DISSERTATION


WOMEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS IN THE MIDWEST:

EXPERIENCES IN LEADING THEIR CAMPUSES



Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

WOMEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS IN THE MIDWEST:

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This phenomenological study has examined the lived experiences of 14 women community college presidents in the Midwest. As community colleges face extraordinary challenges, leaders will be required to be innovative, creative, and responsive to the changing environments. With the impending turnover of community college presidencies by 2016 and the potential for women to assume those leadership positions, an understanding of their day-to-day experiences will prove valuable to prepare the next generation of women leaders. From the in-depth analysis of face-to-face interviews with study participants, four themes have emerged: *Influences to the Presidency*, *Determination and Perseverance*, *Sense of Progress and Success,* and *Advice for Future Women Leaders*.

Broader interpretation of these themes has identified the unintentional nature of the participants' pathways to their presidencies, the impact that mentors or colleagues had on their professional development and decisions, and the self-actualization that occurred to help them realize they could be a successful president. As the presidents discussed the challenges they faced, which included leadership vacuums, gender issues, facility and financial issues, and the balance between personal and professional responsibilities, their

determination and sheer will to move forward and be successful was apparent. They identified progress and success in both tangible and intangible ways. Much of the progress was dependent on their leadership skills and styles. As these presidents offered advice for future women leaders, modeling integrity, honesty, and ethics were at the forefront of all the discussions. They believed strongly that women leaders must be self-confident and utilize innate skills and strengths to create change. Their working relationship with the board and internal campus community were key factors in institutional stability and positive progress. The presidents viewed themselves as change agents for higher education.

Relating the various themes to the research questions and current literature identified opportunities for further discussion. Within the four overarching themes, participants discussed the need for women leaders to have doctoral degrees, professional-development opportunities, mentors, job-shadowing, and broad-based exposure to all types of learning opportunities in order to develop needed leadership skills. Further studies are encouraged to discern how to best acquire and develop necessary leadership skills, the presidents' perceptions of preparedness for leadership, the impact of mentoring of professional development, and the correlation between leadership success and the doctoral degree area of study. Additionally, researchers could study the strengths and weaknesses of internal versus external leadership-development programs, the retention of aspiring women leaders based on leadership development programs, and the impact on institutions of the presence or absence of succession planning. Gender issues should continue to be studied as well to discern how barriers to women might be diminished.

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I am grateful beyond words to the 14 women community college presidents who trusted me with their stories, offered time from their busy schedules, and opened a window into their lives so I could learn. I am overwhelmed by your determination and commitment to your colleges and colleagues, and most especially the students you serve. You have inspired me with your vision and sense of purpose to change higher education and provide a pathway for women following in your footsteps.

For all my family, thank you for believing in me and loving me. I love you all, more than I can say.


And……..

To the young woman who slowly passed me around mile 15 of the 2009 Chicago Marathon….the saying on the back of your t-shirt has changed my life in many ways…..“The woman who started the race, is different than the woman who finished the race.” Thank you wherever you are!

**DEDICATION**

To Steve, Leisa, and John, thank you for allowing me to pursue my dreams and achieve my goals. My life is blessed beyond measure because of you. I love you!

And…..

To my Mom and late Dad who always told me it didn't matter that I was a girl…..I could do anything I put my mind to. Your love, support, and encouragement have always meant the world to me. Dad….I kept my promise!

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**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Leaders with exceptional capabilities are needed to help institutions of higher education meet the extraordinary challenges they face nationally. They will have to be dealmakers and coalition builders as they face 21st century issues of decreasing resources, changing student demographics, assessing student learning outcomes, and increasing oversight by external agencies. Success in higher education today requires innovation, creativity, and an ability to promote environments responsive to change. Coughlin (2005) believes a critical success factor for organizations today requires moving from "hierarchical, secretive, and change-averse cultures to open, collaborative, and risk-tolerant ones" (p. 8).

With 84% of community college presidents expected to retire by 2016 (Shults, 2001; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007), the next generation of presidents will be required to redefine their roles within this new environment, understanding that gender, relations, and communication will take on increased importance. Eddy and VanDerLinden (2006) and Senge (1990) believed rapid turnover in administrative positions presents an opportunity to embrace new leadership styles, wherein the emphasis should be on meeting both internal and external demands through integrating systems thinking and vision.

Until more recently, much of the leadership research has focused on white males and their leadership styles and behaviors (Bass, 1985, 1990; Bennis & Nanus, 1985;

Birnbaum, 1988; Burns, 1978; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Northouse, 2007; Rost, 1991; Roueche, Baker & Rose, 1989). But with more women moving into leadership roles, added attention is being given in general to women and leadership in higher education. American Association of Community Colleges surveys have shown increases in the numbers of women community college presidents over the past 15 years, with women accounting for 29% of the presidencies by 2006 (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). Expectations are that more women and minorities will be entering community college leadership roles over the next decade. Stephenson (2001) has predicted that community college leadership would change and nearly two thirds of the new entrants into leadership roles would be women. She also stated community colleges would serve as model organizations for the advancement of these leaders. Stout-Stewart (2004, 2005) believes that, with the anticipated leadership changes over the next decade, transformational female leaders would be positioned to add new depth and perspectives to help create change for organizational structures and philosophies in higher education. Tedrow and Rhoads (1999) stated that "with present-day environmental demands for greater cultural awareness and diversity, women are critical resources in moving community colleges toward truly becoming the peoples' colleges" (p. 16). Evans (2001) believes it was up to women leaders to make the needed transformational changes in organization and management styles.

### Statement of Research Problem

Projected retirement data suggest there will be significant turnover in community college leadership within the next several years. The preparation of community college leaders is essential for continued success of these institutions as the institutions meet their

missions. Hockaday and Puyear (2000) have stated that leadership development at all levels is vital for community college success in higher education's current challenging environment. According to Amey and Twombly (1992), innovative leadership is a critical component to an institution's effective renewal or decline. With greater numbers of women seeking and receiving these leadership positions, it is important to explore women's leadership styles and ability to effect positive and transformational change. In the past, research on community college leadership has been primarily focused on men (Bass, 1990, Gillett-Karam, 1994, 2001). Only within the last 10 years have more researchers examined women in leadership within the community college context (Avolio & Bass, 2002; Gregg, 2004; Paternoster, 2006). Much of the research on women has focused on specific leadership traits and characteristics or gender differences in communication and management styles. Very little literature identifies the *essence* of the experiences of women in community college leadership positions as they face day-to-day challenges; as they utilize inherent strengths they have brought to their positions; and as they communicate, manage, and lead in creative and innovative ways to move their institutions forward.

As the number of women community college presidents increases, understanding their experiences, their leadership and communication styles, and their ability to effect positive and innovative change is important and will contribute to the overall knowledge base regarding women's leadership. This study will focus on women community college presidents who have been able to effect positive change on campuses.

Using the lens of a social constructivist view, this study will focus on the participants' day to day thoughts, experiences, and challenges as they strive to lead their

campuses toward positive change in innovative and creative ways. Methods of inquiry will include in-depth interviews and extensive engagement to facilitate development and understanding of meaning. This research regarding women's experiences and the essence of those experiences will add to the body of current knowledge on women and leadership.

## Research Questions

Padgett (2008) has stated that in qualitative research, study questions do not have to pose testable hypotheses as they do in quantitative studies. Without these structural requirements, qualitative questions are designed from a more inductive approach. Given the focus of this qualitative phenomenological study, the following overarching research question will guide this study:

1. What meaning do women community college presidents ascribe to their work and experience in leading their campuses?

Questions in support of the overarching question include these:

2. What statements describe the experiences of the women community college presidents as they work to create positive change on their campuses?

3. What are the underlying themes and contexts that account for the experience of being a woman community college president?

4. What are the universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts about being a woman community college president?

5. What underlying transformational leadership themes did the women community college presidents describe as they supported positive campus change?

## Potential Limitations

The scope of this qualitative study involves the phenomenon of the interviewed women community college presidents from public institutions. It is a snapshot of their experiences at this particular point in their professional careers. Because this will be a human subjects study, all presidents interviewed will be treated with respect, fairness, and understanding.

This phenomenological study is based upon universal assumptions, including (a) the importance of listening, and of understanding people within their context and from their perspective; (b) that there will be no external control or manipulation of the natural phenomena; (c) that gathering the most meaningful information occurs through personal interviews with the presidents; (d) and that understanding of the presidents' phenomena emerges based upon qualitative analysis of the open, detailed, and descriptive interviews with them.

Additionally, I used purposeful sampling for this study by intentionally selecting individuals to interview in order to understand and apply the research questions. The sample for this study was limited to 15 women who are 2-year college presidents currently serving on campuses in the Midwest region of the United States. Although there are many successful, effective and innovative women presidents from whom to choose, I chose the presidents in this study by nominated sampling based on personal recommendations from trusted colleagues who are actively involved with the Higher Learning Commission, American Council on Higher Education, and American

Association of Community Colleges. They have worked with these presidents; and have firsthand knowledge of their leadership style and ability to effect change.

## Significance of the Study

Women continue to face organizational hierarchies and communication and management expectations that are based on power relations defined by male norms and stereotypes (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Chliwnaik, 1997; DiCroce, 1995; Eddy 2003; Eddy & Cox, 2008; Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Tedrow & Rhoades, 1999). Buddemeier (1998) and Moore (as cited in Stout-Stewart, 2005) also identified that women community college presidents have faced personal and institutional challenges as well as sexual discrimination during both their rise to the presidency and their service as presidents.

As more women aspire to these positions, research has begun to discuss perceived and real barriers they face. Although community colleges have been characterized by some researchers as male-dominated and hierarchical they also offer ideal institutional settings for women presidents to redefine leadership and create positive change (Amey, 1999; Amey & Twombley, 1992; Birnbaum, 1988; Twombley & Amey, 1994, Vaughan, 1986). Gregg (2004) has stated that women's abilities to achieve leadership positions have been a problematic issue because women have been viewed as incompetent leaders in areas other than those for which they have been socialized, such as homemaking, teaching, and nursing. Some researchers (Northouse 2007; Trigg, 2006) believe an invisible barrier called a *glass ceiling* still prevents women from ascending to top leadership positions in business and higher education. According to Northouse (2007), this underrepresentation can be gender and prejudice based.

**Researcher Perspective**

As I have "grown" as an administrator, what I know and understand has come from the relationships and people with whom I regularly work, the unique culture on my campus, the progress and challenges I face, and the comprehensive synergy that encompasses all these factors. I work to listen carefully to others' viewpoints and understanding of situations, which often offer a different angle than my perspective. I frequently juggle the need to be firm and direct with the soft heart of a "peacekeeper," knowing that the soft heart is a stronger part of my personality. Being fair, ethical, and trusted are paramount in each decision I make; but I often have to weigh these values because not all decisions are completely straightforward.

My job is not an easy one, but I love the challenge and the opportunity to learn new things each and every day. I'm drawn to this career path because I want to make a difference not only in students' lives, but also in the lives of my professional colleagues and all the staff I work alongside. I want to model strong and competent leadership abilities so that others, especially young women, might aspire to do the same things. I believe that if I get in and roll up my sleeves, get my hands dirty, and work as hard as I can, others maybe will follow suit. What I know comes from my interaction with the world around me.

My world changes every day, and if I pursue my goal of being a community college president, I still have a lot to learn. With all the impending retirements of community college presidents, an opportunity lies ahead for me to make a difference. My day-to-day experience has already shown that, as a woman in higher education, I am judged against the former vice presidents and presidents of my college, who were all

men. I am the first woman administrator on my campus. My campus still models some hierarchy formed by power structures and women being judged by male standards of leadership more than 10 years after DiCroce's (1995) research on these topics.

I want to be part of the change that is taking place in higher education. As a believer in transformational leadership, I can bring unique strengths to my leadership positions. I want to be able to foster positive and innovative ways of change, surrounded by people who also want to create a meaningful difference. I'm a relationship builder, communicator, collaborator, and motivator. A recent study by Aurora and Caliper (2005) supports the belief that women possess leadership strengths and consensus-building abilities. According to the study, although women strengthen themselves by strengthening others, they also tend to be "assertive, persuasive, empathic, willing to take risks, outgoing, and flexible" (p. 3). I want to learn and understand what motivates women presidents to move forward, to challenge gender differences, and to believe in their roles as change agents. I also want to understand what experiences cause them to turn around and move on when they have had enough and feel no progress is in sight.

Trigg (2006) has stated there are "powerful and compelling reasons why women's leadership makes a difference as they bring new perspectives and values to the table that can revitalize and transform debate and options" (p. 26). Change is the template in higher education today, and I want to be one of the women who guides the future agenda of higher education.

## Summary

This introductory chapter has provided background information on the anticipated leadership turnover in higher education within the next eight years. It has identified the

expected impact women leaders may have on community colleges. The need to conduct a qualitative, phenomenological study that examines the essence of the experiences, perspectives, and influences of female community college presidents has been explained and justified. The research questions appropriate for this study that reflect my personal and professional interest in community college leadership have been stated. However, these questions also identify the research that frames a scholarly discussion of my topic. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations and significance of the research study, followed by my perspective and reasons for choosing this topic.

**CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This chapter is a review of the important literature relevant to my proposed research. A discussion about community college growth and trends in education provides a foundation for the setting in which my research will take place. With institutions being forced to examine their history, refocus on the present, and plan differently for the future, an in-depth discussion on transformational leadership and women's leadership styles as they relate to the ability to effect innovative and create changes is significant.

I have organized my literature review to include a leadership overview that identifies various leadership eras, leadership definitions, and effective leadership practices. An in-depth discussion of leadership theories, with a specific focus on transformational leadership, follows these topics. I discuss a number of transformational leadership beliefs, as well as impending changes in transformational concepts. A discussion of women as leaders and gender issues follows.

**Leadership Overview**

We must study leadership as a whole to understand colleges and universities as organizations. Because profound changes already are beginning to occur in leadership positions, discussions arise surrounding issues such as the theoretical understandings and basis of leadership, necessary traits for effective leadership, and desired leadership skills and how to develop them. Additional areas of interest and question include philosophical approaches to leadership that will help ensure success, competencies required for leaders

in higher education, future challenges with 21<sup>st</sup>-century higher education, and the paradoxes that face leaders in this next century.

**Leadership Eras**

Because the first public community colleges were established in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and modern-day community colleges began to flourish in the 1960s, there is a relatively short history of leadership research upon which to draw. Twombly (1995) identified four eras of community college leadership: from 1900 to 1939, when the "great man" theory was prevalent; from 1940 to 1959, when college leaders were seeking independence from secondary schools; from 1960 to 1979, when the emergence of new community colleges was unprecedented, with dominant leadership as the norm; and from 1980 to the present, when business models of leadership have emphasized strategic planning, efficiency, and attention to resource issues.

Vaughan (1986) began to research and write about the transition in community college leadership in the 1980s. Discussion about the importance of relationships rather than presidential traits had begun, along with that about the community college leaders' broader range of duties. Identification of women and minorities as having a role in community college leadership was beginning, which marks the beginning of a change in the demographic profile. In 1991, men represented 89% of the community college presidents; but by 2001, women represented 28% of this group, while presidents of color remained essentially unchanged at 14% between 1991 and 2001 (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006; Weisman & Vaughan, 2002).

Eddy and VanDerLinden (2006) have stated that during the 1990s, as economic resources declined, student demographics changed, more community development

programs were initiated, and community college leadership continued to change. As O'Banion's (1997) concept of the learning college began to emerge, shared leadership and governance became more prominent and accepted. These concepts called for faculty, staff, and administrators to be active and accountable with their specific roles and responsibilities in the decision-making processes. Eddy and VanDerLinden (2006) noted that the more participatory process of shared governance reflected community college leadership changes with an increased emphasis on communication, restructuring of organizational management, and accountability.

**Leadership Definitions**

Birnbaum (1988) stated that "calling for leadership is easy" (p. 22). However, he believed there was agreement neither on how leadership was defined, assessed, and linked to outcomes, nor on what measures could distinguish effective from ineffective leaders. Birnbaum (1992) suggested that "leaders may exert influence less through planning, decision making, and related administrative activities than through affecting others' interpretations of institutional life," and by "developing and sustaining systems of belief that regenerate participants' commitment" (p. 10). Although 20 years of writing and research on leadership now exist, a comprehensive concept of leadership still remains elusive. A wide variety of different approaches explain the complexities of leadership (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternburg, 2004; Bass, 1985; Bass, 1990; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Birnbaum, 1992; Burns, 1978; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Northouse, 2007; Rost, 1991).

Leadership has been studied from trait and behavior perspectives as well as from information-processing and relational standpoints. Northouse (2007) has observed that

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the collective leadership research findings provide a far more complex and sophisticated view that has multiple dimensions. Bass (1990) described leadership as the focus of group processes wherein group change and activity reflects the groups' perspective and is facilitated by the leader. Bass and others describe leadership as a combination of traits or skills that enable them to influence others to accomplish tasks or to bring about change in a group (Bass, 1990; Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991; Kouzes and Posner, 1995; Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, and Fleishmann, 2000; Stogdill, 1974). Leadership from a trait viewpoint suggests that select people have innate talents, and those without such talents have restricted leadership abilities.

Rost (1991) noted that traditional leadership theories have been concerned with leadership traits, characteristics, and whether leaders are born or made. He believed less research has focused on understanding the nature of leadership and how leaders and followers relate to each other. Early discussions and definitions of leadership have revolved around more hierarchical aspects and the impact of "great men" on society. Rost (1991) stated leadership change within higher education would be supported by values such as collaboration, open discussion, consensus oriented policy, and decision-making processes. Additionally, he believed that global concern, diversity, and inclusiveness in structures and participation, and working toward the common good would impact leadership change.

Power relationships that exist between leaders and followers also have been used to describe and explain leadership. French and Raven (as cited in Northouse, 2007, p. 6) described the basis of power as "reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert" used to influence the attitudes and actions of followers. Burns (1978), however, described

power from a relational standpoint, whereby leaders and followers together use it to achieve collective goals. Still others view leadership from a transformational process in which followers do more than is expected of them (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1985; Bass and Avolio, 1993, 1994; Kuhnert, 1994).

**Effective Leadership Practices**

Within organizations, both leaders and other employees are the ones who provide the waves of energy for growth and change, and impact whether the organization fails or prospers both internally and externally (Clancy & Weber, 1995). Clancy and Weber believed true leaders empower those around them, allowing those individuals to form collaborative relationships in the workplace, learn and share their skills and knowledge, and demonstrate competence. Amey (2006) and A. W. Astin and Astin (2000) have stated that leaders should be able to enhance equity, social justice, and the quality of life; support access and opportunity; encourage respect for difference, diversity, and cultural enrichment; promote intellectual honesty; and create learning environments for the advancement of knowledge. They believe leaders need qualities of self-knowledge, authenticity, integrity, and commitment to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, collective responsibility, and cultural change.

Northouse (2007) has stated that although leadership has been conceptualized numerous ways in the research, he believes leadership is a process, involves influence, occurs in a group context, and involves goal attainment. A. W. Astin and Astin (2000) and Northouse (2007) view leadership as a collective or group process in which individuals work together to foster effective change.

Birnbaum (1999) reinforced Clancy and Weber's (1995) ideals as he specifically discussed presidential leadership roles. He believed "effective presidents influence others by allowing themselves to be influenced" (p 338). Birnbaum (1999) stated that this effectiveness requires presidents to listen carefully. Gregg (2004) and Hockday and Puyear (2000) believe successful presidents must understand the mission and culture of the community college, and that given the opportunity, will embrace changes and create a vision.

Effective community college leadership will be necessary to meet the societal demands for this century, with the expected increases in enrollment, constrained resources, and increasing accountability requirements. Carnevale and Fry (2000) predicted that higher education would absorb an additional 2.6 million new students between 1995 and 2015, many of whom would include minorities and nontraditional students. With today's economy requiring increased skills, the community college role in career preparation and workforce development will take on added importance, as well. Boggs (2008) has stated that "higher education has become increasingly critical to our nation's cultural, social, and economic well-being, with 90% of the fastest growing jobs in the knowledge economy requiring some postsecondary education" (p. 12). Boggs (2003) has noted that, as the community college mission was fulfilled, leaders would be able to make important contributions to education and to the economic strength of the individuals and communities served. He stated that "preparing leaders who are committed to the mission and values of community colleges is perhaps the most significant challenge faced by community colleges" (p. 16).

## Leadership Theories

In identifying successful leaders and their abilities to effect positive change on campuses, an overview and understanding of the foundational definitions and theories of leadership is necessary. Leadership can denote both power and success. Northouse (2007) has acknowledged that leadership is a complex process; in doing so he has discussed a variety of leadership theories that have been used to describe approaches to leadership. Traditionally, leadership theories have been categorized into (a) trait, (b) behavioral, (c) situational, (d) contingency, (e) path-goal, and (f) transactional leadership. Today, one of the most accepted approaches to leadership being studied and discussed is reflected in (g) transformational theory.

### Trait Theory

The trait theory was one of the first systematic attempts to study and understand leadership. Early attention focused on determining innate traits in an attempt to identify what made certain people great leaders, with the underlying assumption that, if other people could be found with certain traits, they could be great leaders, as well (Bass, 1990). This philosophy of great leaders being born and good leaders having a specific combination of traits has been studied more extensively than other theories over the past century (Bass, 1990, Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Stogdill, 1948, 1974).

Northouse (2007) has stated that the role of personality traits in leadership has emerged from this body of research. Some of the traits central to the research and consistently identified include "intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability" (p. 35). Goleman (1995) and Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2000) also have

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discussed the impact of emotional intelligence on leadership traits. Despite the breadth of

research, however, a definitive list of genetically determined leadership traits has not

been identified. For example, the trait approach fails to take "situations" into account, and

it has not been useful for leadership training and development (Northouse, 2007).

**Behavioral Theory**

Behavioral theory focuses exclusively on what leaders actually do and how they

act, rather than who leaders are. The foundational concept is that leadership can be

learned, rather than that it is inherent. Behavioral theory provides a framework that

identifies both task and relationship behaviors leaders use (Northouse, 2007). The ways

in which leaders combine these two kinds of behaviors to influence others is the basis for

behavioral theory. This theory has broadened the scope of leadership studies to include

the study of leaders' behaviors rather than just personal characteristics as identified by

Blake and McCanse (1991), Blake and Mouton (1985), Bryman (1992), and Yukl (1994).

Northouse (2007) has stated that, as with trait theory, researchers have not been able to

identify a consistent set of leadership behaviors that would result in effective leadership.

**Situational Theory**

Northouse (2007) has observed that "different situations demand different kinds

of leadership" (p. 91). Effective leaders are able to modify their leadership style

depending on the circumstances at hand. This theory focuses on the concept that leaders

must match their style to the commitment and competency of their employees, and that

the most effective leaders are ones who have the ability to adapt their leadership style to

meet the identified needs of those employees. Situational theory identifies that leadership

behaviors are considered to be either directive, which are task related, or supportive,

which are relationship related. Employee development levels are considered also. They are used to determine the degree to which someone has the ability to perform specific tasks as well as their attitude towards doing it.

Situational theory is based upon the premise that in order for a leader to be effective, they must discern the developmental level of their employees and then adapt their leadership style accordingly. Within this theory, Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Nelson (1993) identified four leadership styles, including directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating, which are combined with the subordinate commitment and competence necessary to accomplish a given task or activity. Because there is not a strong body of research to support this theory, there are discrepancies in how the theory truly explains effective leadership. Northouse (2007) has stated, however, that it is "recognized by many as a standard for training leaders, ...it is a practical approach that is easily understood..."(p. 110), it sets forth clear guidelines for leader actions in order to enhance effectiveness, and it "stresses that there is not one best style of leadership" (p. 110).

**Contingency Theory**

Contingency theory has some similarities to situational theory. Northouse (2007) has stated, "contingency theory is concerned with styles and situations" (p. 113). This theory focuses on the match between the leadership style and the respective context or setting. Northhouse noted the body of research on contingency theory was contributed earlier by Fiedler (1964, 1967), Chemers (Fiedler and Chemers, 1974), and Garcia (Fiedler and Garcia, 1987). Leadership styles are again described as task related or relationship related as in situational theory, however a number of situational variables are considered also. Northouse (2007) has identified that "contingency theory suggests that

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situations can be characterized in terms of three factors: leader-member relations, task structure, and position power" (p. 114). Leader-member relations identify the attitude followers have towards their leader. The task structure relates to the specificity of the task and the processes required to complete it. Position power distinguishes the authority level of the leader. These three variables, in combination, are used to ascertain how favorable a situation is. Northouse (2007) has noted criticisms of the contingency theory, including that it fails to identify both leadership effectiveness or ineffectiveness in a given situation, and what should be done when a mismatch occurs between a leader and the workplace.

**Path-Goal Theory**

Northouse (2007) has stated that path-goal theory first appeared in the literature in the early 1970s and focused on how "leaders motivate subordinates to accomplish designated goals" (p. 127). House and Mitchell (1974) identified four leadership behaviors as part of the path-goal theory. These behaviors include "directive," in which standards are set and rules are clearly stated to subordinates; "supportive," in which subordinates are treated as equals by the leader; "participative," with shared decision making; and "achievement-oriented," wherein the leader challenges and guides the subordinates to excellence. The leader's challenge then is to use a style that best meets the subordinates' motivational needs. House and Mitchell (1974) believed leadership creates motivation when it defines goals, clarifies the path, removes obstacles, and provides support. Path-goal theory provides a practical model that identifies the ways leaders help those around them (Northouse, 2007). According to Northouse (2007), criticisms of this theory include limited evidence to use in identifying leaders' ability to

motivate subordinates, as well as difficulty in applying the theory to organizational settings.

**Transactional Leadership Theory**

In this theoretical approach, people are motivated by reward and punishment. Northouse (2007) has noted that a transactional leader doesn't identify the needs of subordinates or support their personal development. Helgesen (1995) believed the adherence to this type of leadership and communication process reinforces the importance of the power structure within an organization, keeping the focus on the position a person holds rather than on a person's actual job. Traditional hierarchies, which provide the foundation for transactional leadership styles, are pyramidal in shape, with information being disseminated through "strict vertical chains of command, discouraging direct communication across levels" (Helgesen, 1995, p. 21).

According to Helgesen (1995), traditional hierarchies further identify and strengthen the dominance of the top leaders, creating an environment that recognizes who has access to information, who is making decisions, who can communicate information and with whom, and who will be involved in the overall operations of the organization. This hierarchical formation sends a message to those below the leadership ranks that they are unimportant to the functioning of the organization and diminishes individual as well as cultural group rights. Helgesen stated that this type of management system tends to "assure that the ... people who emerge as leaders in traditional hierarchies are those who enjoy exercising power from a distance" (p. 22). Additionally, these leaders tend to isolate themselves to reinforce their authority, consistently accentuating the differences in power and communication.

Transactional leaders are more concerned about advancing their own personal interests, and they are influential because it is in the best interest of subordinates to agree with and do what the leader expects. This leadership style is characterized by "contingent reward" and "management by exception" (Northouse, 2007, p. 185). Rewards and recognition are provided when followers carry out their responsibilities and reach goals and objectives; but when they fall short, consequences and discipline are applied (Burns, 1978; Johnson, 2005). Eisler's (2005) "hierarchies of domination" mirrors similarities with transactional leadership because those who lead using this style impose and maintain fear, representing power "over" others as evidenced by "accountability and respect flowing only from the bottom up" (p. 29).

**Transformational Leadership Theory**

Transformational leadership describes certain leaders' abilities to inspire followers to accomplish great things. Over time, a number of researchers (Baker, Roueche, and Gillett-Karam, 1990; Bass, 1985; Bass and Avolio, 1993, 1994; Bass and Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2007) have shared the belief that transformational leaders are change agents with the ability to empower and motivate others by creating trust and articulating a clear organizational vision. Transformational leaders are good role models who help shape values and encourage others to perform at higher levels, regardless of the leaders' personal goals.

Leadership theory changes began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s, and since the early 1980s, transformational leadership has been the focus of discussion and research. Burns (1978), one of the first to provide a definition of transformational leadership, believed the mark of a true leader was the ability to "learn from others and from the

environment—the capacity to be taught" (p. 117). He stated that transformational leaders are concerned with the collective good and create empowering connections to reach common goals.

Bass (1985) expanded upon transformational leadership concepts developed by Burns (1978) and House and Mitchell (1974) by giving more attention to the 'followers' rather than leaders' needs. He stated "we see the transformational leader as one who motivates us to do more than we originally expected to do" (p. 20). Bass believed the transformation could occur "by raising our level of …consciousness about the importance and value of designated outcomes, …by getting us to transcend our own self-interests…by altering our need level on Maslow's … hierarchy" (p.20).

Burns' (1978) work on transformational leadership has been a template for additional research. Bennis and Nanus (1985) identified "four common strategies used by leaders in transforming organizations" (p. 187):

1. Leaders have a *clear vision* of the future state of the organization, which allow the people within the organization to understand the overall direction, see where they fit within the organization, and identify their role.

2. Leaders are *social architects,* creating shared meaning and communicating a direction that transforms the organization's values and norms.

3. Leaders create *trust* by being reliable, articulating a direction and consistently implementing the direction even if there is a degree of uncertainty.

4. Leaders use creative self-deployment through positive self-regard by knowing their strengths and weaknesses, emphasizing their strengths, and creating feelings of confidence in followers.

Roueche, Baker, and Rose (1989) expanded on the transformational leadership

information posited by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) and identified five similar themes.

Studies by a number of people (Amey, 2005; Coughlin, 2005; Eisler, 2005;

Fisher, 2005; Johnson, 2005; and Northouse, 2007) have identified foundations of ethical

and moral conduct, communication, inclusiveness, and innovation when one is discussing

transformational leadership. This type of leadership specifically values and protects

individual and cultural group rights within an organization by supporting the "greater

good" rather than individual self-interests.

Amey (2005) has expressed the belief that transformational leadership can be

cultivated throughout an organization, which flattens the hierarchy and thus changes the

perspective of leadership. Leadership moves, then, from a set of administrative roles and

responsibilities, tasks to be completed, and supervisory expectations to more complex

orientations focused on creating a collaborative learning environment throughout the

organization; this evolution offers others more responsibility for decision making.

Leaders look for ways to reinforce values, create shared language, recognize team

accomplishments, clarify missions and goals to shape meaning, and facilitate

organizational learning.

In discussing transformational leadership, Kouzes and Posner (2002) have stated

that "transforming leadership ultimately became moral in that it raised the level of human

conduct and ethical aspiration of both the leaders and the led, and thus had a transforming

effect on both" (p. 153). Kouzes and Posner's model (2002) includes the following five

practices of exemplary leadership: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the

process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. According to Kouzes and Posner

(2002), transformational leaders exhibit strong personal values; create and communicate exciting possibilities for the common good of an organization; take risks and innovate; promote teamwork and empower others to contribute; and create collective engagement and enthusiasm by showing appreciation and celebrating accomplishments.

Amey (2006) has stated that "transformative leadership focuses on change, although new directions and visions must link to the present and past of an organization … to be fully understood, embraced and sustained" (p. 36). The transformative change process is dependent on both the leader's and the organization's values, which include learning and development, accessibility, creating positive social campus and community change, increased globalization, generation of new knowledge, and service to the community.

Models of positive, transformational, and empowering leadership where diversity is respected, innovation applauded, authority shared, and communication valued will take on increased importance as the new generation of community college presidents redefines its role to face 21st-century challenges. "One of the greatest needs facing community colleges today is revitalized leadership … transformational leadership to meet the changing times" (Roueche, Baker, & Rose, 1989, p. 267). Giannini (2001) has expressed the belief that women are capable of providing this needed new leadership perspective.

**Women As Leaders**

Research conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges suggests that the retirement of presidents and vice presidents poses a critical problem because studies within the past 10 years have indicated that as many as 50% of current presidents would be leaving these positions in the next 3 to 7 years (Fulton-Calkins &

Millings, 2005; Shults, 2001; Stout-Stewart, 2004, 2005). In contrast, Evelyn (2001) has

stated that the rapid turnover in administrative positions presents an opportunity to "bring

in fresh blood at a time when 2-year colleges face increasingly complex demands" (p.

A36).

Whatever one's perspective, public expectations, changing demographics and

diverse populations, increased accountability, and financial constraints are intersecting to

change the face of higher education. Stephenson, (2001) has stated that women leaders

are at the crossroads of these changes and will have the ability to enhance the resolution

of these critical issues. DiCroce (1995) and Giannini (2001) have both expressed the

belief that community colleges have provided ideal settings for women presidents as they

redefine leadership agendas and create positive change in higher education.

Evans (2001), believing in our rapidly changing world, has suggested that women

in leadership roles in community colleges will have the opportunity to create and

implement new models for organizing institutions and ensuring student learning success.

Evans stated that women are not bound by tradition or intently focused on the power and

prestige that has been the template for the hierarchical environment of higher education

for a number of decades. Because women have been socialized over the years to be

sensitive to the value and needs of people, a number of researchers (Coughlin, 2005;

Eddy, 2003; Eisler, 2005; Evans, 2001; Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999; Williamson & Hudson,

2001) believed they will use their managerial, relationship-building, and organizational

skills to promote communication and group values, and thus create flatter organizations

that are responsive to change and innovation. With more women assuming leadership

roles, fresh and novel perspectives are creating positive changes in organizational

structure and management. Helgesen (1995) expressed the belief that women have advantages as organizational leaders because they emphasize collaboration rather than a traditional hierarchical structure, are process oriented, and don't desire personal power.

Giannini (2001) has stated that women, as leaders in higher education, are evolving as "major change agents and decision makers as they respond to increased legislative demands, budget crises, societal and cultural changes, changing technology, and the cyclical learning continuum" (p. 201). Women leaders will have the opportunity to support the transformation of higher education with their focus on being visionary, flexible, network oriented, and responsive to meaningful differences.

Gillett-Karam (1994) took the position that "women leaders can provide a new model for leadership in the American community college" (p. 95). In discussing women's transformational leadership styles and the need to change traditional hierarchical leadership styles of higher education, Owens (2001) has suggested that

> "transformational leadership is based on the conviction that the people in the organization constitute a resource rich in ideas, knowledge, creativity, and energy whose power can be fully tapped only by creating organizational environments that are motivating, inclusionary, caring, and empowering" (p. 257).

Eisler (2005) has supported the idea that women today bring skills to the workplace that are needed for fundamental transformation. She has expressed the belief that organizations can create a synergistic momentum to accomplish goals if employees are empowered and encouraged, and relations are valued and rewarded. She has offered these are "all directly related to changes in gender roles and relations" (p. 29). Fisher (2005) has stated that effective leadership is not about individual success and achievement, but rather about supporting and enabling others toward success and achievement.

**Trends in Gender Research**

Information about women administrators in community colleges was not collected in the early 1970s; but over the past couple of decades, more attention has been given to women's leadership roles in higher education. American Association of Community Colleges surveys have shown increases in the numbers of women community college presidents over the past 15 years (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). In 1991, women represented 11% of the community college presidents. Ten years later, the proportion of women was 28%, and by 2006, women presidents comprised 29% of community college presidents. Although there had been an 18% increase in the number of women in this role in 15 years, the past five years have shown a slower increase. Eddy (2007) has indicated that although women fill only 29% of the presidencies at community colleges, women represent 57% of the students at these facilities.

Until more recently, much of the leadership research has focused on white males and their leadership styles and behaviors. Northouse (2007) reports that a number of research studies in past years have pointed to significant differences between men and women leaders; and some of these differences have turned from the viewpoint of women being inferior to men, to a more popular perspective that states the outstanding abilities of women leaders. In contrast, researchers such as Dobbins and Platz (1986), and van Engen, van der Leeden, and Willemsen (2001) have argued that gender has little impact on leadership differences. Gillett-Karam (2001) has determined that effective leadership was more behaviorally and situationally based than gender based; however, differences in leadership styles do exist between genders.

Early gender research compared "interpersonally oriented or task-oriented styles or democratic and autocratic styles" (Northouse, 2007, p. 266). Meta-analysis by Eagly and Johnson (1990) found the only gender difference was that women tended to lead in a more participatory, democratic manner.

**Barriers for Women Leaders**

Gregg (2004) has stated that "attaining leadership positions has been a problematic issue for women" (p. 42) because they have been viewed as incompetent leaders in areas other than those for which they have been socialized: homemaking, teaching, and nursing. Northouse (2007) has noted that although women currently occupy more than half of all management and professional positions, and make up nearly half the U.S. labor force, an invisible barrier called a *glass ceiling* still prevents women from ascending to top leadership positions in business and higher education. This underrepresentation generally revolves around three explanations: "human capital" differences, gender differences, and "prejudice" (Northouse, 2007, p. 270).

Researchers Mahoney (1996), Eagly and Carli (2004), and Bowles and McGinn (2005) have expressed a shared belief that women have less human capital investment in education, training, and work experience than men due to the disproportionate responsibility women assume for family and domestic responsibilities. Other barriers regarding gender differences often cited are that women are less committed to employment, less motivated to attain leadership positions, less likely than men to ask for what they want, and less likely to self-promote (Bielby & Bielby, 1988; Bowles & McGinn, 2005; and Rudman & Glick, 2001). Gender bias stemming from perceived stereotypes creates prejudice and biased judgments for women aspiring to top leadership

positions. Northouse (2007) has stated that "women leaders are expected to be masculine and tough, but as women they should not be too manly" (p. 277). This prejudice creates difficulty and disadvantage for women's effectiveness, less favorable attitudes toward women leaders, and more barriers for women as they try to attain leadership roles. Eagly and Carli (2004) have determined that many of the barriers women face come from the inconsistencies in gender and leadership roles, which expect women to be caring yet capable, competent, and strong. Northouse (2007) has stated that "the transformational leadership style … encompasses traditionally feminine behaviors such as being considerate and supportive, and ... is strongly associated with leadership effectiveness (Lowe, et al., 1996)" (p. 280). Eagly and Carli (2004) have expressed the belief that women will begin to assume more elite leadership positions because they engage in more transformational and contingent-reward behaviors to a greater extent than men, which thus will help to break down stereotypical beliefs surrounding leadership roles and responsibilities.

Community colleges have been described as ideal settings for women presidents to redefine leadership and have a positive impact on higher education although they have "been characterized as bureaucratic and hierarchical (Birnbaum, 1988; Vaughan, 1986)," and "dominated by male and elite imagery (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Twombly & Amey, 1994)" (Amey, 1999, p. 60). Buddemeier (1998) and Stout-Stewart (2005) have noted that women community college presidents have faced challenges in coping with personal and institutional hindrances, as well as sexual discrimination during their rise to the presidency. Trigg (2006) believes women still face systematic biases and the glass ceiling, and continue to be underrepresented in higher-education decision making.

Nevertheless, women community college presidents are positioned to serve as change agents and transformational leaders (Amey, 1999; DiCroce, 1995; Twombly & Amey, 1994).

Northouse (2007) has stated that a transformational leadership style benefits women, allowing them to encompass traditionally feminine behaviors. According to him, transformational leadership is not a distinctly masculine style of leadership, and it is strongly associated with leadership effectiveness.

Giannini (2001) has expressed the belief that women adopt male standards of success to better fit into the hierarchical systems in higher education. Her studies support the movement to a more horizontal, inclusive style of leadership by women from the traditional hierarchical model of men. Gilligan (1982) believed the reality of women's lives could not be explained using moral development stages and simple reasoning patterns. Helgesen's (1995) focus in this context is on how women place more emphasis on relationships, sharing, and processes as they make decisions, gather and share information, structure and manage their organizations, and motivate those around them, while men focus on completing tasks, establishing more hierarchical organizations, communicating from the top down, and achieving goals. Much of Gilligan's research (1982) has identified women's developmental pathways that result in high values of personal and relational responsibility, while men show legalistic justice. Thus, men are more concerned with systems and rules, while women focus on relationships. Similarly, Tedrow and Rhoads (1999) stated that women are more likely than men to "use relational ways of knowing and leading" (p. 1).

**Gender Differences**

Gender differences are believed to impact values leaders hold and the influence of those values on organizational structure and management, planning, and communication. Chliwniak (1997) believed that leaders with "emerging, inclusive styles of leadership could provide institutions with new values and ethics grounded in cooperation, community, and relationships" (p. 3). Eddy (2007) has taken the position that "perceived gender roles for leaders are still prevalent on campuses, and that women are judged on how they uphold traditional attributes of being nurturing, participatory, and collegial" (p. 275). Amey and Twombly (1992) stated that language use on community college campuses reinforces male norms for leadership. Chliwniak (1997), Tedrow and Rhoads (1999), and Glazer-Raymo (1999) believed women construct their leadership identity as a response to organizational expectations and norms defined by male behavior roles. Eddy and Cox (2008) have stated that organizational hierarchies are built upon gendered processes. DiCroce (1995) provided a framework for women to effect meaningful change in institutions by dismantling institutional gender stereotypes, redefining power structures, changing gender-based policies, advocating policy changes, and raising gender consciousness. A decade after DiCroce's research, change for women leaders is still needed. Kramer (2005) has noted that gender stereotypes persist and power structures continue to dominate, with women being judged based on male models of leadership. Continued research gives women leaders a voice to articulate their visions and viewpoints, and to find a way for inclusion of colleagues in decision-making processes.

A recent study by Aurora and Caliper (2005) provides evidence that "women bring unique personality and motivational strengths to their leadership" (p. 3). The study

indicates that women possess strong leadership profiles and a collegial, consensus-building approach to leadership. According to the study, while women strengthen themselves by strengthening others, they also tend to be "assertive, persuasive, empathic, willing to take risks, outgoing, and flexible" (p. 3).

## Summary

Gillett-Karam, Roueche, and Roueche (1991) stated that "most educators agreed new leadership was necessary to meet the needs of changing external and internal forces in community colleges" (p. 8). With today's diverse world, communication and teamwork are vital, and information must be shared. A review of the growth and changes in community colleges over the past 40 years suggests that accepted leadership practices and theories have evolved, as well. Effective leadership currently focuses on leaders' abilities to empower those around them, to form collaborative relationships, and to establish an environment where individuals work together to create innovative change. Effective leadership will be necessary for community colleges to face challenges of increasing enrollment, constrained resources, and increased accountability. Transformational leadership styles, and specifically women's leadership styles, are believed to be very conducive to meeting these challenges. As more women move to presidencies in higher-education institutions, there will be an increased awareness and focus on their experiences. The synergy women derive from transformational leadership styles to create positive change and overcome gender biases they face will be a driving force in change on community college campuses.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research method selected for this study on women community college presidents, and their experiences as they have led their campuses. It includes a discussion of the specific procedures and the foundational approach through qualitative research methods I utilized to complete this phenomenological study. And finally, it identifies the setting, explains the selection process for the participants, discusses the trustworthiness of the study, outlines the data collection, and discusses the data analysis process.

## Method and Grounding of Proposed Methodology

The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of common themes that surround women community college presidents in the Midwest and their experiences in leading their campuses, in order to provide a framework for women who aspire to leadership roles. This study captures the essence of the participants' real experiences by providing a snapshot of those experiences at a specific point in time.

The research data provide a clear foundation for the research methodology I chose for this study. Creswell (2007) has acknowledged that qualitative research is conducted to provide "a complex, detailed understanding of an issue …to empower individuals to share their stories … to understand the contexts or settings within which study participants address a problem or issue" (p. 40). Patton (1990) believed qualitative

research is well suited for understanding and evaluating a process. Creswell (2007) has

supported this perspective as well, stating that qualitative research is

> …an approach to an inquiry that begins with assumptions, worldviews, ... the study of research problems exploring the meaning individuals ascribe to a social or human problem. Researchers collect data in natural settings with a sensitivity to the people under study, and they analyze their data inductively to establish patterns or themes. The final report provides for the voices of the participants, a reflexivity of the researchers, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and a study that adds to the literature... (pp. 50–51)

Qualitative researchers can study and address unstructured and unexpected

connections that are typically difficult to evaluate with quantitative methods (Clemons,

1998). Clemons also stated that as an epistemology, qualitative research offers a

"phenomenological inquiry philosophy which utilizes naturalistic approaches to

understanding human experience in context-specific settings" (p. 29).

Patton (1990) believed the researcher should bring a commitment to the study to

identify various themes, questions, and perceptions, as well as to report all evidence that

is collected. Padgett (2008) has stated that qualitative research provides an inside, person-

centered rather than variable-centered perspective, which assures depth as opposed to

breadth of information.

Creswell (2003), Miles and Huberman (1994), Padgett (2008), and Rossman and

Rallis (2003) have identified a number of characteristics for this approach that provide a

foundation for my decision to use qualitative research methods, and, specifically, to do a

phenomenological study. Among those characteristics are that this method supports

1.  Research that is naturalistic for development of detail about the participants and

    enables the researcher to better understand their experience;

2.  A desire for active participants, and sensitivity to them through data collection;

3. Research that draws on multiple methods that respect the study participants and focuses on context;

4. An ability to build credibility and rapport with study participants;

5. Data collection based upon open-ended observations and interviews in which the researcher is embedded in the study, unlike quantitative research, which is done on closed, controlled systems;

6. The understanding that qualitative research is dynamic, emergent, and evolving throughout the process, thus creating an "unfolding" of information;

7. Interpretation and filtering of the data and descriptions offered through both a theoretical and personal lens to enable identification of lessons learned and additional questions for study;

8.  The development of a more holistic and interpretive view of the participants' experiences, with an emphasis on subjective meaning;

9.  The understanding by the researcher that a personal reflection is embedded within the study, and a sensitivity to the impact personal perspectives have on the interpretation;

10. The use of both inductive and deductive complex reasoning and thinking processes, within which the researcher moves between data collection, analysis, and writing.

Padgett (2008) has noted that qualitative researchers should be sensitive in their observations, and flexible, in order to respond to emerging themes while they are working with study participants. She has stated that the "heart" of "a qualitative report is a bricolage, a pieced-together, tightly woven whole greater than the sum of its parts" (p.

6). With these characteristics in mind, qualitative inquiry as a research method is appropriate for use in this study.

**Phenomenological Method**

This study uses the phenomenological method of qualitative inquiry because this approach supports the understanding of individual experiences of a phenomenon and the development of a "composite description of the essence of that experience for all the individuals" (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). Moustakas (1994) believed the description was based on "what" and "how" the phenomenon was experienced. Despite differences in the philosophical approaches to phenomenological research as posed by Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (1990), the common ground of the approaches is the interpretation of participants' "lived experiences," the understanding that these experiences are conscious ones and reflect the snapshot of those experiences, and that the focus is on the description rather than an analysis of the essence of those lived experiences. Padgett (2008) supports this same concept of a phenomenological method.

As Clemons (1998) identified, "phenomenological research holds no objective truth as its goal, but rather, truth is found for each individual through personally held knowledge and/or experience" (p. 29). Denzin (1994) believed that text based upon phenomenology would "emphasize socially constructed realities, local generalizations, interpretive resources, stocks of knowledge, intersubjectivity, practical reasoning, and ordinary talk" (p. 502).

Phenomenological approaches began to emerge in the early 20th century, were accepted and flourished for a few years, but seemed forgotten until the 1970s. Groenewald (2004) has noted that in the 1970s, a methodological format was better

established and began to be accepted and utilized as a research methodology. Moustakas'
(1994) research in psychology further supported this work, as did van Manen's focus in
the education arena in 2002. A phenomenological methodology focuses deeper meaning
on the research, which is achieved through the researcher's prolonged immersion to
identify cultural and personal experiences of the study participants. Those experiences are
then described and systematically analyzed to identify common themes, meaning, and the
essence of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2007; Groenewald, 2004; Willis, 2007).
Because my interest lies in understanding and describing the essence of the experience of
women community college presidents, studying several individuals who are serving in
those capacities, using primarily face to face interviews to collect data, and analyzing
data for significant statements that represent themes underlying the presidents' lived
experiences, I chose to use a phenomenological approach.

## Sampling

Hycner (1999) stated that the phenomenon being studied dictates methods and
study participants. I used purposeful sampling for this study by specifically selecting
individual participants and sites for the study. This is accepted practice in qualitative
research and allows the researcher better information and understanding of the research
problem and central phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Maxwell
(1996) believed purposeful or criterion-based sampling could provide information that
might be obtained through probability sampling. Maxwell (1996) identified four major
goals in using purposeful sampling:

1. *The sample should be representative of the settings, individuals, or activities
   selected.* In this study, I selected 15 women community college presidents

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from diverse campuses in the Midwest region of the United States. Both rural and urban campuses are represented, with a range of student populations. Of the 15 who originally agreed to participate, 14 were ultimately interviewed.

2. *The sample should adequately represent the heterogeneity of the population.* My purpose in selecting presidents from a variety of states, campus sizes, and with different campus cultures was to help ensure a more representative group with a variety of experiences based on their unique campuses.

3. *The sample should allow for examination of the ideas and questions put forth as the study begins and any subsequent ones that develop.* I chose study participants through professional colleagues, which allowed for variety in campus location, campus cultures, and presidential perspective as a "change agent." I did not make selections based on preconceived notions or biases regarding participants.

4. *The sample should allow for comparisons that will illustrate differences between the participants and their lived experiences.* Differences in participants' campus cultures, lived experiences, and leadership styles in this study offer additional insight into their unique abilities to create positive change on their campuses.

I performed purposeful sampling using both criterion-based and nominated-sample approaches. This combination of sampling involved identifying possible participants who met the criteria of the research study and had experienced the phenomena of being a president who has been considered a "change agent" on a Midwest campus. Additionally, higher-education leaders and colleagues of mine assisted in

recommending specific individuals whom I could contact about their possible participation. Recommendations were based on the contacts' personal and professional associations through the Higher Learning Commission, American Council on Higher Education, and the American Association of Community Colleges, as well as their knowledge of the potential participants' experience, location, transformational leadership styles, and reputation for effecting innovative and positive change. I initially contacted 22 women who currently serve as presidents of 2-year colleges in the Midwest region of the United States—in Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, and Arkansas—by letter and invited them to participate in the study (See Appendix A).

In-depth interviews are the primary means for data gathering in phenomenological studies. Marshall and Rossman (2006) have noted that use of the interview allows the meaning and essence of a shared experience to emerge. Kvale (1996) believed interviews are a powerful means of capturing experiences in research subjects' everyday worlds, allowing them to convey their perspective in their own words. The current study uses an in-depth interview process based on open-ended questions (See Appendix B).

Patton (1990) believed a smaller sample using open-ended interviews could reveal experiences on a very personal level, to offer deeper understanding of the participants' feelings and phenomenon. The goal of qualitative research, according to Creswell (2007), is to study a few individuals but to collect extensive information about them. Of the 22 women presidents contacted, 14 eventually participated in all aspects of this study.

## Data Collection

Establishing a relationship of trust with study participants was important in this study, to help ensure that a genuine sharing of experiences could occur. According to

Marshall and Rossman (2006), such a relationship allows authentic descriptions and discussions to be elicited. To begin to establish that relationship, I contacted 22 women presidents who were possible participants with an introductory letter that offered background information about myself, explained the scope of my research study, and asked for their consideration to participate. I included a human subject's form to assist the women in making an informed decision regarding participation in the study (See Appendix C). The letters indicated I would make a follow-up phone call within the week to introduce myself personally and visit with them about their possible participation in the study. Prior to the first phone call, I researched the college's Web site for information regarding the academic programs, student activities, and campus and community happenings that might offer additional discussion topics or "ice breakers" during the first phone call.

Of the 22 presidents I contacted by letter, I eventually was able to speak with 19. Four of the 19 presidents indicated up front that they were unable to assist with my study because of busy schedules and prior commitments. Fifteen presidents, located in Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, and Arkansas, were willing to participate. After completion of the phone calls, I sent a confirmation/thank-you letter acknowledging the 15 presidents' willingness to help and identifying the time and place of the first interview. I also included a questionnaire with the confirmation letter to request of the presidents some demographic information, along with an informed-consent form for their review (See Appendix D).

I scheduled interviews over a period of 7 months. I drove or flew to the location of 13 campus presidents to conduct face-to-face interviews. I conducted one interview by

interactive television (ITV) because of repeated weather problems that prevented travel. Another president who had agreed to assist with my study developed health problems and so was unable to be interviewed. Thus, I interviewed 14 presidents who contributed information about their experiences and support for this study.

Padgett (2008) and Marshall and Rossman (2006) have offered that trust increases when common background is shared. So before beginning the actual interview with the study participants, I took some time to tell them about myself and my goals in this research study. I shared with them the steps I've taken to my current vice presidency and what I hope to do upon completion of my Ph.D. work.

Before the interviews, I briefly reviewed the questions I had developed to initiate discussions in the first interviews with the presidents regarding their experiences. The questions were as follows:

1. Describe your personal pathway to the presidency.

2. What skills and strengths did you bring to your leadership roles?

3. Who were significant mentors in your life as a president and why? What were the lessons you learned from these mentors?

4. What do you, as a community college president, consider your leadership style to be?

5. What challenges did you face as a president that had to be overcome in order to create positive campus change?

6. What were the critical and underlying issues that created the campus challenges?

7. What were the most difficult issues you faced personally as a result of the campus culture? Were any of the issues gender related?

8. How were you, as president, able to identify and formulate your leadership team?

9. How were the steps to creating effective change prioritized?

10. How were the change efforts initiated?

11. What benchmarks were used to measure positive change and progress?

12. What advice can be given to women leaders aspiring to a community college presidency?

13. Do women community college presidents view themselves as "change agents"?

I designed these questions to support the overarching research questions. Understanding that qualitative research designs are emergent in nature, I knew that as I conducted, coded, and analyzed initial interviews, the information I gathered might very well generate new and additional questions or identify experiences for further examination in follow-up interviews. I contacted six presidents to conduct follow-up phone interviews using the following questions:

1. What meaning do you ascribe to your work and experience in leading your campus toward positive change?

2. In reviewing the most significant challenges you faced, what would have better prepared you to meet those challenges?

3. What underlying themes and contexts account for your personal experience of being a woman community college president?

4. Describe the most significant feelings and thoughts you have about being a woman community college president.

5. Knowing the theory and basis of transformational leadership, how has this personal leadership style helped create change on your campus?

To ensure ethical research, Bailey (1996), Holloway (1997), and Kvale (1996) indicated that researchers should use informed-consent methods. At the first interviews, I collected the demographic information and reviewed and collected the signed consent forms. Consent forms included the title of the project; my contact information; the project's purpose, procedures, and methods to be used; participation risks and benefits; confidentiality procedures; voluntary participation guidelines; and the interviewees' right to stop participating at any time. I answered any questions that arose and again informed the presidents they could choose not to participate if they so desired. Bailey (1996) believed honest responses could be elicited when interviewees were assured of confidentiality. Consistent with that view, I also informed all participants of the process to maintain the confidentiality of the information they would share.

The first interviews consisted of my asking open-ended questions and lasted from approximately 60 minutes to 90 minutes. With the permission of study participants, I recorded the interviews using digital and microcassette recorders; I also took some notes of those interviews. This format allowed the participants an opportunity to describe their lived experiences, to share personal and professional stories, and to offer perspectives on their roles as presidents. Patton (as cited in Sees, 1999) believed that, by being asked open-ended questions, the participant can choose from a variety of responses, which allows the researcher, then, to determine what "dimensions, themes, images, and words

people used to describe their feelings, thoughts, and experiences" (p. 60). Kvale (1996) believed the interview process was truly an exchange of thoughts whereby the researcher understands and constructs meaning from the experiences described from the participant's point of view. The second interviews over the phone with six presidents ranged from 30 minutes to 45 minutes. With the presidents' permission, I recorded these interviews, as well.

A trained transcriptionist transcribed all interviews, and I reviewed them for accuracy while listening to the audiotapes. I then sent copies of the transcription to each participant for her review, clarification, or correction and return to me.

## Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) has identified that "data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data ... for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in … discussion" (p. 148). Patton (as cited in Clemons, 1998) believed that the qualitative "researcher … provides a framework within which the respondents can accurately and thoroughly represent their perspective" (p. 34).

Miles and Huberman (1994) discussed the analysis of data in a phenomenological study as uncovering the essence of the lived experience through reading and rereading materials acquired through interviews. Researchers must guard against their own biases and preconceived notions while "making meaning" of the gathered data.

In this project, I listened to all taped interviews immediately following the interviews, while the discussion was still fresh, before they were transcribed, so I could begin to identify and understand the themes and meaning of the shared experiences. I

listened to the interviews a number of times, and then again when the transcripts were completed, to ensure accuracy in the transcription, as well as to begin to discover consistent patterns and themes.

Rossman and Rallis (2003) believe that data analysis should include the steps of immersion, incubation, insight, and interpretation steps. For this project, immersion was the process of completely familiarizing myself with the words and conversations by listening to the taped interviews, and reading and rereading the transcripts. Incubation allowed the insights I gained to develop into emerging themes. Insight began to take place as I formulated my initial impressions of the presidents' experiences and my interpretations of those experiences. Then, my interpretation of the data that followed could be comprehensive and consistent.

I used a constant comparative method in which I drew broad categories of meaning from the data, and then focused or narrowed these broader meanings into more central, logical, and frequent themes (Creswell, 2007). This approach allowed the depth of the essence of the presidents' experiences to emerge. Using constant comparative analysis, I determined the open codes, axial codes, and select codes for the interview content (See Appendix E). Open coding allowed for the development of categories of information, axial coding created an interconnectedness among the categories, and selective coding built the "story" (Creswell, 2007).

When I was determining the open codes, I analyzed each sentence or phrase of the text for salient ideas and beliefs then placed this data into a "named" category; doing this allowed me to find and conceptualize the core issues (Hammel, 2008). Once I had identified the open codes, I reviewed them and identified the central phenomenon or code

of interest. As Creswell (2007) has stated, this code of interest is usually one that study participants discuss extensively, or one that seems to be of central interest to the study. Then the researcher can reexamine the other categories to determine their relationship to the central code.

The use of axial coding then allowed me to bring together the information to be compiled into "narrower" categories related to the central phenomenon. Often, these categories indicate "...causal conditions that influence the central phenomenon, the strategies for addressing the phenomenon, the context and intervening conditions that shape the strategies, and the consequences of undertaking the strategies" (Creswell, 2007, p. 161). Axial coding leads to continued emergence of common themes and conditions. Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to this process as *clustering*. Hammel (2008) has stated that "the initial coding of data is marked by constantly comparing data at hand with the phases or themes drawn from previous data. In this way, each step of the data analysis process shapes the next" (p. 115).

The final step in the coding process was the determination of select codes, which allowed me to identify dominant stories (Creswell, 2007). I identified codes that occurred frequently and were common among all the participants, and then used them to develop common themes and conclusions that I could draw regarding the women presidents and their experiences in leading their campuses. To further validate and develop the themes, I reread the interview transcripts in their entirety to ensure I was interpreting and including the needed context from the presidents' observations in my discussion of their experiences.  These conclusions and themes allowed me to answer the research questions

and meet the study objectives. To ensure the confidentiality of the study participants, I observed guidelines in accordance with IRB standards.

## Quality and Validity of Methods

Groenewald (2004) has emphasized the importance of the truth and value of qualitative research. Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) have stated that because thoroughness, originality, and subjectivity must be built into a qualitative study, defining and developing validity measures can be difficult. According to these researchers, initial standards of validity for qualitative studies were directly derived from quantitative research standards. Marshall and Smith (as cited in Whittemore et al., 2001) believe all research studies have "biases and particular threats to validity, all methods have limitations, and research involves multiple interpretations as well as a moral and ethical component inherent in judgments" (p. 534). What is important, they stated, is that the validity standards for each particular study are identified, correct methodologies are utilized, and research findings are presented in detail. Whittemore et.al. (2001) have suggested that "credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity are considered primary criteria, whereas explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence, and sensitivity are considered secondary criteria" (p. 529).

I addressed issues of validity and reliability in a variety of ways in this study. I built trust by discussing with participants complete and comprehensive information about the purpose, process, and intent of the research study. All participants signed consent forms prior to interviews, and I shared with participants all documentation indicating approval by my graduate committee and university for the research study. I made initial contact with participants by letter, followed by a personal phone call, and then followed

by a thank-you/acknowledgment letter identifying the time and place of the first interview. I scheduled second interviews through follow-up phone calls.

It is important that any biases or assumptions that might impact the study be identified and known. Creswell (2007) has discussed the need for this clarification. To that end, I identified my biases before the study began. After each interview, I sent the transcription to the participant for review of its accuracy. Throughout the research process, including the interviews and data analysis, I kept a journal to trace the process. The journal contains information I collected in the process, notes about the process, my reflections, and summary conclusions. I disclosed to each president I interviewed my intent behind the study and my desire to be a community college president, as well.

Merriam (1998) indicated that "achieving reliability with qualitative research in the traditional sense as used in quantitative studies is nearly impossible" (p. 66). She believed replication to try to measure reliability would not produce the same results and instead suggested the use of several techniques to ensure reliability. Marshall (1989) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that dependability and consistency are key, and that, rather than expecting results to be replicated, the results should be consistent with the data collected. Marshall (1989) offered a list of common criteria that could be used no matter what the researcher's paradigm. She believed that even though lists of criteria for goodness can be generated, the criteria are ever-evolving. Some of her original criteria included providing detailed explanations of the methodology; stating assumptions, biases, and research questions; connecting study findings to common and actual occurrences; reporting study information to ensure accessibility for other researchers; documenting and preserving study analyses; and maintaining ethical practices.

Although triangulation is suggested as a means to support validity and reliability, Willis (2007) has suggested that if the goal of the research is "understanding" or interpretive research rather than discovering laws, validity and reliability might not be ensured through triangulation. He suggests implementing a number of steps instead, which include these:

1. The researcher discusses developing themes with the study participants to elicit any additional thoughts.

2. Journaling provides a means for the researcher to record thoughts and feelings as the study data is collected and analyzed.

3. The researcher should document all work from the beginning stages of the study to the final report.

To address reliability in the current study, I also kept audiotapes of all the interviews, the transcriptions, all notes I recorded during the interviews that identify my perspective and interpretations, and any changes or clarifications I noted from the participants after my review of the research study drafts. This information would allow another researcher to follow the process I used throughout the research study.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the lived experiences of women community college presidents in the Midwest as they lead their campuses. Underlying this was an examination of their feelings and thoughts, insights and lessons learned, personal skills and strengths, and leadership style. Additionally, they discussed mentors, gender, and campus/community environment. The presidents identified challenges and change for their colleges, and also noted priority issues and benchmarks for progress. They provided advice for aspiring women leaders and offered insight into the value of women leaders. They shared their responses and perspectives, which enabled me to address the following research questions:

1. What meaning do women community college presidents ascribe to their work and experience in leading their campuses?

2. What statements describe the experiences of the women community college presidents as they work to create positive change on their campuses?

3. What are the underlying themes and contexts that account for the experience of being a woman community college president?

4. What are the universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts about being a woman community college president?

5. What underlying transformational leadership themes did the women community college presidents describe as they supported positive campus change?

This chapter discusses demographic information for the study, and the themes identified in the analysis of the interviews.

## Demographic Information

Initial demographic information was obtained from each president. Fourteen presidents were interviewed with the youngest being 52 and the oldest 65. Three presidents ranged in age from 51 to 55, five were between 56 and 60 years of age, and six were between 61 and 65 years of age. Seven participants had served as a president less than 10 years, six had served from 10 to 14 years and one had served from 14 to 16 years. Prior to their presidencies, one participant had not served in any administrative roles in higher education, three participants had served in other administrative roles for less than 10 years, three had served between 10 and 14 years, and seven had served from 14 to more than 18 years. One president had taught and served as an interim program coordinator prior to leaving higher education for the private business world and before accepting her presidency. One president had held only an associate dean's position prior to becoming a president, while the remaining 12 had served in multiple positions as department chairs, directors, deans, assistant vice presidents, vice presidents, and provosts.

Ten of the presidents interviewed were in multicampus systems with nine of them having three or more campuses. One president was in a two-campus system and the remaining four presidents oversaw single campuses. Campuses with 5,000 to 10,000

students were led by four of the presidents. Six presidents were on campuses with student populations ranging from 2,500 to 4,999 FTE, while four were on campuses with student populations less than 1,500 FTE. Two presidents had earned masters' degrees, one had earned a doctoral degree, and 11 presidents had earned both masters' and doctoral degrees. Nine of the presidents were married and five were single or divorced. Six of the presidents had had children living at home during part of their tenure as a president. All the women interviewed were white, not of Hispanic origin.

## Themes

In-depth interviews with the presidents and analysis of their comments revealed underlying themes which resonated throughout the discussions and offered personal insight into their experiences. Those themes include *Influences to the Presidency, Determination and Perseverance, Sense of Progress and Success, and Advice for Future Women Leaders.*

## Influences to the Presidency

Although each president had had a unique and varied pathway, a common core of experiences and opportunities had influenced their continued move toward attaining a presidency. Some of the presidents I interviewed knew they were drawn to leadership roles of some sort, but none of them had begun their careers in education with the intention of eventually seeking a presidency. All moved up through a fairly traditional academic route, except one who came from the corporate business world and had experienced upward movement within a number of companies.

### Pathways

President A described her pathway to the presidency as unintentional:

Truly, I never intended, first of all, to enter the community college system and, secondly, never intended to be a president. But I have always been open to possibilities, and I think that it is that openness that has led me to where I am today.

Other presidents echoed this same sentiment. President G stated, "I never set out to be a college president; that was the least… that wasn't anything I wanted to do." And President E offered,

I would say my pathway to the presidency is unusual. I certainly did not start my career when I graduated from college with any intention, frankly, of being in a higher-education environment where I was going to be teaching or serving as an administrator—either one.

President H noted that her pathway was very "accidental." She had started teaching part time, and as opportunities were available for advancement, she was continually willing to give them a try. With each situation she was afforded increasing responsibility, which eventually led to administrative positions that launched her rise to the presidency. President C stated that, although she didn't initially intend to seek an administrative position, she had always been interested in leadership roles, even as a young girl:

I was somewhat shy all the way through school, and I didn't push myself into leadership roles as much as I should have probably; but the interest was always there. I tried to make steps that would get me interested in leadership and lead me in that direction. So when I went into my own educational process, I would always try to push myself into roles that would challenge me, that would be difficult, that would kind of be uncomfortable but at the same time I knew would help me grow.

When President F began her high-school teaching career, she hadn't given a college presidency consideration at all:

I had never thought about being a college president; but I have always been ambitious, and a person who works really hard and likes a lot of different, new things. At some point, I kind of felt wherever I was that if I could look up and

there was another level that could be more exciting, or expand my learning, or whatever, I would sort of gear towards that.

Some began their careers in unintentional ways because they were seeking employment and answered an ad in the newspaper for a nonteaching position at a community college. Some were professionals in other fields and had been approached by a community college department chair or dean asking of their interest in teaching part time at a local community college.

President B discussed the fact that she had started teaching part time one summer in criminal justice, and by fall the college president asked if she would stay on part time because the program was dying. She stated that, through her leadership, the program began to thrive again, and she essentially worked herself into a program department-chair position.

President F had started as a high-school teacher, but after being overseas, she came back to the United States, developed curriculum, and was teaching math and writing to returning Vietnam War vets at an army base. She essentially started in adult basic education serving these veterans, and she found her work valuable and rewarding. With this experience, she eventually secured a community college position in "alternative academic delivery programs," which she identified as anything that wasn't traditional curriculum. Presidents H and M started in adult and continuing education, as well.

Many of the presidents related that their familiarity with community colleges had been limited before they began working for a local community college, but once they "drank the Kool-Aid," as President G commented, they never left. For example, as President C started working in adult basic education, with a passion to see people succeed

at all levels, she ended up on a community college campus because it had gotten the bid

to house the state resource center for adult basic-education training. She went on to say,

> As I worked in my role, I began to realize that the community colleges in some ways did a lot of the things that adult basic education did. That was to provide a nurturing environment, to provide encouragement, a lot of individualized attention, a lot of support for people...; and that they really operate with the same philosophy, that regardless of who you are, you can be very successful, and we will help you on that path. So I began to realize that the community college was really a very good fit for me.

Four of the 14 presidents I interviewed seemed deliberate in their employment at

the 2-year college level. After President G had moved and realized there was no

opportunity for her to seek a chief-law-enforcement-officer position, she went to the local

community college and asked whether they needed someone to teach part time. She was

hired full time to develop curriculum and teach, and she never left the community college

setting.

President I taught one year of high school and then went back to college to

complete a master's degree in library science. She then specifically sought a librarian

position with a community college.

President J had a very traditional pathway to the presidency in that she

specifically sought a community college teaching position when she started her career.

She then moved from there into roles with increasing responsibilities.

President L taught 3 years of elementary school, went back to complete a master's

degree in adult education, and then began work for a technical college. She moved from

an administrative support position to a faculty position, but when she became frustrated

with the direction of the college administration, she moved to the private business world

and remained there until being offered a presidency.

All the presidents interviewed described their pathways to the presidency as unintentional and although most moved up through fairly traditional academic routes, many related a limited familiarity with community colleges prior to beginning work on a local campus. In addition to this, three main factors impacted the presidents' continued rise to the positions they currently held: (a) all presidents had a colleague or mentor who encouraged and either supported their initial movement into leadership roles or provided that support later in their careers; (b) many were willing to take on additional responsibilities and roles when these opportunities were available; and (c) all eventually understood their own potential and desire to lead an institution.

**Colleagues and Mentors**

Without exception, each president discussed a colleague or mentor who had encouraged her to seek an additional degree or apply for a position with increasing responsibilities and opportunities for experience, modeled professional and leadership behaviors she observed, or created a leadership opportunity for her. Three presidents specifically stated they didn't have "official" mentors, but they still talked about people who had influenced their careers in some way. For example, President H commented, "I just had good, good people that advocated for me and offered me opportunities." She went on to talk about a specific mentor who was deliberate in providing learning opportunities for her:

> I had wonderful mentors that were significant in my life, both personally and professionally. They are good people who advocated for me, they saw something in me that I never saw. I don't care what it means, they offered me that opportunity. Probably my strongest mentor was my previous chancellor. He and I are probably as different as you could even imagine. But I learned a lot from him on the business side of the spectrum, on budgets, and decision making. He was the kind of mentor that, when I knew that we had a decision to make, I would try to decide what I might do in that role. And then, when he would make a decision,

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and he would go one way or the other way, I was able sit down with him and say, "Tell me about why you did that"; and I could say, "I would have done this." So we talked about the differences. I think that was my healthiest mentor relationship.

President A believed that an effective mentor always sees something in the person they are mentoring that the person doesn't see in herself. She shared that two of her mentors actually insisted she needed to work on advanced degrees and wouldn't give her an option to say "No."

They particularly almost pressured me into working on my master's… so I completed my master's. I, then, was prepared to sit back and rest on my laurels, and they said, "Oh, no; now you are going to pursue your doctorate." So a colleague of mine from the college and I commuted 800 miles a week while we worked full time, to complete our doctorate.

President A discussed the role her parents, as well as a very beloved colleague who truly believed she could do anything she set her sights on, played as mentors. She went on to state that she believed there are professional mentors who help you acquire the technical skills you need to do your job, and then there are mentors who give you unconditional personal support no matter what the circumstances are. She also mentioned that mentors can be negative, and from those you can learn as much what *not* to do as you can learn what *to* do by observing their patterns of behavior.

President J believed one of her mentors, an academic dean, took a special interest in her because, at the time, she was the only woman department chair. Her mentor encouraged her more than once to apply for an open administrative position. President J was uncertain she wanted to uproot her family and move, but her mentor insisted she should give some thought to her future. When the particular administrative position remained open, the dean again came to her and encouraged her to apply. She finally did apply, she said, to keep her dean quiet, and then she ended up being the successful

candidate. President J also discussed a mentor who specifically told her, "I think you have the potential, and I want to see you move up." She identified him as a perfect president, in part because he specifically saw potential in women and encouraged and helped them into leadership positions. She stated,

> He was tough to work for; but as the years have gone by, I recognize what I learned there. He made life difficult, but it is because of those things that I can look back and I think I am the president I have become. I think he is really responsible for some of the ways that I behave and some of the behaviors I model.

Because of this mentor, President J stated she goes out of her way to make sure no woman goes unnoticed, and that she tries to help them in any way she can.

President M shared that one of her mentors provided opportunities for her by allowing her to shadow him nearly everywhere he went. Another president she worked with mentored her in the sense that he opened opportunities for her. She learned from him, and he supported her in leadership programs such as the Executive Leadership Institute (ELI).

Giving credit to a mentor she really didn't like, President G stated,

> She was a mentor I really didn't like at all. We didn't see eye to eye together at all, but she told me some of the flaws I had that really helped me overcome them. She turned out to be what I needed at the time because I thought I was on the fast-track, and I was wrong. She helped me see the better person I could be.

President I didn't believe she had any true mentors, but she did talk about a colleague who encouraged her to apply for a presidency. She felt he was intentional in that encouragement because he was chairing a search committee and wanted to make sure she knew she was a viable candidate. She stated that, during her career, she had always been very self-directed in that she just took it upon herself to decide where she wanted to

be, what she needed to learn and be involved in, and what she needed to do to get the

experiences required to further her career. She said, "No one paved the way."

Although she didn't believe she ever had any formal mentors, President K

discussed people who had influenced her life and career. She shared that a former

president with whom she had worked believed in her skills and encouraged her to be

involved in district-wide activities so that she would be visible and better known:

> He acknowledged my contributions to different things and was an individual that I
> could go to his office and we could just talk. He was a person that I saw make
> some mistakes as a president; so when I became a president, it was a reflection
> point about some of the things I didn't want to do.

President F felt she had never had formal mentors either, but instead believed

some of the presidents she had previously worked with had modeled integrity, calm,

respect, and caring for others, which she now emulates. From one particular individual,

she learned valuable problem-solving skills when solutions to tough decisions were

required. She spoke about his genuine care for individuals, and his desire to seek

solutions that wouldn't hurt others.

Eleven of the presidents specifically identified someone to whom they had

reported as being a significant mentor. The remaining three presidents stated they didn't

have formal mentors, yet they talked about persons who had influenced their careers and

lives in some way. Four of the presidents I interviewed mentioned both men and women

who had influenced their lives, either as formal or informal mentors, while the remaining

10 presidents had mentioned only men as having impacted and mentored them. Four

presidents specifically discussed their parents as being significant mentors, as well.

**Additional Responsibilities**

A number of the presidents indicated that their willingness to assume additional responsibilities when asked was instrumental in supporting their upward administrative movement. While working part time in the adult education area early in her career, President H was asked to work on some grants for the college. Because she willingly helped and was instrumental in the success of those grants, "One thing just led to another," she stated. That was her first introduction to academics. Whenever anyone would ask if she would consider doing something, she would take on the responsibility to complete the project. She eventually served as the Associate Dean of Academics, and when the sitting president left, she was asked to consider serving as the interim president. She accepted and less than a year later was offered the presidency.

President N was assigned a special project for the college to create a tech prep consortium while she was teaching a full-time load. Because she took on that responsibility and was successful in developing the project, she was offered a coordinator's position. This opportunity, in turn, led to a dean's position, which was the entry point of her administrative career.

President D discussed the opportunity for additional responsibilities facing her when the college's president resigned unexpectedly but under pressure from their board. She had been asked to attend a special board meeting one evening; after an executive session when she was informed the president would be leaving, she was asked whether she would serve as the interim president. On the spot, she indicated she could do that, and she served then for 5 months as the Interim President and the Vice President for Instruction. She believed that over those 5 months the board watched how she handled

both these roles efficiently and effectively, and then ultimately appointed her as the college's president.

**Presidential Potential**

At some point in their careers, every president realized a presidency was the next step and that she had the potential to achieve this goal. Some of the presidents were very determined in their decision to poise themselves to seek a presidency. President I, for example, discussed being at a point in her career when she had to make a decision about a doctoral-degree path:

> I came to a fork in the road. I'm only in my mid-30s, with another 30 years' worth of work; so I spent a long year thinking very hard about it because I knew whichever fork of the road I took, I couldn't go back. The fork in the road was "Do I want to move forward and become the Dean of Libraries, or do I want to become the president of a community college?" At that time in my life, I was pretty ambitious and kind of wanted to be in control. I wanted control and power and the excitement of making decisions and being in charge. As the president, you get to do and be involved in the whole spectrum of things.

Because she wanted to be doing something different every day, be involved in major decisions, and create change, she specifically decided she wanted to be a community college president, and then she chose a doctoral program to prepare her for that eventual position.

President B's decision was similar:

> I was kind of at a crossroads. I thought, "I really have a passion for this whole criminal justice thing, but I really like community colleges, too." So I knew I needed to make a decision. I was a single parent with two small kids and couldn't afford to quit working at the community college; so I decided this is what I needed to do. "If I do this, then that's the path; and I want to be a president." So I started the Ph.D. program. And, frankly, I never veered from that goal.

While she was serving as a continuing-education dean, President K's college made a decision to build a new campus. She was involved in all the planning of that

campus. When a search didn't immediately yield a viable candidate for the president of the new campus, President K was asked to serve as the acting president for a year to get the new campus up and going. She indicated that as she got more and more involved, she felt a certain ownership that came along with having helped start the campus from scratch. She was enjoying working with the staff and didn't want to leave the position; so she applied then for the presidency and was the successful candidate.

President C noted that, as far back as she could remember, she always believed she needed to rise to the next level:

> I have the ability, I have the interest, I have the drive, and I wanted to continue on. I don't know that initially I ever pictured myself as the president; but as I took each successful step, I always pictured myself being able to do the next level. So eventually when you get to the level where the only thing left is the presidency, you can also imagine yourself in that position.

> And that is what I did, I was the vice president, and I thought, "I can do this. I can deal with the job; I can be the president of a college. I know I can. I know I have the determination, the educational stamina, the ability to lead people, the ability to manage crisis, whatever it might be. There's not anything they can throw at me that I can't handle, along with the help of a lot of other good people, but I know I can do it." So it just seemed to me to be the next step, and I needed to challenge myself in that direction.

After President F was chosen to be part of a prestigious leadership program, she decided a presidency should be the next step. She stated, "I thought, 'Well, if I'm going to do all of this, I will set my sights on being a president.'" After indicating to her chancellor that she was interested in administration and was given the opportunity, President G said, "About seven years later it dawned on me that I might want to be a president." She attended the ELI, and then began to apply for presidencies. Along with realizing she had the skills and ability to lead an institution, she believed the next natural step was to seek a presidency:

Folks said to me, "You know, you've probably got the talent and the chutzpah to lead an institution. You should really give it a try." I was ... in the Executive Leadership Institute, where you really had to do some introspection about who you were and what you really did want to do, that I figured that out.

President J mirrored the same sentiment as President G about ELI:

I think going to the ELI when I was Vice President of Academic Affairs really firmed up for me that a presidency is what I wanted. When you go to ELI and you come back, I believe you get to know whether you want to do this crazy thing or you don't. And [at] that point in my career, I finally figured out that I had the potential.

When President E was asked to step in as the Interim President, she was certain that she'd be going back to the Executive Dean position after a permanent president was hired. She didn't have a Ph.D. at the time, so she was fairly certain she would not be considered for the presidency:

When I first became the Executive Dean, I went to one of the institutes of Harvard, to the Management in Leadership Education Workshop, which is all about change leadership. And I think it was really during that workshop that I began to realize that, should I decide at some point in the future that that was the direction I wanted to move in, ... I had developed some skill sets that would be very helpful in a presidency. Although, over the set of lifetime experiences I had, I felt like I had had a lot of good experiences that prepared me for the presidency. I was very comfortable serving as the campus Interim President here. I am a part of this community. I know the people here and believe in what goes on here. When the job position was opened, I was encouraged to apply for it and felt a tremendous amount of support from the campus; so I submitted my application and was the successful candidate.

As the presidents spoke of their careers in education and their desire to become presidents and role models for other women leaders, key phrases emerged throughout the interviews that offered insight into some of the additional feelings, perceptions, and thoughts that led them to top administrative positions:

"I'm not a quitter."

"I have the confidence and capability to lead an institution."

"I care about students."

"I have a passion for what I do."

"I'm a change agent."

'I like to make things happen."

"I like building relationships and providing opportunities."

"I want to be successful, and particularly as a woman."

"I don't want to fail."

"I know I have the determination, the educational stamina, the ability to lead people, the ability to manage crisis, the ability to make a difference."

"I am visionary."

"When you have people whose lives have been changed because of getting an education, you can feel good about that."

"I have the confidence in my ability to know that I can do it."

"I *can* be the president of a college."

Both individually and collectively, the presidents shared, with passion, the opportunities, people, and inner drive that led them to where they are today.

## Determination and Perseverance

Throughout all interviews, the presidents identified challenges they had faced and changes they had helped make. They offered insight into their campus and community cultures, and they shared feelings surrounding their leadership roles as they related to these topics. There were numerous concrete examples of their determination and drive to lead their campuses in a positive way, but there was an underlying and often intangible,

yet palatable sense of conviction that drove these women presidents to be innovators and change agents.

**Leadership Vacuum**

Many of the issues the presidents initially faced involved leadership vacuums, which created internal distrust and pockets of self-defined, self-appointed leaders. For example, President B discussed the campus culture created when the prior president was struggling with medical problems that lasted over a significant period of time. These problems resulted in his coming and going from the campus for extended time frames, which in turn required various vice presidents to serve in the senior leadership role. She stated,

> Each time one would step in as interim [president], and they would try to run the college with the senior management team. Then, after the president really did resign or retire, the college was run that way for about a year and a half, or two. I came in then, and (as one of my female trustees said at the time) took the keys to drive the bus away from the passengers, so to speak. They were very good about smiling at you like everything is cool, but underneath is that passive/aggressive, that "stab you in the back" kind of thing. You had to determine who those folks were, and how did you neutralize them, which you do in any situation. Who were those innovators, change makers, or whatever in the midst? There weren't as many as I would have liked.

President G identified that, upon her arrival, the campus had no executive leadership. She described how one president was fired, and the next one suffered some significant health issues and was eventually fired by the board, as well. The college survived with a series of interim presidents, but then, when the next president had been hired, he came the week before his starting date and turned in a resignation letter. More interim leaders followed. She offered,

> There was no executive leadership. People were pulling pieces of leadership and had a vision in different directions. It was just chaos. They had some personalities that were toxic; and when I say toxic, I mean TOXIC. So we had to get rid of

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them and wrestle the leadership back to where it belonged. I had to immediately find a team I could trust, and one that could give me good advice. Any time you have instability at the top and people at the second level that don't trust each other, the organization becomes very, very layered. The leadership vacuum was huge. There were lots of secrets being kept, and no one was speaking to one another… Not a good situation!

As the first woman president on her campus, President J faced leadership team problems, as well. One of the college's vice presidents had been serving as the interim president and decided he was leaving when she was hired. Another vice president had been a finalist for the presidency. She also had a vice president for finance and a human resources director on the executive team. President J was very unsure of the caliber and quality of the entire team. An additional vice president tendered his resignation upon her hire, indicating that he couldn't work with her. He now serves on the board. She knew her leadership team needed to be changed.

President H also served on a campus where there had been some significant leadership turnover, so she identified her toughest challenge to be helping the faculty and staff understand she was there to advocate for them, and that she was there to stay. She acknowledged, "We had had a lot of leaders in and out of our campus and had a pocket of faculty that thought they could run them off." She shared,

> There was a breakdown in trust and a breakdown in people. We had a lot of seniority in both faculty and staff, and they had seen people come and go; and [there was] just a lot of mistrust for leadership. We had quality people, quality education, quality services; but we really needed to develop a team.

A multitude of significant problems faced President I as she was hired; yet she believed that, because she was a solid problem solver and had the ability to envision things to come, she could create positive change on her campus. She had no senior administrators when she arrived. She had a couple of deans and directors but no vice

presidents, and she was facing serious sanctions from the college's accrediting body. She credits her ability to make hard decisions and a lack of fear as reasons the college is now strong. She noted,

> I had a faculty that was going around the administration, a faculty that wanted to try to run the place. I had a board that micromanaged everything coming up. I had some significant challenges impacting the stability of the institution. There had been 11 academic vice presidents in 14 years, and the same kind of turnover in the Dean of Students position and other key campus positions. There was no constancy in the leadership team or administrative team. So, of course, there was chaos at the institution because people would say, "OK; well, you've been here 6 months. Who cares…? We'll run them off." I had a demoralized faculty and staff, a demoralized board, and a community that was down on the college. And yet I was totally confident that we could pull out of it.

She believed everyone was relieved there was someone who was going to be able to set a new direction for the college, and that together they could make it happen.

Two other presidents spoke specifically of leadership styles of previous leaders that were significantly different from their own and thus created some hurdles for them to overcome. Having worked as a vice president under her college's prior president for a number of years, President C described the former leadership style as autocratic, under which people were expected to do what they were told without question. When she was named president, she knew one of her first tasks would be to develop a trust in people by giving them the opportunity, the authority, and the permission to think for themselves. The cultural shift was going to require giving people the permission to be open and share their ideas and thoughts. While she was the vice president, she also had an obligation to follow the previous president's directives because he had board authority to make decisions, and her role was to support him. Although that expectation was uncomfortable and not how she would have led the institution, she stated that she was flexible enough to be able to work under his leadership style. She offered,

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So when I was given the opportunity to be president and I wanted to make that switch, I then had to help the rest of the college understand that there is this transformation happening and you are not going to be penalized for speaking up. You are not going to end up on a black list somewhere for saying too much. It is okay to give feedback, and to talk, and to ask questions and be comfortable, and ... it is safe to do this.

She identified the largest roadblock as getting people to realize that, while she was serving as the vice president and being supportive of the former president, the things she had done were not necessarily "her," but that she had been just playing a role to support the leadership style she found herself in.

President F was faced with essentially the same situation as an outside candidate coming to a campus she had not previously served. The prior leadership was autocratic, under which faculty and staff were told what to do. She felt like the faculty and staff were not empowered and were afraid to offer ideas and opinions; so it took a significant period of time for them to trust her. The campus culture had to shift, from one in which President F's questions of "What do you think we should do?" or "What would be the best direction to proceed?" were met with silence, to one in which a developed trust level created positive interaction and a sharing of ideas.

**Faculty, Board, and Gender Issues**

Faculty, board, and, at times, gender issues created challenges for the presidents as they worked to move their campuses forward. President G stated that when she assumed her position, her faculty believed in shared governance, and that they should run the institution and that they still feel that way. She indicated they still want to have a seat on the board or at the senior management table. She had to explain her interpretation of shared governance so the faculty would understand that it was different. She reaffirmed with the faculty on a variety of occasions that

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The Board of Trustees, whose sole charge is to govern the institution and hire the president, is THE governing board, and they don't share that… not even with me. So the shared part of governance is your input into decision-making. They [the faculty] still don't like it, but they are dealing with it.

She explained that it had taken some really crucial decisions to get the attitude turned around.

President B was met with a faculty council that was transitioning to a faculty senate when she was hired. The members of the faculty senate didn't know what they were supposed to do, according to her, but had adopted the stance that they were going to run the college. President B had to stand her ground and tell them they were not in charge, and that a shared governance model might be more likely. She stated there was a certain faction of the faculty who promoted rumors of people being reprimanded or fired. She believed

There was a select group of people who didn't want to change and thought they could play their silly little games; and then there were probably a couple who thought since I was a woman that I wouldn't be here for any length of time and they could go back to the status quo. They were very subtle at the playing-games kind of thing.

Although President L had the support of her entire board, she faced an internal campus culture that was tougher than she had imagined. She inherited significant financial shortfalls and "hard-core, good 'ole boys" politics, as she described them. As a woman in a long-standing male-dominated campus culture, she was challenged regularly. She observed,

I hadn't been there a week, and I was telling people that I had never been treated so badly in my entire career. It was all internal, and it was horrible. They were making things up, and it just continued. It was shocking and really hard. I did not anticipate it at all. The faculty union was hard-core, and they were the most hateful of me. I was trying to communicate with them and finally just had to back away because they didn't want to talk.

She also went on to describe a meeting that took place about six months into her tenure, when a male faculty member stood up and began screaming at her. She got up and walked out of the room, and he continued to yell at her, telling her he wasn't done with her. No one came to her defense at the time, but she stated that, a bit later, a couple of other male faculty members called to apologize for what had happened. She believed much of the issue was gender related, yet she refused to be run off because she had board support.

President K shared an experience she had endured when she was working to create some change on her campus. She stated that rumors began to circulate that she was having an inappropriate relationship with a male colleague. The rumors were completely untrue, but they were purposeful because they had never come up prior to the project she was trying to initiate. She was unaware of the rumors until some women came to tell her what was going on. She understood the rumors were intentional and directed at the idea that she had only her sexuality, not leadership skills, to contribute as a woman.

President J faced significant challenges, as well. She accepted a job on a campus where she identified the board as political first and interested in the institution secondarily. Her campus also included a substantial number of unions, which represented all classifications of employees from groundskeepers to faculty. She knew it was a difficult situation and one that needed ultimate collaboration and participation. She expressed that

> My first year was hell and before I was here a year and a half, the faculty attempted a vote of no confidence. The faculty contract is faculty first, faculty only, and it doesn't speak enough to learning. It doesn't give credit to the fact that there is leadership in the institution that leads. It holds the institution back. I had a "five-two" board that brought me in, and the two that didn't want me continued to say that if only the internal candidate was the president, we wouldn't have this

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lady that is creating problems on campus. It was a mess. The board wanted reorganization very quickly, so the five trustees in support of me hung very tight against the two that were creating some havoc.

President J worked with the board to create the needed organizational structure. Many of the staff felt the previous president's structure was great, so she met with internal resistance toward these changes, as well as continual reminders that they wanted the previous (male) president back:

> They didn't like the structure; they didn't like the newly created deans' positions—they had never had deans before; they didn't like the fact that I was comfortable in saying the faculty didn't run the institution, that it was the leadership that leads. The vote of no confidence still has not blown over.

When the board voted to extend President J's contract, a faculty member was quoted in the newspaper stating disbelief that the board had approved another contract for her because they'd be stuck with her for 3 additional years. She also had a trusted faculty member tell her she was despised and people were just waiting for her to go. She believed strongly this sentiment was emanating from a core of tenured male faculty members who had been at the institution for a long time and who believed things should be the same as they were 30 years ago rather than change. She stated that the board did a survey after the vote of no confidence, and she was working to "fix the things" the faculty identified as being wrong with her. She believed her challenges were very definitely gender based.

Fairly early in her tenure, President A also was confronted by an angry faculty member in a meeting. She indicated that working with the faculty had been somewhat of a challenge and although they had indicated they wanted to be empowered, there was still a sense among the "old-guard faculty" that they weren't ready for change. The college had grown to five campuses, but the original campus still perceived itself as the pivotal

campus. There was competition between the sites, and yet the administration was

promoting a "one-college" concept to serve students no matter what campus they were

on. President A called a faculty meeting to try to quell the unrest and discontent. She

commented that

> One faculty member stood up and said, "You were hired to be a leader. Why
> aren't you leading us the way we hired you to lead us?" It was really an uncivil
> attack. I didn't know what to say, so I told them I was leaving the room to gain
> my composure, and that I'd be back. I guess it was probably a pivotal turning
> point because it opened the door for me to say, "I was hired to do this and this and
> this, and I am making every effort to do this; but I cannot do it without your help
> and your support." I think that meeting also caused some faculty to gain the
> courage to step forward and say, "We want it to be different. We know we have a
> responsibility to help make it be different, and so we will get on board with it."

President A didn't think any of the impediments she had faced had been gender

based. She believed that, generally, people were open to the fact she is female. She

speculated that her challenges might have arisen because many in the institution, faculty

as well as staff, were hungry for a different style of leadership.

**Additional Challenges**

For a number of campuses and presidents, the challenges they had to address

revolved around the campus' reputation. For example, President L expressed that her

campus did not have a history of success and had a very negative connotation within the

community. She realized that was only one of the issues she faced, but one that she must

address. Presidents C, G, and J faced the same dilemma. The general prevailing attitude

about their colleges was that there was a lack of academic rigor, and people were of the

opinion that if you couldn't go anywhere else, you could certainly go to the community

college because the classes were easy. These presidents were determined to change that

philosophy, and they encouraged faculty and staff to begin to change in areas where that was necessary, and to provide evidence to dispel this limited perspective.

Nearly all the presidents also spoke about the challenges of balancing their personal and professional lives, and the time commitment to each. They shared the critical need to be able to walk away from work and have some private time to relax, to maintain health and "sanity." They also focused on the lack of privacy inherent in a presidency because everything a president does and says is a reflection on the college. Many stated that the "fishbowl" nature of a president's life can create problems for presidents unprepared for that aspect of the job. In this context, President D commented that people make assumptions about you, your children, and your spouse, whether or not they truly know you. And President N talked about the importance of maintaining relationships with friends unassociated with work and the campus in order to balance the work challenges she faced on a regular basis.

Funding shortfalls, stagnate campus enrollments, outdated facilities and technology, accreditation concerns, and nonexistent strategic plans created issues, as well. A couple of campuses were seeing increasing percentages of adjunct faculty in comparison to full-time faculty, which was impacting campus cohesiveness and creating communication and consistency problems. Three of the presidents also talked specifically about challenges in trying to motivate faculty and staff toward change. They used similar examples in saying 20% will do almost anything that is asked of them; 20% won't do anything, ever; and 60% in the middle, with some time and effort, can grow and join the first 20%, and be "doers." The presidents talked about focusing their efforts on that 80% and eventually shifting their energy away from the 20% who refused to change. They

believed that future leadership for institutions came from the top 20% and middle 60% groups.

Although faced with nonexistent leadership, leadership team problems, faculty, gender challenges, and facilities issues, the presidents I interviewed continued to move forward. A few spoke frankly of facing repeated challenges, which made them step back for a moment and question whether to move on or quit. But… they didn't quit. They sought solutions through building relationships; communicating; empowering their colleagues; and, at times, being both stubborn and completely committed. President B summed up the general perspective of many of the presidents regarding their determination and perseverance when she stated,

> I guess my self-assurance saw me through. When you give so much of yourself to the point where it's really too much, it becomes hard to just walk away and not see it through. I am just bullheaded enough to say, you know… I'm not going to quit. Besides, there were probably people out there laying odds that I was just going to walk away, so I had to show them.

### Sense of Progress and Success

Progress and success for all the presidents came in both tangible and intangible ways. They measured it in part by increased community support, including financial and facilities support; enhanced campus communication; changes in faculty leadership and support; growing enrollments; successful capital campaigns; cohesive leadership teams; and collaborative contract negotiations. President B created a visual description that many other presidents could relate to when she said,

> I have been here over six years now, but it wasn't until I reached the 5-year mark that I really felt like I had made a difference. I felt like I had this visual of a big ship that I was turning around to go in the right direction. I had built my leadership team, whom I now trusted. We were able to establish some community partnerships and a more visible presence in the community. Our enrollment was growing, and the board was beginning to be on the same page.

**Financial and Facilities Support**

For five different presidents, community validation for college progress and positive changes came in the form of bond-issue support and capital campaign dollars for renovating current facilities and building new facilities. President G stated that her campus had gone from one allied health program to 12, and that it had a brand new health and science building to support the new programs. She felt as if those things were beginning to create positive "ripples in the pond." President I's campus went from needing no-fund warrants to meet salary obligations to money in the bank in just over two and a half years. Her board also was making decisions to spend $2 million raised through a capital campaign, along with $2 million borrowed, to build a new building and refinance a dorm project. And over a 4-year period of time, President B's newly formed foundation raised about $16 million for new campus building projects.

**Cohesive Culture**

President C felt that she was making progress, with the awareness of both external and internal validation. She noted,

> I guess I felt like I was on the right track when I felt like there was external validation of our changes … some external belief that things were going well, and I was hearing it from people in the community. I think once I felt like the employees had that trust, I knew internally we were making progress. I don't know just when that happened, but after the first year—maybe around the second or third year. It was a gradual process; but once they started to feel comfortable and felt like things were working, things began to gel, and we were working well together.

Three presidents specifically indentified a coalescing of their leadership teams as a benchmark for progress on their campuses. When that began to happen, they related that members of their leadership teams would offer ideas freely without fear of reprisal or

retaliation, were willing to be creative, and would take ownership for their decisions. President M talked about the open monthly meetings they now have on campus to discuss questions, comments, concerns, and rumors. She also identified the initiation of a continuous improvement accreditation process on campus as a benchmark of positive change. President H identified new processes for equipment purchasing as a measure of campus progress. She offered that usually the equipment money was gone by the end of the first semester. With the new processes, budget requests were submitted to a faculty leadership committee at a certain time of the year so the group could make a decision about the purchases. The first year was "ugly" according to President H because they were not used to working together. But the second year yielded a much more collaborative process in which there was discussion and "give and take" surrounding who had the greatest need and how groups could share purchased equipment. By the third year, the process was embedded and working smoothly. She described that one faculty member who stepped up to help lead that process told her, "I will volunteer and continue to do anything I can to help…. It's nice to be listened to." President H stated,

> As I look at our leadership today, they are coming from that middle group of 60% whose involvement you want to encourage. I look at our accomplishments together, and the relationship building, and I can say this is okay… We're going to make it. It's all the little things that indicate positive change.

Significant change in the negotiations process on President A's campus was an identifiable benchmark for positive progress. She related that, as a first-year president, she walked into a very contentious collective-bargaining process. The faculty association had developed uncomplimentary posters of the college administration and had placed them around campus. After trying to introduce a different plan to the senior management team her first year, she was told they had always negotiated the same way and would

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again that year. It took more than half a year to "heal" internally after negotiations; and after the second year of the same contentious format, President A said things would change. With outside consulting help to work with the faculty association, administration, and board, a positive mutual-gains bargaining process was initiated. She shared,

> It is such a better process. We work as a team of 12. We work together as a unit to identify solutions to issues. We wouldn't go back, but it took some work to cultivate the administrative team to be open to doing things in a different way. This change told me that we had taken some steps in building a culture in which we were all willing to work together to achieve better aims and solutions.

She also commented that very recently, a visiting accreditation team reported that they had continually heard references to the "campus family," which the team stated, "you don't find everywhere." They indicated it was a commendable campus culture and that people had expressed their comments in unsolicited ways. President H said the team members also identified other campus advances in continuous improvement that had been made, which faculty, staff, and administrators didn't always see. She felt these were other milestones that were examples of where her campus had made some very positive changes.

Three presidents specifically discussed board changes as evidence to support their perspectives that their campuses were moving forward. President E related that she felt her board really wanted to see positive change occur. She believed they were stepping into a new paradigm and that it was time for the college to change, so they didn't push back very seriously when she wanted to move the campus forward. She kept them very informed, and they rarely interfered with the decisions of the president and the administrative team. They supported the move to a more collaborative leadership style, which in turn created a more positive campus culture.

President J offered that she was very proud of her board and the changes that had been made in just over three years. By bringing in an outside consultant from ACCT, her board realized that, as the president, she was taking the college in the direction it needed to go, despite all the internal struggles. The board's own self-assessment indicated they needed to make some changes in boardsmanship and trust of the administrative team. She believed progress had been made in this context because these groups now work more collaboratively.

President A discussed the fact that her board was a "good 'ole boy" board and not very visionary when she was hired as the president. She stated,

> We have worked hard at grooming candidates to run for reelection who were not only visionary and forward thinking, but were also electable. The neatest thing about that is now the board sees it as their role to groom their successors. I tell them early and often that the current board, they are a dream-team board. They just go get it in terms of their roles and responsibilities, and they are truly a joy to work with now.

Because the campus issues were so critical when President I was hired, she believed she had spent the first 6 months of her tenure putting out fires. She identified goals for improvement immediately upon her arrival because financial, board, faculty, and accreditation problems abounded. She felt that, even in those first few months, they were able to keep moving slowly but surely forward to the point where nearly every accomplishment, whether big or small, was viewed as positive change. She and her campus had less than two years from an accreditation standpoint to uncover issues and problems, put processes in place to solve the problems, and then evaluate the situations to measure progress. In that timeframe, significant changes had been made. She offered,

> I have a board now that is very future oriented and does not worry about the details of something getting done. I think they have turned into this board which has totally turned around. I don't see them between board meetings. The board

trusts and respects the leadership team and knows that when we say, "Here's what needs to be done," ...we'll get it done. The faculty are focused on the classroom instead of worrying and focused on arguing with the administration.

We now have money in the bank, enrollment increases every year, athletic teams that are not involved in fights off campus, a manicured campus with trees trimmed and sidewalks edged, new buildings, and new programs. I think we have people who are excited. I think they are a little tired because I'm always looking for the next project.

**Presidential Leadership**

Interwoven throughout the discussions on positive progress and successes was the theme relating to the impact the presidents' leadership had had on those changes. Whether it was their ability to promote effective communication, build relationships, coalesce colleagues around a common cause, or build trust, the influence of their leadership was significant in so many ways.

President J identified her leadership style as situational and shared that it was much more collaborative than ever before in her career. She believed that her style when she was younger would have been considered hierarchical and directive; but given her campus culture with numerous unions, she had become more participative. She now uses monthly meetings with the union presidents to discuss even the simplest issues because this approach offers them some buy-in regarding decision making on campus.

Being open to the fact that they have to work through differences of opinion was something President E shared with those around her. She stated she understood that differences in opinion would arise because she felt strongly that leaders need to be surrounded by people who will challenge what they're thinking. She said she finds great value in the exercise of letting people come together to talk about what's important to them.

As soon as she was hired, President G began to listen to people. She expressed that she talked and listened to every full-time employee, one on one. Campus issues had caused people to feel disenfranchised and hurt about a number of things. The employees with long histories of employment offered glimpses of what the institution had been and what it could be with change. She believed it was important to listen carefully to everyone in order to begin to formulate a pathway for change. She felt that her leadership style was adaptable and more situational. By conveying a clear message and then following through on what she said, she was able to build a foundation of trust to create positive campus change.

President C also believed that being open and willing to listen to people, and not operating under the assumption that she had all the answers were key components to establishing her leadership style on campus. Because the prior president had not been collaborative, her first year was spent helping people on campus realize she had a different leadership perspective. She wanted to move the campus to a more open, inclusive environment. She believed the basic organizational structure didn't change much, but she allowed her administrators to make more autonomous decisions in their areas of oversight. She asked that she be kept informed. She said,

> I think what I tried to do is give people as much authority as possible, and allow them and encourage them to be very open to new ideas. I see my role as being there to oversee and to bounce ideas off of; to help problem solve; to provide financial support, facilities support, things like that, so that great things can happen at the college. I see my role as really helping, supporting, facilitating the deans and the vice presidents in making great things happen.

She was intent on allowing people to be creative, initiate new activities, form alliances with other institutions, and not worry about doing the wrong thing or thinking outside the box. She also believed leaders are created within organizations, and that part

of moving an institution forward in a positive way is through the formal mentoring and development of those leaders.

President F saw herself as a collaborative leader. Much like Presidents C and G, she believed listening and communicating with individual employees is an important piece of making connections and building relationships. She stated that she drew energy from working with groups of people and with her administrative team for planning and decision making. She believed she was probably more hands-on than many leaders because she liked to create new initiatives and change through teamwork.

Communication is at the core of everything you do, shared President L. She believed that no matter how much you communicate, it is never enough. She also believed that establishing personal relationships with college personnel and community supporters is imperative. She described her experience this way:

> I was able to get on board by creating probably more than a vision..., almost a really personal kind of dream of accomplishment, or success, or way to contribute in important ways to peoples' lives—something that resonated with key business people and key formal and informal leaders within the college.

President C believed her leadership was more participative because she likes to include everyone in discussions. She said she doesn't like to shoot from the hip, so she values input. She stated she tries to mentor and encourage other administrative decision makers to help them look at all sides of an issue. She felt there is value in talking through decisions with these individuals. Although her leadership tended to be very inclusive, she believed she could make decisions if necessary. She stated that, as a president, you have to know your own strengths and weaknesses as you build a team. She offered these thoughts:

Frankly, if I can hire someone who is better than me, I am not intimidated or threatened by that because it will make my life easier. I don't ever look at it like, "What if that person outshines me?" You know what? That would be fabulous, because we are a team; and if we shine, we all shine together.

By using a Web page on the Internet as one means of communication, President B related that she has been able to build relationships both on and off campus. She shares pictures of things involving faculty and business leaders, as well as events on campus, on this page. She said she likes building relationships and is passionate about what she does. She stated that conveying that passion as well as being a person of integrity and high ethics forges relationships and builds trust.

President H characterized herself as a communicator and facilitator. Under her leadership, she said she encourages people to do what needs to be done, but she doesn't mettle or micromanage them. She acknowledged that

I work hard to empower those around me. I'm very comfortable leading from the back and staying out of the spotlight. I'm a listener, and I can bring people together and get them to work together. I think I am fairly analytical and can look at where we're going, look at both sides, and analyze things. I've very "big picture." I can be very hands on, yet allow the people around me to do their jobs.

President H works closely with faculty leadership, keeping the lines of communication open, talking to people and supporting them, as well as making sure decisions are transparent. To facilitate change on her campus, she said campus leaders consciously talk about the critical issues. She and her administrative team work to make sure they are all going in the same direction, and they have made changes to a number of processes to get people involved. Although some of the changes have been very small, she was conscious that she wants the entire leadership team on the same page.

President A stated she is a consensus builder and someone who can create a collaborative spirit, rallying people around a common cause. When she was hired, she

began working to create a brand new campus culture that had never existed within the organization. She shared that looking back to when she was a new president, she found it surprising that someone didn't tell her to find another place to work because she was so naïve and underprepared for the presidency. Over time, she has developed the necessary confidence and skill to support positive changes. She said, "I really believe that every person in any organization has something of value to offer that organization if given the opportunity. I am all about creating opportunity for people to make positive contributions."

Although unspoken by the other presidents, the statement above is reflected in the actions of the women leaders as they listen to their colleagues, work closely to forge collaborative relationships, empower those around them, and support innovative ideas to create forward progress and change. The presidents believe in creating leaders from within their organizations, generating momentum and synergy for innovative change while keeping the ultimate goal of student success at the forefront.

### Advice for Future Women Leaders

Each president was firm in her belief that she is creating a pathway for aspiring women leaders who might follow and to that end, each was resolute in her advice. All interviewees believed that women presidents can serve as incredible role models for students, whose percentage of women is more that 60%.

### Integrity and Ethics

Nearly every President I interviewed identified the importance of modeling integrity, honesty, and ethical behavior. For example, President C stated,

> Integrity and ethics are *incredibly important* in the role of the president. As soon as you do something that is even approaching unethical, or hinting at it, your

credibility is damaged. You don't ever want to be in a position where people could question your integrity. Because once you do that, then they are never quite sure about you. They are never quite sure you are going to do the right thing, or if you are going to sell them out, or you are going to turn on them. Because if that is not there, then they don't trust you and they don't sense you are a good person. They don't sense that you are going to always act in the best interest of the college or in their best interest. They just begin to question everything. People have to be very comfortable, very confident that your ethics are beyond reproach and that your integrity is beyond reproach. If they've got that much, they will work with you a little closer.

President I commented, "You have to be honest; you have to have personal and professional integrity"; while President J added, " We can't do things that are in the public eye that make us look anything but absolutely perfect." And when offering her insight on the importance of honest and ethical behavior, President D observed, "I've come to realize that we don't get breaks with anything."

While discussing professional and ethical actions, many presidents affirmed the belief that as a president, they are always in a fishbowl and very visible. President G shared, "No matter where you go, no matter what you do, someone knows you, and someone is watching what you do; so you just have to be super, super careful about that." President L added, "Because you are the face of the college and *always* the face of the college, everything you do reflects back on the college."

**Self-Confidence**

Aspiring women leaders have to believe in themselves regardless of the external pressures and constraints. They need to have self-confidence and believe they have the capability to be a community college president. In this context, President A noted,

> Women have to believe in themselves regardless of external pressures and constraints. My observation is, and I don't mean to be stereotyping, I see a tendency in male presidents to be more self-confident than I do a female president … when female presidents have many of the innate leadership skills that we've never been more in need of today.

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Similarly, President C offered,

> You have to really believe you can do it because if you believe and understand that and you set it as a goal, then you can begin to chart a path for how to get there from here. We still have too many women who don't recognize their own potential at all levels. You have to deal with yourself. You have to know you have that potential. You can't rely on someone else convincing you that you have that potential.

"You need to have some confidence that you are going to be able to rise to the challenges that are presented to you," was the advice from President N. President I went a step further when she stated,

> You have to be able to have the confidence to make hard decisions and make decisions that maybe no one else agrees with … but that you know deep in your heart that decision is the best one for the institution; not really the best one for you, but for the institution.

President A added to this thought when she stated, "Don't hesitate to make a decision that is in the best interest of the institution but worst for the individual, because the needs of many have to outweigh the needs of the few." She believed men were far less hesitant to make those tough decisions and choices than women because it was harder for women to distance themselves emotionally.

**The Right Fit**

A number of the presidents discussed their belief that finding a presidency and being successful in that presidency was about "finding the right fit." They advised aspiring women leaders to research institutions of interest very carefully. Candidates for leadership positions should read local newspapers, talk to community members, seek information about the board members and how they function as a board, study any college information available, and review accreditation self-studies and strategic plans because every institution will be putting its best foot forward during an interview process.

President I discussed her belief that, during the interview, a candidate has to be able to figure out whether the institution is the right fit because, at the same time, the campus will be trying to determine whether the candidate is the right fit for its culture. She stated,

> Analyzing the position to decide if it is the right fit or not comes with experience. So anything you can do to help yourself be able to figure that out, even without the experience, is important. I suggest you really think it through carefully.

President E specifically believed that, as a new president, you have to spend time learning about the people, the campus, and the culture after you're hired, to be certain you're in the right place. President K said, "You have to be willing to move on if it is not the right fit." President M laughed and said she took her first presidency because it was offered to her, but she would never do that again. Experience had taught her that, if it wasn't the right fit, it would be draining both personally and professionally. She believed strongly that if it is not a good match, and is not a place where you are having fun and enjoying your job, you need to move on. Part of determining the right fit, President B felt, was self-assessment. She observed,

> You have to give yourself an honest evaluation of who you are—not just your strengths and your weaknesses, but who you are as a person. What is your passion? What is your goal? What is the purpose you and God have for your life? Because if you don't know yourself well enough, then you are not going to be able to match to a place that needs you. Just research anything that you can about whatever institution that you are looking at to see if you can find any of those hidden things, because they are there; they're always there.

President D shared the following perspective:

> Look for the right fit for the right institution at the right time for you. You have to know your skill set, and researching that institution can be really difficult as far as people putting on their best front or whatever. You really need to understand if this is going to be a good place to be, and "Am I going to be the right person for that institution?"

> ...very skilled, wonderful people lose these jobs every day. I really do believe that things can be going really well, then all of a sudden there is change on the board,

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or something happens, or whatever. And then something that was wonderful no longer is. So I really do encourage people to look for the right place for them… because it just isn't everywhere.

Two of the presidents added insight into the role the board plays when one is considering whether or not the institution is the "right fit." President D noted:

I would also research the board very well before you take a job. For anyone seeking a presidency, knowing [that] a board can change with any given election, you really want to look at that and see: To what degree do they speak as one voice? Where are they making multiple contacts within the institution? And who are they contacting?

President G added that "the board that brings you results is always your best dance partner, because they brought you [in] and have a key investment in the fact that you're successful. This adds [to] making your choice the right fit."

## "Feminist" Approach

Five of the presidents discussed campus and community cultures during their careers, which had created some challenges for them as women. So they offered advice with those experiences in mind. President B spoke very frankly in saying, "Don't use being a woman to your advantage … don't apologize for it, but don't use it as some kind of badge." President J cautioned new women leaders not to get caught up in the "feminist stuff." In her career, she had seen a number of women who had stepped into presidencies with that kind of approach, and they were unsuccessful. President B also stated that she had seen women fail in leadership positions because they had come barreling in with an "I Am Woman" attitude. She believed that, as a woman president, you had to build allies, and that wasn't the way to do it. Two of the presidents specifically stated that women should utilize their innate strengths of relationship building, caring, and compassion, and

never apologize for them. "Just don't use being a woman to your advantage … that's who you are, but you don't have to compromise your womanhood," said President H.

Even though more women are moving into leadership roles in higher education, the presidents offered their belief that women still have to work harder to prove themselves than do men. President B believed women feel a greater obligation to be everything to everybody in order to be perceived as successful. She felt women must be prepared for both internal and external challenges, and be able to lead an institution forward with defined maturity and confidence. She stated,

> I think those of us that reach these positions have a huge responsibility. Now a man can be unsuccessful and "Well, it was a bad fit," whatever it was. But when a woman is unsuccessful, it is like, "Oh, well, she is a woman." I take that personally. I don't want to fail. I want to be successful, particularly as a woman, because I don't want those women that are coming up to have that stigma.

**Change Agents**

Many of those interviewed indicated women presidents are more closely scrutinized and don't have as much leeway to make mistakes as do men. Without exception every president offered the idea that women were the next change agents for higher education. They believed that women bring innate leadership skills, which today's institutions have never needed more. Many offered that women leaders bring a unique perspective to decisions and discussions, with some truly believing that uniqueness relates to having learned from mothers and from being mothers. Women have a sense of relationship building which is a key to moving institutions forward. Some believed women leaders are innately more patient, reassuring, and encouraging. President A expressed,

> I think about the women leaders I know today, and of course I am a change agent. I think we can serve as incredible role models for our students. I also think that

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we bring a dimension to discussions that are uniquely gender based. I think women have a wonderful balance of thinking with their heads as well as their hearts; and again I don't mean to stereotype, but I think male leaders don't always see the human element to the extent women do.

President H believed change in higher education is not necessarily gender based. She believed that, whether leaders are male or female, they are at community colleges because they want to make a difference in students' lives, want to bring about change, and want to make sure there is a positive impact. She added,

> I don't think it is probably a gender thing, but a generational thing. I think that each generation of leadership that we have at the community college system especially is driven by the surrounding environment and different things, and the leadership style adjusts to that and tries to change with that. I look around and see a lot of male leaders right now that have very, very similar characteristics and tendencies that I do; and I think it is the environment and culture we've grown up in. I think that the change we need to do is to make sure that the system, processes, and people are cognizant of the world, and that we need to learn to adapt to change and teach our students to be prepared for a life of change.

In talking about women leaders in higher education and the value they bring to those positions, President A discussed her doctoral research. She had come across a reference to community colleges as the "Ellis Island of higher education" because community colleges take all students and offer them opportunities. She had never forgotten that reference because she felt it is a wonderful description of what community colleges do. President A believed women are ideally suited to be the leaders of this "Ellis Island of higher education."

## Summary

Although difficult to discern through a transcribed interview on paper, the value gained in my being able to interview these presidents face-to-face included a personal opportunity to see their facial expressions, hear the intonation in their voices, read their body language, and realize, at a very personal level, their motivation to ensure student

success and create change. Common themes were evident within each individual's experiences and then were magnified when viewed collectively.

The presidents all conveyed a passion about women in leadership roles in community colleges today. As the presidents discussed the changes in their careers that led to their current leadership roles, common factors arose that impacted their lives. Combinations of significant mentors, new opportunities, self-actualization, and personal realization of desire and capability all influenced their pathways to presidencies. Challenges they faced in multitudes of ways often served to make the presidents more determined. Their lengths of tenure as presidents were not indicative of the variety and multitude of issues they had worked to resolve. Although the presidents' situations and experiences were unique, their determination and perseverance to overcome campus and community obstacles was a common thread throughout the conversations.

All of the presidents easily identified benchmarks for progress and success, and these benchmarks provided the momentum the presidents needed to continue to see value in their work. They discussed the importance of finding and encouraging leaders within their organizations to create empowered teams working toward change. As women, their innate characteristics of communication, relationship building, and caring served to enhance these opportunities. Each woman's experiences had provided insights and lessons learned that she shared openly, with honesty and clarity. As current women leaders, the presidents' advice for future women leaders came from their hearts. They viewed themselves as "trailblazers," role models, and mentors for the next and newest women presidents.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Shults (2001) and Weisman and Vaughan (2007) have indicated that 84% of current community college presidents are expected to retire by 2016. Stephenson (2001) has commented that significant turnover in senior-level administrators will be seen, as well. Despite having made significant gains in the past 20 years, Gresham (2009) has noted that women are still underrepresented in leadership positions in higher education. While the percentage of women community college presidents, according to Weisman and Vaughn (2007), increased from 11% in 1991 to 29% in 2006, the growth of women in leadership positions between 2001 and 2006 slowed and leveled off (Weisman and Vaughn, 2007). Sullivan (2004) has stated,

> As the 21st century begins, both the external circumstances confronting … organizations and the expectations of people inside those organizations are undergoing radical and unremitting change, with the consequent need … for a renewal of leadership. Community colleges are no exception (p. 35).

The success of encouraging and preparing the next generation of community college leaders will be dependent upon a number of their personal traits some of which include desire to lead, confidence, mentorship, leadership development, and ability to communicate and collaborate. The purpose of this phenomenological study has been to better understand the experiences of women community college presidents in the Midwest as they manage day-to-day challenges, utilize innate strengths they have brought to their positions, and communicate and lead in positive and innovative ways to create

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change in higher education. As the transition continues for the next, new generation of community college leaders, they will be able to draw upon the experiences of women in prior leadership roles as well as women who are currently serving. This study and its findings will add to that body of knowledge and experience, hopefully providing inspiration, insight, determination, and a framework for those aspiring to new leadership responsibilities. The overarching question that guided this study is, "What meaning do women community college presidents ascribe to their work and experience in leading their campuses?"

Chapter 4 includes compiled demographic information that the 14 participants of this study offered. It also identifies four emergent themes that resulted from the in-depth, face-to-face interviews with the presidents. I used the narrative and quotes from the presidents to support the themes of *Influences to the Presidency*, *Determination and Perseverance*, *Sense of Progress and Success*, and *Advice for Future Women Leaders*.

Chapter 5 addresses the interpretation of themes, how those themes are linked to the research questions, and how the literature and study findings correlate. This chapter also includes a discussion of the findings as they relate to future community college leadership, study limitations, and recommendations for future research.

## Research Questions Findings

Both individually and collectively, discussions with the presidents about their attitudes and feelings, their insights, challenges they have faced, changes they created, gender issues, mentors, and leadership styles contributed to the coalescing of four significant themes, along with a number of subthemes. The significant themes are *Influences to the Presidency,* with subthemes of pathways, colleagues and mentors,

additional responsibilities, and presidential potential; *Determination and Perseverance,* with subthemes of leadership vacuum, gender issues, and additional challenges; *Sense of Progress and Success,* with subthemes of financial and facilities support, cohesive culture, and presidential leadership; and *Advice for Future Women Leaders,* with subthemes of integrity and ethics, self-confidence, the right fit, "feminist" approach, and change agents. As these themes and subthemes emerged, the lived experiences of the study participants offered a truer understanding of the overarching research question: "What meaning do women community college presidents ascribe to their work and experiences in leading their campuses?"

**Influences to the Presidency**

Most of the presidents gained their administrative experience prior to their presidencies through a fairly common academic route. In their study on community college presidencies, Weisman and Vaughan (2007) identified that "in 2006, 55% of the respondents were in academic positions prior to assuming their first presidency." Of the 14 presidents I interviewed, all had served in an academic area prior to their first presidency, which supports that study. All presidents had taught at some point in their early careers. Some moved up administratively as deans, directors, assistant and associate vice presidents, vice presidents, and then presidents, while others had skipped some positions but still remained within a traditional academic framework.

**Pathways.** None of the presidents I interviewed began their careers with the intention that they would become administrators or seek a presidency which supports a study by Eddy (2008). Some described their pathways as "unintentional" and "accidental." Others knew they were drawn to positions of leadership but didn't realize a

presidency was in their future. Many admitted that their familiarity with community colleges had been limited before they began work for a local community college; but once on staff and with a growing awareness of their potential value and impact on students' lives, they didn't leave the community college setting. Only one president left academia for the private business world for a period of time before she became a president.

During the interviews, I asked each president if she could specifically remember when she knew she wanted to be a president. They all recounted both tangible experiences and "gut feelings" regarding their decisions to seek a presidency. Although some presidents are coming to their positions with experience in areas other than academia, the traditional route for study participants still seems to be with an entry point as a faculty member, and continued success in academic areas with increasing administrative responsibilities. Recent research (Stubbe, 2008; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007) has supported this as well. The combined influences of impacting students' lives through learning, making a difference in colleagues' lives, and being able to effect campus culture change seemed to provide the impetus for the women in this study to remain in the community college setting and to eventually seek a presidency.

**Colleagues and mentors.** All presidents discussed at least one person who had had some influence on their careers, either by encouraging them to seek additional education, creating new learning experiences for them, helping them to participate in leadership-development opportunities, or supporting their application for leadership positions with increasing responsibility. A number of the presidents indicated that their mentors had seen potential in them that they had not seen in themselves. A few presidents

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spoke specifically of "negative" mentors whom they learned from, but whose leadership and communication styles they chose not to emulate. Studies by Anyaso (2010), Eddy (2008), McNair, Duree, and Ebbers (2011), Stubbe (2008), Sullivan (2004), and Wallin, 2006 all point to the significance and impact that mentoring has on individuals as they develop professionally. The presidents in this study gave clear examples of the importance of mentoring in their own careers.

**Additional responsibilities.** Often, taking on additional responsibilities, successfully completing new tasks along with their regular jobs, and being willing to support campus projects and leadership initiatives were key components for the presidents in being named to positions of greater responsibility. The presidents' willingness to work hard and be open to new opportunities and possibilities were instrumental in their upward mobility. The knowledge these study participants gained with each additional opportunity they assumed provided a broader foundation of experience as they became presidents.

**Presidential potential.** All the participants eventually understood that a presidency should be their next career move, and they were prepared to take that step. In some cases, working toward and attaining their doctoral degree was the culminating factor before they sought a presidency. McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebbers (as cited in Sullivan, 2004, p. 37) have noted that one identifying factor of a successful community college president is completion of a Ph.D. or Ed.D. degree. The women interviewed for this study understood the need for that terminal degree. All but two of the presidents I interviewed had attained doctoral degrees.

Four of the presidents spoke specifically of the impact a leadership institute had had on their desire to seek a presidency. They confirmed that those opportunities for leadership development provided a realization that they were capable of serving as a president and had the desire to do so.

The study findings surrounding the theme of *Influences to the Presidency* support the personal impact that community college exposure and experience, teaching opportunities, mentoring, and internal and external leadership-development opportunities had on the participants' pathways to their presidencies. Numerous studies (Eddy, 2008; Eddy & Lester, 2008; McFarlin, Crittenden, & Ebbers, 1999; McNair, 2010; McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011) are aligned with the participants' thoughts and experiences surrounding their leadership development, mentoring, degree attainment, and broad-based experiences.

**Determination and Perseverance**

Every president identified multiple challenges she had faced. Whether those challenges were internal from faculty, administrators, board members, or staff, or externally from community members or businesses, these presidents met the tests with a determination to continue to move forward. Budget shortfalls, out-of-date facilities in need of repair, campus climates in turmoil, and gender-related issues were evident, as well. During the interviews, every president conveyed through body language, voice intonation, and personal stories a commitment to her campus and the fortitude to create positive change despite the roadblocks she faced.

**Leadership vacuum.** A number of studies (AACC, 2006; Criswell & Martin, 2007; Fulton-Calkins & Millings, 2005; Wallin, 2006; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007) have

identified the need to develop and retain future leaders to address leadership challenges and succession planning. Often, the presidents in this study faced nonexistent senior leadership, unprepared or unqualified leadership team members, or ones who could not be trusted. In these cases, their immediate priorities were to stabilize the college leadership by identifying qualified personnel who were willing to communicate, to work together toward common goals, and to solidify positive leadership attitudes. Many presidents faced internal campus cultures distinguished by mistrust because prior leadership styles were autocratic and unethical. These issues did not deter the presidents' desire to coalesce the campus around leaders, and at times even around new leaders, with integrity and the capability to help implement innovative changes.

Although each campus culture is unique, a college commitment to internal leadership development and empowerment might have lessened some of the challenges the presidents faced. An expectation of integrity and ethical behavior embedded internally within the college and its leadership culture would provide stability for a period of time, as well, in the absence of senior leadership.

**Gender issues.** As some presidents conveyed, challenges they faced at times were gender related. Some of the objections were leveled because college constituents believed that some of the working styles and personalities of the women presidents that differed from men made the women ineffectual presidents. Examples were given of campus faculty wanting to be involved in the college governance and decision-making processes and presidents facing heated encounters when explaining their philosophies on "shared governance." Presidents experienced confrontations from angry faculty regarding their leadership abilities and styles as well as votes of no confidence and unfounded rumors of

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inappropriate relationships. Some presidents believed the problems were vestiges of a campus culture that was not ready to change while on others, the gender issues were driven by a small group of male, tenured faculty who were very vocal. In these cases, the challenges often were linked to differences in leadership style when the women presidents' leadership styles were compared to those of former male colleagues.

While most presidents faced gender-related issues, a few felt they had not faced those challenges. The sentiment on those campuses seemed to be that they were ready for new ideas and new leadership, and thus were accepting of a woman president.

In this snapshot study of women community college leaders in the Midwest, 11 of the 14 participants shared that they had faced gender-related issues. Studies continue to focus on barriers for women leaders, including gender differences and gender stereotypes as they relate to leadership (Bielby & Bielby, 1988; Bowles & McGinn, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2004, 2007; Eddy, 2007; Gregg, 2004; Gresham, 2009; Rudman & Glick, 2001).

**Additional challenges.** Additionally, presidents in this study faced poor campus reputations, negative connotations in the community, or a perceived lack of academic rigor. They prioritized these problems, along with other campus issues, and faced them with diligence. Every president spoke of the challenges of balancing the time commitments to both her personal and professional life. All identified the importance of having personal and family time away from work to maintain physical and emotional health. Many commented on the "fishbowl" nature of their jobs and the perspective that women aspiring to a presidency have to know they will be making personal sacrifices while they are serving as presidents. The presidents also discussed the difficulty of engaging faculty and staff in initiatives for change. A few presidents discussed the model

wherein 20% of the faculty and staff will do anything they are asked, 20% will never participate or support anything, and the remaining 60% in the middle are the ones who need encouragement and focused attention because internal leaderships often come from the middle group.

The study findings surrounding the theme of *Determination and Perseverance* point to the presidents' personal skills and strengths, resilience, core beliefs, and determination to make a difference even when faced with significant challenges. Examples they shared provide evidence that today's community college presidents need knowledge and experience in an expansive array of areas, along with sheer determination at times to move forward and not give up. Christman and McClellan (2008) believe resilience allows a leader to realize successful outcomes using a skill set to navigate multifaceted challenges. They feel that resilience is developed through a determination to succeed, supportive relationships, and having an optimistic outlook. The presidents' experiences offer support to studies identifying the importance of leadership development and leading with personal integrity (McFarlin, Crittenden, & Ebbers, 1999; McNair, 2010). The majority of presidents faced gender-related issues. The discussion of their experiences supports the prior research studies indicating challenges faced because of personal and institutional hindrances, sexual discrimination, and systematic bias impede women as they aspire to leadership roles (Buddemeier, 1998; Ligeikis, 2010; Stout-Stewart, 2005; Trigg, 2006). This study has also identified challenges for women presidents associated with facilities, community, and academic rigors. Apparent in the responses of these women presidents is their need to be prepared based on the AACC leadership competencies of "organizational strategy, resource management,

communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism" as discussed by McNair, Duree, and Ebbers (2010, p. 4).

**Sense of Progress and Success**

Progress toward positive change was identifiable in both tangible and intangible ways in the women presidents' comments and responses to the research questions. As they discussed priorities and benchmarks of progress, they measured some of these advances by physical progress and concrete evidence, while they intuited others.

**Financial and facilities support.** Progress was obvious when new buildings were being constructed, capital campaign dollars were being raised, and college fund balances had gone from being "in-the-red" to "in-the-black." One president offered an example of progress when she commented about the growth on her campus in the number of allied health programs, along with a new building to support them. Internally and externally, college constituents identify measurable progress and develop trust when they believe revenues are being well spent. Growth in the number of programs generates positive enrollment trends, which in turn produce additional operating capital and increased stability.

**Cohesive culture.** Cohesive campus cultures where people were working together were also measures of progress for these presidents. When they began to hear positive comments from external, community sources, they felt a validation of progress and change. When leadership teams began to work together and communicate, offer ideas, and take ownership for decisions, and as communication increased on campus with faculty and staff openly seeking information, the presidents measured these events as positive change. As faculty and staff began to "step up" to assist with campus projects

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and presidential initiatives, the campus culture was evolving. For some colleges, forward movement was evident to their presidents when mutual-gains bargaining processes replaced traditional, often caustic, negotiating formats that, upon completion, had required 6 months of internal "healing."

A few presidents discussed specific changes in board perspectives and actions as indicators that the campus was moving forward. They discussed the impact of collaborative leadership, which moved their boards from "micromanaging" to having a more trusting attitude toward administrative decisions. Trombley (2007) has discussed the importance of a board's support of a president and the positive institutional impact a cohesive relationship can create. They also measured progress as accreditation teams validated a variety of positive changes on campuses.

**Presidential leadership.** Leadership style was a key factor in the presidents' ability to create positive and innovative campus changes. The presidents empowered and encouraged autonomy in decision-making, supported creative and innovative ideas, opened communication lines, and worked alongside their colleagues as opposed to directing and dictating their actions. On many campuses, their transformational and situational leadership styles replaced autocratic and hierarchical perspectives. These presidents supported internal leadership development and promoted teamwork college-wide. All believed communication was at the core of all positive change. The presidents believed that transparency and consensus-building created internal changes to campus cultures. The presidents listened to their colleagues, worked closely to form cohesive teams, and empowered and encouraged constituents to develop new and innovative

initiatives. Development of internal leaders was critical to their ability to create and sustain progress in support of student success.

The study findings surrounding the theme of *Sense of Progress and Success* support the fact that tangible changes can impact internal and external culture. Because these elements go hand in hand, effective leaders can create a synergy of progress and change. These changes are integral to leadership style. Research studies (Coughlin, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eddy, 2003; Eisler, 2005; Evans, 2001; Gresham, 2009; Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999; Williamson & Hudson, 200l) have shown that women use relationship building and organizational skills to form collaborative partnerships, which open communication supports to initiate change.

## Advice for Future Women Leaders

The women I interviewed for this study all believed they were role models for the next, new generation of women community college presidents. They were adamant that they had to do their jobs with the utmost integrity, and with strength and conviction because there was no room for failure. They felt women in leadership roles are judged by stricter standards than are men, and that failures on their part would create complications for the women who follow them as presidents.

**Integrity and ethics.** Nearly all presidents discussed the importance of modeling integrity, honesty, and ethical behavior. They believed there was no room for question if women aspiring to leadership positions were to be considered for those roles. Many of the presidents shared insight that their roles were always public no matter where they were or what they were doing; they were always representing the college and constituents were watching. All presidential actions were a reflection on the college which supports

the previous work by Boggs (2008), McNair (2010), and Trombley (2007). As the American Association of Community Colleges' (AACC's) *Competencies for Community College Leaders* notes, professionalism is based in part on integrity, honesty, and setting ethically high standards (AACC, 2005).

**Self-confidence**. Regardless of internal and external pressures, women leaders must believe in themselves. A number of the presidents I interviewed echoed this view. They believed it was critical for women presidents to make hard decisions, ones that were best for the institution and students, but maybe ones with which not everyone else agreed. One president offered that men were far less hesitant than women to make tough decisions; so in essence she challenged women to distance themselves emotionally and be prepared to make hard decisions.

**The right fit.** Finding a presidency that is the right fit for both the presidential candidate and the college can be challenging. The presidents encouraged aspiring women leaders to research institutions very carefully to identify board/administration relationships, community perspective, accreditation initiatives and challenges, faculty and staff involvement, and both internal and external campus culture. The presidents believed the ability to create positive change was dependent upon synergy with both the board and internal campus community. They also were strong believers that a potential presidential candidate should do a very personal and honest evaluation of her own strengths and weaknesses to determine the "right fit." Their perspectives closely align with studies done on leadership transition and finding and supporting effective leadership (Denton & Moore, 2009; Eddy, 2010; McFarlin, Crittenden, & Ebbers, 1999; Trombley, 2007).

**"Feminist" approach.** Because campus cultures had created some challenges for them, five of the presidents offered advice to aspiring women leaders. They believed a female leader should not apologize for being a woman, but also should not use a "feminist" attitude to create an advantage. Some had seen other women in leadership positions fail because they had adopted a more obvious feminist approach, which they tried unsuccessfully to use. The presidents believed women should not be afraid to be caring and compassionate, or focused on relationship building because those are innate strengths of women, which can be the foundation of positive leadership and campus changes. Evans (2001) has commented that women are not bound by tradition; and because women have been socialized differently than men, numerous researchers (Coughlin, 2005; Eddy, 2003; Eisler, 2005; Evans, 2001; Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999; Williamson & Hudson, 2001) have stated that women use relationship-building, managerial, and organizational skills to promote communication and collaboration, which break down hierarchical barriers to change. The presidents also spoke about the need for aspiring leaders to have a strength of conviction and determination in their positions because women still have to work hard to prove themselves. Their comments echo a similar finding in a study by Aurora and Caliper (2005) that has noted that women must be more persistent and focused to go beyond the status quo.

**Change agents.** The participants saw themselves as not only change agents on their campuses, but also in their communities and statewide. Some believed women's innate strengths to build relationships come from being mothers themselves, and from learning from their own mothers. One president commented that change in higher education today is not necessarily gender based, but is, instead, related to generational

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and societal changes that have occurred. She believed there are men currently in leadership positions or aspiring to positions who exhibit similar abilities to collaborate, communicate, and build relationships. She thought these are changes that have been occurring over time because leadership expectations, student needs, and community college challenges have changed. Without delineating gender, Malm (2008) has stated that effective leaders facilitate organizational change and innovation. Various studies (Amey, 2006; A.W. Astin & Astin, 2000; Bass & Avolio, 1993, 1994; Birnbaum, 1999; Burns, 1978; Clancy & Weber, 1995; Gregg, 2004; Hockaday & Puyear, 2000; Ligeikis, 2010) have identified that leaders who empower those around them, encourage respect for diversity, develop trust through modeling ethical behaviors, form collaborative relationships, support open communication, articulate a clear vision, and reward accomplishments foster organizational change.

The study findings surrounding the theme of *Advice for Future Women Leaders* are firmly rooted in core beliefs and philosophies that guide these women presidents' daily actions. They were adamant that integrity and ethics must form the foundation for all decision making and communication in order to build trust. The presidents offered candid insights into women in leadership roles based on their personal experiences and shared advice as change agents for higher education. Women are at the crossroads of changes occurring in higher education today (Stephenson, 2001). Because they will have increasing opportunities to seek community college presidencies in the next 5 to 10 years, they will help to redefine leadership perspectives and be change agents for higher education (DiCroce, 1995; Eddy, 2007; Eddy & Lester, 2008; Evans, 2001; Giannini, 2001; Sullivan, 2004; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). Gresham (2009) has stated that early

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women leaders in higher education "cut a path through their environment that demonstrates the importance of not allowing others to define our identity, our roles, or our worth" (p. 3). The women community college presidents in this study envisioned themselves as "trailblazers." Because they also believed in the importance of sharing their stories and experiences, they were willing to be candid in their interviews.

## Linking Themes to Additional Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study (question 1) asked what meaning women community college presidents ascribed to their work and experiences in leading their campuses. Four additional questions helped frame the discussions with the study participants and generated responses about their lived experiences.

### Question 2

The second question explored statements that described the experiences of the presidents as they worked to create positive change on their campuses. Supporting this question, the presidents identified their relationship with colleagues and mentors in the first theme of *Influences to the Presidency*. Much of the discussion surrounded the importance of these professional relationships and friendships as their careers progressed; but many of the presidents offered insight, as well, into the importance of those continued relationships after they became presidents. They commented about the importance of being able to use these associations as resources if problems arose or if they needed support and advice. The presidents' comments validate studies by researchers (Boggs, 2003; Wallin, 2006) that have pointed to the importance of mentoring in career development, empowering women to seek leadership positions, and offering realistic views of challenges and opportunities that would be faced.

In the second theme of *Determination and Perseverance,* as the presidents were able to form positive and cohesive leadership teams, they began to see changes in team members in terms of college planning, commitment to new initiatives, and increasing levels of developed trust. Although most of the presidents faced gender-related issues, they were able to identify some positive internal changes in many cases as faculty, staff, and administration began to develop confidence and trust in the new leadership styles and expectations. Resolution of the gender issues has been slow in some circumstances; but the presidents believed that, if they communicated, made well-founded decisions, modeled integrity, and continued to build relationships, concerns would lessen. This approach to internal leadership based on collegial communication and consensus building is supported by Aurora and Caliper (2005).

The third theme of *Sense of Progress and Success* and the examples offered speak directly to these women's experiences as they worked to effect positive change on their campuses. The presidents saw measured progress with financial stability, fund raising, facilities improvements, new building projects, and increased enrollments. They witnessed positive changes in campus culture, enhanced communication, additional participation by faculty and staff in new initiatives, and better understanding by board members of their roles and responsibilities. Valdata, Mendoza, and Lum (2008) have shared candid comments on leadership skills from women presidents and the need for a leader to build trust and create an inspired vision which can be shared with the college culture in order to embed a positive attitude towards change.

As the fourth theme of *Advice to Future Women Leaders* emerged, comments the presidents offered that described their experiences as they worked to create positive

change addressed the importance of integrity as a foundation to build a culture of trust and both internal and external support. Because the presidents were constantly in the public eye, they believed that they were the face of the college; thus, everything they did reflected on the college, both positively and negatively as validated by a number of studies (Boggs, 2008; McFarlin, Crittenden, & Ebbers, 1999; McNair, 2010; Trombley, 2007). College constituents have to be able to believe and trust the president in order to support campus planning and projects. For positive change to be realized, the president must be the right fit for the organization, and vice versa. The presidents believed these aspects must dovetail to create the momentum and energy needed for innovative change. Along with having the right fit, the presidents believed they must also be change agents and risk takers. These attitudes reflect studies by Aurora and Caliper (2005) and Malm (2008) which have shown women leaders generate innovative solutions, are willing to take risks, and have a drive to accomplish tasks. The participants in this study believed women presidents feel a true sense of obligation to work hard, more forward with confidence, and prove to others they can be successful. Sullivan (2004) has stated that "Today, community colleges are experiencing another changing of the guard" (p. 35). The study participants understand the challenges that face community colleges today which include changing student demographics, internal demands for shared governance and decision-making, increasing accountability for assessment of student learning, changes in technology that impact curriculum and instruction, dwindling resources, and increasing expectations of workforce development and industry credentialing as obstacles to degree completion (Criswell & Martin, 2007; Malm, 2008; Sullivan, 2004). These women presidents are acting as catalysts on their campuses to meet those new challenges.

**Question 3**

The third research question specifically addressed indentifying the underlying themes and contexts that accounted for the participants' experiences of being a woman community college president. Four themes and a number of subthemes emerged as the participants' interviews were coded and analyzed. As the theme *Influences to the Presidency* began to develop, without exception, the presidents described the pathways to their leadership positions as unintentional. Eddy (2008) has identified through interviews with women community college presidents this same lack of intentionality. She also has noted the women often held a variety of positions that provided a broad base of experiences and knowledge. Eddy (2010) has stated many presidents could relate to specific incidences that offered them the realization they could seek a presidency, or that they sought the position because they had the encouragement of a mentor or colleague. The presidents that I interviewed for this study echoed the same sentiments. Their pathways to presidencies were unintentional; and often a combination of mentors' encouragement, their participation in senior leadership development opportunities, self-actualization, and confidence in their acquired experience and knowledge base led them to an awareness that they could be a successful president. The presidents were candid and passionate about the opportunities, people, and personal determination that led them to presidencies.

Throughout the theme of *Determination and Perseverance*, the presidents discussed challenges they had faced related to their leadership teams. A number of studies (Eddy, 2008; Eddy & Lester, 2008; McFarlin, Crittenden, & Ebbers, 1999; McNair 2010; McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011) have identified that leadership gaps can

be addressed through formal leadership development programs. Other challenges surrounded differences in leadership attitudes and styles of the prior college presidents. Overcoming these internal roadblocks required collaboration, communication, and the development of trust. Most all presidents interviewed faced additional challenges related to board, faculty, and gender issues. Some presidents believed their campuses were not yet ready for the leadership of a woman while others felt vestiges of prior leadership styles and attitudes remained embedded within the internal campus culture. Although the number of women community college presidents has increased in the past 20 years, men still hold the majority of those positions; consequently, much of the leadership research has focused on men's leadership styles and practices. Some researchers (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Lester, 2008; Sullivan, 2004) believe hidden institutional norms based on the dominant, White, male leadership paradigm, frame the leadership expectations for women. Presidents faced with boards whose main interests were political in nature rather than the advancement of the institution faced challenges as well. Presidents also spoke of difficulty in balancing their personal and professional lives. Facilities issues, funding shortfalls, outdated technology, and lack of strategic plans created additional struggles. Criswell and Martin (2007) have identified that challenges facing higher education institutions today, are more complex. The presidents believed self-assurance and determination helped them find solutions to their challenges through communicating, empowering, and building relationships.

The third theme that emerged, *Sense of Progress and Success*, offered both tangible and intangible examples the presidents believed showed progress and success. They discussed positive changes in financial and facilities support through capital

campaigns and building projects. They related hearing positive comments from community members and saw progress in the development of cohesive leadership teams. Changes to negotiations processes and comments received through accreditation visits validated forward progress as well. As boards better understood their roles and responsibilities, campus progress was also evident. Some presidents related examples of significant campus challenges and yet felt slow and steady progress could be measured and celebrated regularly. Discussions about leadership styles offered insight into campus progress and change and supported studies on women in leadership roles (Aurora & Caliper, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2007). The presidents discussed the impact effective communication, relationship building, and the development of trust had on moving campuses forward. They believed modeling a willingness to change and take risks spurred positive momentum. Collaborative and inclusive leadership styles helped rally college constituents around common causes. The presidents firmly believed in creating internal leaders, empowering others to make decisions, inspiring momentum for innovative change, and keeping students and student success as the primary goal. Their leadership approaches align closely with the theoretical constructs of transformational leadership as defined and discussed by numerous researchers (Amey, 2005, 2006; Baker, Roueche, & Gillett-Karam, 1990; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1993, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2007; House & Mitchell, 1974; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Northhouse, 2007; Paternoster, 2006).

The presidents offered insight into lessons learned and advice for aspiring women leaders as the fourth theme, *Advice for Future Women Leaders,* emerged. Every president was passionate in their belief they were role models for the next generation of women

leaders. Without exception, they all discussed the importance of integrity and ethics in their decision-making, behavior, and communication. They felt honest and ethical actions were the foundation to building trust which in turn was required to create positive change on campuses. Eddy (2010) has shown campus leaders must lead by example which mirrors the study participants' comments. The presidents believed self-confidence and determination were needed even in the face of obstacles. In order to create a synergy for innovation and change, there had to be a right fit between the president and the institution. Determining the right fit required personal introspection on the part of the potential president to identify their skills and strengths as related to the institution as well as an in-depth look at the institution to identify its opportunities, challenges, and strengths. The presidents indicated the same process needed to occur on the institutional end to determine what they were seeking in a president and the internal identification and realization of their own strengths and opportunities for improvement. This advice supports a number of researchers who believe the relationship between the board and president is critical to a college's success (Anyaso, 2010; Bornstein, 2008; Denton & Moore, 2009; Eddy 2010; McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011; Trombley, 2007). The presidents believed aspiring leaders should not use a feminist approach to leadership but instead should use the innate strengths of relationship building, caring, and compassion to solidify their acceptance as a woman leader. The presidents believed themselves to be change agents for higher education bringing new models for leadership. Throughout the interviews with presidents, numerous examples of leadership approaches mirrored the discussion in recent studies on effective leadership traits (Criswell & Martin, 2007; McNair, 2010; Sullivan, 2004). With the significant turnover expected in higher

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education leadership, the presidents believe their leadership styles will be based more on transformational and inclusive models and less on traditional community college tenets of male leadership that have existed the past 40 or more years. Research (AACC, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2004, 2007; Sullivan, 2004) has shown women are predisposed to transformational leadership styles and bring unique leadership qualities to 21st century institutions that are facing unparalleled challenges and are in need of change.

**Question 4**

Revealing the universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts about being a woman community college president was the focus of the fourth question in support of the overarching question. In the first theme, *Influences to the Presidency*, the presidents candidly discussed the unintentional nature of the path that eventually led to their current positions. Eddy (2008) has discussed, as well, the leveling off of the number of women seeking community college presidencies and believes their unintentionality is a cause. What was evident, however when interviewing the presidents, was the passion and confidence with which they worked toward their goal of a presidency once they had made the decision regarding that career move. According to a number of researchers (Bielby & Bielby, 1988; Bowles & McGinn, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2004; Gregg, 2004; Rudman & Glick, 2001) women have faced a variety of barriers to leadership positions, including perceived incompetence; less human capital investment in education, training, and work experience; and less motivation and commitment to employment. The challenges some women face along their leadership pathway are described as a "labyrinth" (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Participants in this study provided examples that opposed some of these concepts. In fact, their experiences were quite opposite. Many of the study participants discussed

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working full time while completing their master's and doctoral degrees and raising families as well during this timeframe. The participants discussed their willingness to assume additional responsibilities and to seek new positions with increasing leadership opportunities, as well as their motivation to move to a new location and institution to broaden their knowledge and experience base. Study participants felt strongly about the influence colleagues and mentors had had on their career success which supports a number of studies (Anyaso, 2010; Eddy, 2008; McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011; Stubbe, 2008; Sullivan, 2004). Key phrases beginning on page 63 are all examples of identified beliefs, attitudes, and abilities that express feelings and thoughts about being a woman community college president.

The second theme of *Determination and Perseverance* evolved based on the presidents' thoughts and feelings surrounding a variety of subthemes. They expressed frustration, surprise, and incredulity when they were discussing the state of leadership teams and capabilities on their campuses. Specific terms they used to describe the leadership problems were *toxic* and *chaos,* which evoked their recognition of a significant challenge to be overcome. Yet, unfailing determination was the driver as they made the needed leadership changes, some of which were still ongoing as I interviewed three of the presidents. Greshman (2009) has stated that, "for women in higher education, the academy is a bureaucratic system that was founded on traditional beliefs about male superiority; it is still a place where the biases about women and their place in the academy remain subtle but nonetheless evident" (p. 6). Impediments for women as leaders often come from inconsistencies in gender and leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2004; Northouse, 2007). Gender stereotypes still exist and power structures dominate at

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the leadership level with women being judged on male models of leadership (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Eddy, 2007; Kramer, 2005).As the presidents described prior autocratic or hierarchical leadership styles whose impact they had found difficult to overcome, they shared their willingness to be consistent, fair, steadfast, and patient as they worked to change the campus culture. They felt the benefits to their colleges in encouraging these changed philosophies would create positive, long-term impacts that would better serve not only faculty and staff, but students, as well. In describing some of the gender-related issues they had faced, many of the presidents conveyed a spectrum of emotions they had felt over time, ranging from surprise to anger. They felt they had been prepared to face potential problems; but a number of them expressed complete surprise that the incidents had been so overt, mean-spirited, and pointed. Although each took a step back at times to assess the situations and sometimes to question their abilities, all who had faced issues conveyed a drive to "show" the challengers that they could not be intimidated nor run off. This general attitude mirrored Aurora and Caliper's (2005) findings that women leaders were assertive and had the ability to draw on personal strengths of determination and ambition even when faced with challenges. Presidents gave a couple of examples that portrayed a change in campus culture, with faculty stepping into more positive roles when the presidents were willing to stand up and challenge the naysayers. A few of the presidents interviewed had not faced gender issues; they felt that was because their campuses were ready for change and new leadership. These experiences support some studies that indicate leadership challenges are unrelated to gender differences (Dobbins & Platz, 1986; van Engen, van der Leeden, & Willemsen, 2001). The presidents also discussed finding the balance between their personal and professional lives. Every

president expressed some frustration at the difficulty doing this posed, and how deliberate she had to be to protect her private life and personal space as best she could. Although they knew it would be a struggle when they accepted their presidencies, they all indicated they weren't prepared for how truly challenging finding the middle ground would be. Trombley (2007) has identified the challenge presidents face as the line blurs between their personal and professional lives, as well as the fact that presidents are the college representative both on and off campus.

Within the theme of *Sense of Progress and Success,* all the  presidents became energized as they spoke about their benchmarks of progress and how they finally understood and believed positive change was taking place. They described feeling proud, not of themselves, but of faculty, staff, and board members for understanding change was needed and then working to create it. They expressed feeling uncertain about whether they were actually effecting progressive change and, at times, being not quite willing to believe it was happening. Yet, every president was able to describe when she felt her campus was changing. Some had indicated they felt women had to work harder than men to prove themselves; so when these positive changes were evident, they felt they had begun to prove themselves as women leaders.

Issues that precipitated thoughts and feelings were evident as well in responses within the theme of *Advice for Future Women Leaders*. Every president interviewed was adamant that integrity, honesty, and ethical behavior had to be the foundation for day-to-day actions and decision making which was reflective of research by Boggs (2003). The presidents were emphatic that women presidents, especially, were unlikely to get second chances when it came to unprofessional behavior. They were also ardent that women

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need to be self-confident and believe in themselves. As the presidents talked about the importance of an aspiring president having certainty that a college was the right fit, and vice versa, they shared their personal experiences, both good and bad; and they were introspective as they discussed the lessons they had learned in the process. As they commented on their abilities to be innovative leaders for higher education today, they were passionate in believing themselves to be change agents who were creating opportunities for new women leaders.

**Question 5**

The fifth question asked what underlying transformational themes the presidents described as they supported positive campus change. Supporting the theme *Determination and Perseverance*, as the presidents discussed the leadership issues they faced, they expressed the belief that a key to creating positive change was surrounding themselves with a strong leadership team who were innovative thinkers, good problem solvers, trusted colleagues, believers in student success, and empowered decision-makers. Development of good leadership teams and future college success will be dependent upon succession planning and access to formalized leadership development opportunities according to a number of researchers (Criswell & Martin, 2007; Eddy, 2008; McFarlin, Crittenden, & Ebbers, 1999; McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011; Stubbe, 2008; Wallin, 2006). Many talked about what shared governance meant to them, and how they conveyed and modeled that philosophy on their campuses. Examples they offered provided evidence that they changed campus challenges to opportunities through building relationships, and communicating with and empowering those around them.

One subtheme that emerged within the theme of *Sense of Progress and Success* was presidential leadership. Presidents gave examples of prior campus presidents with more "closed" leadership styles and the work they were doing as current presidents to form more open, inclusive campus cultures. Allowing administrators to make autonomous decisions, encouraging people to initiate new activities, mentoring and developing internal leaders, and stabilizing communication are examples of their underlying transformational leadership styles. Aurora and Caliper (2005) have identified that women have a more inclusive, team-oriented way of leading. Women are more outgoing and flexible as well as open to sharing ideas and information. Eddy (2010) has believed leaders need an awareness of the internal campus culture and being willing to interact with college constituents in order to frame communication patterns. Some presidents specifically discussed talking with every person on campus when they first arrived to learn about the campus culture, and more importantly to convey to the employees that their thoughts and ideas were important. Most all of the presidents talked about building collaborative relationships both on and off campus. The presidents use verbs such as facilitate, communicate, empower, listen, and support to describe some of their leadership actions.

As they offered *Advice for Future Women Leaders*, the presidents believed they had to model professional behavior at all times in order to build the trust necessary to create change. They believed in their abilities to lead, and that self-confidence was then apparent when they faced internal and external challenges. Through their actions, the women presidents helped shape campus values and encouraged others to achieve at higher levels.

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Being the right fit for an institution was critical to these women presidents to articulate a clear organizational vision for their colleges and encourage constituents to move beyond personal interests by supporting broader institutional goals. Malm (2008) has stated, "leading organizational change is among the most important and challenging leadership responsibilities" (p. 614). The results of this study identify women's innate leadership skills of relationship-building, communication, patience, sensitivity, and flexibility as important factors that allowed the women to respond to the challenges and increased demands facing them as community college presidents.

**Significance of Findings to Women in Community College Leadership Roles**

With the significant number of pending retirements of community college presidents and senior-level administrators, the intent of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of women community college presidents in the Midwest. It was designed to reveal their thoughts and feelings, insights into their presidencies, challenges they faced, benchmarks for progress as their campuses changed, and advice for aspiring women leaders. Their candid discussions about the barriers they faced; the climate of campus cultures; and their frustrations, failures, and successes have provided a framework of understanding that we can use to better prepare the next generation of women leaders. The format of the study facilitated the identification of four significant themes that encompass the participants' pathways to the presidency: their influences on the journey; their required determination and perseverance to overcome a variety of obstacles; their realization and sense of progress and success; and, finally, advice they would offer for aspiring women leaders. The four themes and their identified subthemes can offer a current perspective on the necessary strengths, skills, and leadership styles for

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community college leadership, in addition to an awareness of potential challenges that face women leaders as they work toward innovative and creative campus changes.

Within the first theme of *Influences to the Presidency*, study participants revealed their initial lack of intention to seek a presidency and their general lack of awareness of community colleges and their missions until they were employed on a campus. The participants spoke, as well, of the eventual realization that they had the capability to be a president, along with the role mentors played in this self-actualization. While much of the literature addresses the need for mentoring and leadership development, fewer studies were identified that discussed the unintentional nature of women's decisions to seek presidencies or how those decisions were eventually made. This study's participants noted they were continually open to possibilities, willing to take on new opportunities to learn and expand their knowledge base. They were willing to challenge themselves to move to the next level in pursuit of increased responsibilities and new venues to learn. Their personal experiences and examples add insight to the current body of knowledge that exists on women's pathways to the presidency.

Over the coming years, as current presidents and senior administrators retire, community colleges and boards of trustees may be faced with smaller pools of qualified and interested internal and external candidates to fill those positions. College leadership teams and boards will need to solidify strategies for internal leadership development and mentoring at all levels, formalize succession planning, make a defined funding commitment for external leadership-development opportunities, retain qualified women leaders, develop unique recruitment efforts, and utilize comprehensive employment

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packages to fill these vacancies with candidates qualified to lead institutions into the 21$^{st}$ century.

As the second theme of *Determination and Perseverance* emerged, participants discussed the leadership vacuums they faced with nonexistent senior leadership and with unprepared, unqualified, or untrustworthy leadership team members. The participants' leadership styles and abilities were critical in forming a cohesive team that could be trusted. Most all of the presidents faced internal gender-related issues that generally emanated from a core group of people who were opposed to women in leadership positions, or who did not like the new leadership styles the women presidents exhibited. They also faced campuses with critical financial, facility, and curriculum needs. Finding the balance between professional and personal lives could be a struggle, as well.

A number of studies are available on gender related issues and gender differences. The literature addresses, as well, information on leadership gaps and pending problems on finding qualified leaders as community college presidents and senior administrators continue to retire in the next 10 years. Some information is also available on the balance presidents need to achieve between their personal and professional lives. This study provides a very frank, candid, and at times, startling discussion of challenges the presidents faced. They offered insight into their relentless determination to continue to move forward in spite of obstacles whether they were human, financial, or physical. For most, giving up was not an option. Because this was a phenomenological study, the personal examples and quotes from the participants offer a realism that is sometimes lost in the literature when it is distilled to lists, tables, and statistics.

Findings within this theme pointed again to the need for both internal and external leadership-development programs to encourage aspiring leaders to seek positions of more responsibility; participation in these programs, in turn, builds their knowledge base and awareness of internal campus culture. Boards of trustees and senior administrators should support leadership-development opportunities in order to provide additional exposure and training in the areas of resource management, organizational strategy and planning, collaboration, college advocacy, and professionalism. Additionally, they should systematically examine internal environments and paradigms, to develop a better understanding of the perceptions of women in leadership roles and to neutralize gender barriers and differences.

Within the third theme of *Sense of Progress and Success,* it became apparent that the presidents' ability to form a cohesive campus culture, create innovative change, and solidify working relationships with the board of trustees and college constituents was dependent upon their communication skills and leadership styles. Progress was often measured in tangible ways but many times the presidents just had a "sense" that they were moving their institutions forward. Numerous studies have been done over the past few decades on transformational leadership styles and as more women move into leadership roles, increasing numbers of studies are focused specifically on women and their strengths and abilities as leaders. With the expected turnover in leadership positions, a number of studies are also focused on leadership development programs and core competencies for leaders. This research study seems to provide the most current and in-depth look at how women community college presidents measure progress and success.

These factors identify the need for aspiring women leaders to seek leadership preparation that is multifaceted. Completion of a terminal degree is considered a requirement for potential presidential candidates (McFarlin, Crittenden, & Ebbers, 1999; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007), and many institutions now focus on candidates whose degree area of emphasis is community college leadership. Degree programs in this focus area will serve to solidify candidates' understandings of the requisite challenges and opportunities within a community college setting. Internally, colleges could consider shadowing and mentoring experiences that would pair aspiring women leaders with senior women administrators. This approach would validate, in part, the leadership styles and strengths women bring to those positions. These experiences would provide exposure and practice in understanding and building relationships, empowering others, and inspiring a vision of the qualities and transformational leadership styles that are well-suited to women in leadership positions (Aurora & Caliper, 2005; Coughlin, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eddy, 2003).

Within the emergence of the final theme, *Advice for Future Women Leaders*, participants conveyed the belief that they were role models for the next generation of leaders, and thus were focused on the importance of the personal strengths of self-confidence, and integrity and ethics. They noted that women have to believe in themselves and their abilities to face complex challenges and make decisions. They believed that an internal compass must guide women leaders in all their actions because second chances will not be available. They felt that developing a balance between a "feminist" approach and using the innate strengths of being a woman will serve aspiring women leaders as change agents in moving institutions forward positively and

progressively. The consensus was that finding the right fit for both the aspiring leader and the institution requires of the potential president a comprehensive understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses, as well as an awareness of institutional needs. The literature addresses needed leadership traits of integrity and honesty, collaboration, and communication; effective organizational strategy and resource management; and the ability to face complex challenges as a community college president today. However, studies seem nonexistent that could offer straightforward advice from the perspective of current women leaders to aspiring women leaders. This phenomenological study provides that an honest, candid way. The advice offered is a list aspiring women leaders can review and use to their advantage as they prepare for and move into leadership roles.

These discussions, again, point to the need for access to broad-based learning experiences that might come from internal as well as external opportunities. Aspiring leaders might have to consider relocation to other institutions to seek positions of increasing responsibility that will broaden their experience base. Leadership-development opportunities will assist aspiring women leaders in defining their abilities to make decisions and meet challenges. These opportunities will also expose them to internal and external circumstances that community colleges face today.

The results of this study will inform current community college leaders, boards of trustees, and aspiring women leaders on the issues related to having the necessary qualified candidates to fill the expected presidential vacancies at community colleges in the next 5 to 10 years. The results should provide insight and awareness into the personal and professional opportunities and challenges community college presidents will face, and they will add to the overall body of knowledge on women in community college

leadership roles. Study findings suggest the need for internal succession-planning

strategies founded on internal leadership-development and mentoring experiences.

Support for these strategies might very well create a realization that, for women leaders,

there are internal opportunities for advancement. Requisite within those processes should

be college-wide validation of women's leadership strengths and styles through policies,

processes, and intangible campus culture changes. For new women leaders to be able to

build relationships and create cohesive campus cultures in support of change, constituents

must first be supportive of women in leadership roles. While these study results support

the belief that women must develop an approach for leadership effectiveness (Eagly &

Carli, 2007), they also point to the fact that institutions must change the norms embedded

in organizational structure and culture related to gender inequality. An in-depth look at

campus culture and college constituents will help identify gender barriers and

philosophical differences. Finally, external leadership development for future community

college leaders must be solidified with a focus on identifying and providing training in

the range of effective leadership styles and understanding of the next generation of

leaders as they address the dynamics and demands facing community colleges today

(Eddy, 2010; Malm, 2008; McNair, 2010; McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011; Sullivan,

2004).

## Limitations of the Study

This phenomenological study was limited to the lived experiences of 14 women

community college presidents in the Midwest. The participants in this study held

presidencies in Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, and Arkansas. The

findings of the study provide a snapshot of the participants' lived experiences and offer

insight into their feelings and thoughts, insights and lessons learned, personal skills and strengths, and leadership styles. The presidents discussed their mentors; gender-related issues; and the campus/community environment, challenges, and changes. They identified priority issues and benchmarks for progress, and then they offered advice for aspiring women leaders.

A limitation, as well, is the assumption that the participants provided honest discussions of their lived experiences and feelings. Face-to-face interviews offered opportunities for me to observe body language and nonverbal cues. The interviews also presented a chance for me to engage the participants on a more personal level and be more assured of honesty and genuineness. I conducted 13 interviews face-to-face and one by interactive television because of weather problems that limited travel. Although the president and I were able to see each other and engage easily, this interview was a little less personal because we completed it through "distance delivery" modes. I conducted follow-up interviews with six presidents over the phone. In those cases, I did not observe body language and nonverbal cues.

Interpretation of the qualitative findings and emergent themes also represents a limitation. As a strong believer in transformational leadership, this belief may influence the study. I have attempted to identify my biases based on a goal to be a community college president and to be cognizant of how my thinking might influence data interpretation and thematic development. Another researcher could ask the same questions but might interpret the findings differently. The coding format I used was subjective, based on my interpretations, and it could have been biased. A larger sample of

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presidents and one that included women of color could have offered additional

information in support of current research identified and discussed in the literature.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

Identifying and understanding the experiences of current women community

college presidents will help professionals to better define the leadership needs and

leadership-development requirements to effectively prepare the next generation of

women leaders. With impending retirements of 84% of community college presidents by

2016 (Eddy, 2010; Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; Shults, 2001; Weisman & Vaughan,

2007), grooming women for those responsibilities is critical. Because of the globally

dynamic nature of community colleges and the complex challenges they are facing,

leadership styles and competencies are a current focus. Eddy (as cited in McNair, Duree,

& Ebbers, 2011) has identified that the demands on community college presidents are

increasing, and, because of that, she has "concluded that contemporary community

college leaders thus require skill sets and life experiences that differ from those needed in

the past and that allow them to successfully navigate 21$^{st}$-century challenges" (p. 8).

As study participants offered advice for future women leaders, all indicated the

critical need for women to have doctoral degrees, professional-development

opportunities, mentors, job-shadowing, and broad-based exposure to all types of learning

opportunities to develop the required leadership skills. Previous studies (Amey,

VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; McNair, 2010) have identified that leadership skills are

not developed in a singular way but instead are acquired through a variety of professional

experiences, mentoring, shadowing, professional development, and doctoral-degree

programs. AACC (2005) has stated that "the leadership skills now required have widened

because of greater student diversity, advances in technology, accountability demands, and globalization" (p. 3). *Competencies for Community College Leaders,* developed by the AACC (2005), provides a foundation to address those needed skills as integral components of leadership development, succession planning, and graduate degree programs (McNair, 2010; McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011). Competencies include "organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism" (McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011, p. 4). Weisman and Vaughan (2007) also have discussed the importance of preparing future leaders through campus mentoring and "grow your own leaders (GYOL) programs," (p. 7) which can focus on both midlevel academic and student-services directors, and top administrators and faculty. This current research can provide the foundation for further studies on the importance of community college leadership development and how leadership skills are acquired and best developed.

Aspiring women leaders must be encouraged early in their careers to pursue master's and doctoral degrees in community college leadership or higher education administration. Increasing opportunities are available to complete these programs from land-grant institutions through distance delivery methods for place-bound learners. According to McNair, Duree, and Ebbers (2011), doctoral degree programs could embed the AACC leadership competencies into curriculum and leadership experiences to create "intentional connections between curriculum, the leadership competencies, and skills needed to lead community colleges" (p. 20). To create a greater understanding for gender equity, degree programs could also include courses that specifically discuss women's leadership styles and skills and their relationship to community college needs. Eddy and

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Cox (2008) have noted that national conferences and organizational publications offer information to assist women leaders in understanding gender-related obstacles they may face. For aspiring women leaders, community colleges should provide incentives such as tuition reimbursement and release time to encourage enrollment in community college leadership doctoral programs. Further study could be completed to correlate community college leadership success with the emphasis area of the doctoral degree program. Additionally, studies could focus on community college presidents' perceptions of "preparedness" after they have completed a doctorate in community college leadership and 2 years as a president.

Professional-development opportunities, whether internal GYOL programs or those offered at the state and national level by AACC, League of Innovation, Harvard Institutes for Higher Education, or American Council on Education, for example, provide opportunities for aspiring leaders to develop professional networks and the necessary leadership skills. GYOL programs allow institutions to reduce the time and resource commitment for leadership development, with a focus on retaining the best employees. GYOL programs would provide opportunities for aspiring women leaders to acquire the needed leadership skills and competencies from successful women leaders within the system. Further studies could focus on professional development programs and their impact on solidifying participants decisions to seek leadership roles, retention of leaders, and supporting the quality of community college leadership teams.

Greater access to external leadership-development opportunities could be facilitated through the use of distance delivery and online learning methods, creation of regional workshops, and reduction of costs. Place-bound administrators would be better

able to take advantage of the opportunities, and participant expenses would be reduced. Eddy (2010) has identified the value of integrating the AACC competencies into professional-development programs, as well. Further studies could be completed to assess the impact of internal versus external leadership-development activities, or those that have embedded the AACC leadership competencies versus those that have not.

All study participants identified the impact a mentor or colleague had had on their pathway to the presidency. Eddy (2008); McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebbers (1999); and McNair, Duree, and Ebbers (2011) have discussed the value of professional-development mentoring of women leaders. Mentoring and job-shadowing experiences could provide opportunities that focus on relationship building, strategic planning, collaboration, and college advocacy. Job-shadowing experiences would allow emerging women leaders to work directly with presidents to learn how to cultivate positive relationships with boards of trustees, raise funds, create community partnerships, and oversee day-to-day college operations. Future research on mentoring and job shadowing could identify the impact these experiences had on understanding the roles and responsibilities of a community college president.

Current community college leaders and boards of trustees have an obligation to identify and develop internal leaders to fill vacancies through succession planning. With impending leadership openings (Eddy, 2010; Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; Shults, 2001; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007), the potential to lose internal leaders to other institutions is apparent. Prospective leaders should be supported with leadership-development and mentoring opportunities to assure constancy in the quality of educational offerings and student services if the leadership positions they assume are

vacated through resignations or retirements. Internal leaders who bring experience and college cultural knowledge to new positions can help ensure the stability of the institution. Further studies focused on GYOL programs, and the correlation to retention of aspiring leaders, would be merited. Studies that focus on the impact of succession planning and leadership development versus no succession planning or leadership development at the community college level would provide insight into the value of succession planning and leadership development.

A number of studies have focused on the barriers for women, including gender differences and gender stereotypes as they relate to leadership (Bielby & Bielby, 1988; Bowles & McGinn, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2004, 2007; Eddy, 2007; Gregg, 2004; Gresham, 2009; Lester, 2008; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Sullivan, 2004). While the majority of the study participants had faced gender-related issues, a few did not. The presidents who had not faced gender issues believed their internal campus cultures were prepared for change and responsive to women's leadership styles. Research should continue into gender issues women community college leaders face, how those barriers are diminished, and why some campuses are more responsive and affirming of women in leadership positions while others are not.

Drake (2008) has stated that women comprise 51% of the United States population and earn more degrees than men. Women represent 58% of the enrollments in community colleges (AACC, 2011) and encompass 29% of community college presidencies (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). Researchers (Shults, 2001; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007) have indicated that 84% of the community college presidents are expected to retire by 2016 and while the growth in women in leadership positions

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increased by 18% between 1991 and 2006, it has slowed and leveled off (Weisman &

Vaughan, 2007). Various studies have focused specifically on women in leadership roles

(DiCroce, 1995; Eddy, 2007; Eddy & Lester, 2008; Giannini, 2001; Gresham, 2009;

Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). These studies have discussed the

change in the number of women serving as community college presidents, the roles

women leader have played and will continue to play in changing the landscape of higher

education, the reasons for the slowing advancement of women into leadership positions,

and the barriers to equitable representation of women in these positions. Because the

study participants identified their pathways to the presidency as unintentional; spoke of

the need for mentors and leadership development; faced leadership vacuums; realized

numerous challenges as women presidents; and yet believed their roles to be change

agents for higher education, further research should focus on the apparent leveling-off of

women seeking community college leadership positions and identify a template to change

this trend.

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**APPENDIX A: INTRODUCTORY LETTERS**

Dear:

Please allow me to introduce myself to you briefly. I am a doctoral student at Colorado State University completing my research and dissertation requirements for a Ph.D. in Community College Leadership through the School of Education under the guidance of principal investigator Dr. Sharon Anderson. I began the program in the fall of 2005 and am anticipating the completion of my degree in May 2010.

I am writing to inquire about the possibility of you participating in my research. The focus of my study as the co-principal investigator surrounds women community college presidents who have been able to effect positive and innovative change on their campuses. I am most interested in your pathway to the presidency, mentors, ability to build and motivate a leadership team, communication style, leadership and management beliefs, challenges you have faced, strengths and skills you brought to your presidency, and changes and accomplishments that have been realized under your leadership.

With nearly 84% of community college presidents expected to retire within the next 10 years, many researchers believe this turnover will present continued opportunities for women to enter those roles bringing new values and vision that will transform higher education. Because you are already part of that emerging transformation, I would like to visit with you. I received your name from a professional colleague who knows you and knows the positive impact you've had at {college name}. You have been identified as a transformational leader who is making a difference.

While most research on community college leadership have been conducted primarily on men, more recent studies have begun to focus on women and their ability to support collaborative, flexible campus cultures that are open to change. My goal is that my research will add to this knowledge base and provide added foundation information on the lived experiences of women community college presidents.

If it is all right, I would like to follow this letter with a phone call to you on …….. to visit further about my request. I'll plan to call at …… If you have a prior commitment, I'll leave a message and call at a later time. If you have any questions that I can answer prior to my call, please feel free to reach me at (785) 243-1435, ext. 249 or by email at **kkrull@cloud.edu**. If you would prefer not to participate and not to have a phone call, just let me know by email at your convenience.

I appreciate your consideration of my request and hope that we'll be able to visit on ……. Thanks so much.

Sincerely,


Kimberly W. Krull
Co-principal Investigator

Dear:

It was so nice to meet you and visit on ……… Thank you so much for agreeing to help with my research. I'm looking forward to the opportunity to spend some time with you and learn about your experiences as a president.

As per our conversation, I will plan to arrive on your campus on……… (date) at (time). I've enclosed a consent form that I will ask you to sign and return to me when I arrive on campus and a demographic survey that will give me some additional information about you. I've also included a list of the interview questions for your review. As we discussed on the phone, the first interview will last no longer than 2 hours. Before I leave campus after our first interview, we can check our calendars to set the second interview at your convenience within about 6 weeks.

I'll call you the week prior to my visit on ….. to make sure this date and time will still work. Please feel free to contact me before that if your schedule changes and we need to set another date.

Again, thank you so much for allowing me to spend some time with you in the middle of an already busy schedule. I'll look forward to seeing you soon.

With Best Regards,


Kimberly W. Krull
Co-principal Investigator

**APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Interview Questions

*Interview Questions for First Interviews*

1. Describe your personal pathway to the presidency.

2. What skills and strengths did you bring to your leadership roles?

3. Who were significant mentors in your life as a president and why? What were the lessons you learned from these mentors?

4. What do you, as a community college president, consider your leadership style to be?

5. What challenges did you face as a president that had to be overcome in order to create positive campus change?

6. What were the critical and underlying issues that created the campus challenges?

7. What were the most difficult issues you faced personally as a result of the campus culture? Were any of the issues gender related?

8. How were you, as president, able to identify and formulate your leadership team?

9. How did you prioritize the steps to creating effective change?

10. How did you initiate the change efforts?

11. What benchmarks did you use to measure positive change and progress?

12. What advice can you give to women leaders aspiring to a community college presidency?

13. Do women community college presidents view themselves as "change agents?"

*Interview Questions for Second Interviews (and Third  Interviews, if Needed)*

Second interview questions (and third, if needed) will be developed based on information and significant themes that emerge from the first interviews. In some cases they will be clarifications of information, and in others more in-depth information will be sought.

14. What meaning do you ascribe to your work and experience in leading your campus toward positive change?

15. In reviewing the most significant challenges you faced, what would have better prepared you to meet those challenges?

16. What underlying themes and contexts account for your personal experience of being a woman community college president?

17. Describe the most significant feelings and thoughts you have about being a woman community college president?

18. Knowing the theory and basis of transformational leadership, how has this

**APPENDIX C: HUMAN SUBJECTS FORM**

# Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
## Colorado State University

**TITLE OF STUDY:** Women Community College Presidents in the Midwest: Experiences in Leading their Campuses

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Dr. Sharon Anderson, Director of Graduate Programs Office and Graduate Program Faculty, Department of Education, sanderson@CAHS.Colostate.edu (970) 491-6861

**CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Kimberly W. Krull, Department of Education, Kimberly.Krull@ColoState.EDU , (785) 243-1435, ext. 249

**WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?** You have been chosen to participate in this study because you meet the criteria of the research study as a woman community college president serving on a campus in the Midwest and have been nominated by a professional colleague as a president who has been able to strengthen your campus culture and lead it with innovation.

**WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?** Kimberly W. Krull will be doing the study under the direction of Dr. Sharon Anderson, Dr. John Littrell, Dr. Timothy Davies, and Dr. Bruce Hall in order to fulfill requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy in Community College Leadership.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?** Drawing on the theory of transformational leadership, this study will attempt to identify common themes surrounding women community college presidents' ability to effect positive change within campus cultures. The study will focus on successful women presidents' pathways to the presidency, their mentors, ability to build and motivate a leadership team, communication styles, leadership and management beliefs, challenges they have faced, strengths and skills they brought to their presidency, and changes and accomplishments that were realized under their leadership.

**WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?** You will be interviewed and audiotaped two times within 6 weeks on your campus. The first interview will take approximately 2 hours and the second will take approximately 2 hours. If a third interview is needed, it will take place according to your choice either on your campus or on the phone. All interviews will take no more than a total of 6 hours.

**WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?** Data for this research study will be gathered through personal interviews that will be audiotaped. The format will be open to encourage you to describe your experiences and to share your personal and professional stories. You will be asked to answer a series of open-ended questions including the following:
1. Describe your personal pathway to the presidency.
2. What skills and strengths did you bring to your leadership roles?
3. Who were significant mentors in your life as a president and why? What were the lessons learned from these mentors?
4. What do you, as a community college president, consider your leadership style to be?
5. What challenges did you face as a president that had to be overcome in order to create positive campus change?
6. What were the critical and underlying issues that created the campus challenges?
7. What were the most difficult issues faced personally as a result of the campus culture? Were any of the issues gender related?

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8. How were you, as president, able to identify and formulate your leadership team?
9. How were the steps to creating effective change prioritized?
10. How were the change efforts initiated?
11. What benchmarks were used to measure positive change and progress?
12. What advice can be given to women leaders aspiring to a community college presidency?
13. Do women community college presidents view themselves as "change agents?"

As the research proceeds, the questions may change a bit in focus to capture the complete experience.

**ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?** None are known.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?** There may be very minimal risk if challenges or barriers women community college presidents have faced in their careers have created stress and/or anxiety problems. These feelings could potentially resurface during the interview process. Although the risk is minimal, you will have the option to end any interview, not answer any question, or end your participation in the study at any point in time.

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?** None are known. Results from this study may be of interest to other women in leadership roles who aspire to a presidency position. Better information and understanding from the lived experiences of you as community college presidents may be realized and used to the benefit of other women leaders.

**DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?** Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE?** There is no cost to you as a participant in this study.

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?** We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep you name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key. You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court.

All study data will be kept by the student researcher in a filing cabinet in her home office. Any audiotapes and/or documentation received from study participants will be identified with a unique ID number. Study materials and data will only be accessed by the student researcher and

principle investigator. After all research is completed and the student researcher's dissertation is completed, all study data will be turned over to the principal investigator, Dr. Sharon Anderson for secure storage for a period of 3 years and then will be destroyed by her.

**CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?** If you decide to participate in the study, you can withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty.

**WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?** No compensation will be received.

**WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH?** The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

**WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?** Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the co-investigator, Kimberly W. Krull, at (785) 243-1435, ext. 249 or kkrull@cloud.edu . If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator, at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

**WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW**? Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

_____ _____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study          Date

_____
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____ _____
Name of person providing information to participant          Date

_____
Signature of Research Staff

**APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

## Demographic Information
All information will be held in strict confidence. Collected information will be
aggregated to provide maximum confidentiality.

1.  Institution
    Please indicate the size of the institution where you are employed.
    _____ 7,500 – 10,000 FTE
    _____ 5,000 – 7,499 FTE
    _____ 2,500 – 4,999 FTE
    _____1,500 – 2,499 FTE
    _____ less than 1,500 FTE

    _____ single-campus system
    _____ multicampus system
    _____ 2 campuses
    _____ 3 campuses
    _____ 4 campuses
    _____ more than 4 campuses

2.  Years Served as President
    Please indicate the number of years you have served as a president in your career

    0 – 3  3 – 5  5 – 8  8 – 10  10 – 12  12 – 14  14 – 16  16 – 18  18 +

3.  Prior to Presidency, Years Served as an Administrator

    0 – 3  3 – 5  5 – 8  8 – 10  10 – 12  12 – 14  14 – 16  16 – 18  18 +

    Please mark the administrative positions held
    _____ Provost                    _____ Dean
    _____ Assistant Vice Provost     _____ Director
    _____ Associate Vice Provost     _____ Department Chair
    _____ Vice President             _____ Other, please specify _____
    _____ Assistant Vice President

4.  Supervision
    Please indicate the number of employees in your institution

    _____ # full time              _____ # part time

5. Degrees
   Please circle the degrees you've been awarded.

   |  |  |  |
   |---|---|---|
   | Associates | M.A. | B.F.A. |
   | B.S. | M.Ed. | Ph.D. |
   | B.A. | M.F.A. | Ed.D |
   | M.S. | M.B.A. | Other_____ |

6. Age
   Please circle one answer.

   |  |  |  |
   |---|---|---|
   | 25–30 | 46–50 | over 65 |
   | 31–35 | 51–55 |  |
   | 36–40 | 56–60 |  |
   | 41–45 | 61–65 |  |

7. Ethnic Origin
   Please circle one answer

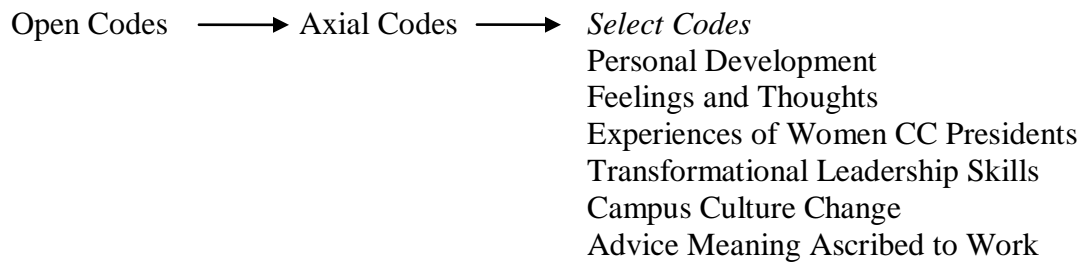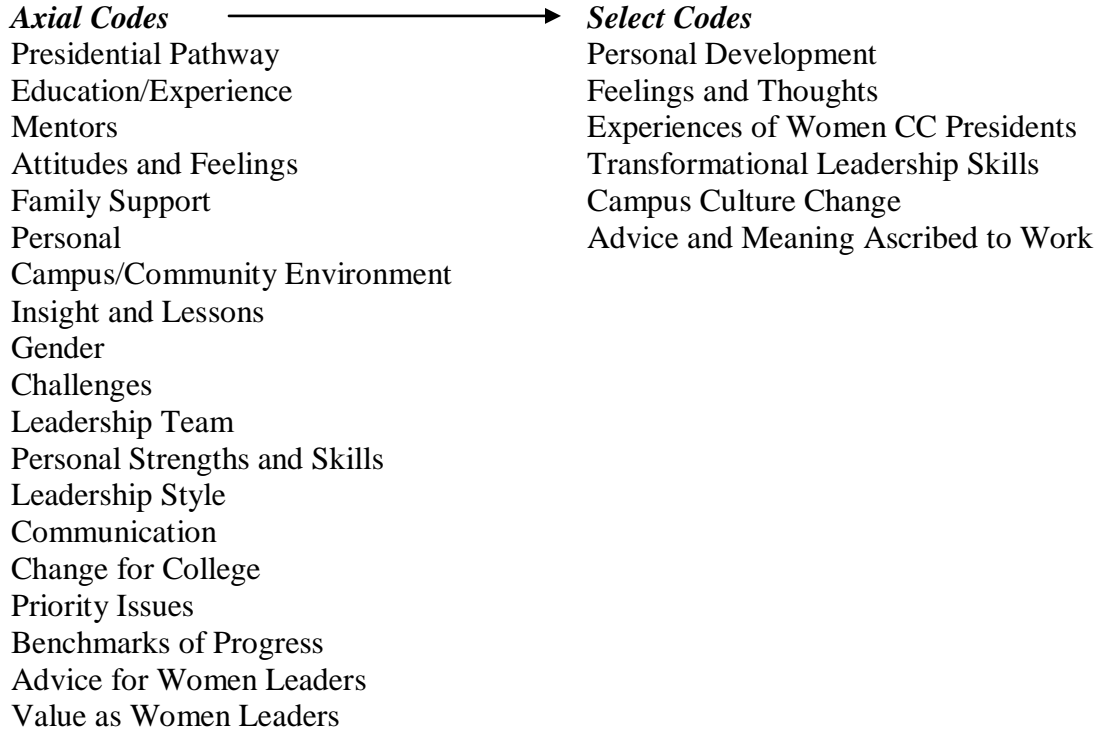   |  |  |
   |---|---|
   | American Indian | White, not of Hispanic origin |
   | Black, but not of Hispanic origin | Foreign |
   | Asian or Pacific Islander | Multicultural , specify_____ |
   | Hispanic | Other _____ |

8. Marital Status
   What has been your marital status while serving as a president at your community college

   Married                    Single

9. Family Status
   Have you had children at home while serving as a president at your community college

   Yes _____ (# at home)         No

**APPENDIX E: CODING FORMAT**

*Axial Codes*   ———————————▶   *Select Codes*

| Axial Codes | Select Codes |
|---|---|
| Presidential Pathway | Personal Development |
| Education/Experience | Feelings and Thoughts |
| Mentors | Experiences of Women CC Presidents |
| Attitudes and Feelings | Transformational Leadership Skills |
| Family Support | Campus Culture Change |
| Personal | Advice and Meaning Ascribed to Work |
| Campus/Community Environment | |
| Insight and Lessons | |
| Gender | |
| Challenges | |
| Leadership Team | |
| Personal Strengths and Skills | |
| Leadership Style | |
| Communication | |
| Change for College | |
| Priority Issues | |
| Benchmarks of Progress | |
| Advice for Women Leaders | |
| Value as Women Leaders | |

Open Codes  ——▶  Axial Codes  ——▶  *Select Codes*

Personal Development
Feelings and Thoughts
Experiences of Women CC Presidents
Transformational Leadership Skills
Campus Culture Change
Advice Meaning Ascribed to Work

How **Axial Codes** fit into **Select Codes:**

*Personal Development*
- Presidential Pathway
- Education/Experience
- Mentors

*Feelings and Thoughts*
- Attitudes and Feelings
- Family Support
- Personal

*Experiences of Female CC Presidents*
- Campus/Community Environment
- Insight and Lessons

- Gender
- Challenges

*Transformational Leadership Skills*
- Leadership Team
- Personal Strengths and Skills
- Leadership Style

*Campus Culture Change*
- Communication
- Change for College
- Priority Issues
- Benchmarks of Progress

*Advice and Meaning Ascribed to Work*
- Advice for Women Leaders
- Value as Women Leaders