meeting minutes, the scheduling of interviews, conducting the interviews, transcription with adherence to confidentiality, constant comparison of interviews, coding, and then discovering the themes. The interview protocol was created from the theories, the reading of documents and the board minutes. The themes were discovered from the theories in the literature and from the data in the interviews.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research**

The nature of this research problem is suitable for qualitative research. Qualitative research allows for one to uncover the nature of experience with a particular phenomenon and is used to uncover and understand that which is yet unknown (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Qualitative research methods allow one to delve into a complex process and explore little known phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Research questions were based on theoretical assumptions aiding in the investigation of decision making for a major university. Qualitative research allowed

for explaining the complexity of details that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Qualitative research also allows the research to build in flexibility (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The minutes of board of trustees meetings offered additional information, including some experiences from the trustee emeriti in the study. This information was used to revise the interview guide and offer new avenues to explore during the in-depth interviews, in the tradition of grounded theory research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Principles used in qualitative research allow for an emphasis on creativity, spontaneity, and improvisation in research methodology (Fonow & Cook, 1991). With the election of two board members in November of 2001, observations of the two political debates enhanced the data.

Qualitative methods provide the means to study the individual trustee emeriti as the unit of analysis (Daly, 1992). This method can also accommodate multiple perspectives and give a more rich account of individual tenure on boards as *lived experiences*; better understanding how and why they made decisions (Handel, 1989, in Daly, 1992). Using trustee emeriti as the unit of analysis made these experiences possible to explore (Daly, 1992). Utilizing qualitative research, which allowed the use of in-depth interviews, provided an opportunity to describe the board as a whole and from an individual basis.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

### **Interviews**

The researcher conducted interviews with trustee emeriti so the researcher was sensitized to issues with which the board members dealt. These interviews consisted

of open-ended interview questions that were analyzed and assisted in the construction of the outcomes or themes for this study.

### **Instrumentation**

A demographic questionnaire was used before the beginning of each in-depth interview. This questionnaire included questions regarding length of service, occupation, ethnicity, education level and position on the board.

### **In-Depth Interviews**

An in-depth interview is a standardized, open-ended interview that allows for the researcher to explore general topic areas (Marshall & Rossman, 1993). The interview questions were similar for all trustee emeriti that allowed for common themes to develop. The questions were open-ended to allow the subjects to explain how and why issues were resolved. An in-depth, open-ended interview was conducted with each of the board members as the primary data-gathering tool. The topic areas originated from the decision-making theory as a guide for the researcher. The use of this instrument allowed the researcher the latitude to change questions based on observations that were conducted (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The interviews were audiotape recorded and transcribed. The questions, exploratory in nature, were seeking to receive information about a naturally occurring event (Marhsall & Rossman, 1993).

### **Primary data**

The researcher examined minutes and agendas from board meetings over several years to better understand trends in decisions or issues that were noticeable,

which then were included in the interview. The data helped strengthen any suggested patterns in the board discussions over time.

The minutes from the board of trustees meetings explained what issues were discussed and/or resolved. The preliminary review examined the major policy issues in two-year periods that followed the election cycles for the board. The last section of the interview asked for the subject to discuss the major issues during their tenure and explain how the outcomes were determined. The researcher then compared board minutes to the interviews to determine similarities between issues.

### **Validity**

A qualitative study's validity relies on the skills of the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1993). The more experienced the researcher, the more expertise held about decision-making and boards of trustees, the more credible the researcher would be. Although the researcher could not write from an insider's perspective, he wrote from the educated observer's viewpoint.

The researcher discussed the research project with interested trustee emeriti and several other individuals. Finally, the use of professional literature added further validity to the study. The researcher continued to cite from sources and discuss their relevance to the research.

### **Sampling**

The researcher had a set pattern of members who were studied and interviewed. Trustee emeriti were utilized in the study to preserve the confidentiality of those interviewed, as current board members are highly visible in the community. The eight trustee emeriti were selected representing the four previous decades and

included equal numbers of members of opposing political parties—republican and democrat. Gender, ethnicity and length of service to the board were represented in the sample.

### **Confidentiality**

The researcher was the only individual able to associate responses and other data with individual trustee emeriti; thus, insuring confidentiality. The identities of the trustee emeriti were kept confidential and reports of research findings did not associate participants with specific responses or findings. This was very difficult, as the sample was limited and public. Data were not identified by participants' names or any other identifying information (i.e., demographic information). Care was taken to ensure that personal descriptive information would not intentionally be identifiable by someone within the community. Pseudonyms (letters A through H) were used for the names of the trustee emeriti in field notes and other written materials. Other than the researcher, only a transcriber heard the taped interviews. The transcriber was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. All written material and audio taped materials were kept in a secure place to further ensure confidentiality. The researcher also requested that the trustee emeriti consent to the use of research findings. All trustee emeriti were requested to sign a consent form. The interviews took place in locations mutually agreed upon by both researcher and participants.

### **Data Analysis**

One of the major purposes of qualitative research is to generate themes, categories and patterns, and to provide meaning (Marshall & Rossman, 1993). The data included accounts of experiences of being on the board provided through

interviews. The researcher was searching for similarities in decision-making techniques, influences, word usage, issues and concerns expressed. The researcher also used field notes, the primary data and scanned for trends in the transcripts. The interviews were constantly compared and the identified themes coded. The trends were again compared with the interview data to solidify interview themes or to explain unidentified topics.

As a researcher, I have a personal commitment to validating the current board composition, and I recognize that can cause bias. The benefits of using a qualitative research methodology far outweighed the risks. The gap in the literature has not been well documented. Qualitative research, which allows for the use of in-depth interviewing and observational techniques, was the best way to capture these experiences. The interviews allowed for the exploration of the issues the emeriti faced as they ran for an important eight-year position. The flexibility of qualitative research was needed throughout the interviewing phase of this study. Although I was consistent with the use of the interview guideline, I had the flexibility of asking follow-up questions when clarification was needed and asking additional questions to obtain further information.

### **Limitations**

The complexity of the topic created a lengthy approval process for the study to be completed. The ability to create a balance between the confidentiality of the subjects and the right for the citizens of Michigan to know how their elected representatives make decisions was complex. The researcher created a process to protect the rights of all individuals involved with the study. The researcher met with

representatives from the President's, the Provost's, the Secretary of the Board of Trustees' and the General Counsel's offices to discuss necessary safeguards for the study. The dissertation committee approved the study contingent on approval from these offices. The researcher appreciates the opportunity to have been able to conduct the research.

The concern for confidentiality completely negated the use of current board of trustee members in the study. The trustee emeriti offered a larger pool of subjects to interview but again the ability to offer confidentiality was of paramount importance. The sample size was a limitation, as it may not represent the views of all trustee emeriti.

The ability to replicate the study was a limitation. The concerns for confidentiality created the need for several meetings to ensure that all of the safeguards were in place. The researcher's need to gather approvals, confidentiality safeguards and access to subjects could hamper future studies.

Also, the researcher's personal values were an issue as the researcher has been a member of the MSU community for several years. As a participant researcher, I needed to understand my own values, so that bias was not apparent in the interviews or in the outcomes. As an ethnographer, I was able to chart the actual process for completing the study and better understand what external issues faced the study.

In order to be a responsible researcher, I consistently avoided undue risk to the participants in this study. For example, I chose not to include information on the nature of employment. There were times when identifying the specific career of a particular participant would have helped to clarify a point, or strengthen it. Protecting

the confidentiality of the subjects was a priority. The risk involved and the steps necessary to protect the participants' confidentiality illustrate the extent that volatility still exists in the political world even when no longer in office. This was also evident in my own personal struggle with how much to include regarding specific issues, stories, individual backgrounds, or fights. This information would have addressed and highlighted theories in action. However, information was omitted for fear of putting the confidentiality of the study in jeopardy.

This study is qualitative, and this type of research is not value free (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Having a high personal interest in the research topic can cause bias (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). I struggled with being a participant in the community of the study for the last twenty years. In qualitative research, the fact that researchers are members of the community being studied can add to the validity of their study (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1995). This creates more sensitivity to problems and issues that may otherwise be invisible. I am not a direct member of the group studied, but I was both a student and employee of Michigan State University during the tenure of several emeriti trustees. This experience let me ask questions and explore thoughts that hopefully will add to the credibility of the research.

The use of in-depth interviewing in research involves personal interaction and cooperation from the research subjects who may be unwilling or uncomfortable sharing all that the researcher aims to explore (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). There is also the risk of not properly comprehending experiences shared by the subjects. As a validity check, I asked them if I was "on target" or asked for clarification when unsure as to what they meant by a particular point.



## **Summary**

The analysis involved abstracting “rights and duties” about interaction, consistent categories for talk and concomitant valuations, and in general, much microanalysis of board discussions. This means that the primary data source was tape recordings of individual interviews, supplemented by the field notes. The researcher was given background information from trustee emeriti who were willing to share news clippings on the studied topic with the institutional positions, their Secretaries of the Boards’ minutes, and any related writings. The researcher kept field notes of what was discussed “off tape.” The researcher also received “contextual” information about the university’s history, the trustee emeriti, voting records, recent and past issues, and concerns for the various boards of trustees from the trustee emeriti and from the minutes of the board meetings.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

But we found later that by tests we basically stirred the pot and changed the world. We found that our actions in East Lansing affected the world and not just the university community. No one really knew who we were before the decision, but after we were welcome most anywhere.

*Trustee Emeritus A*

There was little interest by the general public in the trustee emeritus races. I was wisely advised that there was little campaigning that I could do that would make any difference. The race would be won or lost on the basis of the top of the ticket.

*Trustee Emeritus B*

### **Introduction**

This study explored the effect of the electoral process on the decision making of the Michigan State University Board of Trustees by examining the experiences of eight previous board members through in-depth interviews and the reading of board minutes. The researcher learned how the trustee emeriti experienced their particular elections, indoctrination to an existing group and how decisions were made while sitting on the MSU Board of Trustees. Hearing these stories helped to identify the major themes involved within the research and to describe trustees' experiences as they negotiated their individual tenure in the elected position. As the first quote above from one of the trustee emeriti illustrates, these members feel the position is an honor and often overlooked by the general public within the state of Michigan. The trustee emeriti's stories provide a tool for potential board members to learn how decisions are made and what ramifications are possible. The trustee emeriti's combined experiences could also enable the citizens of the state, and possibly

lobbyists, to better understand how the board makes decisions for their own personal use.

The interviews consisted of eight former board members who were elected through the previous four decades equally representing the republican and democratic parties. All individuals belonged to, represented, and were initially endorsed by one of the two major state political parties. The trustee emeriti consisted of five men and three women, not all graduates of Michigan State University. In this chapter, each emeritus has been designated with letters A through H to keep his/her confidentiality.

The analysis is presented in three sections. The first section, consisting of the key findings of the study, discusses the life cycle of a board member in three stages, from beginning to middle to end, and includes theoretical foundations. This section also examines what the individuals thought they believed about internal and external influences that were placed upon them during their tenures. The second section examines the actual decision making while on the board of trustees. The trustee emeriti described how decisions were made; influences, both internal and external; styles of decisions, power and politics as well as philosophies that contributed to votes and consensus building. The trustee emeriti also described board dynamics, the culture, the environment and indoctrination to the MSU Board of Trustees. The third section examined if the trustee emeriti thought the elected process is the best method for creating a governance board for a major public university and what happens in the process of being elected.

Each trustee emeritus responded to three major categories of questions relating to Michigan State University governance. These responses, and the board

meeting minutes, provide background and data for analysis. It is not useful or practical to include all responses in their entirety, or even extracts of all responses, because of duplication and length. Included are excerpts of responses from a cross-section of trustee emeriti that represent the range of all trustee emeriti perspectives. When there were concerns about including or not including a response, inclusiveness and breadth became the guiding principles. This chapter gives paramount importance to accurately presenting the trustee emeriti responses to the questions from the survey protocol (Appendix E). Also providing trustee emeritus confidentiality created the need to extrapolate quotes from some responses. The three categories of questions, the subsidiary questions, and selected responses of trustee emeriti follow.

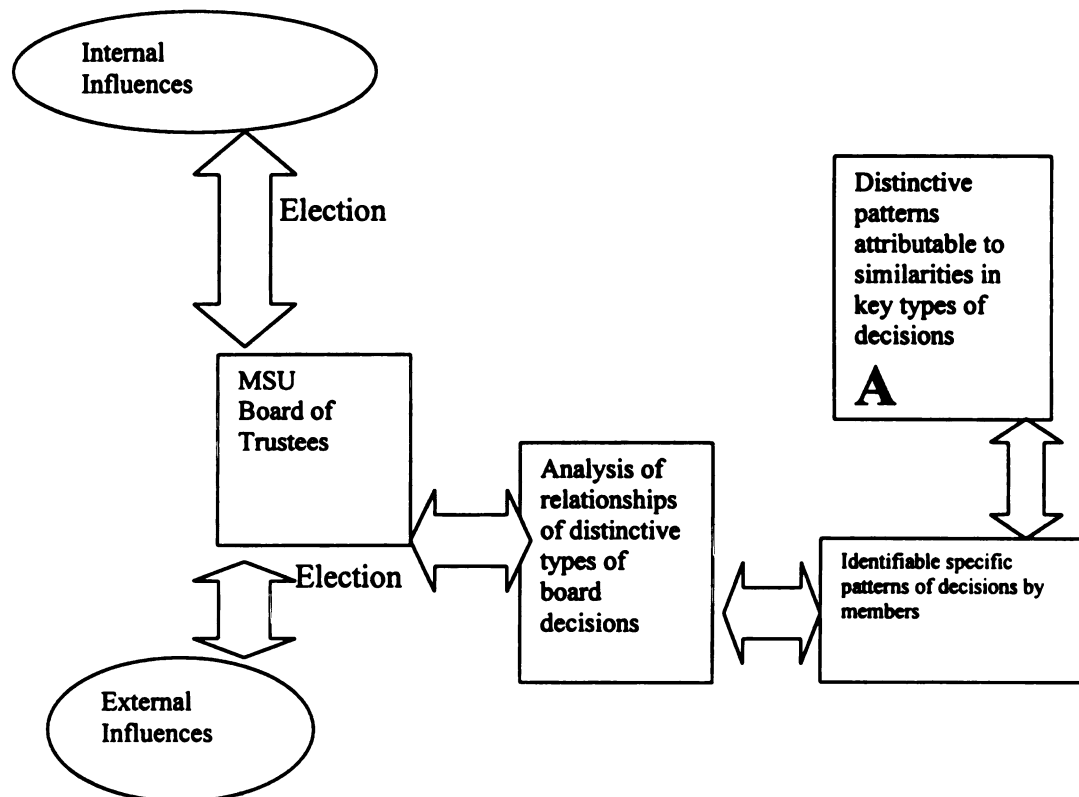
### **Theoretical Foundations**

Developmental theory is the foundation that guided this study by guiding the research protocol and offering definitions for the findings. The political framework, described by Morgan (1976), Cohen and March (1972) and Bolman and Deal (1991) directed the study, which focuses on the electoral process, decision-making, internal and external influences. As trustees, these individuals were influenced by their environment, which includes family, work, politics, the board, and supporters. Figure 4.1, discussed in Chapter One (Figure 1.1, p.18), outlines the original decision-making design pattern identified by the literature review and pilot studies. Each of these issues eventually emerged in the data as environmental components that influenced the research participants' experiences, some more extensively than others.

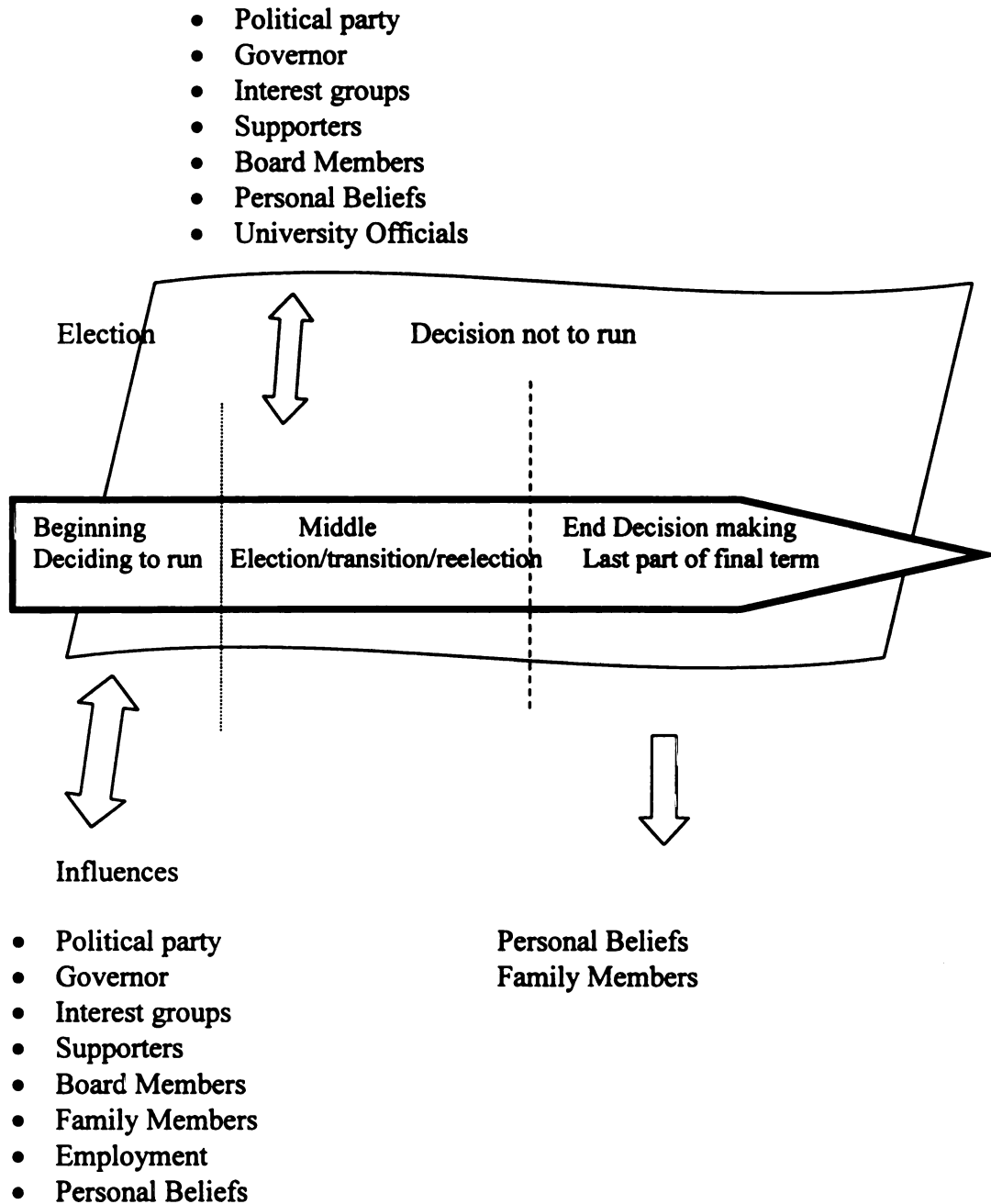
Figure 4.2 (A) is a more extensive conceptual map (Area A from Figure 4.1) that reflects the findings of this study. The life cycle of the board of trustees member

demonstrates how the influences upon the individual board member changes over time which alters how decisions are completed with similar or disparate pressures.

#### 4.1 Design of the Study of Decision making Patterns of MSU Board of Trustees



#### 4.2 (A). Life cycle of an MSU Board of Trustees Member with Decision making influences



The cycle repeats if the person is reelected to the position creating a spiral.

## **Key Findings of the Study**

Thematic analysis of the data can be conceptualized into two key findings: influences and decision-making. The process of being a trustee is highly intentional and involves multiple decisions. The influences and the style of decision making vary, but the political foundation remains. The findings emerged into themes that are further explained with a Life Cycle model for an MSU Board of Trustee member.

### **Stages of the Life Cycle of an MSU Board of Trustees Member**

The three stages of the life cycle of an MSU board of trustees' member include a beginning, middle and an end. Each stage has different foci or motivations, influences and desired outcomes. The life cycle is a developmental stage theory demonstrating the growth and changes in a board member. The time periods represent the movement from the original thought of serving the university through the election and then serving on the board. The cycle will repeat if the individual chooses to run for reelection.

#### **Beginning Stage**

The beginning period, when a trustee emeritus is deciding if he or she is running for an open seat, has very self-centered decision making processes. The internal influences are critical as the individual is deciding what the benefits are personally and professionally. Most of the trustee emeriti talked about their own immediate families and how the families are affected as a critical factor. Other influences included the expense, the exposure and time. These issues were immediate and apparent.

One's political party was a critical external influence to the prospective trustee. Since the political party is critical for the electoral process, that group is heavily involved with the decisions that the person has to make. The party representatives may have to convince the candidate to run, explain how the process works or the benefits to the individual, the institution and the state, or demonstrate how personal and political parties are congruent. The trustee emeritus needs to decide if the political party has similar philosophies and desired potential outcomes.

All of the candidates recalled being influenced to run by others who believed in them, their philosophies and their experiences. Members in the political parties were influential in that they helped persuade some uncertain candidates to see that they would be helping the party, the institution or the state. Most trustee emeriti described family support and giving back as the main influences to run for a position.

"I finally agreed to run to meet, as my Father had suggested, my obligation to repay society for the benefits I had received from a good education," claimed trustee emeritus B. "I had a completely different issue or platform for which I was working across the state. I was trying to make a change in a different political arena but then was approached by the party when MSU and my issues intersected. I had operatives all over the state who highly encouraged me to run," explains trustee emeritus A. The trustee emeritus went on to say that the issue had created a network of people in all 83 counties working on the topic and each freely went out to promote this individual for the trustee position. "When I saw that work that they were doing, I felt then that I had to run as they believed in me."



“I actually was helping a committee search for good candidates for the board. The committee was made up of different people and we kept meeting and interviewing people for the position. We met a lot of good people who were non-political. The committee then approached some of us who were helping search for candidates and asked us to run as we were the strongest that they had seen, so I ran,” stated trustee emeritus B.

“I knew I was running for public office when I was seven as my father and grandfather were involved with [political party] politics. I did have to seem more conservative to be able to get a more moderate agenda infused. I had to keep up the legacy,” surmised trustee emeritus G.

“Perhaps the greatest motivation to run came from my parents. They reminded me that MSU is a statewide school and should have [statewide] representative[s] on the board. They also reminded me of the long history of public service to which the family was duty bound. They were instrumental in helping me address the fears of a campaign and very supportive once the nomination was in place,” added trustee emeritus E.

Half of the trustee emeriti were asked to run for the board by their own political party and the other trustee emeriti decided to try for the board out of dedication to the university. Current board members, the Governor of the state of Michigan or the head of the political party asked those that were asked to run. All were involved in local, regional or state party politics and had some name recognition in the political party or in the particular community.

“I was standing at the delegates’ meeting and was approached by the assistant to the party chair to come behind this tall black curtain. It was late at night, as we had been working all day, so I thought it was odd, but went. The party chair, who was very powerful at the time, told me that I would be running as I had name recognition in the party and was a nice person. ‘We have the votes already to get you on the slate.’” Trustee emeritus C went on to say that that was the beginning of a political career and the person had not considered running before that time.

Another trustee emeritus had intended to run for the board as service was in the family “blood” [tradition]. The family had expected the trustee emeritus (D) to run for a position in the state. “As I had such a deep love for MSU and such fond memories, this made sense for me to run for the board. There was no question after I made this suggestion, that I would not be elected to the board.”

All of the trustee emeriti described the need to give back to the community, mentioning specifically MSU, the region or the state. They all had an inner desire to make a difference and believed in the value of community service. Two of the trustee emeriti ran for the position as they had specific agendas that they wanted to implement at the university and deliberately coveted a seat. The other six reported they ran for office to help make an overall difference.

“The governor approached me and said that the other party has a senator in [Washington] DC that they want to put up for the seat. ‘We need you to counter them, as we know that if anyone can handle their own affairs, it is you.’ I knew he was trying to flatter me and it worked and that is how I ran,” claimed a third trustee emeritus (E).

Another trustee emeritus (F) said, “I was in a high profile and extremely busy position and this seemed a natural progression as I was heading towards retirement. It was slower and a perfect complement to what I had been doing. As I had friends in the party, I suggested it and they ran with the idea. It seemed fairly simple, until I was elected.”

“I was asked by a group of students that I knew. I was involved with them on campus and they approached me one evening to meet by the [Red Cedar] river. They asked me then and told me that they would run my campaign—the interviews, the meetings and all. I figured if they were that dedicated, I should be,” stated trustee emeritus G. This person was the only individual who talked about MSU students being involved in the campaign.

“I did not ‘campaign’ for the [party] nomination for the MSU board seat. I was ‘recruited’ by the chair of the MSU board and the state party leaders. Situation: the party ‘slate’ had been completed by the leadership prior to the state convention. Two days prior to the convention, the chosen candidate was selected as the Lieutenant Governor candidate, leaving a void in the state...I said no thank you but that was not accepted,” added trustee emeritus H.

“I was born to be in politics. My grandparents were involved, my parents were involved, and all of my relatives were somehow in local, state or national politics. I knew it was my calling,” claimed trustee emeritus C. Trustee emeritus A claimed, “I had no desire to participate in an elected position, yes, some position, but elected did not matter. Once I was approached and accepted, I became very

interested in the process. This was so much bigger than I had ever expected. I thought it was a few chicken dinners and speeches, but it was so much more.”

Each of the trustee emeriti decided that, once they made the decision to run for a board position, the process became more impressive and hectic than anticipated. The process was much more involved in the beginning of the campaign than after the delegates’ meetings. In the beginning of each campaign, the individuals discovered that the majority of the campaigning was completed at the party level as the candidates needed to be recognized at the delegates’ selection meetings so they could be elected to the slate. Most trustee emeriti were in agreement that the timing helped them stay involved in the process. They felt that the approximate three months before the state political party conventions seemed to be a good amount of time to work hard and then after the meetings, the party “machines” [respective political organization] completed most of the work. This timing helped them realize that a run for the open seats was obtainable.

Trustee emeritus E claimed, “I did not want to campaign at all—I wanted the seat, but I did not want to have to become that political. My family already was my main priority and I did not have enough time with them. They were the ones who pushed me into the campaign and said that I had to do it. So I did.”

Trustee emeritus C said, “I had no idea what I was getting into and said yes too innocently. Looking back on it, if I knew what I know now back then, I probably would not have run. Out of all my time involved, the electoral process, the first time, was the worst as it is the most work.”

“I was not enthralled with the idea of participating in the ‘election process.’ I did not look forward to going through the process of speaking at all District meetings and selling myself. Several delegates from the sixth district (Ingham County) were related to MSU and had specific issues for which they wanted candidate responses. Given the circumstances of my nomination, I was not prepared to address issues raised related to MSU,” included trustee emeritus E. The individual did not attend Michigan State University and was working in a different region of the state at the time of the nomination process.

A trustee emeritus said that he was approached by an influential person in the party who said he would get the person the nomination. “If you decide to do this, I’ll help you any way that I possibly can. And lo and behold, I had to go to the state convention and my competition was leading by far. Then the person I was running against became the Secretary of Commerce for President [name’s] cabinet,” added trustee emeritus C.

### Campaign Process

All trustee emeriti talked of the traditional cycle of trustees in that the candidates are usually swept into office on the “coattails of the national or state positions.” Each trustee emeritus said that what happened across the state or the country usually was reflected in the individuals being elected to the board. A few trustee emeriti said that they “bucked the trend, but they that they were rare.” Trustee emeritus D explained, “Michigan tends to vote straight party so the particular candidate on the stronger ticket in that campaign usually wins. Individuals usually do not pay attention to the trustee position, unless it affects them directly...so this affects

how we campaign.” Most of the trustee emeriti spoke of their campaigns as “working” particular regions of the state. The strategy was to concentrate on Southeast Michigan, Lansing area and Grand Rapids. All agreed that Grand Rapids was a republican stronghold so that if resources were low, most candidates concentrated on the other two areas. Most of the candidates discussed spending a major percentage of time in the Detroit, Saginaw and Lansing areas. The candidates remarked that they spent little time in the “thumb” (eastern peninsula) or the northern Lower Peninsula. The Upper Peninsula was often forgotten during campaigns.

Trustee emeritus E said, “I went to every county in the state and talked to the people. I was the first candidate to travel through the U.P. and I may still be the only one to have done this. Just by showing up in the U.P., I had tremendous support at the nominating meeting—they all campaigned for me. They had been so excited that I had cared to come to the U.P.”

Trustee emeritus G described the decision not to campaign outside of his immediate area. The trustee emeritus said that the press carried all of the interviews, which gave name recognition. “I agreed to every newspaper, radio and television interview so I would receive free publicity. I did not need to go out and campaign as I had friends in the major markets so they came to me for interviews. It was cheaper as I could not afford to campaign.”

The expenses of the campaign often were cited as issues since candidates had to raise their own funds. Most said for that reason, they had limited print materials created or commercials made. Many laughed when discussing the miles that they covered in old cars that should not have been on the road. Only one candidate

claimed to have a bumper sticker, which had started as a joke amongst friends. A few candidates indicated that to run a successful campaign almost \$50,000 was needed.

“Only had one suit, one sport coat, one pair of loafers, two pair of pants, four pair of jeans and one beat up car to last through the campaign. The first meeting that I attended I was asked to park elsewhere and had to show a picture from the paper to be let into the lot,” remembered trustee emeritus G.

### **Campaign Decisions**

“There are few decision points in these races. Historically, emphasis is given to a candidate’s awareness of issues relating to the University and the logic of a candidate’s position on the issue; personal association with the institution; and reputation (good or bad). Very few in the public citizenry even know the questions to ask. I had very few ‘decisions’ to make related to issues,” explained trustee emeritus D.

The trustee emeriti described that most of the decision making was completed before the electoral campaign started. Once the political campaigning started, the trustee emeriti explained that most of the major decisions were decided within the party. The candidates who were running for an additional term explained the added complication of voting on issues on the board as well as campaigning. If the trustee emeritus voted differently than the party representatives wished, the support for the campaign varied. The trustee emeriti reflected that they made some difficult decisions during this time as each decision affected the university, the campaign and themselves directly.

“When seeking the nomination for my second eight year term on the MSU Board, I had greater hurdles to jump. This was largely due to my having taken positions while on the Board that went against my [party’s] colleagues’ preferred positions. My decision to not seek a third term was based on the realization that I had alienated the party powers and would not receive their endorsement,” concluded trustee emeritus B.

Almost all of the trustee emeriti said that they did not change any fundamental beliefs that were held prior to their service on the board. Several said that their personal convictions were strengthened after being constantly confronted on specific topics. Several said that they were surprised that very personal beliefs were challenged in that they thought such beliefs had nothing to do with academic governance whether it dealt with religious convictions, abortion, or land use.

The trustee emeriti described debates and interviews as the most challenging times in the campaign. They found when they were at the podium or on the dais that the conversations often would move away from specific Michigan State University issues to rather general issues that somehow could be tied to campus. Trustee emeritus D explained that at one debate in a church the congregants asked about the idea of co-educational residence halls. The trustee emeritus had thought before the election that this would be an issue so visited other schools that already had co-educational halls. The candidate spent a week in halls at different institutions to better form an opinion. The individual decided that benefits were very strong and was supportive of the co-ed halls. The debate moved quickly from there to condom dispersal, sexual education, pre-marital sex and abortion. The trustee emeritus was



questioned on personal beliefs and how it would make the person vote. “I was shocked at how the questions moved from the halls to my personal beliefs...I had been prepared to talk of the benefits of co-ed halls and ended up feeling as I was defending my own beliefs. That was hard.”

Trustee emeritus A said, “I was hammered on my opinion about abortion. My party had a stand, but what did I believe. I tried to explain what the university stance was and what the laws were, but everyone kept asking me what I believed...the concern then became should Olin Health Center be able to complete abortions. Most people figured if my personal beliefs were different that they would be carried out, if it was different from the party’s [beliefs].”

“I had my eyes opened to the total world and from that you need to use cooperation. Everybody can live by that; before compromise seemed like a bad idea, but this position can be helpful...one does not always need to be steadfast...was quite a revelation,” trustee emeritus G.

### **Middle Stage**

The middle stage, during and immediately following the election, is self and party centered in terms of the decision-making processes. If a person chooses to run for reelection, he or she tends to stay in this stage until the final term. The influences are more external in this stage such as the political party representatives, other board members, state and federal government officials, and the UAW representatives all wanting to create particular outcomes. The internal influences are strong as one is searching for security and survival for and during reelection to the board.

The political party is very influential at this point as the individual wants to keep the party representatives pleased with the work being completed. The trustee is making decisions that will benefit both the political party and the individual. The importance of the institution becomes stronger but still may not be the primary focus for the trustee.

#### **President, Provost, Faculty Liaison Influence on Trustees' Decision-making**

“The president and provost are the major source of information and perspective on all issues by virtue of their close proximity to all Board actions and activities. As ‘visitors’ to campus, board members must necessarily rely on the information provided by the administration,” explained trustee emeritus A. “As a safeguard, the board liaison with faculty, staff and students were established to provide the opportunity for independent input from individuals outside of the formal administration. Decisions made by the board can only be as good as the information provided to them as part of the decision-making process,” said another trustee emeritus (H).

All three groups are gatekeepers to the board either directly or indirectly. “In fact, most issues don’t come to the board, except through them [president and provost]. See it would be rare that we would bring an issue to the board independently of the routing. We usually went through the president and the provost if we brought something to the floor. Most of the time, they would add their own opinion to the new topic,” explained trustee emeritus G.

“...I had been contacted by a faculty member about an issue which I did not know. I raised the concern at the meeting and the response that I received from the

president was not what I expected. He said that they should not be contacting me. This was different from what I thought but it sent a loud and clear message to the faculty and the board,” offered trustee emeritus E.

The trustee emeriti were in agreement and said that the president and the provost were aware that their opinions and actions influenced the board, as they were the ‘gatekeepers’ for issues usually brought forward to the group. The trustee emeriti all thought that the president and provost perceived that they had a greater influence than they actually held. The faculty liaison was not considered to be a highly influential person as the individual rarely speaks and offers opinions usually only when asked. The board felt that the position is important, as it is independent of direct administrative oversight but did not believe that it was highly influential to the decision-making.

All eight trustee emeriti agreed that the president should have an opinion, but not always a recommendation, on all topics brought before the board. They felt that the president should guide the board members through the background, the rationale for the issue and what he believed an outcome should be. They also all agreed that the president should not expect them to vote with the administration on every issue.

“If a recommendation is coming from the administration, they are expected to have an opinion and position on the issue. In the case of a strong president and equally strong provost, it is not uncommon to have multiple viewpoints expressed which do not necessarily agree,” offered trustee emeritus A. “If a board topic is initiated outside of the university administration, their opinion is sought. If it is a

‘new topic’, the board would typically ask for administrative review and defer any action or decision until the topic is researched further,” explained trustee emeritus H.

“They are very careful in most instances not to express those [opinions] publicly. But they do with the board in the course of the public meetings, such as the Thursday night or in one on one conversations, at some point or another in the course of our two or three day meetings,” added trustee emeritus F.

### **Board Members’ Decisions When They Consider Constituents**

“Even though you reach the Board as a political animal, most elected board members realize that they serve a larger public once they are elected. You cannot do this if you are beholden to a specific group or political body. I can think of very few exceptions to board members approaching their role with any other perspective...they relate more to the personal motivations of the individual choosing to run in the first place [affects how the individual will behave in office],” hypothesized trustee emeritus C.

Most of the trustee emeriti thought about how being elected affected their decisions and usually responded about the difficulty in defining possible constituents and who they are. All of them were in agreement that the students should be the most important constituents but rarely were. The only trustee emeritus who said that the students came first was the trustee emeritus who first had been approached by students who asked him to run for the open seat. “The students were so sincere and I was doing this for them. I thought of them often, contacted them for opinions and made myself available to students whenever I could,” stated trustee emeritus G.

The trustee emeriti listed different constituents to consider when making a decision. Most added the constituents changed over the length of service and the proximity to a reelection period. The constituents were listed as the Governor, the political party, the legislature, those who were vested in the outcome, the students, the staff, the faculty, labor unions, the president, the provost, the banks and those who may have financial involvement. The answer was closely divided among members of the two political parties. The democrats more often said that the Governor and labor unions were often trying to influence a decision, which could affect the outcome. The republicans were more closely aligned with financial stakeholders when considering decisions.

“Different board members have different constituencies. Special interests all participate in the nominating process at the state conventions. You do not want to alienate anyone. The democrats are extremely sensitive to race and gender. The republicans are sensitive to the economic power base—corporations, agriculture and conservatives. When making decisions, these groups factor in every time,” explained trustee emeritus F.

#### **Party Affiliation Affects How Trustee Emeriti Made a Decision**

This answer was almost split down party lines. The democrats freely explained that the Governor or his office representatives would become involved with MSU issues. They all agreed that they had received phone calls, visits or invitations to the Capitol to meet with the Governor. Most of the republicans said they could tell when the Governor had visited their counterparts.

The republicans stated that they had rarely or if ever been talked to by the Governor regarding university or trustee emeritus matters. With the exception of one trustee emeritus who was a personal friend of the Governor, this individual often talked with the Governor about specific MSU issues. The democrats agreed that the republicans did not seem to have the interference or pressure from the republican governors that they did from their own governors.

The democrats also talked about the influence of the United Auto Workers in their party. They indicated that the UAW has become heavily involved in trying to influence decisions—whether it is try to have the union expand on campus or influence appropriations. The republicans also reported having been approached by the UAW but on a personal level and not through the party.

“There was a lot of pressure to vote on the [issue] according to what other democrats felt was the party line. I didn’t see it as having a political base one way or the other, so I voted against them. That was another nail in the coffin...if I had to bend my principles or my personal integrity to be reelected, it wouldn’t be worth getting reelected,” discussed trustee emeritus H.

“I had been approached by the labor unions, the Governor and other strong democrats who wanted to make sure that I knew what way I was voting. I was upset with this as I disagreed completely with what they were thinking. I knew that if I voted against what they wanted I would not be reelected—that was made clear. I had to vote my conscience and that was my last term on the board,” explained a different trustee emeritus (F).

“When actively seeking the nomination for my next term on the board, I had greater hurdles to jump. This was largely due to my having taken positions while on the Board that went against my Democratic colleagues’ preferred positions. My decision not to seek a [time] term was based on the realization that I had alienated the party powers and would not receive their endorsement. To them I had voted ‘wrong,’” added trustee emeritus B.

Since the 1962 State Constitution was adopted, providing for the election of the governing board members, partisan politics was the basis on which the board chair and vice-chair were selected. Those positions were reserved for the board members whose party held the majority of members of the Board. When an even 4-4 split existed, the chair and vice chair typically split between parties. That practice was modified in 1976 and the current practice allows board leadership to rotate on the basis of seniority on the Board. The chair and vice-chair positions are now automatically given to the two most senior members whose terms are expiring within two years. “This has de-politicized the board leadership and allows everyone a chance to take that leadership role,” explained trustee emeritus E.

“Agriculture has aligned itself with the Republican Party and they are very influential as they control a large segment of the economy. MSU started out as an agricultural institution and has never moved away from that—added to, but has not strayed. So therefore, they did have a lot of influence when I am seeking input on issues,” explained trustee emeritus E.

“I just came on to the board, came to a solution [of party affiliation and allegiance] that the only way that I could be honest to myself and my beliefs, was not

to seek reelection because there was no way that I could please the special interest groups that I could foresee at the next democratic convention. Big question one, was I a bigot? Two, was I anti-feminist,” offered trustee emeritus F. The individual added, “anytime that you start talking about a fair process, you immediately become opposition [to the usual process]. Well, when I made that choice, I was immediately liberated and I could speak on issues freely and uncompromisingly.”

“I have always been a Democrat, always will be. They know that. But I have the unique distinction, I think, of having good friends in both political parties. Unfortunately, I think the last years, it is more difficult to establish those personal relationships because of the horrendous animosity that grew within the two political parties over the last ten to fifteen years,” lamented trustee emeritus F.

#### **Public Institution Philosophy Affects Board Members’ Decisions**

Without hesitation, all board members concurred that the land grant philosophy that the university incorporated into its mission in the 1860’s was the strongest and the best foundation an institution could have. All of the board members referenced the three-fold mission and how it helps the university, the state, the country and the world. Each person outlined the benefits of outreach and how it enhances the university reputation and all were appreciative of what MSU has accomplished around the world.

Diversity in students, staff and faculty also was described as a great strength for the land grant philosophy. Individually, the trustee emeriti described racial, ethnic, socio-economic, religion, sexual orientation differences as being enhanced by



the values listed in the philosophy. Some were careful to add a caveat that there were struggles to move the university ahead in certain areas.

All board members strongly insisted that “accessibility to the masses” was critical for the success of the institution and for the state. Many budget issues, especially setting tuition rates, often were determined by what could the students and or their families reasonably afford. “Decisions such as tuition increases often come into conflict with the mission to educate the masses. Holding down the number of students due to faculty and staff constraints, while seemingly inconsistent with our mission, has contributed toward enhancing the overall quality of education MSU can provide,” explained trustee emeritus C.

### **End Stage**

The end stage is when the trustee has made the decision not to seek reelection and the decision-making becomes issue centered. The influences change dramatically in this stage. The trustee has made a decision to either run for reelection or not and then the importance of the political party shifts. Most trustee emeriti stated that when they made the decision not to run again, it was a freeing experience. They no longer felt beholden to the political party and could more easily make decisions closer to their personal beliefs. Some of the trustee emeriti felt this was their favorite stage on the board as they could think more freely and genuinely examine what was best for the institution.

The political party in this final stage loses importance and influence over the board member, as the outcomes are not affecting the direct future of the individual. Most trustee emeriti discussed that they had paid their “debt” to the particular party

and could most easily vote with their conscience. Some trustee emeriti concluded that they did not want to have any outside influences and decided early in their tenure that they were not seeking reelection so they could lose the political party influence.

### **Influences upon the MSU Board of Trustees Members**

The influences discussed by the participants included internal influences such as family, work and personal values as well as external influences such as the political party, the Governor, supporters, interest groups, students and other board members. These influences changed and had different magnitudes during the tenure of the trustee. The influences also affected how a trustee made a decision when a board member and if the individual chose to be considered for reelection.

#### **Internal Influences**

In the beginning stages, the internal influences came together to help the individual decide to run for the open seat on the MSU Board of Trustees. Personal beliefs were the most important internal influence each trustee had to consider when determining whether to run for an open seat on the MSU board. The beliefs are listed separately as some of the participants were approached to become candidates and had no internal feelings to participate in the electoral process. These individuals explained that they needed to understand if their personal and the requesting group's belief systems were compatible and comparable. Those who decided to run on their own claimed to have taken a serious inventory before they approached the particular political parties.

Individuals took into consideration the stress that was placed upon the family by increased publicity, the time away from home, and the possible unpopular

decisions that would be made. All of the participants listed the family as the second strongest influence on deciding to run for an open seat on the board of trustees. Some of the trustee emeriti said that they knew individuals who chose not to be candidates for the same reasons.

Most trustees also listed the work environment as an internal influence because they were close with the other employees who could understand the impact of the possible election on colleagues. Each individual has to decide if the trusteeship takes away from the job, causes harm to the business, creates philosophical differences, and potential costs to the company. Most trustee emeriti stated that after the family, work associates was the group with whom they most discussed the idea of campaigning for the board.

During the beginning stages, the internal influences were considered extremely important to the candidate. Most individuals said that these influences were strong and often lifted their spirits and desire to run for a position. These influences were often credited with helping the participants better understand themselves and what they believed.

In the middle stages, the internal influences were often overlooked or not as often sought according to the trustee emeriti. The trustee emeriti often claimed that these internal influences lost importance when making a decision as the external pressures grew in importance. The family and work environments were still considered important for personal strength, but not in helping create an opinion on an issue. Some trustees said that they no longer talked about issues with family and

colleagues, as they did not want to hear contrary opinions to what the external groups were wishing.

Some trustees said that they struggled most with their own belief system as it often clashed with the political party's or the governor's desires. When a trustee was newest to the board or when considering running for reelection, the internal influences were most often overlooked when making a decision. Some trustee emeriti claimed to have become somewhat "depressed" at this stage and that was what made them decide not to campaign for reelection.

During the ending stage, trustee emeriti maintained that the internal influences once again became important and, for the first time, personal values were the most listened to or followed influences. Several of the trustee emeriti identified a small "spiritual" journey where they could reconnect with their inner soul and could make decisions free of external influences. The trustee emeriti agreed in that they made their best decisions for the university at this stage.

"Opinions are frequently volunteered by the university committees established to evaluate programs and policies to the University. If opinions are not volunteered, they are frequently sought by board members, typically with the blessing of the provost and the president," explained trustee emeritus F. Another trustee emeritus (D) added, "Individual issues brought by faculty, staff and students are often raised privately with individual trustees and trustees typically make an effort to work with the administration to find a solution to the problem. Some exceptions include matters in litigation as board members defer to the administration and are required to avoid intervention."

“I met some great, great individuals at Michigan State...that is the people on campus take themselves awful serious. When you get fifteen miles off campus, things are not quite as important as they think they are,” added a trustee emeritus (C) when explaining how the internal influences are not as strong as perceived.

Utilizing diagram 4.2 (A), (page 54) one can see how the internal influences at first were supporting the trustee and helping create a strong foundation for decision-making. In the middle stage, these same influences weighed down and hampered the decision-making of the trustee. Internal influences often had contrary opinions to the external influences thus causing turmoil within the trustee. Finally, in the end stage, the trustee once again was supported by the internal influences and was able to utilize them for a strong foundation. The internal influence voice was loudest at the end stage, loud in the beginning stage, and quietest during the middle stage.

### **External Influences**

During the beginning stage in the lifecycle of a trustee, external pressures helped create a foundation for which the participant made a decision to campaign for a position on the board of trustees. At this time, the political party gained prominence as the strongest and most important of the external influences.

The political party representatives approached the individual to campaign for a position on the board; worked with the individual to better understand how closely aligned the philosophical bases were; worked to convince the individual to serve the university, the community, the political party, the students and the state. The political party representatives also explained to the prospective trustee how they would support the individual financially and personally through the campaign. Besides the

internal influences, at this stage, the political party was the strongest of the external influences.

The governor, supporters, and interest groups rose in prominence as they started to make themselves known to the potential trustee. The trustee emeriti often discussed the role of these groups at this stage and how they explained what they could offer to the campaign and to the participant. Most trustee emeriti stated that these groups rarely indicated how they directly benefited from helping elect a board member. These groups, however, continued to rise in his/her influence at the middle stage in the trustee tenure.

The external influences were very important during the middle stage as they often had opinions about issues facing the board. Several trustee emeriti claimed that they “owed” the political party and their supporters for helping them win the campaign so they were more likely to listen to these outside groups at this point. The trustee emeriti reported that these external influences changed at this point in that the specific group members reminded the trustee that they had helped the person win the seat or that they could control their winning reelection.

When the individual considered or planned a reelection campaign, the external influences again rose in importance. The political party wanted a candidate closely aligned with their agenda and their beliefs. Most trustee emeriti felt beholden to their particular party at this stage. The participants spoke of great pressure to please external constituencies, but rarely themselves. If they were able to please the external constituencies and themselves, it was a major victory.

At the end stage, the external influences lost most of their importance to participants and were unable to sustain their personal agenda, as the trustee was no longer soliciting input on issues. The trustee emeriti spoke of a cathartic experience when they made the decision not to campaign for reelection and felt beholden to no one. Most trustee emeriti felt that they had paid back or were so upset with the external forces that they owed these groups nothing. Most participants reported that they consciously felt the difference within themselves when they made the decision no longer to be influenced by their external constituencies.

At the point when the participant made the decision not to seek reelection for a seat on the board, several things typically occurred. Some trustee emeriti explained that they started having strong differences of opinion with an external influence and started listening more closely to the internal influences, thus moving to a conscious decision to split from the regular decision-making patterns. At this time, some trustees figured that running for reelection was not viable, as they had lost support from the political party or other supporters. Other trustee emeriti indicated they decided that they had worked hard enough on the board and it was time to retire.

“As a general observation, the external public is relatively uninvolved with—or interested in—the policy matters of the board. Legislators will periodically seek trustee intervention for student admission to competitive programs or may share a perspective based upon a constituent’s concerns,” lamented trustee emeritus D. The trustee emeriti were in agreement that the influences were issue specific so they varied with the individual concerns. “Issues effecting alumni frequently come directly to the Board by way of letters and public comment, as do issues with great

public visibility or community interests, such as tuition increases, student/community problems, or athletic activities. Boards react to the influences as necessary,” offered trustee emeritus F.

The trustee emeriti were in agreement that external influences changed as they were consistently issue specific. The trustee emeriti mentioned several influences including the general state of the economy, student enrollment pressures or, conversely, significant drops in enrollees, the governor’s budget for the university and the response and action by the legislature, state or federal mandates for specific programs, the larger and more influential groups associated with the University programs or with campus personnel such as labor unions, agricultural organizations, alumni groups, the cost of healthcare and other benefits for University students and employees, and the cost of new technology to remain competitive with research and maintain faculty.

One trustee emeritus (D) laughed and said, “We read The State News [school paper]. In fact, one of the nemeses for Michigan State is that The State News is distributed at the [state] legislature. I always proposed that we sponsor and distribute the Michigan Daily [University of Michigan newspaper] to the state legislature, so they would know what was going on at [the University of] Michigan as they do with MSU. The legislature is way too involved.”

#### Influences on Individual Member’s Decisions on a Specific Matter

“As a guideline, I would typically review the level of research and data provided in support of a specific recommendation. If it made sense, it would be supported. MSU also has active student and faculty representatives who serve as



liaison to the board...I would say internal reaction and input from those groups influences board actions,” explained trustee emeritus B.

The trustee emeriti spoke about many spheres of influences on how individual decisions were made for specific discussions. “It is similar to an onion. You will have the core issue with many outer layers covering what is at the center. [Laughing] Some of them do make you cry and some are very sweet, but they all have an individual stake. These layers will change with the issue, the politics behind the issue and the depth it will have in making a change,” offered trustee emeritus C.

Trustee emeritus (C) continued, “The labor unions wanted to control education. They would do anything that they could. I did not believe that they should and instead of criticizing them, I was elected so that I could stop them. It did not and still does not seem right that labor controls what is taught. I was exerting my own influence over the other board members for what I believed.”

Trustee emeritus H answered, “It depends on the board member’s personal agenda. Board members were comparatively free from personal agenda and had the interest of the university at heart. It’s the first decisive factor in making decisions...if for instance, you were in a business and the university was providing you with some research consultancies...tell you have a strong obligation...that money was in your pockets.”

One trustee emeritus mentioned concern about personal gain from the board, which influenced personal board member decision making on specific matters. “In order to maintain that personal relationship with administration, in order to help hire friends as staff or travel or putting money in your pocket, their objectivity was

compromised. I think that the politics of the president also comes into play in how the board, individual board members, sees issues...party loyalty often times overruled the interest of the university anymore,” reflected trustee emeritus F.

### **Decision Making**

“Decisions of the Board are by majority vote when matters qualify as policy-setting. Many other matters may come to the Board, which may require only consensus following presentation and discussion of issues, e.g., strategic planning concepts. The origin of topics requiring decision-making is often misunderstood by the university community and the broader public,” explained trustee emeritus H. “As a general statement, actions of the Board typically originate from the President or the Provost; they do not ‘start’ at the Board level. In other words, Board actions are typically responsive to recommendations from University administration. The work done in Board committees, likewise, is typically responsive rather than proactive,” clarified trustee emeritus A.

“It was a period of individualism. Today, they are led by sheep. The trustees had a wide range of intelligence and taught each other much. They argued and debated on the vote. Trustees were concerned with the issues. During this time, the board was constantly in the news, each member had beliefs—lots of them and were often quoted. These were all public issues, so they were discussed in public,” claimed a different trustee emeritus (G).

The trustee emeriti explained that the decision-making processes were distinct and different during the public and the private meetings or work sessions. All of the trustee emeriti acknowledged that the patterns varied by the importance of the vote

and for the type and location of the meeting. Public image was mentioned several times concerning the difference of appearances in the decision-making patterns.

“The principle decisive factor was what does the President want? And 99% of the time that’s what happened. And a lot of times issues were handled way out of the public’s eye, at our Thursday night dinners or in alternative [settings]. The president would call several of the board members and say well what do you think of this situation? He would then outline the situation and offer his opinion until he got the votes needed,” explained trustee emeritus E.

As outlined previously, since 1976, any meeting that has a vote or a decision or has quorum is open to the public. All official action, beyond discussion about personnel, legal, or sale/purchase of property matters, will take place in an open meeting. A business or working meeting will not have quorum, may not always be open to the public, has the President or his designee in attendance and will not have the possibility to take official action. Trustee emeriti were very careful to note the distinction, as they did not want to violate the law. The responses were different for the previous trustee emeriti who served before the Opening Meetings Act was enacted and those who served after the law. Four previous board members stated that the working meetings were where most of the fact-finding, background and possible outcomes for decisions were first discussed.

The smaller working meetings were noted for being lively and intense as board members tried to convince fellow trustees that a certain decision was critical. Philosophical differences were more apparent in the working sessions as the board members felt that they could talk freely. “There were no cameras, no microphones,

no one watching us so we could pretty easily say what we were thinking with no repercussions. The gloves could come off and we could fight for what we believed,” explained trustee emeritus C.

Two trustee emeriti offered that the smaller work sessions were also the time to count possible votes so when a board meeting with an official action took place there would not be a complete surprise or a perceived political party embarrassment in public. “If we could count on our own [fellow political party] and then guess at who we had convinced at working meeting, then we knew what would happen at the board meeting and could be prepared,” shared trustee emeritus B. “I was a renegade so no one could guess what my vote would be. I had my opinions and I was there to serve the state, not my party, so the meetings were very interesting during my tenure,” added trustee emeritus G.

The public monthly meetings were formal and more serious than the private work sessions. “The monthly meetings rarely had any surprises as the members could usually guess how colleagues were voting on an issue. The decision was not made ahead of time, but rather finalized at the board meeting. Solidarity is important when it comes to major votes—budgets, hiring of a president, and anything athletic—so we can make a statement to the public on a particular issue,” explained trustee emeritus D.

“The best part of the monthly board meetings was listening to the open session when all guests could speak—the students, the faculty, the community and the staff. I learned over and over how much people love the university and how they want to make it better. It makes me work that much harder so I can fulfill my

obligations. All of the arguing that took place [around an issue] seems smaller when listening to them,” described trustee emeritus H.

The decision-making patterns reflect the literature presented by Cohen and March (1986), Morgan (1986), and Bolman and Deal (1991) describing political metaphors and frameworks. Cohen and March present the garbage can theory for decision-making. Morgan highlights the political frame as do Bolman and Deal as a framework to better understand how key decisions are made.

Cohen and March (1986) describe decision-making theory as fluid and changing over time. The fluidity was evident within the discussions with trustee emeriti regarding how they made their decisions. Decisions changed with the influences facing them and due to the experiences they had. The literature is similar in its description of processes, which is, in turn, similar to the participants’ experiences during their board tenures.

Morgan (1986) emphasizes a “way of thinking” in his metaphors for explaining organizational functions within which decision-making is a primary aspect. The political metaphor can be used to unravel the politics of daily organizational life. This theory recognizes that politics and politicking may be an essential aspect of organizational life affecting the decision-making, and not necessarily an optional and dysfunctional extra. Morgan discusses how specific individuals attempt to advance specific interests through “wheeling and dealing” (p. 142).

Several of the trustee emeriti spoke of the political environment in which they made decisions while sitting on the board. The very structure of the board of trustees

created an environment, whether obvious or subverted, in which one had to barter for a result. With two major political parties with different philosophies represented on the board, the governing group structure automatically creates a framework requiring the need to consult and negotiate for a majority vote. Trustee emeriti spoke of “horse-trading” that was required to pass a motion on a key decision as they had finite resources and scarce time which were elements of the political decision-making frame.

The trustee emeriti reported that the political decision-making environment was the one continuous aspect of the board. Whether campaigning for a seat, participating in orientation, leading the board, campaigning for reelection or deciding not to run, “politicking” was always in the background. Diagram 4.2A (page) demonstrates that decision-making of the board is enveloped with the political environment. The curves represent the ebb-and-flow of the environment as the trustee emeriti discussed how the political “noise” would change with issues, campaigns, media or other interested groups needing attention.

Bolman and Deal (1991) utilize frames for the metaphors in their organizational and decision-making theory. The political framework asserts that, in the case of enduring differences and scarce resources, conflict among members of a coalition is inevitable and power becomes a key resource. This theory emphasizes that organizational goals arise not from fiat at the top, but from an ongoing process of negotiation and interaction among the key players in any system. The political framework views organizations as “alive and screaming” arenas that house a complex variety of individual group interests (Bolman and Deal, 1991, p. 189).

The trustee emeriti most often felt that the major conflicts or debate occurred with decisions involving the allocation of resources, not necessarily monetary, but rather personnel or facilities. The trustee emeriti concurred that they spent little time examining the budget but rather relied on the expertise of the budget committee and the university personnel to create a strong and ethical budget. Trustee emeritus F claimed, “We spent maybe three minutes looking over what the budget committee recommended. We did not really talk about it much as we realized that we were not experts and hoped that the President’s Office and the group that worked on the budget knew what they were doing. We rarely talked about it unless there was a specific issue with a specific allocation.”

Trustee emeritus A said, “We spent way too much time talking about athletic directors. How does this person really help with the academics of the university? I am not even sure why it is a board decision really.” Trustee emeritus H had similar concerns and stated, “I went through an AD [athletic director] [selection] and had more awful discussions with other board members than I did with anything else I did while on the board. I am not sure why some people were so invested who ran athletics. Yes, money is important, but not our primary focus.”

Major debates occurred during the hiring of staff, changes in policy or when a particular political party pressured for a specific point of view. The trustee emeriti spoke of constant negotiations surrounding several smaller issues throughout the board meetings or outside of the “public eye.” Board members considered how many votes they had for an issue and then interacted with those they may have needed to convince about the merits of passing a particular resolution. The debates were

described as objective and fair until a trustee felt pressure from an external influence or was trying to garner power. At such times, the usual decision-making patterns were not followed, as someone was not behaving per usual, so the need to preserve personal interests interceded.

Combining Morgan's (1986) and Bolman and Deal's (1991) metaphor for decision-making processes helped create a political framework within which the MSU Board of Trustees members interacted. The environment created a foundation from which the trustees made decisions. The atmosphere was open for negotiation and conflict when debating issues and bringing those issues to resolution.

Cohen and March's metaphor for decision-making (1986) focuses attention on the ways in which meaning changes over time. It calls attention to the strategic affects of timing (in the introduction of choices and problems), the time pattern of available energy, and the impact of organizational structure on these. Within a garbage can process, decisions are made in three different ways: by oversight, by flight, and by resolution. Cohen and March further explain eight properties within the decision-making process which include who, what, how and when the issues are addressed (Cohen and March, 1986).

The participants discussed how issues were brought to the board and how decisions were made. The themes were similar to what Cohen and March (1986) explained in their research. The trustee emeriti had several influences in this political environment to help create a specific pattern for decision-making to occur. Depending on the importance of the issue, the pattern occurred in similar fashion. Most trustee emeriti agreed that the patterns were similar and had not changed much



over the last four decades. Participants feel that they are better informed today with the advent of e-mail and the Internet. The trustee emeriti are able to find out more information from independent sources than the university officials and they also do not need to wait for traditional mail delivery to receive correspondence.

Cohen and March's (1986) metaphor exemplifies how the MSU Board of Trustees makes decisions. A key to understanding the processes within organizations is to view a choice opportunity as a garbage can into which participants dump various problems and solutions. "The mix of garbage in a single can depends partly on the labels attached to the alternative cans; but it also depends on what garbage is being produced at the moment, on the mix of cans available, and on the speed with which garbage is collected and removed from the scene" explain Cohen and March (1986, p. 81). A decision is an outcome (or an interpretation) of several relatively independent "streams" within an organization. The four streams include problems, solutions, participants and choice opportunities.

Following this metaphor, trustee emeriti described the baggage that one brings with them to the board and what accumulates in the garbage can during their tenure of service. This baggage affects which process is used and how they make decisions within the system of oversight, flight and resolution. The trustees discussed that personal, work, and familial experiences were considered baggage that they brought to the board. When making decisions, the trustee emeriti explained that many times decisions were based on previous experiences, either positive or negative.

Continuing with the metaphor, trustee emeriti illustrated that the accumulation in the garbage can usually involved interaction with other board members. Trustee

emeritus B explained, “I would not try to hold grudges. Believe me when I said it was hard enough to make decisions for the university, but at times, I would remember how someone treated me on a different issue and it could cloud how I made a decision. By the actual vote, my head would clear and I would make a sensible vote.” Most trustee emeriti described how they made decisions. Their processes were closely aligned with what March and Cohen (1986) described. The trustee emeriti offered examples of how they felt decisions were made during their tenure on the board. Most trustee emeriti described three methods in their decisions, which were similar to those explained by Cohen and March.

With the size of the board and the importance of the issues, few outcomes can be decided by one particular method. Several groups are watching the decisions of the MSU Board of Trustees so the members need to bring closure to issues. Within the trustee emeriti’s interviews, they described three methods used to make decisions that are reflected in the garbage can theory (1986). The trustee emeriti also discussed how their decision-making changed with their experience on the board. The patterns reported follow through oversight, flight and resolution as defined by Cohen and March.

Oversight was the method most often described by the trustee emeriti for decision making at first as they were trying to understand how to be a legitimate board member, so decisions were made without attention to the existing problems as the newcomers were not aware of the history of the issues. Trustee emeritus H explained, “My first meeting I was being asked to make decisions on things I had no idea about as I was not totally prepared on what to expect. I know I voted on some

items that I had no idea were included in the resolutions. After two years, I felt comfortable with what I was doing.”

The trustee emeriti described decision making by flight during the middle stage of the lifecycle of the board member. In some cases, choices are associated with problems (unsuccessfully) for some time until a choice “more attractive” to the problems comes along. The problems leave the choice, and thereby make it possible to make the decision. The decision resolves no problems; they have now attached themselves to a new choice (Cohen and March, 1986). In this stage, many issues were tabled or members asked for further research so that the group passed on possible resolutions offered and delayed immediate action. A few of the trustee emeriti said many problems and solutions “died on the vine and that is what the president or the governor wanted.”

As the trustee’s tenure was closing, Trustee emeriti described wanting to “leave their mark or to make a difference to the community,” so they worked to resolve serious issues. This behavior is also seen when a specific outcome is particularly important to the individual. Some choices resolve problems after some period of working on them. The length of time may vary greatly; depending on the number of problems. This is the familiar case that is implicit in most discussions of choice within organizations (Ibid, p. 83).

The trustees worked relentlessly on a particular issue usually associated with the original platform of the individual when campaigning for the position. Trustee emeritus A explained, “I was elected by a group of people who wanted [topic] completed for the state of Michigan, not just MSU. The issue grew in importance

while I was on the board and I worked hard at the end to have the board vote on [topic] which turned out to be so much more than what I had started with several years earlier.”

Trustee emeriti reported that the decision-making patterns shifted with the importance of an issue. The more important problems found faster, more researched solutions than less important topics as the media and other external influences forced decisions to be made and flight and oversight could rarely be utilized on these considerations when a group was waiting for an outcome. Flight and oversight were not utilized as resolutions because the outcomes were important to the external influences that the trustees needed for support and who were informed on the issue. At this point, the internal or external influences are exerting pressure on the trustee to bring forth a decision by the board.

Trustee emeritus E described, “The UAW really wanted us to make a decision on [topic], but no one on the board felt properly prepared.

We tabled the [issue] until we could learn more. At the next month’s meeting, all of us learned that we had had letters and phone calls from the UAW. Again, we did not feel ready as it took awhile to gather the data. They were not happy as they felt we were dragging our feet.

Finally, in the next month, we voted; but the UAW was trying to push the issue the whole time.”

The eight properties included in garbage can theory as described by Cohen and March (1986) were definitely apparent from listening to trustee emeriti discuss how the board made decisions. Trustee emeritus C explained, “I helped select two



presidents and an athletic director. What can be bigger than that? It seemed that not much else happened in several meetings as we deliberated over what we wanted and whom we wanted and why we wanted them. I think some policies may have changed during this time [laughter] as we were looking at who was coming in to run the university and not much else.” Important problems are more likely to be solved rather than unimportant ones and important choices are much less likely to resolve problems than are unimportant choices (March and Cohen, 1986. p. 83) were two properties represented often in the interviews.

Trustee emeritus E discussed, “The meetings changed with the presidents’ styles and it was hard to move with the changes. It is his right to run a meeting how he wants, but I had to get used to lively, not always friendly discussion. We most likely came to the same decision but how we arrived there changed. Once I was used to it [new style], I enjoyed the frank talks that we had on topics.” That decision-making processes were frequently sharply interactive (Ibid) was a property described often as well.

Trustee emeritus A offered, “It seemed some problems would come back up again and again...[the group] dug out a resolution that I had written a few years earlier and brought it up again. It was fun to see the resolution come out of the file but I did not want to discuss [topic] again and again. This [topic] seemed to follow me through my time on the board.” Decision makers and problems tend to track each other through choices (Ibid, p83).

### **Dynamics within the Groups that Help Them Come to Consensus**

Each trustee emeritus claimed that the dynamics changed dramatically over the length of their term or service on the board. The dynamics were described as explosive, cordial, powerful, hidden agendas, politically driven, but overall the trustee emeriti felt that ego played the biggest role in how the dynamics worked. “We all are somewhat ego-centric and so we want things a certain way so the dynamics changed with our interest in the topic. . We did have a few people who were just power hungry and wanted the chair position so they were bullies,” claimed trustee emeritus D.

“Achieving consensus, as a rule, was relatively easy if the issue was non-explosive and all board members were equally informed of the facts and consequences of the action. Issues on which various boards have difficulty reaching consensus: personnel issues; alumni; and budgets,” explained trustee emeritus H. The members added that the explosive issues with personnel included the hiring of Presidents, athletic directors and coaches as well as the delegation of authority to the president for faculty promotions.

Key alumni issues included developing methods to meet their needs and dissolving the separate Alumni Association and returning it to University control. “The alumni are over 300,000 strong and are very vocal in all matters of the university. Some want us to do more for them [alumni]; some want us not to spend time or money on them. It is a double edged sword as they are our main contributors and fundraisers,” explained trustee emeritus H. Raising tuition, raising faculty salaries, and program reductions related to budget cuts were the main areas of concern for budget issues.

Most agreed that for a majority of the time the dynamics of board members were cordial. They all agreed that the dynamics ended up not being party driven but felt that the length of the service on the board created cliques that worked together. They stated that the longer an individual served on the board, the more one knew his or her idiosyncrasies and voting patterns so one would be able to discern how the trustee would act. One could trust someone more easily over time and better understand individual voting patterns. At this point, the trustee emeriti said that they could freely discuss influences that may alter the usual voting patterns. "The new whippersnappers tend to think of party issues instead of what is best for the university. The old timers were able to discern the two and would talk often. If we had pressure from the governor or the UAW, we would let the other old timers know, so they knew what to expect," explains trustee emeritus C.

"As a general conclusion, it takes a strong president and board chair to help the entire board reach consensus. The board chair needs to intervene when one outspoken trustee tries to sidetrack an action. Typically, this has been true when a trustee has a strong will or inside interests which conflict with the majority. It may be nefarious, pure politics or it may be nothing more than personalities conflicting," added trustee emeritus A.

In the public meetings, rarely is dissension shown, but behind closed doors or between meetings, the dynamics change. "At the Thursday night dinners or in the alternative [sessions], the President would call several of the board members and say well what do you think of this situation...Usually it occurs on a difficult vote where



the president wants the board to be one, informed and in agreement with him,” said trustee emeritus F.

“I remember one occasion in which the President lost control of the board and the board voted against his proposal and he went ballistic and told one board member, that he was betrayed. Only two or three times while I was on the board did we work independent of the president. That’s a sad commentary on the board,” added trustee emeritus G.

### **Strategies Used by Those with Power to Make Decisions within the Board**

The trustee emeriti were in agreement that the strategies used to create power varied with the individual personality of the board member. Each person used idiosyncrasies, threats, “swapping of votes,” “this for that,” and other methods to swing a vote or create a power vacuum. Some trustee emeriti spoke about individuals utilizing the press as a vehicle for power. They said that those trustees would ask to be interviewed by someone in the media so that the issue is moved into the public arena and out of the private meetings or work sessions.

“I can say that my first two years on the board that my philosophy was that you hire the best administrator that you can find and then you get out of the way. What disturbed me was that whenever President [name] offered a suggestion that the [opposing party] found problems with every idea. I started talking with newspaper editors before the issues were released so the president had strong public support first,” explained trustee emeritus C.

## **Training/Orientation the Board Received**

The training and orientation to the board changed over the time that the trustee emeritus was in his or her position. The research participants served throughout the last forty years with eight MSU presidents and eight Secretaries' of the Board of Trustees. The most recent trustee emeriti talked of a comprehensive training that had started previous to the start in the position. The trustee emeriti with the earliest service usually laughed and said that they learned as they went along. They said that as board members they learned how to behave, what to ask and how to ask from watching the experienced board members in the first few meetings.

Most of the trustee emeriti explained that orientation to the board could not be taught, but rather learned through working on the board. Most trustee emeriti felt that towards the end of the second year is when they felt comfortable with their positions, that they had earned trust, and that they consistently contributed to the conversations. This timetable also demonstrated that a new election had taken place so they were no longer the newest members sitting on the board.

## **Electoral Process is the Best Procedure to Create Boards of Trustees**

One unexpected theme that appeared in the data included the actual electoral process being the best procedure for selection. Six of the eight trustee emeriti concurred that the electoral process is the best process for creating a governing board at a land grant institution. All of the emeriti believe that it is important for the citizens to be involved with the decision making of the land grant institution, but how they should be selected varied. The six who appreciated the current system were adamant in their support and were very supportive in maintaining this method. The

two individuals who wanted different approaches offered their preferred selection procedures.

“I believe there is merit in seeking a Constitutional change in Michigan which allows for an appointment process which includes the Governor, Legislature and University administrators and alumni to set selection standards for governing boards. Such standards should be set which preclude obvious political cronyism to assure the selection of honorable citizens who are clearly committed to excellence in all facets of University operations,” suggests trustee emeritus H. The individual added, “My position...goes against the traditional philosophy and position of my [political] party. As a general conclusion, I developed a personal bias against having University governing board members elected on a statewide ballot. While it is infrequent, board members have been elected who are, in my opinion, negative forces within the governing board of Michigan State University.”

Trustee emeritus F, from the same political party, suggests, “I would suggest dictatorial appointment and then I would do something that’s utterly unbelievable, I would term limit the dictatorial appointment. In other words, you would be appointed to a seven person board for seven to nine years without the ability to be reappointed.” The trustee emeritus added, “You can’t trust the legislature to an active code of ethics because they don’t like the term ethics. The [Michigan] Constitution already says that they will establish a conflict of interest policy for elected officials. The individuals would need to be separated from the government.”

Furthermore, the trustee emeritus remarked, “I was discouraged with the election process because I would look at the results and the difficulty is, the

applicable party had these kinds of litmus tests that they put on the candidates. And then especially in the [Political] party and even now in the [Political] party they have this, gender balancing. They have racial balancing in my party, and I am too old to make adjustments for that.” The trustee emeritus concluded, “And I still believe that neither race nor gender has any place in the decisions making process... [in a] true democratic society, you have a fairness in which you deal with people on the basis of their individuality... [which is a] utopian concept...I’m interested in abilities and performance, and ethics. These do not come into play in the nominating process of either party.”

Trustee emeritus G who believes the electoral process is preferred said, “Control by the government is a no-no. These people would become the Governor’s cronies and an extension of his office. If the Chair [of the board] and the Governor are friends then the board cannot think for itself.” Trustee emeritus E added, “It does seem silly traipsing all over the state of Michigan asking people to vote for you, but you get to hear what their concerns are. You are representing them so it is helpful in knowing who you represent, that you are determined to be elected and have a desire to do the best for the institution...if appointed, the Governor is more apt to appoint people who are close friends or supporters financially.”

“One reason I ran is to keep labor from having that much control over education. No one group or group of individuals should be able to totally control a land-grant institution. I was representing different constituencies. This process, with the different parties, keeps one group, such as labor, from taking over the board,” added trustee emeritus A.

The six trustee emeriti who seemed to be in agreement that the electoral process was preferable remarked that it keeps government control somewhat at bay, that it keeps cronyism from being a factor and that it lets the citizens independently decide who is governing the school and spending education money. They also concluded that through interviews, debates, dinners and campaigning, the members were able to better understand which issues are important to the voters. This process also let the trustee emeriti better understand their own beliefs before they are in office and have to “try figure out what [we are] thinking.”

One concern that arose in several discussions was that the electoral process keeps some of the best candidates from running for a position. Several trustee emeriti said that some of the potentially best individuals may not want to enter a contest as they are too busy, concerned for their privacy, intimidated by the process or not wanting to be associated with a particular political party. “I know several great people who would be great at moving the institution forward—the pedigree, the varied experiences, the teachings, the big picture, the love for MSU, but they are so apolitical or not affiliated to a philosophy that they choose not to run,” commented trustee emeritus C . Another trustee emeritus (D) added, “Some of the best people are thinking in ‘other worlds’ that they could not concentrate on a campaign or that they want to have some balance with the family that they have made the conscious decision not to run. It is a shame because they would be great, but this system [of trustee emeritus selection] is [still] the best [system] as it is by the people.”

## **Summary of Findings**

This chapter presented the major findings of this study. Findings revealed that there is an identifiable lifecycle for a board of trustees' position. Within the lifecycle, the trustee emeriti experienced distinct decision-making patterns that changed while sitting on the board. The transitions are cyclical based upon the number of terms the individual serves with the governing group. The political decision-making framework, discussed in chapter two, is apparent in all aspects of a trustee emeritus's experience, but changes in importance over time.

As the Michigan Constitution outlines the academic governance process for Michigan State University, the selection process is inherently political by nature. The political parties nominate individuals for the open seats thus magnifying the importance of political decision-making strategies for the nominees. The trustees, after being elected, then are representing the political party while governing the university. As noted, representing one's political party philosophy and clout is critical for reelection to the seat.

The electoral process does have an impact on the decision-making of the MSU Board of Trustees whether inherent, overt or underlying. The process affects all stages within the decision-making, as it is the foundation for the governing board. The Michigan Constitution through the electoral process bestows upon the political parties incredible influence and access to the board members throughout their service.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of the electoral process on the decision making of the Michigan State University Board of Trustees members. The goals of this research were to identify how daily decisions were made, the effects of the electoral process on the decision-making, what the influences were, and to describe the transition from being elected to a sitting member of the board. This research was accomplished by interviewing eight previous board members whose board service covered the last forty years and the two dominant political parties. All trustee emeriti discussed in-depth their experiences. The complexity of the participants' stories was evident. This chapter will provide a summary, conclusions and suggestions for future research.

#### **Summary of the Findings and Conclusions**

This study expands the literature on the decision making of governing boards in higher education. It goes beyond simply identifying the decisions. It *describes* how these decisions were *experienced and categorized*. From this study, one better understands how board members make a decision during their tenure. One learns to understand and work with the internal and external influences upon the board member and when during the eight-year term, the pressures change. From this research, one better understands that there is a lifecycle to being on the board of trustees. The study

demonstrates that the electoral process affects the decision making of the board of trustees.

The research and theoretical foundation included stage theory discussing decision making styles and influences on the process. This study was conducted with qualitative methodologies. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews after completing an examination of previous board minutes. The interview questions were guided by the research questions, the literature review, the theoretical foundations and the official minutes of the Michigan State University Board.

Analysis of the data revealed several key findings that included a life cycle for the board of trustees' tenure. The stage theory includes how the electoral process effects how decisions by and influences to trustees are made over time. The pattern demonstrates a specific decision making system utilized by the trustee emeriti. The outcomes strengthen the existing literature.

The research discovered that six of the eight trustee emeriti strongly agreed that the election process is the best method for selection to the Michigan State University Board of Trustees. All of the trustee emeriti believe that it is important for the citizens of the state to be involved with the decision making of the land grant institution. Most of the trustee emeriti stressed the importance that citizens in the state of Michigan elect the individuals who represent them at the three public research universities.

The research found that the orientation to the MSU Board of Trustees has changed dramatically over the last forty years from a lunch meeting to a two day workshop with a notebook on policies and procedures. The trustee emeriti discussed



and appreciated the more in-depth orientation workshop format which enabled them to quickly assimilate with the current board members. Since the 1980's, the current board members also have had the opportunity and are encouraged to attend national workshops on trustee governance.

The research demonstrated that MSU Board of Trustees members follow a specific pattern of decision making over the life cycle of their tenure as board members. This is important when understanding how and why individuals make decisions. The March and Cohen Garbage Can Theory (1986) in which decisions are made by oversight, flight, or resolution techniques and the political frameworks suggested by Morgan (1986), and Bolman and Deal (1991) represent a foundation from which the board members operate.

The electoral process was found to have direct and subverted effects on the decision making of the individual trustees and with the entire board. The structure of the electoral process inherently creates a political environment for selection to the board and for subsequent decision making of the members. Internal and external influences also were discovered to effect how the trustee emeriti made decisions over time.

## **Conclusions**

The trustee emeriti offered much insight into the selection and election process to the MSU Board of Trustees, from the initial contact to service through ending their formal association with the governing body. From their stories, one learns much about how politics influences the trustee electoral process as well as

trustee decisions to sit and remain on the board. The political framework offers a foundation from which the trustees can maneuver.

This chapter provides suggestions and recommendations, based on the research, regarding: the overall selection process, board orientation, and decision-making techniques that appear during the board tenure. The material presented should help to demonstrate the life cycle of an MSU board member. The material may serve as a discussion tool for states wanting to assess ways in which to improve their higher education governing boards.

### **Recommendations for Board Member Selection**

Six of the eight trustee emeriti strongly agreed that the election process is the best method for selection to the Michigan State University Board of Trustees. All of the trustee emeriti believe that it is important for the citizens to be involved with the decision making of the land grant institution. Most of the trustee emeriti stressed that citizens of the state of Michigan must elect individuals who represent them at their public institution and that the governance should represent the interests of the people within the state.

The six trustee emeriti felt that the electoral process was the preferred method as it kept the state government from having too much control, kept one individual group from having too much power or influence, and allowed all of the constituents within the state to be heard concerning their particular issues. Undue influence by any single group was the biggest concern discussed by these trustee emeriti for possibly changing the current method of selection. The need to learn about all areas

of the state and their needs was also discussed by the trustee emeriti as a good reason for state elections.

The two trustee emeriti who held differing opinions felt the current system is flawed because the best individuals may not be selected. Several reasons trustee emeriti offered that talented and qualified individuals exclude themselves in the election process included the amount of the time away from family and work, affiliation with an individual party, and a lack of sufficient resources to conduct a successful campaign. The concern also arose that political representatives would only choose candidates with name recognition within the state or who may be seen as biased because they were closely aligned with the party philosophies. Finally, the idea arose that many Michigan citizens vote a straight party ticket and are not actively engaged in understanding the platforms or abilities of trustee candidates.

The results of trustee emeriti conversations reflect the divisiveness of the electoral campaigns and often the governing board literature identifies the state of Michigan campaigns as examples. The literature explains, “That litmus tests that are irrelevant to higher education are included in the electoral process, the need for board members to see heightened visibility and headlines around election times, and the lingering influence of obligations owed to the agendas of those who helped nominate them, contribute to their campaigns, or are responsible for their re-nomination” (Anderton, 1997, p. 249).

Another concern voiced by trustee emeriti and supported in the literature is that the board of trustees does not always represent the demographic population of the state of Michigan. Trustee emeriti discussed that the gender, race, economic status,

age, ethnicity, geographic region and religion are not always represented on the board and such diversity should be included if the board is to truly represent the state's citizens. "...It does speak to the need to have board members, regardless of color, age, economic status, etc., who can discuss and decides on issues while taking into perspective the multi-faceted needs of the states' population" (Ibid, p. 256).

It is my conclusion, based on this study, that the state legislature should not have the ability to appoint members of the governing boards for Michigan State University, Wayne State University and the University of Michigan. The state could, however, create a group to find or create a pool of candidates for the various boards of trustees. The political party representatives then could interview the pool of candidates to possibly represent the group on the slate for the board of trustees. The need to represent the citizens of the state of Michigan is paramount for all constituents to be heard.

Ideally, the selection group would consist of political party members, individual university, regional and alumni representatives who would identify possible candidates for the respective boards within the state. The pool of qualified individuals would be suggested to the political parties, as they would maintain the freedom to use other candidates. This group would assist in finding diverse, interested qualified persons from which all parties could choose possible candidates for the open seats on the academic governing board for the three major research institutions in the state of Michigan.

## **Board Orientation**

The orientation to the MSU Board of Trustees has changed dramatically over the last forty years. In its earliest development, training consisted of a lunch; in its current form, it is a two-day workshop. Since the 1980s, board members have the opportunity to attend national workshops regarding academic governance. The trustee emeriti discussed and appreciated the in-depth workshop to more quickly assimilate with the current board members. The answers changed with the individual tenure of the trustee emeriti but all wanted more information before they started serving the university on the board. Several of the trustee emeriti suggested having workshops in late November and December; the time was after they were elected but before they took office.

This research supports previous literature and demonstrates that members of any new organization are more effective with sufficient and strong orientation programs. Immersion in the current board is suggested to help new individuals to better understand the current culture and to understand how they are to become active members. The literature suggests that efficient and easily understood operating rules are a good foundation for the new members. More important than teaching the formal culture are the teachings of the informal culture so one can understand how to better interact with the current board members.

Based on this research, I suggest expanding orientation to a six day orientation for the new board members where they spend one day a week for six weeks meeting with other trustees and university officials. Several trustee emeriti suggested that one day each week for six weeks would help new trustees. The suggested format was that

the new members spend half a day with current board members and the other half learning more about MSU and all of its constituents.

This procedure would serve many facets of the orientation for new board members by having them learn both the formal and informal culture for the academic governance. The new trustee would learn about each of the six current members, more about the other newly elected individual as well as more about the university. This process would last for six weeks, and in that time span, it presents the opportunity for the new board member to observe one or two meetings of the current Board of Trustees. This additional time allows the individual to have more material and experience with people within the group so each can feel more effective when starting the term.

### **Decision Making Techniques**

This research demonstrates that MSU Board of Trustees members follow a specific pattern over the life cycle of their tenure. This is important when understanding how and why individuals make decisions. The March and Cohen Garbage Can Theory (1986) and the political frameworks suggested by Morgan (1986) and Bolman and Deal (1991) represent a foundation from which the board members operate.

Being able to identify patterns of decision-making was considered critically important for the trustee emeriti. They discussed the ability to better understand the importance of a particular issue by listening to the other trustees and how they were contemplating voting. With this knowledge, the trustee would learn how easily the vote will or will not pass. This information lets the trustee know how hard to fight for

a resolution or to change a vote. These patterns assist trustees, internal and external influences, and the public understand decisions to be made by the board. Those individuals who want to influence an outcome can examine how a trustee or group of trustees will vote and possibly discover a method to secure a particular outcome.

The lifecycle model diagrams what pressures, influences and decisions that the trustee must endure while sitting on the board. Previous decision-making and developmental theory literature, this study, and the diagram help explain how the decisions are made and offer a suggestion regarding how other decisions may be made. Some trustee emeriti discussed the importance of discovering patterns of fellow board members when trying to resolve issues or looking for passage of a specific item. “I knew that I could usually count on those within my party for support, but then had to figure out who I could gain a vote from when I wanted something passed. It was easier after I and they were on the board so I could guess what was important to them,” explained trustee emeritus D.

Sharing the lifecycle diagram with potential and current board members can help trustees better understand that their decisions will change over time and that difference and change are anticipated and appropriate. The chart also lets them better understand who is trying to influence them and why. The ability to better understand one’s self will only make one a more effective trustee. I suggest distributing the literature and research to the proposed group created to discover quality candidates, the political parties, the MSU executive management team and current board members. I suggest that the results of this research be included in the board orientation as well.

## **Limitations**

The sample of trustee emeriti in this study is not representative of all trustee emeriti across the state or the nation. The goal was not to homogenize trustee emeriti, but rather to understand the experiences, general influences and decisions they faced as trustees. The sample size of eight is small. I do not claim that all trustee emeriti commonly share the experiences of these trustee emeriti when they were remembering their experiences on the MSU Board of Trustees.

My intent with this qualitative analysis was to identify general themes that consistently were addressed by the sample. There is a risk of generalizing the experiences of trustee emeriti with all trustee emeriti, elected, appointed or self-perpetuating. Despite the limitations, the use of triangulation of methods enhanced this study's generalizability (Marshall & Rossman, 1993). The themes that were identified during the in-depth interviews also emerged in the literature and board of trustees meeting minutes.

This sample consisted of one trustee emeritus of color so there was not a diverse race/ethnicity representation, so therefore I cannot speak to the particular issues within this population. It is difficult to report on the issue of race/ethnicity when few were represented in a sample.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendations for future research include interviewing current board members. This study was completed with trustee emeriti over the last forty years. Replicating the study with current board members would add to the richness of data and determine if the patterns are continuing.



Another recommendation is to replicate the study at other institutions to determine if these themes or suggestions are transferable to other colleges and universities. A suggestion is to implement the study with academic governing boards that are appointed, self-perpetuating or partially appointed/partially elected to determine the similarities and differences or to replicate the study at the University of Michigan and/or Wayne State University where their governing boards are also elected on a statewide ballot.

The lifecycle diagram should be further examined to see if there is generalizability with other groups outside of higher education. This addition to the literature may help other groups better understand how their board makes decisions and what pressures are exerted upon the board members. The additional use of the diagram will also increase or decrease the reliability of the tool for other projects.

The over 20,000 individuals who serve the academic governing boards have many pressures, influences and decisions that they must analyze daily. Hopefully, this research will help them better understand what they are continually working with when they are making decisions for a higher education institution. Working as a quality academic governing board and knowing the influences are critical for the future of higher education.

## **Reflections**

The process of completing a dissertation is a labor of love. This particular study followed the traditions of grounded theory where I observed and interviewed trustee emeriti to better understand how decisions were made individually and then

with the entire board. I wanted to know more about the experiences that these individuals had and if the outcomes changed over time.

I have learned much from this research project. As a qualitative researcher, I learned more about the tools necessary to understand how and why individuals make decisions. I was able to learn the strengths and challenges of my own research skills as they were put to practice during the dissertation. As an ethnographer in this study, I was much more of a participant than I than I expected. The entire process needed a determined person to meet the needs of confidentiality of the participants, the concerns of the university and to accurately reflect the data in the final product.

There were many surprises throughout the study. I thought I was researching an unusual, but small topic; but as the study continued, many individuals wanted to know the findings. The approval process took much longer than expected (over nine months) so that the needed safeguards were in place. The care and concern by all involved in the study to ensure positive outcomes was a pleasant surprise.

The trustee emeriti were an amazing group who shared freely and wanted to learn more about the topic as well. I was surprised at what they thought was important. From reading the minutes of the board of trustees' minutes, I was expecting their concerns at times to be different than what they talked about in the interviews. The trustee emeriti demonstrated a great concern for the Michigan State University, the state of Michigan, the students, staff and faculty. At times, it was overwhelming to hear them tell their stories about being part of the community. This journey was a long and arduous task, but taught me much about myself, the university and elected officials.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **SOLICITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY LETTER**

## **Appendix A**

Dear MSU Board Member Emeritus,

My name is Allyn Shaw and I am a doctoral student in Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education within the department of Educational Administration at Michigan State University.

The purpose of this letter is to recruit for my dissertation research project examining election and decision-making techniques of the Michigan State University board of trustees' members. As the selection process is considered one of the most divisive in the nation because the board members are selected by the political parties and then elected by the citizens of the state of Michigan, I aim to examine how the election process effects, if at all, how daily decisions are made by trustees. I will identify and explore the issues and dilemmas that trustees face being elected to a traditionally non-political position.

I am hoping to interview eight MSU trustee emeriti and the previous secretary to the board who are willing to share their experiences through an interview. I will also observe two meetings of the current board. I will also read minutes from the previous twelve meetings to better understand the issues presented to the board and discern any patterns. Your confidentiality will be protected throughout the interviews. All interviews will take place in a mutually agreed upon location. I will pay for any childcare or travel costs incurred during the interview time (approximately 1 hour).

My goal as an educational administration scholar is to contribute to growing literature on policy making with college and university board members. I am committed to sharing accurate stories of the election process and the decision-making techniques needed to work with a Big Ten university. My hope is that my dissertation will portray your stories and shed much needed light on the stage of becoming a university board member.

If you are interested in participating and/or learning more about my project, please contact me at (517) 337-7206 or at [shawall@msu.edu](mailto:shawall@msu.edu). I would be happy to share my research plan with you.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Allyn R. Shaw

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

## Appendix B

The purpose of this study is to identify and explore the issues and dilemmas that MSU board of trustees members face with the election process and decisions made on a daily basis for the university. This qualitative study will include an in-depth interview with you, as well as observations at two board meetings. I am looking specifically at the election issues and political behavior of trustees when faced with making decisions for the welfare of the university.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have agreed to participate in this study. You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by completing and returning this questionnaire. Please read the form carefully. It outlines your rights as a participant in this doctoral dissertation research project. **Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.**

As a participant in this research study, I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to the following terms:

- I will be voluntarily participating in a doctoral dissertation research project that will explore the experiences of MSU board of trustees.
- I can withdraw participation from this research project at any time. I can also refuse to answer a question.
- I can ask questions of the interviewer at any time during the research process.
- My identity will be confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in all written papers; both published and unpublished, in order to protect anonymity.
- I know that all interviews will be taped. All tapes will be destroyed or erased after the dissertation is complete. The researcher will retain the transcripts of the audiotapes.
- I consent to the publication of this study and accept that any information will be anonymous in order to prevent any identification.
- If I should have any questions regarding the role and rights as a subject of research, I can contact the Institutional Review Board separate from the principle investigator. The Michigan State University contact is:  
**David E. Wright, Ph.D., Chair**  
**University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects**  
**(517) 355-2180**

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Allyn R. Shaw, 6251 Gossard Avenue, East Lansing, MI 48823 (517) 337-7206 shawall@msu.edu

## **APPENDIX C**

### **UCRIHS APPROVAL**

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

June 25, 2001

TO: Marylee DAVIS  
420 Erickson

RE: IRB# 01-410 CATEGORY: EXPEDITED 2-F

APPROVAL DATE: June 20, 2001

TITLE: THE EFFECT OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS ON THE DECISION-MAKING  
OF THE MSU BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects' (UCRIHS) review of this project is complete and I am pleased to advise that the rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and methods to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Therefore, the UCRIHS approved this project.

**RENEWALS:** UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year, beginning with the approval date shown above. Projects continuing beyond one year must be renewed with the green renewal form. A maximum of four such expedited renewals possible. Investigators wishing to continue a project beyond that time need to submit it again for a complete review.

**REVISIONS:** UCRIHS must review any changes in procedures involving human subjects, prior to initiation of the change. If this is done at the time of renewal, please use the green renewal form. To revise an approved protocol at any other time during the year, send your written request to the UCRIHS Chair, requesting revised approval and referencing the project's IRB# and title. Include in your request a description of the change and any revised instruments, consent forms or advertisements that are applicable.

**PROBLEMS/CHANGES:** Should either of the following arise during the course of the work, notify UCRIHS promptly: 1) problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects or 2) changes in the research environment or new information indicating greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.



OFFICE OF  
**RESEARCH  
AND  
GRADUATE  
STUDIES**

University Committee on  
Research Involving  
Human Subjects

Michigan State University  
Administration Building  
Lansing, Michigan  
48824-1046

517/355-2180

FAX: 517/353-2976

[www.msu.edu/user/ucrihs](http://www.msu.edu/user/ucrihs)

[ucrihs@msu.edu](mailto:ucrihs@msu.edu)

If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at (517) 355-2180 or via email:  
[UCRIHS@msu.edu](mailto:UCRIHS@msu.edu). Please note that all UCRIHS forms are located on the web:  
<http://www.msu.edu/user/ucrihs>

Sincerely,

David E. Wright  
UCRIHS Chair

DEW:bd

cc: Allyn R. Shaw  
6251 Gossard Ave.  
East Lansing, MI 48823

## **APPENDIX D**

### **CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**

## **APPENDIX D**

### **CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**

I promise to hold the information on the tapes provided to me by Michigan State University in complete confidence, to safeguard the materials while in my possession, and to return the tapes and furnish the transcriptions to Michigan State University without retaining any copies of them.

---

Name of Transcribing Source

---

Signature

Date



## **APPENDIX E**

### **THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

## **APPENDIX E**

### **MSU Board of Trustees Protocol** *Allyn Shaw Doctoral Dissertation 2001* **1 hour duration**

#### **Research Question:**

How does the election process effect the decisions that board members make on a daily basis? Can an individual (advisor) help influence a decision that the board makes? I am studying the effect of the electoral process on the decision-making techniques of the Michigan State University board of trustees' members as their selection process is considered one of the most divisive in the nation. The board members are selected by the political parties of the state and then elected by the citizens. Michigan is one of few states to govern the three state research universities by this means

#### **Demographics:**

Years of service:

MSU graduate:

Party Affiliation:

Positions held on the board:

Professional positions:

Other service positions:

#### **Why:**

Why did you decide to run for MSU Board of Trustees position?

What influences helped you make the decision?

How did you come to realize that you wanted to participate in the election process?

#### **Electoral process:**

How did the election process proceed while campaigning for a less visible position than governor, senator or house or representative position?

How did running for an elected position force you to make decisions for the campaign?

Did this process make you change any beliefs that you previously held?

Do you think this is the best procedure to create boards of trustees at the three major Michigan research institutions?

#### **Decision-making:**

What kind of training/orientation to the board did you receive?

How does the board of trustees make decisions?

What influences the individual member's decision on a specific matter?

How does being elected effect the decisions made by the board members when they consider the constituents?

Does party affiliation effect how you make a decision? If yes, how?  
How does a public institution philosophy effect decisions made by board members?  
What are the dynamics within the groups that help them come to consensus?  
What are the tactics used by those with power to make decisions within the board of trustees?  
How do the external influences effect the decisions by board members?  
What are the external influences to the boards of trustees?  
How do the internal influences effect the decisions made by board members?  
What are the internal influences that affect the board of trustees' members?  
How do organizations help create the decisions that are made by board of trustees members?  
How do the President, the Provost and/or the faculty chair effect how the trustees make a decision?  
What does the President, the Provost, and/or the faculty chair think their influence to the board is and why?  
Is it expected by the board for the President, the Provost and/or the faculty chair to have an opinion on all topics reaching the board for a decision?  
Is there anything that I did not ask that you feel is important to know for this study?

**Specific Topic:**

Each of the last four decades had a consuming issue and the emeriti will be asked about the topic in their particular decade. The topics will include the grape boycott, South African divestiture, athletics, tuition guarantee and minority programs.