Many organizational studies in education focus on issues of governance, leadership, and effectiveness as ends in and of themselves. However, I view these organizational processes not as ends, but as means to the goal of generating, using and disseminating usable knowledge that improves educational practice within and beyond the boundaries of our educational institutions. My contributions to the study of education have largely come through the application of organizational and leadership theory to the examination of the ways in which postsecondary institutions impact student outcomes, faculty performance and the ways in which faculty and administrators perform their professional roles as the organizational agents charged with the primary responsibility for educating students, generating knowledge and applying that knowledge to real-world challenges. I am particularly interested in extending our knowledge about the impacts of organization and leadership in higher education on issues related to equity and social justice – here in the United States and in countries with under-developed higher education systems.

Because I focus on educational organizations as open systems embedded within larger networks of related organizations, I define the environment to include social, cultural, historical, political, and economic forces relevant to the education arena. This emerging body of work examines how broader environmental forces are channeled, intentionally and unintentionally, by organizational agents (faculty and administrators) as influences on the educational mission and performance of colleges and universities. This is a significant area for investigation not only because it generates findings that are relevant for policy action and practical application, but also because it provides for the development of a deeper, empirically-based understanding of the ways in which organizational structure and actors are impacted by environmental influences and in turn, moderate these influences on other individuals within higher education.

Given the important role that education in general, and higher education in particular, plays in promoting opportunity and development for individuals, groups and societies; my work has increasingly focused on how the improvement of leadership and organization in higher education can and should be directed at the development of social justice and equitable opportunity for those that have been most traditionally under-served by the institutionalized structures within higher education and across broader social, economic and political systems. Hence, much of my domestic scholarship has focused on the impact of higher education on students from under-represented racial/ethnic groups and lower socio-economic backgrounds. More recently, I have also turned much of my efforts as a scholar to making an impact in those societies around the globe that are of greatest need and most under-developed with regard to higher education. These
efforts have intentionally included work in diverse high-need contexts such as Malawi, northwest China, the Philippines, Egypt, and Afghanistan.

My initial research efforts focused on ways in which various organizational elements within postsecondary educational institutions impact undergraduate student outcomes. Much of this work has focused on persistence toward undergraduate degree attainment (Berger, 1997a; Berger & Braxton, 1998; Berger & Milem, 1999; Braxton, Bray & Berger, 2000; Milem & Berger, 1997), but I have examined other attitudinal and behavioral impacts as well (Berger, 2000; Berger & Milem, 2000). I have conducted a series of studies that focus on ways in which five dimensions of organizational behavior (bureaucratic, collegial, political, symbolic, and systemic) combine to form different types of organizational environments that influence the development of individual student outcomes (Berger, 1997b; 2000; 2001; 2002; Berger & Van Thanh, 2004; Williams, Berger & McClendon, 2005). I have built on this initial body of work to increasingly focus on the impact of colleges and universities as organizations on social justice for students from under-represented groups (Berger & Milem, 2002; Berger & Van Thanh, 2004; Williams, Berger & McClendon, 2005; Berger & Malaney, 2003; Malaney & Berger, 2005; Zuniga, Williams & Berger, 2005).

I also focus some of my research on faculty as professional members of postsecondary educational organizations. The ability of faculty to effectively fulfill their roles as both researchers and teachers is of fundamental importance to the academic enterprise in higher education. From an organizational perspective, faculty members are the organizational agents with the most direct responsibility for influencing student learning and other undergraduate outcomes. Hence, given my interest in how colleges and universities as organizations affect students, I feel a compelling responsibility to study the nature of faculty role performance as an important source of influence on students. My empirical initial investigations in this area (Dey, Milem & Berger, 1997; Milem, Berger & Dey, 2000; Braxton & Berger, 1999) have focused on the influence of organizational socialization and institutional isomorphism on faculty role performance in higher education. Subsequently, I have conducted a number of evaluations of NSF-funded initiatives to improve science education and have been working with colleagues to investigate the effects of market forces on faculty performance in a series of studies (Mendoza & Berger, 2008; Mendoza, Kuntz & Berger, forthcoming; Kuntz & Berger, under review) that are just now beginning to be published. This strand of work emphasizes the ways in which a combination of concepts from various open systems perspectives, neo-institutional and resource dependency theories in particular, explain changes and differences in faculty role performance across various institutional, disciplinary, and historical contexts.

Over the past few years and largely in collaboration with my colleagues in the Center for
International Education, I have extended my scholarly interests beyond the borders of the United States of America to work on leadership and organizational development for higher education in some of the most under-developed international settings – Afghanistan, northwest China, Malawi, the Philippines, and Egypt. This has been some of the most challenging and rewarding work of my career as I have lead and contributed to both large-scale (including two grants totaling $9 million from USAID for work in Afghanistan and a new $600,000 FIPSE award for higher education development in Russia) and smaller funded projects that have significant impacts on postsecondary campuses and national systems. Some of the tangible outcomes of this work have included the development of new master’s programs in Malawi and Afghanistan (the first of their kind in each instance) and I am currently engaged in providing expertise that will contribute to the development of additional new graduate programs in Afghanistan, Egypt, and Russia, respectively. These international projects have allowed me to apply my scholarly expertise to the design and implementation of organizational, leadership, and faculty development programs and initiatives in a wide variety of multi-cultural settings. I am just now beginning to disseminate the knowledge I have gained through research I have been conducting in conjunction with these development efforts, and this promises to be a rich vein of scholarship. It is important to emphasize that while myself and others have contributed to postsecondary education development in these countries; much of my current and future scholarship focuses on how we all can learn from each other in this increasingly global world.