

DISSERTATION

ENGLISH MAJOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS:

A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Submitted by

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School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

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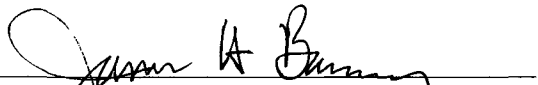
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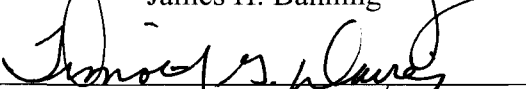
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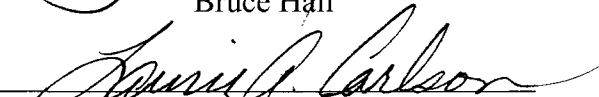
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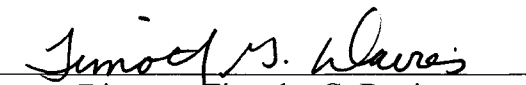
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## **ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION**

### **ENGLISH MAJOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to discover how community college presidents who were undergraduate English majors (English major presidents) construct the stories of their academic and professional journeys. Six presidents shared their stories in private, audio-taped interviews. Narrative inquiry was employed as a qualitative method for analysis and interpretation of data, and themes were drawn from each president's story and then all presidents' stories were compared. For the findings, I used literary pseudonyms to invoke parallels to the presidents' lives, and I first presented the presidents' stories individually to capture their voices and highlight differences in their experiences. Then I synthesized my findings using three themes—boundaries, connections, and transformations—as an interpretative framework. The selected presidents crossed boundaries, made connections to ideas and people, and transformed their thoughts and actions as found in the descriptions of their academic and professional experiences. Data analyses determined that the content and context of English major presidents' stories uncovered relationships among their experiences, their beliefs, about higher education's purpose, and their understanding of the community college mission.

The meaning and significance of English major presidents' experiences have implications for community college leaders, community college constituents, other researchers, and the broader academic community. The findings provide access to

English major presidents' self-understanding about how their academic experiences affect their perception and description of community colleges and their leadership practices. The selected presidents illuminated their relationships to higher education and narrated how their educational endeavors have influenced their personal and professional lives. In particular, they believe their past study of literature helps them understand people and informs their present leadership practices. Their self-reflective explorations provide an additional lens to view the purposes of higher education, the comprehensive community college mission, and community college leadership.

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## **DEDICATION**

For Erich, Amber, and Conor, my greatest fans.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
DEDICATION .....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	viii
RESEARCHER’S PROLOGUE .....	1
CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION .....	7
Background .....	8
Research Context .....	10
Purpose of the Study .....	14
Rationale for the Study .....	14
Methodology .....	15
Research Questions .....	16
Significance.....	17
Conclusion .....	18
CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW .....	19
Community College Mission .....	21
Community College Mission Literature 1980s to early 1990s .....	21
Access, Transfer, and Vocational Missions.....	22
Mission Stability.....	24
Transfer Research and Opinions.....	25
Mission Shift.....	27
Mission Ambiguity .....	28
Community College Mission Literature mid 1990s to early 2000s.....	29
Transfer and Vocational Missions.....	30
Mission Shift.....	31
Mission Integration.....	32
Mission Comprehensiveness .....	33
Synthesis.....	37
Community College Leadership .....	38

Community College Leadership History and Evolution.....	39
Participatory Leadership and the Community College Mission.....	41
Community College Leadership Traits.....	44
Community College Leadership Training.....	46
Community College Presidents' Backgrounds and Preparation.....	48
Community College Leadership in Context.....	51
Synthesis and Conclusion.....	58
<b>CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>61</b>
Theoretical and Ideological Framework.....	61
Narrative Inquiry Framework.....	63
Rationale and Research Design.....	65
Pilot Project Summary.....	66
Project Approval.....	67
Participant Selection.....	67
Reciprocity.....	69
Development of the Interview Guide.....	69
Data Collection.....	71
Data Analysis.....	73
Ethics.....	75
Trustworthiness and Validation.....	75
Conclusion.....	77
<b>CHAPTER FOUR – TELLING THEIR STORIES.....</b>	<b>79</b>
Janus's Prologue.....	81
Janus's Academic Journey.....	81
Janus's Professional Journey.....	85
Janus's Community College Mission.....	91
Janus's Epilogue.....	92
Athena's Prologue.....	94
Athena's Academic Journey.....	95
Athena's Professional Journey.....	98
Athena's Community College Mission.....	104
Athena's Epilogue.....	105

Aeneas’s Prologue.....	108
Aeneas’s Academic Journey .....	109
Aeneas’s Professional Journey.....	111
Aeneas’s Community College Mission.....	117
Aeneas’ Epilogue .....	119
Atticus’s Prologue.....	122
Atticus’s Academic Journey .....	123
Atticus’s Professional Journey.....	129
Atticus’s Community College Mission.....	134
Atticus’s Epilogue.....	136
Robin’s Prologue.....	138
Robin’s Academic Journey .....	139
Robin’s Professional Journey.....	146
Robin’s Community College Mission.....	151
Robin’s Epilogue.....	153
Antigone’s Prologue .....	156
Antigone’s Academic Journey .....	156
Antigone’s Professional Journey .....	160
Antigone’s Community College Mission .....	164
Antigone’s Epilogue .....	166
Conclusion .....	169
<b>CHAPTER FIVE—INTERPRETING THEIR STORIES .....</b>	<b>170</b>
Demographics .....	171
Definitions.....	172
Academic and Professional Journeys.....	174
Higher Education’s Purpose and the Community College Mission .....	184
Relationships.....	189
Conclusion .....	192
<b>CHAPTER SIX--CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>194</b>
Trustworthiness and Validation .....	194
Expected Findings and New Discoveries.....	196
Future Research.....	197

Contribution .....	199
RESEARCHER'S EPILOGUE.....	201
REFERENCES.....	204
Appendix A: E-mail Recruitment of Participants .....	209
Appendix B: Letter Invitation to Participate in a Research Study .....	210
Appendix C: Participant Profile Sheet .....	211
Appendix D: Interview Guide.....	213
Appendix E: Participant Consent Form .....	215

## RESEARCHER'S PROLOGUE

My experiences as an English major have shaped my beliefs about higher education's purpose and my understanding and acceptance of the community college mission. Like many community college students, I was a first generation college student. Although I attended a private four-year institution and not a community college, I still find a clear connection to the first generation students I teach in a community college setting. I gave little thought to an academic major my first semester. I concentrated on fulfilling the general education requirements, although I understood little about college requirements. My parents were just happy that I and my twin brother were in college; since we were first generation students, they were unfortunately not much help with navigating the collegiate landscape.

Because I had no clear direction for my studies, I initially advised myself. I felt no personal or academic connection to the advisor, a German professor, selected for me and saw him just so he could sign my advising slip. I remember that he was interested in my well-being, and he asked me if I had friends. I, for inexplicable reasons now, simply did not give him a chance to know me. I enjoyed my psychology classes during my first semester, and then I took an English literature class the second semester, after English 101. I discovered an aptitude for writing and understanding literature. I remember reviewing the college catalog to see what courses an English major needed to take, and I also knew some older students who were English majors and pre-med majors. I saw that I could "easily" become a double major in English and psychology and advised myself through each semester so that I was able to finish both majors in four years.

My academic majors seemed to find me rather than my consciously choosing them. I also remember how the two majors complemented one another. My writing skills excelled, and I had a high level of success on examinations and writing assignments if one equates success with grades. As time went on, I identified more with my studies in English than psychology. This identification resulted from my experiences with other English undergraduates. There were few of us at the university I attended, which was lauded for its science and engineering programs. We developed a liberal arts identity and formed academic and social groups. My experiences also involved teaching English to high school students during my senior year, which later led me to pursue a master's degree in English.

Throughout high school and even earlier, my parents repeatedly referred to higher education as a "piece of paper" that I would need to obtain a better paying job than they. My older siblings chose not to go to college, and, therefore, my twin brother and I were their last hope. He initially chose engineering as his major and then switched to mathematics. I entered the higher education arena as an undecided major and finally settled on a double major in English and psychology. Of course, my parents' initial reaction was "What will you be able to do when you're finished?" I did not know the answer to this question, a question never asked of my brother.

My background and academic path, so different from my brother's, have shaped my beliefs about higher education's purpose and its effects on my life. I have often been put in the position to defend my choice to major in English. I could write well, analyze stories and poems, understand Shakespeare, but my inner voice constantly asked: "So what?" "What's the point?" My parents' voices echoed these questions: "But what will

you do?” Frankly, I did not know, and I still ponder how I became an academic division chair at a community college. As an undergraduate, I did not specifically set out to do what I am doing now. So what did my higher education experience do for me? I have a job, but I also find joy in the pursuit of knowledge. I read, I vote, I volunteer, and I serve on community boards. I am an active citizen, often a consequence of a liberal arts higher education (Goyette & Mullen, 2006). These elusive benefits from my education are what I find myself attempting to defend and to promote for the students I teach.

I find myself at the boundary between the academic and vocational tension at my institution. Some colleagues often prioritize their agenda before the needs of students and the institution. Generally, those on the academic side believe general education is what is best for students even if students do not want it; it is what they value. They consistently argue that students do not know what is best for them because they do not have the necessary perspective to make decisions about their educations. I think some students do not understand that they are building their knowledge through their educations. I know I did not. I believe as the citizen described in the literature, I should give students access to the unquantifiable effects that higher education afforded me.

On the other hand, I still hear my parents’ words that higher education is just a piece of paper, a ticket to a higher income instead of more opportunities and career choices. They still connect success to money. Many community college students pursue more education for this reason, and many vocational education colleagues have this same perspective. They argue that we need to give students what they want, which is less general education and more vocational education so they are able to perform a particular job. Some view phrases like “life-long learning” as soft. Because some students know

what career they want, they believe we should give them the opportunity to acquire the skill set needed for today's careers, which begs the question of whether that skill set will serve them for a lifetime, a goal for liberal arts education (Goyette & Mullen, 2006).

Some vocational education colleagues assert that students really do not need more than one composition class and that reading Franz Kafka's stories is a proverbial waste of time. For some reason, these colleagues took particular umbrage at the required literature for a second semester composition class. "What is the point of Kafka?" or really "Why read literature?" they asked. How could they not understand literature's importance? I read Kafka as an undergraduate and still vividly remember "The Metamorphosis." This disturbing work touched me in an inexplicable way; I knew I did not want Gregor Samsa's fate. Was it really so bad that I was "forced" to read Kafka? I did not think so, and I still do not because his stories made me think. At the community college where I am employed, this either/or argument between higher education's abstract and concrete benefits has disrupted communication and even trust among colleagues who are essentially seeking similar goals—to educate students. What is overlooked in this argument are the complexities of living in a dynamic world and the critical examination of what may be required for students now and in the future to lead self-defined, fulfilled lives.

The tension between academic and vocational perspectives is a part of my professional experiences at a community college. I have a clear understanding that the mission of comprehensive community colleges is to afford all students access to developmental, academic, and vocational education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). I accept

this mission because I believe higher education is beneficial for individuals and communities. However, I cannot ignore this mission's inherent limitations in practice.

How can community colleges provide students with general education and vocational education in a mere two years? Is it appropriate to require both for students who just want a vocational career? Should we rely on them knowing this is what they want? These questions are further complicated when I consider the community college access mission. Despite community colleges' historical emphasis on access, many programs such as nursing are not open to every student. For such programs, qualified students often have to vie for limited seat space thereby undermining the access mission. How should community colleges reconcile their contradictions and limitations? For me, there are no easy answers to these complex questions.

Access to higher education directly relates to my background; without a great deal of financial aid I would not have attended college or even graduated. My parents wanted me to go to college for a particular purpose—to obtain a good job. So how do I tell the additional story about higher education's abstract benefits to potential and current students who just want that job and to vocational colleagues and external constituents who want students to have the skill set for that job?

The tension between the academic and vocational perspectives is not all that different from the tension I faced with my family when I defended and still defend my choice to pursue English as my academic discipline, an experience more than likely shared by many when finally settling on a field of study. My story has come full circle. I stand in the space where two circles overlap. My education has given me a job and the ability to live a contented life. I have a "piece of paper" and so much more. My

understanding about higher education's purpose is still evolving and remains inextricably bound to my past academic and current professional experiences. These experiences will continue to shape my outlook about how I understand higher education's purpose and the comprehensive community college mission. As I continue my journey as a community college leader, I will seek ways for others to help me widen the space where I and they stand.

My story as an undergraduate English major who has embarked on the journey of community college leadership compares and contrasts with the stories of English major presidents whom I interviewed for this study. However, I told their stories. Despite our similar academic degrees, their stories were different from mine. I remained aware of this as I listened and sought to discover how they construct the stories of their academic and professional journeys, which I believe have shaped their understanding of self, of higher education's purpose, and the comprehensive community college mission.

## **CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION**

This dissertation explores the academic and professional journeys of community college presidents who were undergraduate English majors (English major presidents) and uses narrative inquiry as the underlying methodology. The purpose of my study was to discover how the selected presidents construct the stories of their journeys and to determine if the content and context of their stories uncover relationships among their experiences, their beliefs about higher education's purpose, and their understanding of the community college mission. My dissertation begins with my researcher's prologue, and then I divide my dissertation into six chapters, and end with my researcher's epilogue. Chapter one provides an introduction to the study. In this chapter, I describe how the study evolved, followed by an overview of the research context found in the literature and the purpose and rationale for the study. Then, I explain my choice to employ narrative inquiry as a research method. After that, I explain my research questions. Finally, I briefly discuss the study's significance and end chapter one with a conclusion. Chapter two will provide a literature review, Chapter three will detail my research method, Chapter four presents each participant's story separately, Chapter five synthesizes participants' experiences and answers my research questions, and Chapter six reflects on the study's contribution to the community college academic and research literature. I end my dissertation with my researcher's epilogue.

## **Background**

During the first year of my doctoral program, I had the opportunity to visit many community colleges and a few four-year institutions. These visits included meeting community college presidents and other higher education administrators. I noticed that some of the presidents and administrators had academic degrees in the liberal arts, particularly English, which happens to be the same discipline I pursued. Throughout the campus visits, many leaders expressed a great deal of knowledge about their institutions, and most were proud to serve in their positions. Because the visits gave leaders an opportunity to highlight their best programs and institutional achievements, their backgrounds were described quickly. Their descriptions were neither detailed nor reflective. I wanted to know more details about their educational and career paths. I began to wonder if their academic paths established the foundation for their leadership and their understanding of institutional purpose. How would they describe their relationships to higher education if given the opportunity? Did their individual academic paths shape their understanding about higher education's purpose and the institutions that they were serving? What experiences would they have in common? Where would their stories differ? I wanted to know more about their stories and how they compared or contrasted with my own.

My choice to study community college presidents who majored in English (English major presidents) and their stories evolved from the above visits and from my research interests in the comprehensive community college mission and community college leadership. Early in my doctoral program, I took classes titled "History of the Community College" and "Community College Curriculum." These courses allowed me

to explore my educational path as an English major within the framework of higher education's history, philosophy, and purpose. I gained a more thorough understanding of the community college mission and became more cognizant about its complexities. Institutional programs and curricula not only represent degrees students may earn or courses they may take, but also represent institutional values about the benefits of a higher education.

Educational journeys and professional paths give individuals unique experiences and perspectives, which may be found in the stories they tell. Their stories represent what they remember and perhaps value about their educational and professional experiences. Their stories may illuminate higher education's purpose from a personal rather than a public perspective. Community college presidents were chosen as participants for this study because of their potential to impact the life of an institution. Furthermore, English major presidents were selected to provide a definitive, manageable respondent pool and to discover the abstract and concrete outcomes of having a particular liberal arts degree. Exploring the stories of those who have similar academic degrees allowed comparisons to be made and allowed for the exploration of participants' individual situations. My goal for this study was to obtain a clearer understanding about how others who have a similar degree as I, but who are more advanced in their careers, construct stories of their academic and professional journeys. I wanted to determine if their journeys have shaped and continue to shape their beliefs about higher education's purpose and their understanding of institutional mission.

As I learned from my participants, I discovered more about myself and my research interests. These discoveries also have implications for community college

leaders, faculty, staff, students, and external constituents. Community college leadership research indicated that effective leaders have practical skills combined with an understanding of self, others, and internal and external organizational complexities (Pettitt & Ayers, 2002; Yoder, 2005). Research additionally indicates that community college leaders should understand their values and engage in self-reflective practices (Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005), which may be found in a thorough exploration of their educational and professional experiences. One way for leaders to gain self-understanding is to describe perceptions about their educations. How were my participants “educated”? What do they remember and value about their educational experiences? What do they include in the stories they tell about their academic and professional journeys? The answers to these questions may assist those who support higher education and the community college mission. My study allowed six English major presidents to examine the roots of their educational philosophies and the impact these philosophies have on their decision-making processes. I believe my participants may have achieved a deeper understanding about their motivations to support community college students and the institutions that they lead.

### **Research Context**

As I began to investigate my interests in choosing a dissertation topic, I recursively reflected on the relationship between the community college mission and community college leadership, which led to my development of these themes in my literature review. The extensive volume of available literature required that I narrow the focus of these themes. The narrowing process resulted in a chronological pattern for community college mission literature and a topical pattern for community college

leadership. These broad themes provide a backdrop for my study. The selected literature moves from general perspectives about the comprehensive community college mission and its relationship to higher education's multi-faceted purposes to more specific perspectives about the skill set and training needed for community college leaders.

First, I discovered that community college mission literature from the early 1980s to early 1990s focused on research and opinions regarding the relationships among access, transfer, and vocational missions. From their legal inception, community colleges or junior colleges gave students access to the first two years of a baccalaureate education (Vaughan, 1985). Later, community colleges were given the charge to provide transfer and vocational education and to respond to a community's specific needs (Vaughan, 1985). The legislative history of community colleges underscores the comprehensive mission's competing goals, which made it subject to scrutiny.

From the early 1980s to the early 1990s, mission literature emphasized a tension between the transfer and vocational functions of the comprehensive mission. Some authors argued that the transfer function held the key for citizens' social mobility (Dougherty, 1992; Grubb, 1991; Pincus, 1980; Reitano, 1988), where others argued that restricting the mission to a vocational function would assist community colleges' efficiency, quality, and competitiveness (Clowes & Levin, 1989). Despite this tension, Cross and Fideler (1989) determined that the comprehensive community college mission was stable during the 1980s; the mission did not shift to favor the transfer function or the vocational function. However, a later study found that the emphasis on the transfer function was eroding to favor the vocational function due to economic factors and increased competition for funding (Raisman, 1994). Fusch (1996) suggested that

community colleges would not find consensus regarding their identity or mission due to their diversity and local autonomy. Fusch predicted that future discussions would focus on the access mission.

Based on my examination of later community college mission literature from the mid 1990s to early 2000s, I discovered a shift in focus to vocational education and its relationship to the economy. Bailey and Averianova (1998) found that community colleges turned to workforce development due to economic necessity and that this shift enhanced all core functions for comprehensive community colleges. The researchers based their views on an examination of preliminary findings from a national study of the missions of community colleges. Additional researchers also found that curricular efforts targeted skills development and employer needs and that these efforts may have been linked to intervening government policies established during the 1990s or to the influences of globalization (Ayers, 2002; Floyd, Walker, & Farnsworth, 2003; Levin, 2000; Levin, 2001). The increased pressures to respond to external constituents resulted in institutional ambiguity in purpose and identity for community colleges. The literature also included perspectives that separated or integrated transfer and vocational education and criticized or applauded comprehensiveness for community colleges (Ayers, 2005; Bailey & Morest, 2004; Williams, Zdravkovich, & Engleberg, 2002). Overall, viewpoints about core curricular efforts converge and diverge for comprehensive community colleges.

The mission literature may be linked to leadership literature about community colleges. The leadership literature provided a broad range of views about the necessary training and skill set needed for effective community college leadership. Authors

connected leadership to the comprehensive community college mission and determined that leaders must understand themselves and the organizations they lead. Community college leaders should engage in participatory practices and pluralistic leadership (Boggs, 2003; Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; Kezar, 2000; Kezar, 2002; McClenney, 2001; O'Banion, 2002; Romero, 2004; Spaid & Parsons, 1999). Leaders must also have essential leadership skills for their and their institutions' success, which include an understanding of their values and the abilities to be self-reflective, to afford leadership opportunities to others, and to understand and lead within an ever-changing environment, to name a few (Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005). These skills may be honed and developed with specific community college leadership training that includes formal programs and professional development opportunities (Bragg, 2000; Duvall, 2003; Romero, 2004). Finally, the leadership literature reviewed indicated that successful leaders must understand the community college mission and the role that conflict, climate, and change play in mission implementation (Eddy, 2003; March & Weiner, 2003; Pettitt & Ayers, 2002; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998; Yoder, 2005).

Chapter two further develops the themes of community college mission and community college leadership identified as a foundation for my study of English major presidents. This literature provides the background for my study, and includes demographics about community college presidents (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998). Although researchers have reported on leadership traits, training, and backgrounds, the specific academic experiences of community college presidents are not reported in any qualitative study. There is no study that carefully and methodically examines the academic experiences of English major presidents, and, thus, my study provides access to

leaders' self-understanding about how their academic and professional experiences affect their perception and description of community colleges and their leadership practices.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of my study was to discover how English major presidents construct the stories of their academic and professional journeys. Data analysis determined that the content and context of their stories uncover relationships among their experiences, their beliefs about higher education's purpose, and their understanding of the community college mission.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Examination of the community college mission and leadership literature provides a rationale for this study. The mission literature indicated that the community college mission is inherently flexible as community colleges continue to respond to their community's competing needs within the context of providing access for developmental, transfer, and vocational students (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). The mission's complexities call for leaders who are self-reflective and understand and accept the mission. Several authors asserted that presidents' backgrounds, training, and the evolving expectations for community college leadership intersect with the comprehensive community college mission (Bragg, 2000; Eddy, 2003; Kezar, 2002; Spaid & Parsons, 1999). Researchers believed that understanding the reciprocal relationship between the collective organizational identity and personal identity remains a key component for the development of successful community college leaders (Eddy, 2003; Kempner, 2003; Kezar, 2002). Vaughan and Weisman (1998) confirmed that presidents must understand the mission and effectively communicate that mission to others. To do so, they must

engage in internal and external inquiries to learn about past, present, and future realities for themselves and the colleges they lead (Boggs, 2003; Eddy, 2003; Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; McClenney, 2001; O'Banion, 2002; Yoder, 2005). The mission and leadership literature examined focused primarily on what community college leaders should understand and how they should be trained. Leaders' stories that describe how their undergraduate and professional experiences affect their perceptions and descriptions of community colleges and leadership practices are not found in the literature.

My study gave selected community college presidents the opportunity to engage in internal inquiries, which as described in much of the available community college leadership literature, is an important activity in the leadership process. The focus on English major presidents allowed comparisons of leaders' internal inquiries to be made and provided a specific liberal arts perspective. This perspective gives an additional lens from which to understand leadership and the comprehensive community college mission.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative research paradigm was chosen for this study because it employs an "interpretive, naturalistic approach" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15) to gain understanding about human experiences. Within the qualitative research paradigm, researchers may choose from several traditions such as phenomenology and grounded theory that often fragment participants' interview responses to create descriptions and generalizations about experiences or to develop a theory (Bruner, 1987; Creswell, 1993; Riessman, 1993). However, narrative inquiry looks at how and why a participant's story was told, the way it was told, and the story's holistic content and context (Schram, 2006). In narrative inquiry, the research emphasis is placed on participants' stories.

English major presidents have particular stories to tell about their academic and professional experiences. Narrative inquiry provides the best method for my exploration because of its emphasis on personally and socially constructed realities (Nash, 2004). Narrative inquiry allows me to create meaning and significance from their experiences for others without fragmenting their narratives' content and context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry gives a perspective about community college presidents' lives that has not been reported.

English major presidents from comprehensive community colleges were interviewed to invite stories about their experiences. I identified participants by using the American Association of Community College's 2007 directory, which provides information about community college presidents including their academic degrees and majors and contact information. Using an interview guide, private interviews were conducted over the phone or in person and audio-taped. The primary purpose of the interview guide was to obtain the desired stories without engaging in an artificial question and answer session. I analyzed transcripts thematically and holistically. The goal for data analysis was to draw themes from the entire story that each participant told and then to compare themes from all participants' stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through interviews, participants were given the opportunity to reflect on and to share their experiences with me and subsequently a broader audience.

### **Research Questions**

The community college mission and leadership literature I examined suggested that community college leaders who understand themselves and the institutions they lead are more effective leaders. This literature does not report community college presidents'

narratives about such understanding, which is why narrative inquiry was employed for my study. Narrative inquiry allows researchers to delve into participants' experiences to capture a holistic perspective about how particular events have shaped their lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As detailed in my researcher's prologue, my beliefs about higher education's purpose and the community college's mission have been shaped by my academic and professional experiences. Thus, my research questions have evolved from my research context, methodology, and researcher's perspective. My major research questions are:

*How do community college presidents who were undergraduate English majors construct the stories of their academic and professional journeys?*

*How do these presidents understand higher education's purpose for individuals and communities?*

*How do these presidents understand the community college mission?*

*How do these presidents understand the relationships among their academic and professional journeys, their beliefs about higher education's purpose, and their beliefs about the community college mission?*

### **Significance**

The answers to my major research questions provide another layer to what is already known about community college leaders. Because community college presidents should understand the community college mission within the context of higher education's purpose, an exploration of their academic backgrounds and professional experiences illuminated a greater understanding of self and the means by which they communicate their values on their campuses. I believe such understanding allowed them

to examine their motivations regarding their decisions and actions as representatives for their institutions and their students.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter one introduced and outlined my dissertation. In Chapter one, I included a rationale for my study, described the purpose of my study, and included the primary research questions. Although I have a similar academic degree as my participants, I recognize my research goals were to share the meaning and significance of their experiences. I designed a study based in narrative inquiry principles where personal and socially constructed realities have pedagogical purposes. I explored the narratives of English major presidents to gain an understanding of their perspectives about their academic experiences, their professional experiences, higher education's purpose, and the community college mission.

Chapter one outlined the concepts from the literature that is developed further in Chapter two. Literature available on the comprehensive community college mission and community college leadership is extensive. However, the selected literature neither reports on how community college presidents from a particular academic discipline narrate their academic and professional journeys nor reports on whether or not they link these experiences to their beliefs about higher education's purpose and the community college mission.

## CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

Since community colleges first began, their mission and purpose set them apart from universities and four-year colleges. Their emergence in the higher education arena was not without controversy, disagreement, and misunderstanding, which has had significant implications for community college leaders. Community colleges are unique higher education institutions whose comprehensive and inclusive mission has been both lauded and criticized. This mission includes offering transfer, vocational, and developmental education combined with an emphasis on open access, innovation, community responsiveness, teaching, and learning (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

In this chapter, I present academic and research literature that provides a framework for my dissertation. The literature I selected, while not comprehensive, allows me to report on a broad spectrum of published articles most relevant to my narrative inquiry on English major presidents' academic and professional journeys.

In an earlier literature review, Frye (1994) divided community college literature into two major themes. First, community college literature attempts to find a place for community colleges in the higher education system. Second, Frye explained that traditional assumptions about higher education's purpose influence beliefs about community colleges. The traditional assumptions include the beliefs that individuals are responsible for their social positions based on their achievements, and educational attainment for the most sought after positions is not available for everyone. However, due to open access, an influx of non-traditional students, and changing employer needs,

traditional assumptions are being called into question. Frye emphasized that community colleges must be examined within this changing context. He explained that the focus on education as a private benefit overlooks the public benefits and is neglected in the literature on the two-year college. Instead, Frye claimed that

an understanding of the two-year college literature can benefit from a perspective that sees the institution not in an isolated institutional form, but as a dynamic system representing interest groups which in turn are impacted by social forces outside education altogether. (p. 189)

Frye claimed that “a satisfactory picture of the two-year college, its programs, purposes, procedures, and definitions does not emerge” (p. 194) in the reviewed literature.

Similarly, the community college mission and its impact on community college leadership cannot be depicted in my selective literature review either. But, in contrast to Frye’s literature review, I present a spectrum of community college mission literature that spans over two decades as well as leadership literature that is relevant to my study. I review the literature based on two broad themes titled—“Community College Mission” and “Community College Leadership.”

For the first theme, “Community College Mission,” I divide selected community college mission literature chronologically into two categories “Community College Mission Literature 1980s to early 1990s” and “Community College Mission Literature mid 1990s to early 2000s” to describe the mission’s evolution. I report that during the 1980s and early 1990s, the community college mission literature focused on the access mission and its relationship to transfer and vocational education. An either/or split between transfer and vocational education often emerged in the literature selected from this decade. During the mid 1990s and early 2000s, the community college mission

literature shifted focus to vocational education and its relationship to local and global economies.

For the second theme—“Community College Leadership”—, I examine leadership literature that begins with a broad overview regarding community college leadership and ends with a discussion about this topic from contextual and cognitive perspectives. This literature suggests that community college leaders have specific leadership traits that must be coupled with their understanding of the historic and current community college missions. This understanding must also be viewed within the context of leaders’ experiences and the institutional history of the community college they are serving. I provide a synthesis of this theme’s major points after I end my discussion, followed by a conclusion that integrates the two themes’ importance to my study.

### **Community College Mission**

For this section, I present a broad spectrum of viewpoints and studies gleaned from over two decades, 1980s to early 2000s, to demonstrate that the community college mission and purpose are neither monolithic nor static. An agreed upon identity, purpose, and mission for community colleges were not discerned in my review of this mission literature.

#### ***Community College Mission Literature 1980s to early 1990s***

The authors in this section examined community colleges from various perspectives to illuminate the development and evolution of the comprehensive community college mission. I classified this literature into five categories—*Access*, *Transfer*, and *Vocational Mission*, *Mission Stability*, *Transfer Research and Opinions*, *Mission Shift*, and *Mission Ambiguity*. The research and opinions in this section show the

complex relationship among access, transfer, and vocational missions, which is often discussed in either/or terms particularly between transfer and vocational missions.

I begin this section with a discussion about the community college mission from a historical perspective (Clowes & Levin, 1989; Pincus, 1980; Reitano, 1988; Vaughan, 1985). Then I describe a study that explores mission stability (Cross & Fideler, 1989) followed by a discussion about transfer education based on research and opinions (Dougherty, 1992; Grubb, 1991; Lane, 2003). I conclude with a study about mission shift (Raisman, 1994) and Fusch's (1996) opinion about the continuation of mission ambiguity.

### ***Access, Transfer, and Vocational Missions***

In his seminal work, Vaughan (1985) traced the legislative history that created community colleges and identified their position within higher education. Vaughan explained that the Morrill Act of 1862 created land grants to establish academic institutions. This Act afforded a college education to any white male who had the academic ability needed for collegiate success. The Morrill Act also established the belief that higher education should teach "practical subjects" (Vaughan, 1985, p. 18). Before this, college was only available to wealthy, male elites. Vaughan suggested that this Act provided the backdrop for today's open access to higher education. Later, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the GI Bill, provided financial support to encourage returning World War II veterans, regardless of socio-economic status, to attend college. Then, the 1947 Truman Commission Report firmly placed public two-year colleges in a national higher education framework. The Report also committed the nation to expand higher education opportunities for its citizens. The Truman Report

called these institutions “community colleges” and established their comprehensive mission. Finally, the Higher Education Act of 1965 and later amendments, especially those in 1972, provided need-based financial assistance to anyone who wanted to attend college. This legislative history, according to Vaughan, underscores the philosophical basis of the community college’s access mission, which is made manifest in its comprehensive programs.

Where Vaughan (1985) examined the legislative evolution of inclusive access to higher education, two authors (Pincus, 1980; Reitano, 1988) argued that the community college transfer function, rather than vocational education, is the foundation for citizens’ access to higher education and economic and social mobility. Pincus (1980) explained that the first public community colleges established in Joliet, Illinois and Fresno, California, in 1901 and 1910 respectively, “were not associated with vocational education” (p. 344), but, instead, were associated with preparing students to transfer to a four-year school. Second, vocational education, defined as terminal degree programs that lead to immediate employment, emerged later as an “attempt to meet the changing labor market needs of an advanced industrial society” (p. 339). Vocational education, Pincus asserted, maintains socio-economic class distinctions, and does not yield the economic rewards it promises to students. Therefore, community college students should be encouraged to undertake a transfer curriculum, which increases their chances for socio-economic mobility.

Like Pincus (1980), Reitano (1988) explained that until the 1970s, community colleges’ transfer mission remained the primary focus, but shifted during the 1970s and 1980s to career education. Without a liberal foundation, career education, according to

Reitano, is “dead-end education” (p. 122) that perpetuates class distinctions. Reitano also believed the name “*two-year college*” contributes to the confusion about community colleges’ purpose and identity. Reitano explained that “... the name community college reflects a shift of emphasis towards daily life and away from the pure pursuit of knowledge” (p. 122). Reitano argued that the community college curriculum should afford all students an opportunity to examine liberal arts’ and sciences’ most humanistic, inclusive traditions.

In contrast, Clowes and Levin (1989) believed that community colleges should identify career education as their core function. Since other “nonselective senior institutions” provide the collegiate function, community colleges are not “primary providers in this area” (p. 325). A career education focus would assist community colleges in maintaining their place within higher education by allowing them to focus on a single mission “and not dissipating [their] energies over multiple functions with imprecise focuses and indifferent support” (p. 353). In doing so, they believed community colleges would increase their efficiency, quality, and competitiveness. Taken together, the previous authors described the transfer and vocational missions as opposing forces within community colleges.

### ***Mission Stability***

Although Pincus (1980), Reitano (1988), and Clowes and Levin (1989) argued that the community college mission is shifting or should shift to favor vocational education, empirical evidence indicated that the mission during the mid-1980s remained stable. The purpose of Cross and Fideler’s (1989) study was to ascertain whether or not community colleges in the mid-1980s established new goals and priorities. This article

reported the researchers' findings from an analysis of "data from a 1984-85 administration of the Community College Goals Inventory (CCGI) at ten geographically dispersed community colleges who were users of the CCGI" (p. 210). These data were compared to the CCGI data collected in 1979 from eighteen community colleges. The Educational Testing Service developed CCGI to assist community colleges in clarifying "goals and [determining] differences in perceptions among their various constituencies—faculty, administrators, students, trustees, and community groups" (p. 210).

For the study's purpose, the responses from community college administrators were examined. The findings indicated that administrators ranked general education as the highest institutional goal, but "accomplishment of this goal has not kept pace with expectations" (p. 214). The researchers' selective review of CCGI data showed little evidence that goals and priorities had changed or that new goals and priorities emerged for community colleges from 1979 to 1985.

### ***Transfer Research and Opinions***

Despite critics like Pincus (1980) and Reitano (1988) who argued that the increased emphasis on vocational education contributes to the erosion of the transfer mission and perpetuates socio-economic class distinctions, Grubb (1991) asserted that the community college's flexibility, rather than a clear educational progression from associate's degree to bachelor's degree, is the primary cause for this erosion. The data from national longitudinal surveys showed that overall fewer community college students from 1980, compared to 1972, transferred and completed the baccalaureate degree (Grubb, 1991).

Because of these findings, Grubb (1991) declared that the transfer function must be renewed for three reasons. First, the transfer function demonstrates that community colleges are academically sound institutions. Second, many community college students, including non-traditional students, still want to obtain a baccalaureate degree and must begin their studies at a community college. Third, the access mission depends, in part, on the transfer function. Grubb asserted that the most important evidence about community college transfer students' success was their completion of the baccalaureate degree. Grubb concluded that declining transfer rates indicate that the "health of the entire educational system" (p. 215) is in jeopardy, and the many causes must be addressed systematically to reverse this trend.

Dougherty (1992), through another examination of national longitudinal surveys, confirmed Grubb's (1991) findings that community college students achieve lower levels of baccalaureate attainment when compared to four-year institutions. Dougherty examined "the nature of the institution they are entering" (p. 192) and found that community college students who desire a four-year degree are hindered by open access programs that do not have clear entry and exit standards. Without such standards, many community college students face difficulty transferring to four-year institutions, and they fail to persist at four-year institutions. Dougherty suggested that "post-transfer retentions would be promoted through more and better packaged financial aid, greater social integration of transfer students, more rigorous academic preparation, and greater acceptance of credit" (p. 205). Dougherty thought this could be achieved by restructuring community colleges into branch campuses of state universities.

Although Grubb (1991) and Dougherty (1992) believed students' baccalaureate attainment was associated with community colleges' success, they did not examine community college student demographics or define transfer education specifically. However, Lane (2003) revealed that general education needs to be defined according to community college student demographics instead of university student demographics. Lane asserted that most community college students will not attain a baccalaureate degree. Lane also argued that "the upward progression through a stratified educational ladder is no longer the only path through higher education" (p. 64). Thus, for the short time community college students are in college, they should be exposed to general education and liberal arts education through a variety of learning experiences rather than disparate courses designed to satisfy graduation requirements. Community college students must have the prerequisite knowledge offered through general education to be successful in liberal arts courses. Community colleges would do well to focus their efforts on educational opportunities for students rather than their credentialing or transfer role (Lane, 2003).

### ***Mission Shift***

Although Lane (2003) primarily focused on internal curricular efforts to underscore the community college mission, Raisman's (1994) study revealed that external influences also affect the mission. The purpose of the quantitative study was to determine the state of general education at 29 Michigan community colleges based on 1989 fall course offerings. Data were collected through an examination of course offerings, which were categorized into five groups: "(a) general education; (b) career education; (c) remedial and developmental studies; (d) physical education; and (e)

personal growth” (Method section, ¶ 3). The course description from colleges’ catalogs determined into which group the course was placed. To separate courses designed to meet vocational and technical needs from general education courses, technical math and technical writing were not counted as general education even if there was some “liberal arts emphasis” (Method section, ¶ 6).

Cross and Fideler’s (1989) Community College Goals Inventory (CCGI) provided the definition for general education, and other studies provided the basic approach for methodology and data analysis. The findings indicated that the number of general education courses offered were significantly lower (30.6%) than career education courses (54.4%). In addition, general education courses were limited to introductory courses or service courses such as mathematics and English, and, therefore, contributed little to the transfer mission. Raisman’s findings indicated that community colleges serve primarily as career education institutions rather than transfer institutions. Raisman suggested that this mission shift may be linked to the economy and the competition for funding, since administrators surveyed still believed that the transfer function was the primary mission for their institutions.

### ***Mission Ambiguity***

Despite continued debates about transfer and vocational education as they relate to institutional stability or instability, mission clarity did not emerge for community colleges during the 1980s and early 1990s. Fusch (1996) concluded that community colleges consistently have struggled to find consensus regarding their identity and mission. He suggested that future discussions will continue to focus on the access mission. Fusch explained that social scientists have identified five likely directions for

American twenty-first century community colleges. First, they may become four-year institutions. Second, they may restrict their missions to serve the needs of vocational education. Third, they may become a boundary-spanning organization and utilize new technologies to expand distance education offerings. Fourth, they may expand international and business partnerships. Fifth, they may enhance their historic access mission and maintain their core functions to provide transfer and vocational education, while serving the community's local needs. Fusch predicted that community colleges will not give up their comprehensive mission and will remain true to their historical roots.

#### *Community College Mission Literature mid 1990s to early 2000s*

As Fusch (1996) described, community college mission literature during the mid 1990s and early 2000s continued to examine institutional identity and mission. I classified this literature into four categories—*Transfer and Vocational Missions*, *Mission Shift*, *Mission Integration*, and *Mission Comprehensiveness*. The research and opinions in this section show that the community college mission literature has shifted its focus to vocational education and its relationship to the economy. This contrasts with mission literature from the 1980s to early 1990s, which focused on the transfer versus vocational education debate.

I begin this section by describing a study that explores assumptions about the community college mission (Bailey & Averianova, 1998) followed by studies and opinions that identify a mission shift during this decade (Ayers, 2002; Floyd, Walker, & Farnsworth, 2003; Levin, 2000). After that, I report on opinions and a study that focus on mission integration (Ayers, 2005; Williams, Zdravkovich, & Engleberg, 2002). I end this section with a study that describes why the comprehensive community college mission

has survived (Bailey & Morest, 2004) followed by two opinions that confirm and criticize this comprehensiveness (Hanson, 2006; Jacobson, 2005).

### *Transfer and Vocational Missions*

In a report conducted for the Community College Research Center, Bailey and Averianova (1998) sought to clarify implicit assumptions regarding the community college mission and to report “some preliminary findings from a national study of the missions of community colleges” (p. 3). One primary objective was to conceptualize the extremes on the continuum that call for community colleges to restrict or to expand their mission. The authors explained that critics perceive vocational education as leading to the demise of transfer education, a core function for community colleges. However, due to economic necessity, community colleges are turning to workforce development as state funding and enrollments decrease. Instead of this either/or split between transfer and vocational education often found in the selected mission literature of the previous decade, Bailey and Averianova argued for the integration of academic and vocational education because students who transfer or who enter the workforce need similar skill sets.

Bailey and Averianova’s (1998) preliminary findings indicated that community college leaders’ “perceived priorities” (p. 20) influence the internal and external understanding of their institution’s mission. If leaders focus on workforce development, then less time is spent strengthening the transfer mission. Yet, the focus on workforce development garners political support for the institution, which enhances all core functions. Bailey and Averianova indicated that “few colleges have achieved anywhere close to the potential for integrating their diverse activities” (p. 29), even though

community colleges have demonstrated historic flexibility in adapting to their community's needs.

### *Mission Shift*

Other researchers explored additional implications about the comprehensive community college mission. Levin (2000) conducted a qualitative multiple-case-study at seven community colleges to investigate the changing nature of the mission in the 1990s. The findings indicated that college personnel believed their institutional mission remained unchanged from the previous decade, although organizational behaviors indicated a mission shift “from serving local needs to serving the economy” (Institutional Change section, ¶ 3). Levin determined that community colleges in the 1990s emerged as globalized institutions whose primary focus was on “new vocationalism” (Institutional Change section, ¶ 3) in which curricular efforts targeted skills development and employer needs. Levin (2001) later determined in a second qualitative study that this mission shift could be linked to intervening, government policies during the 1990s. Community colleges became an extension of state interests, which were devoted to the development of “private sector business and industry” (p. 258). Due to state interference, institutional ambiguity in purpose and identity for community colleges continued during this decade.

Changing curricular efforts were also reflected in community college mission statements and institutional activities. Through a quantitative, content analysis of 102 community college mission statements from 82 comprehensive community colleges and 20 technical colleges, Ayers (2002) found evidence of a mission shift from transfer education to career education, which may be the result of institutional responsiveness to the global economy. Floyd, Walker, and Farnsworth (2003) also found that community

colleges, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, expanded their responsiveness to local needs to include global education as a “new, community-driven educational imperative” (p. 6). These authors discerned “common mission imperatives” (p.19) for comprehensive community colleges, which include general education, work force development, and responsiveness to both areas, and asserted that community colleges need to become globalized institutions to enhance such responsiveness.

### ***Mission Integration***

Although Ayers (2002) worked from an either/or polarity and Floyd, Walker, and Farnsworth (2003) implicitly integrated transfer and vocational education, Williams, Zdravkovich, and Engleberg (2002), who were leaders at Prince George’s Community College, believed that merging transfer and vocational education is best for students. Their goal to excel “as a nationally recognized, intellectually vibrant model of liberal education” (p. 34) compelled them to integrate liberal arts and practical education at their institution. With such integration, students are prepared for careers, citizenship, and lifelong learning. Williams, Zdravkovich, and Engleberg believed the historic mission of the comprehensive community college lends itself “to embrace a more open and democratic form of higher education” (p. 35). Liberal arts education, despite its elitist connotations, will allow community college graduates to see themselves as part of a global society. Liberal arts education coupled with practical education creates opportunities for individuals to question and to engage in conversations about the interdependence of thought and action.

However, such integration is subject to scrutiny. In a later, qualitative case study at one community college undergoing change, Ayers (2005) found tension between its

academic and vocational programs through a critical discourse analysis of organizational climate. Although the study's primary focus was to describe and analyze institutional discourses as they related to organizational climate, Ayers questioned whether comprehensive community colleges should continue to house both academic and vocational programs because of the social stratification between their leaders. Those who led academic programs held advanced degrees, understood the "collegial culture" (Conclusions section, ¶ 3) of their institutions, and viewed education as a lifelong pursuit. Those who led vocational programs were likely to have an associate's degree, made hierarchical decisions, and viewed education as a way to gain "immediate entry in the workplace" (Conclusions section, ¶ 3). These leadership differences created a power differential between academic and vocational programs, with academic programs gaining the upper hand. Ayers asserted that this power differential makes it difficult to create and to maintain a sense of community among constituencies across a community college campus.

To summarize, the previously described studies and opinions indicate that curricular efforts, government policies, mission statements, institutional activities, and institutional climate contribute to the identification of a mission shift for comprehensive community colleges. More emphasis on career education and globalization and less emphasis on transfer versus vocational education were found in the community college mission literature reviewed from these decades.

### ***Mission Comprehensiveness***

Because increasing emphasis on work force development and globalization is controversial, Bailey and Morest (2004) investigated in a qualitative, multiple-case-study

design why community colleges have persevered as comprehensive institutions in a study conducted for the Community College Research Center. They also analyzed mission integration as one approach to increase organizational efficiency without compromising comprehensiveness.

Eight community colleges from five different states were chosen through purposeful sampling based on “state policy context, degree of urbanicity, and comprehensiveness of program offerings” (Bailey & Morest, 2004, p. 9). Data were collected from interviews of administrators, faculty, and students. Analysis of the data allowed the researchers to identify two outcomes categories as they related to their research questions –“emphasis referred to the extent to which the college engaged in a particular mission (12 codes) and cohesion referred to the extent of integrations between missions (9 codes)” (p. 9).

Organizational and resource-dependency theory guided the data analysis. The researchers used resource-dependency typology to identify three mission categories “core, vertical, and horizontal” (Bailey & Morest, 2004, p. 6) to describe the community colleges’ activities. Core activities are those associated with degree-granting programs. Vertical activities include improving “college outputs in the form of transfer students” (p.7) and terminal students. Horizontal activities diversify the college’s “market niche and revenue streams” (p.7).

The findings for the first research question indicated that political and financial environments contribute to the comprehensive mission’s perseverance. All colleges in this study were participating in dual enrollment programs with high schools and strengthening their articulations with four-year institutions. Horizontal expansion,

through the pursuit of “non-credit, continuing education, and contract training programs” (p. 15), was found, too. Presidents of these colleges indicated that horizontal programs strengthened political support for their institutions. The community colleges expanded activities, but did not eliminate core activities associated with transfer and vocational education.

The second part of the study examined “mission integration across three different dimensions” (Bailey & Morest, 2004, p. 26). The three dimensions examined were the use of faculty and administration, the use of finances and facilities management, and the enrollment behaviors of students. The findings indicated that faculty, facilities, and curricula are not shared among programs. However, core missions are “more likely to be integrated with one another but not with others” (p. 26). Academic and vocational programs remain at odds, and “integration between core and horizontal missions” (p. 29) is non-existent. Governance separates core and horizontal missions, but finances between the two are integrated. The level of financial integration was difficult to determine due to lack of available data. Presidents perceived integration to be more difficult than separation of missions even though the presidents believed mission coordination may benefit the institution.

Bailey and Morest’s (2004) analysis and interpretation predicted that community colleges will expand their comprehensiveness without abandoning their core functions—transfer and vocational education. If traditional programs are discarded, “colleges risk alienating constituencies and ultimately reducing the overall resources available to the institution” (p. 34). The researchers postulated that a focused, rather than comprehensive, mission plausibly increases institutional efficiency; yet, this remains unmeasured. The

political and financial environments of community colleges bind the often independent programs found at these institutions. Thus, comprehensiveness is currently the best strategy for institutional leaders. Until better research measures untangle the financial “costs and tradeoffs” (p. 37) for a more focused institutional strategy, community colleges will continue to expand their comprehensiveness.

Bailey and Morest’s (2004) study showed that empirical evidence is unavailable to determine if mission restrictions will definitively increase organizational efficiency at community colleges. Confirming Bailey and Morest’s (2004) conclusions, Jacobson (2005) called for community colleges to expand their mission to become more effective at teaching and learning and to spearhead “K-12 education and workplace reform” (Introduction section, ¶ 2). Jacobson argued that community colleges have the opportunity to improve and to develop programs “that link schools, colleges, business, and community organizations” (Supporting Learning Communities section, ¶ 19) through learning networks, a new core competency for community colleges. These learning networks will then reciprocally assist community colleges in fulfilling their “multiple missions more successfully” (Integrating Multiple Missions section, ¶1).

Where Jacobson (2005) applauded workforce training programs, Hanson (2006) criticized this trend. Hanson determined that individual learning, while important, excludes the notion that higher education serves a social and public function. Hanson believed the mission shift to work force development and globalization results in short term gains at the expense of long term aims to prepare citizens “to fill ... social and political roles within our communities” (p.134). Hanson believed that two-year colleges have more in common with high-status, higher education institutions than with private

organizations that provide work force training. Community colleges, by their very nature, serve the public good. Now more than ever community colleges can use liberal arts “to strengthen their foothold in the marketplace” (p. 132). Students at community colleges, because of and not despite of their demographics, deserve the same educational quality found at top tier higher education institutions and “to offer [them] less is to partake in a subtle ... form of bigotry” (p.136). Community colleges should return to their historic mission and public responsibility.

### *Synthesis*

Authors and researchers from the mid 1990s to early 2000s examined the community college mission from differing perspectives. First, some asserted that the community college should remain and will remain a comprehensive institution (Bailey & Morest, 2004; Floyd, Walker, & Farnsworth, 2003; Jacobson, 2005). Second, others argued that the community college should restrict its focus (Clowes & Levin 1989; Pincus, 1980). Still others believed that the community college should be restructured or is restructuring (Dougherty, 1992; Floyd, Walker, & Farnsworth, 2003; Levin, 2000). Within these categories, I believe viewpoints about core curricular efforts—transfer, liberal arts, or general education versus terminal or vocational education—may be characterized as an either/or polarity or a both/and integration. However, these broad categories do not account for the diverse viewpoints and studies about the community college mission during these two decades.

What should comprise the comprehensive community college mission is not agreed upon in the examined community college mission literature. The lack of a monolithic mission may be the consequence of several factors. A dominant factor,

however, is the inherent flexibility in the mission as reflected by the community college's commitment to serve diverse students and communities. This flexibility illuminates this institution's complexities. Thus, the values of the comprehensive community college, which call for open access and community responsiveness, have significant implications for community college leadership.

### **Community College Leadership**

Despite the numerous studies and opinions concerning community college leadership, Brown, Martinez, and Daniel (2002) suggested that research on this topic would not yield firm conclusions because "leadership is a fluid, dynamic process that is continuously being redefined" (p.6). Thus, to illuminate leadership complexities for this second major theme, I selected a broad spectrum of leadership literature. The authors in this theme offered multiple viewpoints about leadership and more specifically community college leadership. I classified the literature into six categories— *Community College Leadership History and Evolution, Participatory Leadership and the Community College Mission, Community College Leadership Traits, Community College Leadership Training, Community College Presidents' Backgrounds and Preparation, and Community College Leadership in Context.*

First, a historical evolution of community college leadership is explained (Sullivan, 2001). After that, I examine the connection between community college leadership and the comprehensive community college mission. This connection, according to the authors, is based on the reciprocal relationship between leaders and their organizations' cultures (Boggs, 2003; Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; McClenney, 2001; O'Banion, 2002; Romero, 2004; Spaid & Parsons, 1999). Then, I illustrate that

proponents for pluralistic leadership advocated that diverse and divergent ideas regarding community college leadership practices must be accepted (Kezar, 2000; Kezar, 2002). Next, a description of community college leadership traits based on observations, surveys, and literature reviews is described (Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; O'Banion, 2002; Spence, 2002), followed by a description of best practices in community college leadership training (Bragg, 2000; Duvall, 2003; McFarlin, Crittenden, & Ebbers, 1999). After that, community college leaders' backgrounds and preparation is described, and then community college leadership in context is explained (Eddy, 2003; March & Weiner, 2003; Kempner, 2003; Pettitt & Ayers, 2002; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998; Yoder, 2005). Finally, a synthesis of these views as they relate to my study is provided followed by a conclusion for this chapter.

### *Community College Leadership History and Evolution*

Community college leadership history is inextricably bound to the history of the community college as it emerged and evolved. Sullivan (2001) examined community college leadership from this historical perspective. Sullivan described generations of leaders from the inception of community colleges to the present day. The first and second generations, founding fathers and their successors, were generally described as White, married men who rose through academic ranks to become traditional leaders of a "hierarchical organizational structure" (p. 561). The community college's hierarchical structure coupled with the early generations' leadership styles led to the creation of a successful and distinctively American institution with a primary mission to educate the masses through open access. The first and second generations were good managers because they led community colleges through rapid growth and ample resources. Today's

generation, or the third generation, described as collaborative, is demographically more diverse. Sullivan suggested that this generation has “remodeled” (p. 561) the hierarchical structure through coalition building and manipulation of the power structure.

Sullivan (2001) applied Bolman and Deal’s (1991) four leadership frameworks to describe the current generation of community college leaders. Sullivan discussed that leaders have a preferred leadership framework as defined by Bolman and Deal, but that the most effective leaders successfully transition among all frames that included: a structural frame, a human resources frame, a political frame, and a symbolic frame. Each frame emphasized a leader’s effects on the organization and the organization’s effects on a leader.

A brief definition of each frame will help explain why Sullivan (2001) and Bolman and Deal (1991) believed a multi-frame approach to leadership is the most effective leadership strategy. First, leaders, who operate from a structural frame, use their understanding of authority and policies to make decisions. Second, with the human resources frame, leaders create a sense of community, and examine the effects of their decisions upon people. Third, leaders who use a political frame build coalitions with people inside and outside the institution. Finally, with the symbolic frame, experienced leaders “establish an almost legendary or mythical reputation that spills over to the organization” (Sullivan, p. 565). Today’s community college leaders are skilled at moving among the frames because employees, during the last ten years, have “demanded greater involvement in decisions that affected their lives and work” (p. 565). This generation has also worked under the concepts of “team as leader” and “ethical leadership” (p. 566) to move toward a participatory leadership process. However,

Sullivan concluded that emerging community college leaders will face numerous challenges because of participatory practices. Since participatory practices created ambiguities in authority and decision-making, Sullivan predicted that community college leaders may return to a structural, hierarchical framework.

### ***Participatory Leadership and the Community College Mission***

Sullivan (2001) is not alone in suggesting that the emerging generation of community college leaders will face challenges. However, many authors viewed these challenges as an opportunity to cultivate new leaders who will continue to develop the essential community college mission, but who will move away from hierarchical leadership styles to more participatory practices (Boggs, 2003; Kezar, 2000; Kezar, 2002; McClenney, 2001; Spaid & Parsons, 1999).

Empirical evidence supports a need for community college leaders who engage in participatory practices. Spaid and Parsons (1999) conducted a study to investigate the critical characteristics needed for community college leaders. This article reported the findings from a survey of 39 individuals who assessed needed leadership skills and reported “the extent to which [leaders] can be situational facilitators of organizational change” (Spaid & Parsons, p. 14). Survey data were collected and analyzed from 25 community college “mid-level” (p. 16) leaders at small to very large institutions. The researchers also surveyed 14 mid-level hospital administrators to gain broader insight from other organizations undergoing “extensive redevelopment” (p. 16) because of societal changes. The results were meant to provide “empirical insight into emergent leadership trends” (p. 16). They postulated that “if the critical incidents of leadership emerge in a similar fashion from both environments, then the recommendations from

leadership theory have some utility for managing change” (p. 16). A content analysis of leadership theory guided the researchers’ interpretation of the completed surveys. From this analysis, they reported several practical generalizations about leadership qualities that would facilitate positive, organizational change. These generalizations included the ability to share leadership, the importance of teamwork, and the ability to learn from mistakes.

Spaid and Parsons’ (1999) analysis and interpretation led them to argue that leaders must be adaptable, flexible, responsive, and ethically sensitive because hierarchical leadership will no longer address sufficiently continuous change and retain the comprehensive community college’s values and mission. McClenney (2001) also believed leaders must not abandon the community college mission, which provides the foundation from which they should lead. Boggs (2003) confirmed that the mission and values of community colleges – open access, responsiveness to the community, resourcefulness, and a clear focus on teaching and learning—should drive the directions that emerging leaders take. McClenney and Boggs advocated that current leaders must pass their commitment to the mission on to new leadership. McClenney also believed leadership succession should be a primary focus for leaders. Thus, Boggs, McClenney, and Spaid and Parsons viewed the historic mission as the foundation from which emerging leaders should build to promote a shared vision for community colleges because of their complex environment.

Within the context of this complex environment, participatory community college leadership practices were further examined from a qualitative paradigm. Kezar (2000, 2002) determined that perceptions about participatory practices must be understood

contextually. Kezar believed that participatory models of leadership still assume that organizational reality is the same for all individuals in the same setting. Kezar asserted that perceptions of power within an organization would prove that organizational reality differs for individuals within the same institution. Specifically, the purpose of Kezar's (2002) ethnographic case study was to explore the ways power and context shape leadership beliefs and to explore leadership throughout an institution. Kezar wanted to determine individuals' perceptions about leadership, group interactions, and institutional interactions at the same community college. Data were collected from 36 interviews, document analysis, and observations.

In the data analysis, Kezar (2002) categorized four leadership themes across the 36 interviews. First, there is a relationship between how individuals defined leadership and how they viewed leadership within their organization. Second, an individual's understanding of leadership is related to power relations; beliefs about leadership were affected by an individual's status. Third, the "contextual conditions" (p. 567) such as a person's background, profession, and current professional environment impacted beliefs about leadership. Finally, "positionality and power relations [were] related to every individual's understanding of leadership" (p. 567).

Kezar's (2002) analysis and interpretation suggested "individuals' positionalities (by gender, race, ethnicity, role within the institution, discipline or field of study, among other characteristics) appear to be related to distinctive leadership beliefs" (p. 558). Kezar identified three reasons why it is important to understand multi-dimensional leadership. First, difference must be valued. Second, because a diversity of leaders is more evident, a new viewpoint about leadership is needed. Third, participatory models of leadership

require dynamic descriptions and definitions of leadership. Kezar argued that inclusion would not take place if varying leadership beliefs are not respected. She used the three components of positionality theory—“overlapping identities, power relations, and context” (p.562)—to examine a specific campus. Kezar determined that a pluralistic leadership model offers the best principles for creating an inclusive environment because it provides awareness of individual identities within the context of power relations, acknowledges varying definitions of leadership, and allows for negotiation among the definitions.

The study’s importance, according to Kezar (2002), is to demonstrate that dialogue about the history of an institution’s leadership, the past and current power relationships of an institution, and acceptance of multiple leadership styles would allow community colleges to create a pluralistic, participatory culture. Kezar confirmed that multiple and differing viewpoints of leadership hold the power to facilitate positive organizational change necessary to retain the comprehensive community college mission.

### *Community College Leadership Traits*

Based on relevant leadership literature, Spence (2002), O’Banion (2002) and Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) additionally described effective leadership traits specifically needed for community colleges’ continued success. The authors believed that emerging community college leaders are inextricably bound to the mistakes and successes of their predecessors, but that new leaders must also create their own paths to success. If the community college is to remain a relevant and an integral part of American higher education, then multi-dimensional leaders must be trained appropriately and must have a desire to meet the demands of an ever-changing environment.

Spence (2002) selected community college leaders who were near retirement to share what they viewed were essential leadership qualities. First, these experienced leaders focused on skills such as fundraising, communicating, and prioritizing. Then, the leaders shared some ideas about personal qualities that helped make them successful. The qualities included a willingness to take risks, the ability to create trust through the practice of fairness, and the need to maintain a consistent identity.

Like Spence (2002), O'Banion (2002) emphasized personal qualities necessary for leadership but, unlike Spence, separated good leaders from "great" leaders in terms of their shtick, "a special talent or interest that becomes identified with a particular person" (p.35). O'Banion argued that leaders who are good facilitators carry a process shtick that disappears when a change in leadership occurs. Although the ability to build consensus and participation is an essential leadership quality, other qualities are needed for a lasting leadership legacy. Those who carry a resource shtick are adept at fundraising, but they, too, do not have the ability to make as large an impact as those who carry an idea shtick. These leaders "transcend the norm for impact when they embrace creative ideas, provide resources for their implementation, and pay attention to how the ideas are placed into practice – when they combine the process, resource, and idea shtick" (p. 36).

O'Banion's (2002) description of versatile leadership is developed further by Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) who used relevant literature to argue that community college leaders must have nine essential leadership skills for their success and their institution's success.

1. Leader must embrace past successes and simultaneously focus on the future.
2. Leaders must be self-reflective through analysis of mistakes and successes.

3. Leaders must understand their personal values and show those values to constituents.
4. Leaders must be able to create an organizational vision.
5. Leaders must be willing to grow other leaders.
6. Leaders must implement a succession planning process.
7. Leaders must allow faculty to lead and allow administrators to teach.
8. Leaders must discover ways to meet workforce needs in an interconnected world.
9. Leaders must not forget students who need to be prepared for the workforce.

### *Community College Leadership Training*

As identified in the previous sub-theme, leaders need a perspective and skill set that requires specialized knowledge about leadership practices within a community college setting. Romero (2004), founding director of the Community College Leadership Development Initiatives, identified two trends that should influence leadership training. First, community colleges are growing and expanding. Second, Romero asserted that the historical and expanding community college missions have created an increasingly complex, comprehensive organization. Twenty-first century community colleges, therefore, “require leadership and collaboration both within and outside of their institutions” (p. 32). Leadership must be interspersed throughout the institutional hierarchy and viewed from a broader perspective. “Every leader ... needs to know how to handle the conflicts that arise from clashes of values or competing missions” (p. 32). Romero emphasized that leadership programs must prepare leaders for a collaborative leadership style that successfully functions in a unique, community college climate.

The need for community college leadership training that addresses this organization's complex needs specifically has been identified. This need may be met from doctoral programs in community college leadership. Duvall (2003), professor of higher education and coordinator of the community college leadership program at Oregon State University, described the importance of community college leadership training and the elements needed for an effective program. First, Duvall described the training of early community college leaders. These leaders generally rose from faculty ranks, possessed a master's degree in a specific subject area, and received on-the-job training to gain leadership experience. However, Duvall asserted that such training was problematic. The community college mission requires leaders who have a broad knowledge base. Community college leadership programs, according to Duvall, should view learning as a communal endeavor. Leaders must be trained to work with others to create new knowledge specifically related to the community college.

Duvall (2003) described community colleges as old and new in that they have a "commonly understood and accepted ... mission, purpose, and philosophy" (p. 66) that continues to evolve. Balancing the old and new requires unique leadership. Leaders who lead only from experience look backward rather than forward. Thus, leaders "must be comfortable with growth and change ... to lead their institutions ... to be vital and responsive" (p. 66). Community college leadership "...now and in the future is [also] likely to involve teams; doctoral programs have a responsibility to develop the ability to work in teams" (p. 69). Doctoral programs should also require students "to think deeply and to explore and develop research skills" (p. 66) because future leaders will then be prepared to face the challenges they will encounter in a community college setting.

In addition to formal leadership programs, professional development, according to Bragg (2000), should focus on specific community college leadership needs. Bragg identified six core knowledge areas for community college deans. First, deans should understand the historical mission and philosophy of community colleges and their particular institutions. This will allow deans to look to the past to respond to the future. Second, learning is made up of reciprocal relationships throughout the institution. Third, deans must understand teaching and learning as it relates to the “instructional reform process” (p. 79). Fourth, deans need to understand new technology and how it can contribute to meeting institutional goals. Fifth, deans need to understand how their institutions receive funding and how external influences impact internal goals. Sixth, deans need to understand how change in one institutional area affects other areas. Bragg concluded that professional development for deans should focus on how the past informs the present and future in these core areas.

### ***Community College Presidents’ Backgrounds and Preparation***

Leadership training criteria may additionally be found through an examination of presidents’ backgrounds and preparation for their roles. In chapter two of their book *The Community College Presidency at the Millennium*, Vaughan and Weisman (1998) identified the “personal characteristics of community college presidents, their educational background, and their lifestyle choices” (p. 19). They examined data from three Career and Lifestyle Surveys (CLS) conducted in 1984, 1991, and 1996. The researchers created a community college presidential profile based on the data. The majority of presidents in 1996 were married men in their mid-50s. Of the 673 presidents who responded to the 1996 survey, 41% attended a community college and 89% hold a doctorate degree in

higher education. Additionally, 33% were “internal candidates at the college at which they assumed their first presidency” (p. 52) and 54% and 49% of internal and external candidates, respectively, were academic vice-presidents. Eighty-eight percent had community college teaching experience.

A later study moved beyond demographic information to distinguish presidential backgrounds and preparation for those who exhibit exceptional leadership practices. The purpose of McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebbers’ (1999) study was to determine what factors, including but not limited to academic training and non-academic training, help to develop exceptional community college presidents. The researchers identified nine factors found in the literature that contributed to developing outstanding community college leaders. These nine factors included:

- (a) possession of an earned doctorate, (b) the specific study of community college leadership as an academic major, (c) an active personal research and publication agenda, (d) preparation as a change agent, (e) previous career position, (f) relationship with a mentor, (g) development of a peer network, (h) previous participation in a leadership preparation activity, and (i) knowledge of technology. (Methodology section, ¶ 1)

McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebbers used these factors to develop a survey instrument, which was piloted with selected community college presidents. After the pilot study, 975 community college presidents were sent surveys; 74% responded. Based on an analysis of the responses, the researchers refined a previously developed peer rating method to divide the sample into two groups—normative and outstanding leaders. Of 718 respondents, 96 were peer identified as outstanding community college presidents. The 96 presidents were compared to the remaining sample.

An examination of frequency data from both groups guided the researcher’s data analysis. The findings indicated that outstanding community college leaders were

predominantly White, married males. Based on the information the presidents provided, the comprehensive community college represented the most frequent institutional type—82.5%. Presidents in the outstanding group were more likely to possess an earned doctorate when compared with the normative group. Their doctorates were more likely to be in higher education with an emphasis in community college leadership than those presidents in the normative group. Additionally, outstanding leaders were more likely to research and publish actively, to have had training in facilitating change, to have been recruited from inside the community college system, to have had a mentor and a well-developed peer network, and to have had leadership training outside of academia. Outstanding leaders were not more likely to have better knowledge of technology or to have had more community college teaching experience than the normative group. Outstanding community college leaders were less likely to have served as academic vice-presidents or full-time instructors in a community college.

McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebbers' (1999) analysis and interpretation identified that “graduate programs designed to prepare community college senior leaders should continue to require research, scholarly writing, and presentations at professional meetings from their students” (Recommendations section, ¶ 2). Additionally, community college boards of trustees should target their presidential searches around the backgrounds of “outstanding-leading community college presidents” (Recommendations, ¶ 3). Finally, informing middle-level community college administrators about backgrounds and career paths for community college leadership would help them make better decisions regarding their professional development and career paths.

### *Community College Leadership in Context*

Not only is there a need to train individuals to lead community colleges, but there is also a need to find community college leaders who believe in the community college mission and understand the organizational culture of the institution they serve. A leader must understand the community college mission, conflict, climate, culture, and change.

The need for leaders to understand the mission was confirmed in Vaughan and Weisman's (1998) book, *The Community College Presidency at the Millennium*. Vaughan and Weisman (1998) compared community college presidential profiles from 1984 and 1994, which was the book's primary purpose. They used statistical data generated from the 1984, 1991, and 1996 Career and Lifestyle Surveys (CLS). In addition to survey data, they conducted telephone interviews in 1996 with 13 community college presidents from diverse geographic regions to "present the views of those who have the major responsibility for leading the nation's community colleges" (p. 73). Interview questions were framed from the survey results and focused particularly on the access mission. In general, the 13 presidents were committed to open access, but did not interpret this to mean that community colleges must meet the needs of all constituents. Despite declining resources, the presidents believed a commitment to access would persevere. Finally, all of the interviewed presidents understood the mission and "the need to communicate that mission effectively and efficiently to the college's various constituents" (p. 95).

March and Weiner (2003), who also interviewed experienced community college leaders, declared that community colleges are losing their sense of mission and community, and that such loss brings about a culture of mistrust within institutions. They

feared such a climate would only attract leaders who thrive on competition and power rather than leaders who want to serve because they believe in the access mission.

Although Boggs (2003), Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005), McClenney (2001), Spaid and Parsons (1999), and Vaughan and Weisman (1998) did not explicitly suggest that community colleges were losing their sense of mission, they concurred with March and Weiner (2003) that the continued viability for comprehensive community colleges would necessitate that emerging leaders uphold their institutions' historic mission and values.

If community colleges continue to expand their comprehensiveness as indicated in the mission theme of my review, conflict and change may be an inevitable part of such growth. However, March and Weiner (2003) stated that most community college leaders are not prepared to address conflict in their institutions, and they overlook the benefits of conflict. Thus, leaders must be trained to navigate conflict in a constructive way rather than attempting to avoid or stifle it.

Empirical evidence supports the need for leaders to understand conflict and to use conflict to promote organizational growth and change. Pettitt and Ayers (2002) conducted a quantitative case study to examine the ways different community college employee groups communicate conflict, and to determine if such behaviors are related to organizational climate. They believed the study of the relationship between conflict communication behaviors and organizational climate will help community college administrators "address factors in the organizational climate that may be the source of [less constructive conflict communication behaviors]" (p. 108).

For this case study, a new college president wanted to understand employee groups' perceptions about organizational climate. This community college had just

restructured from a quarter to a semester course calendar. To support the college as it was undergoing this change, data were collected from two surveys. The Personal Assessment of the College Environment (PACE) was used to measure organizational climate and Putnam and Wilson's (1982) Organizational Communication Conflict Inventory (OCCI) measured "the reported use of conflict communication behaviors" (p. 108). Ninety-seven full-time employees completed the OCCI survey and 142 completed the PACE survey.

The generation of frequency data and multiple regression analyses with all tests of significance at the 0.05 level guided the authors' data analysis from the PACE and OCCI surveys.

*The data were analyzed to determine (1) the perceptions of the college employees regarding the climate of the college, (2) the reported use of conflict communication behaviors and styles, and (3) relationships between perceptions of organizational climate and reported use of each conflict communication style. (Pettitt & Ayers, 2002, pp. 109-110)*

These three communications styles were "nonconfrontation," "solution orientation," and "control" (p. 109). The findings indicated a positive association between nonconfrontational behavior and satisfaction with organizational climate for employees who had less than one year or more than 15 years of college employment. All employee groups reported more satisfaction with organizational climate the less frequently control styles were used. Solution orientation styles were not found to be linked significantly to the level of satisfaction with organizational climate.

Pettitt and Ayers' (2002) analysis and interpretation suggested the "importance of understanding how climate may be related to the use of conflict communication behaviors and how this understanding might be used in giving leadership to organizations" (pp. 116-117). The PACE and OCCI surveys generate data that leaders

may use to support a constructive, organizational climate. Since the community college mission is to respond to local needs, which often means change, leaders must first be able to lead constructive change within their organizations. Successful internal and external change comes about if leaders understand the role of constructive conflict.

Understanding organizational climate and its relationship to leadership is also illustrated in less tangible ways. Yoder (2005) explored organizational climate and emotional intelligence as they relate to the identification of a “leaderful” (p. 47) community college. Using an appreciative inquiry design, data were collected through interviews “to reveal organizational successes, what people value, and what they hope and wish for to enhance their organizational vitality” (p. 49). Sixty-eight leaders from a large, urban community college participated. Yoder analyzed 281 responses from these leaders who participated in six appreciative inquiry group sessions.

Appreciative inquiry theory and emotional intelligence theory guided the author’s content analysis of the interview transcripts. The findings indicated that emotionally-intelligent leadership, based on eight emotional intelligence competencies, determines organizational climate. These eight competencies include “developing others, teamwork and collaboration, organizational awareness, building bonds, visionary leadership, empathy, respect, and open communication” (Yoder, 2005, p. 51). Those interviewed indicated that “leadership is a quality that some have and others do not” (p. 53). The data also supported that emotional intelligence was critical for the development of a “ ‘leaderful’ organizational climate” (p. 53).

Yoder’s (2005) analysis and interpretation defined a leaderful community college as one that genuinely cares about employee and student success. Yoder asserted that

appreciative inquiry is valuable because it promotes dialogue among organizational members, which, in turn, creates energy and renewal that cannot be quantified. Based on the findings, Yoder recommended that community college leaders provide opportunities for employees to have “simple conversations” and to “encourage wholeness” (p. 56). Emotional intelligence in organizations may be improved through an awareness of how “emotional dynamics work in the organization” (p. 57) and how such dynamics affect performance.

The previous quantitative and qualitative studies suggested that effective community college leadership requires practical skills and an understanding of self, others, and internal and external organizational complexities. Two other studies confirmed the need for the right fit between a leader and the institution, which is not limited to a singular process.

In a qualitative study, Kempner (2003) conducted in depth interviews with retired community college presidents. Kempner identified three purposes for the study:

- a) to understand how these former leaders constructed their personal definitions of themselves as community college presidents, (b) to identify their struggles in the new age of cultural relations, and (c) to determine the wisdom they have to offer contemporary leaders of higher education in general and of community colleges in particular. (p. 364)

Kempner explored how the presidents sought organizational balance, their beliefs and visions of leadership, and the community college context. Across the interviews, presidents searched for ways to reconcile the community college mission, an external reality, with their own beliefs and values. One president expressed that “an inspirational leader is one who teaches by helping the individuals understand themselves” (p. 375). Additionally, the presidents in different ways held great regard for the community college

access mission as a foundation for their educational philosophy. Several presidents expressed that community colleges should seek leaders who they need. The presidents felt that an ignored part of the selection process is asking how an “individual constructs his or her view of leadership” (p. 378). Kempner culled seven concepts of leadership from the interviews. The presidents “attempted to construct their leadership by empowering, energizing, healing, inspiring, revealing, cultivating, and humanizing the organization and its participants” (p. 381). Most importantly, Kempner determined that today’s community colleges should look to the identified concepts when choosing a president. Presidential candidates should be questioned about their beliefs and their understanding of leadership and the organizational culture where they want to lead.

Another study addresses Kempner’s (2003) identified need for presidents to understand organizational culture. The purpose of Eddy’s (2003) qualitative multiple-case-study was to explain how community college presidents understand change, and how they share information about change to campus constituents. Data were collected using inductive research strategies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 people comprised of two presidents, their senior cabinet members, and selected faculty at two technical colleges.

Eddy (2003) used Morgan’s (1997) organizational lens of culture for an initial content analysis of these interviews. Morgan discussed culture as a process of reality construction based on framing events and issues from diverse perspectives. The findings indicated that the two presidents used visionary framing and operational framing respectively.

Visionary framing focused the attention of the campus on the future and highlighted campus members working together to achieve an obtainable vision.

Operational framing focused the attention of the campus on the moment at hand and sought to achieve solutions to campus issues via establishing processes and operations. (Eddy, p. 457)

The findings also indicated that the two presidents “disseminated information on organizational change using similar methods of delivery, but with different priorities and frequencies” (Eddy, 2003, p. 457) Four methods, “talking the frame,” speeches or casual conversations, “walking the frame,” bringing information to others, “writing the frame,” using memos or e-mails, and “symbolizing the frame,” using literal or metaphorical language, were used to disseminate information (p. 466). One president, through the visionary frame, used walking and symbolizing the frame more than the other president, whose operational methods “relied on talking the frame and writing the frame” (p. 467). Organizational constituents at each college believed their respective presidents led their institutions successfully.

Eddy’s (2003) initial analysis and interpretation established a dualistic relationship between visionary and operational framing, which was not the intent of the research. Therefore, using Bolman and Deal’s (1997) structural lens to analyze operational framing in a subsequent analysis and interpretation, Eddy explained that the structural frame achieves “goals and objectives through standardization of operations” (p. 467). Visionary framing and operational framing are two ways these leaders understood change in their organizations. Thus, Eddy determined that the fit between the institutions and their leaders had been achieved even though they led from different frames.

Eddy (2003) also asserted that leaders’ self-awareness and critical reflection about their leadership practices would assist them in making adjustments regarding their leadership and their understanding of change. Eddy stated, “cognition for institutional

leaders evolves from past life experiences as well as the current context” (p. 469). Eddy concluded that a leader’s “cognitive orientation regarding campus events drives the selection of a particular [leadership] frame, the methods of disseminating information to campus constituents, and the accompanying goals and strategies to accomplish change” (p. 470). An understanding of organizational and personal contexts will assist leaders in effecting positive change in a dynamic, community college environment.

### *Synthesis and Conclusion*

Self-reflective, critical leadership is a foundation for effective leadership practices in a community college setting. Because leadership and institutional expectations continue to evolve and change, empirical evidence has confirmed that effective community college leadership is based on reciprocity of values among the leaders, constituents, and the institutional environment (Eddy, 2003; Kempner, 2003, Pettitt & Ayers, 2002; Yoder, 2005). Spaid and Parsons (1999) indicated that “as the leadership design changes, all participants will also change, through engagement with others and with technology, and through interaction with internal and external events” (p. 13). Other researchers believed that understanding the reciprocal relationship between the collective organizational identity and personal identity remains a key component for the development of successful community college leadership (Eddy, 2003; Kempner, 2003; Kezar, 2002).

Vaughan and Weisman (1998) and McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebbers (1999) identified community college leaders’ academic and professional backgrounds. They found that community college presidents hold doctoral degrees in community college leadership, but they do not identify leaders’ undergraduate fields. One article reported on

initiatives spearheaded by an English major community college president, but the president's educational background was not the central focus (Evelyn, 2002). There is a lack of attention to presidents' undergraduate backgrounds as related to leadership. A deeper and more focused exploration of community college leaders' undergraduate experiences gives further understanding about a leader's personal identity, which provides a rationale for my study.

In Chapter two, I discussed academic and research literature that related to two major themes "Community College Mission" and "Community College Leadership." These themes move from a general perspective regarding the community college mission toward a specific perspective about community college leadership. The identification of leadership traits and effective leadership training and preparation is important for community colleges' comprehensive and inclusive mission. Such identification often points explicitly and implicitly to the connection between a leader's own history and the history of the institution he or she leads. Personal values, self-reflective practices, a leader's discipline or field of study, and past and present life experiences contribute to the cognitive complexities from which leaders learn about and from organizations. These complexities, in turn, provide community college leaders a lens to view and understand higher education's purposes and to support and understand the mission of their institutions.

Academic and research literature about the community college mission and community college leadership generally identifies the importance of a leaders' understanding and acceptance of the comprehensive community college mission and their possession of an earned doctorate in community college leadership. The lack of

specifically described academic journeys that move forward from undergraduate experiences for community college leaders allowed me the latitude to explore this gap in my study. The literature provided enough background to conduct my research because the community college mission literature examined higher education's purposes from diverse perspectives, and the community college leadership literature often pointed to the need for leaders to understand, accept, and support the community college mission.

However, the literature did not include leaders' voices about their academic and professional journeys and their relationships with higher education and the community college mission. As I interviewed practicing English major presidents, their stories *illuminated how they understand themselves and the institutions they lead. The focus on one particular undergraduate major allowed comparisons to be made and provided a liberal arts perspective from a particular context.*

In Chapter three, I describe the rationale for choosing narrative inquiry as my research methodology, detail how I collected my data, and explain how my data was analyzed.

## **CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes my rationale for selecting a qualitative paradigm generally and narrative inquiry specifically as the research methodology for this study. I explain how I explored the narratives of English major presidents to discover how they construct the stories of their academic and professional journeys and their perspectives on leading their institutions. Through data analysis, I determined that the content and context of the presidents' stories uncover relationships among their experiences, their beliefs about higher education's purpose, and their understanding of the community college mission. Chapter three also discusses the theoretical and ideological framework for qualitative research and narrative inquiry. This discussion provides a rationale for my chosen method—narrative inquiry—and leads to a detailed description of my research design. Then, I describe participant selection, the development of an interview guide, data collection and analysis, a description of research ethics, and approaches to ensure trustworthiness and validation for my narrative inquiry methods.

### **Theoretical and Ideological Framework**

A qualitative research paradigm was chosen for this study because of my desire to examine my topic using an “interpretive, naturalistic approach” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). A qualitative research paradigm, according to Schram (2006), holds the basic assumption that all knowledge is interpretative, and researchers who follow this paradigm seek the meaning or significance they have gained from their data. Because of its emphasis on “few variables and many cases” (Creswell, p. 15), a quantitative research approach would

not yield the answers I seek about my participants' accounts of academic and professional experiences. Instead, my research relies on a "few cases and many variables" (p. 15). The research questions for my study also ask "how," which Creswell linked to qualitative research. Creswell listed other reasons to undertake qualitative research, too. Researchers should choose qualitative research if they plan to explore a topic, have a need to engage in a detailed review of the topic, have a desire to write from a literary perspective, and want to focus on the participants' views. These reasons align generally with the qualitative research paradigm I have chosen for my study and specifically link to my chosen tradition--narrative inquiry.

Within the qualitative research paradigm, researchers may choose from several traditions. Phenomenology was initially considered for my study because of its emphasis on "lived experiences" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15) among individuals who share a common experience or phenomenon (i.e. English major presidents). Data are collected via interviews. However, data analysis for phenomenological studies reduces participants' lived experiences until an essential meaning about the phenomenon studied is found across several interviews (Creswell, 1998). Grounded theory involves interview data as well, but seeks to discover a theory about the situation being studied. Phenomenology and grounded theory often fragment participants' interview responses to create descriptions and generalizations about experiences or to develop a theory (Bruner, 1987; Creswell, 1998; Riessman, 1993). Narrative inquiry differs from the above methods because content and context are viewed holistically.

### **Narrative Inquiry Framework**

Narrative inquiry falls within the qualitative research paradigm and may be viewed from a postmodern perspective where truth is believed to be personally and socially constructed (Nash, 2004). Narrative inquiry “builds upon people’s natural impulse to tell stories about past and personal experiences” (Schram, 2006, p. 104). Broadly speaking, narratives are first person accounts of experiences with a beginning, middle, and end that may or may not be told chronologically (Riessman, 1993). Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) also explained that stories give people a way to communicate a coherent identity to others. Bruner (1987) further distinguished narratives from other traditions because of its emphasis on “sequence and consequence” (p. 394). Individuals select, organize, connect, and evaluate experiences within a particular context.

The descriptions of narrative inquiry point to the limitations and challenges inherently found when researchers use this method. Narratives provide researchers with insight into others’ experiences, but these experiences are approximations of experiences that may never be duplicated in the telling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For the narrative inquirer, there is no real distinction between fact and fiction because events are included and excluded in the story (Riessman, 1993). Narratives are considered interpretations of experiences that require further interpretations (Riessman, 1993).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described narrative thinking as an act of reciprocity among researchers, participants, and readers. Lives intersect and bring together experiences that are interpreted and reinterpreted. Humans are wired to think narratively from a three-dimensional perspective that Clandinin and Connelly described.

They used the terms interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, future), and situation (place) to describe a “metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space” (p. 50). They distinguished narrative thinking from the viewpoint of the grand narrative—an objective for traditional qualitative research.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) detailed five key tensions found between narrative thinking and the grand narrative—temporality, people, action, certainty, and context. In narrative thinking, temporality is conceptually viewed as ongoing change, which is in opposition to a sense of timelessness found in grand narrative thinking. “Any event ... has a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future” (p. 29). People must also be viewed similarly as they “at any point in time, are in a process of personal change” (p. 30). The goal for narrative research is to capture this process in the retelling of participants’ experiences, which is generally viewed as irrelevant in grand narrative thinking. Actions, in narrative thinking, are considered narrative signs that must be contextually examined to glean their meaning and significance. This contrasts with the grand narrative viewpoint, which uses action as a form of direct evidence. In narrative thinking, certainty does not exist; events may always be interpreted differently. From the grand narrative perspective, however, certainty exists. Finally, context is never separate from the described views about temporality, action, and certainty in narrative thinking and is needed to make sense of people and their experiences. On the other hand, the grand narrative viewpoint considers cases to be universal rather than placing “the person in context” (p. 32). These descriptions of narrative thinking coupled with the theoretical and ideological framework for qualitative research align with the rationale and research design of this study.

### **Rationale and Research Design**

I chose narrative inquiry as the specific method because it best fits my research questions, which seek to invite and to explain participants' stories, provide the opportunity to hear, record, and explain multiple voices, allow meaning and significance to emerge, and is recursive, reciprocal, and flexible. I created new meaning from my data and its analysis to help readers imagine its usefulness in their personal and professional lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

English major presidents have particular stories to tell about their academic and professional experiences. Narrative inquiry allowed me to create meaning and significance from their experiences for others without fragmenting their narratives' content and context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry provides a perspective about community college presidents' lives that has not been reported.

This study focused on six English major presidents to discover how they construct the stories of their academic and professional journeys. Presidents were chosen because of their potential to impact the life of an institution. Furthermore, community college mission literature and leadership literature presented in Chapter two revealed that presidents should engage in self-reflective practices and understand the community college mission. I determined that this understanding was present in my participants' stories. Their understanding is based on their experiences, which they reflected upon during interviews. Their ongoing experiences include their educational backgrounds and their path to the presidency. For the narrative inquirer, temporality is a basic, natural assumption that "any event is an expression of something happening over time: it has a past, a present, and an implied future" (Schram, 2006, p. 105). For this study, I captured

this temporality by determining that English major presidents believe their academic and professional journeys shaped and continue to shape their understanding of higher education's purpose and the comprehensive community college mission. I found this information in the stories the selected presidents told me about their experiences as students and leaders. Overall, the many considerations that make up good qualitative and narrative research were reviewed consistently and assisted me in creating a meaningful and significant retelling of my participants' stories.

### **Pilot Project Summary**

During the Summer of 2007, I took a narrative inquiry class that included conducting two pilot interviews as part of the course work. For the first pilot interview, I developed an interview guide and interviewed a faculty senate president, John (a pseudonym), who was a history and political science major. I chose John because of his liberal arts background. I audio-taped the interview and then transcribed it. John and I reviewed the transcription for errors and omissions; I made corrections as needed. After that, I completed a holistic-content analysis and a content analysis based on the criteria established by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998). The holistic-content analysis allowed me to create a sample research text, which was shared with John for critical feedback, including whether or not he saw himself in this text. The interview process and interview guide were also critiqued together in a second interview that was not taped. This led to the creation of a new interview guide, which was used in a second pilot interview.

For the second pilot interview, I interviewed a current community college president who was a history major. This interview did not elicit detailed stories. Because

of this shortcoming, I refined the interview questions. I also decided to give participants an interview guide prior to the interview to capture more in-depth stories about participants' concrete experiences (Chase, 2003; Weiss, 1994).

I used the new interview guide and process to conduct a third interview with a former university dean and current English faculty member. My revised questions elicited detailed stories that lent themselves to effective data analysis. However, I discovered that my interview guide was too long as I was only able to ask two of the four pages of questions in a 90 minute interview. Still, I gained more confidence as an interviewer. The interview guide in Appendix D is the result of reducing the number of questions and from listening to the tape of this third pilot interview to determine which questions provided other questions to be answered.

### **Project Approval**

I reviewed the procedures with participants and sought their consent before beginning the interview process. I followed Colorado State University's policies regarding human subjects as defined by the Institutional Review Board, submitted the H-100 form, consent form, and interview questions to receive approval for my study. Approval for this study was granted.

### **Participant Selection**

Participants for this study were limited to former and current community college presidents of comprehensive community colleges who were undergraduate English majors. The number of potential participants was unknown so I relied on convenience sampling, including "snowball sampling" (Weiss, 1994, p. 25). The community college president where I am employed helped me locate potential participants and served as a

liaison between me and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). I accessed the AACC's 2007 directory, which provided information about community college presidents including their academic degrees and majors and contact information. From this directory, I found 41 potential participants who met my criterion as undergraduate English majors. I determined how long they have been employed at their institution and whether or not their institution is considered a comprehensive community college through a review of the colleges' websites. After this process, I identified initial contacts based on the geographical proximity to Wyoming and then branched out to other locations.

From the directory, I contacted 20 presidents first by e-mail (Appendix A), and then a letter (Appendix B). The e-mail briefly described my study and stated that a detailed letter would be arriving shortly. In the written correspondence, I included the objectives of my study, the time commitment required to participate, and an explanation that I would be telephoning them to determine if they desire to participate. As it turned out, telephoning participants for this purpose was not necessary because presidents responded to my e-mail inquiry either saying they would or could not participate. When presidents responded affirmatively, I contacted them via e-mail to identify potential dates for the interview and asked for a response via e-mail. One date was confirmed as soon as possible with the president and his or her staff. Attachments to the e-mail included the participant profile sheet (Appendix C), the interview guide (Appendix D), and consent form (Appendix E). I asked them to return the participant profile sheet electronically or via fax and the consent form via mail or fax.

Five English major presidents and one English major chancellor and former president who are employed at comprehensive community colleges responded affirmatively to participate in this study. Participants have been employed at their current institutions for at least two years to over 20 years. Participants' gender, race, and age provided some diversity, but the purpose of my study was not to compare groups or generalize the results to a larger population.

### **Reciprocity**

My participants did not receive payment or materials for their participation. I informed them of this before the interview. Participants may or may not have benefitted from their participation, but it is highly unlikely they were harmed. Although benefits for participation may not be readily known, participants were given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and to share these experiences with me and subsequently with a broader academic audience. This may have led them to a deeper understanding about how their academic and professional journeys have shaped their beliefs about higher education's purpose and the community college mission. Their stories may assist community college leaders with their understanding of self, of higher education's purpose, and the community college mission.

### **Development of the Interview Guide**

The development of the interview guide provides additional context and access to this study's design. Bruner (1987) stated that readers of narrative inquiry be privy to "how the interview context shaped the developing narrative" (p. 400). I chose to follow Chase's (2003) narrative principles in my process of writing an interview guide. Chase

explained that two narrative principles—personal and social—must be considered in narrative research practices.

First, Chase (2003) asked researchers to “think of a group of people whose lives or experiences are especially interesting to them” (p. 81). This places the emphasis on lives rather than research, which invokes a personal connection between researchers and their participants. Because of my experiences as an English major, I chose community college presidents who were English majors. Our similar academic degrees helped me gain access to their experiences and develop an initial rapport.

After this, I considered the broad constructs that I wanted to cover in the interview. Many of these constructs have been studied and analyzed in my doctoral course work and in the development of my literature review. These constructs include higher education’s purpose, the community college mission, transfer versus vocational education, mission shift, community college leadership, leaders’ academic and professional journeys, and relationships among these constructs in leaders’ lives. From these constructs, I developed four research questions as follows:

*How do community college presidents who were English majors construct the stories of their academic and professional journeys?*

*How do these presidents understand higher education’s purpose for individuals and communities?*

*How do these presidents understand the community college mission?*

*How do these presidents understand the relationships among their academic and professional journeys, their beliefs about higher education’s purpose, and their beliefs about the community college mission?*

These research questions provided the backdrop to develop my interview guide, which presents 18 questions. Each question on the interview guide corresponds to one or more of these research questions. The interview guide was written and rewritten multiple times based on Chase's (2003) advice to develop "a well-constructed interview guide" (p. 84), the constructs I developed in my literature review, and what I learned from the pilot interviews.

Chase (2003) believed such an interview guide will prepare interviewers "to be open to a wide range of stories their interviewees may tell, and it helps them to know what in general they want to hear about" (p. 84). Chase also cautioned interviewers not to be tied to a script. Often stories will emerge and many interview questions "will be answered without even being asked" (p. 84). Chase indicated that the hard work in developing interview questions is "learning to communicate the level of concreteness and specificity needed" to invite the "full story" (p. 88). The interview questions were designed to invite full stories and to allow me to engage in careful listening. The complete interview guide may be viewed in Appendix D.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected from individual interviews. Prior to the interview, participants completed the participant profile sheet (Appendix C), were given the interview guide (Appendix D) and signed the consent form (Appendix E).

In my interview with each participant, I introduced myself, reviewed the study's purpose, and his or her role in my study. For all interviews, I asked participants if they had any questions about the study, their participation, or the interview guide before the interview began. I reiterated that their identity would be concealed by my use of a

pseudonym and that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the study and after the study is completed. Pseudonyms for their institutions and communities were also used. The participant was informed that participation is voluntary, that he or she may withdraw at any time, and that he or she would receive no financial or material benefits for participating. He or she was also informed about the potential benefits or effects that may ensue from participating. Participants were given adequate opportunities to ask questions about their participation or about the study throughout the process.

After the participant profile sheet was completed and the consent form was signed, all interviews were audio-taped. I interviewed five participants via the telephone and one face-to-face at a mutually agreed upon time. Participants' time constraints and schedules were accommodated. Only one interview had to be rescheduled due to a last minute conflict. All participants chose a 90 minute interview format instead of two shorter sessions. For my face to face interview, I met with my participant at his office. Once the interviews were underway, participants did not request breaks, although I asked if they needed them.

After each interview, I wrote my initial reflections. Within two weeks, I transcribed each interview. Once I finished the transcript, I listened to the tape and compared it to the transcript to note any errors or omissions. I determined that follow-up interviews were not needed due to the content and volume of data I collected. I shared my corrected transcripts of interviews with the participants who also helped me identify additional errors or omissions (Creswell, 1998). Once transcripts were corrected, I began data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in narrative inquiry begins immediately and recursively before, during, and after the interview. Ouellette (2003) stated that in “narrative analysis, writing is the way analysis happens” (p. 19). Ouellette advised narrative inquirers to “let go” (p. 24) and be willing to begin again repeatedly to ensure that the “story you are telling ... is the most accurate and compelling story you can tell” (p. 24). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated that narrative analysis always emerges from the middle of researchers’ and participants’ ongoing stories, and that field texts remain but an interpretation of one moment.

Because narrative data analysis is emergent and recursive, a specific, chronological process will not be described. In data analysis, I used Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber’s (1998) holistic-content approach, an inductive process. After reading the corrected transcript multiple times, I wrote a “global impression” (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, p. 62). In this global impression, I developed and examined broad themes from the individual interviews. References as to how participants began their stories and how they evaluated their experiences were included.

As I refined the global impressions, I paid special attention to themes, transitions, and “content, mood, or evaluation” (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 63) found in the stories and identified any themes and descriptions that did not fit with my initial reflections. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber asserted that a life story, which I sought from my participants, is “not just a chronology of ordered events ... but also the specific kind of organization according to what the narrator chooses to tell about his or her life” (p. 80). Details were examined for frequency and length of identified themes in

the narratives. The places where participants' stories were incomplete or contradictory were also noted. The goal for my approach to data analysis was to draw themes from the entire story that each participant told and then to compare themes from all participants' stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) based on the constructs developed in the interview guide and new constructs I discovered. Individual stories are presented in Chapter four, and the comparison of participants' stories is presented in Chapter five. Throughout my analyses and writing process, I referred to my research questions and interview guide that set the context for the interviews.

As I used Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber's (1998) holistic-content approach, I transformed field texts into research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and looked for ways each participant's story overlaps and differs from others'. As I composed my research texts, "the patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes either within or across an individual's experience and in the social setting" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 132) were examined. I shared drafts of these research texts with my methodologist and advisor for critical feedback. I demonstrated what I have learned from and about my participants to "make the reader aware of ... what it is like to be this person in this situation" (p. 168). Within the research texts, I included interview excerpts as evidence for my interpretations (Weiss, 1994). Excerpts were not decontextualized from the interviews because when language is "stripped of context, [it] can be misinterpreted" (Bruner, 1987, p. 40). The goal for narrative analysis is to tell a coherent story (Weiss, 1994). Thus, my intention was to create a coherent retelling of my participants' stories that has meaning and significance for me, my participants, and my audience.

## **Ethics**

Throughout this study, I was aware of ethical considerations in my role as a researcher and participant in data collection and analyses. I was a partner with my participants who were expected to provide their observations and experiences needed for my study's success (Weiss, 1994). I brought my biases and perspectives to this study as I wove my story with my participants' stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 1993). However, participants were afforded the opportunity to tell me their stories. Finally, Weiss advised that it is my responsibility as a researcher to create an accurate, useful report that details the lessons I have learned from and about my participants.

As an interviewer, I remained cognizant that some of my questions may have intruded upon my participants' lives and, although unlikely, may have invoked unpleasant memories (Weiss, 1994), although none were mentioned. Despite these risks, I made every effort to create and establish rapport in a safe interview environment for my participants. I also had an ethical responsibility to protect my participants' confidentiality. This protection was established in the consent form and was accomplished using pseudonyms to conceal participants', institutions', and communities' identities.

## **Trustworthiness and Validation**

From a narrative study's inception, researchers must be able to describe data collection and analysis transparently. I described the interview context (Bruner 1987) and made my interview guide available as part of my dissertation text. In Chapters four and five, I also explained how interpretations and analyses were developed. Throughout my

study, ambiguity was embraced as a way to remain true to the ideological assumptions regarding temporality.

Criteria for qualitative research generally and narrative research specifically exist to assist researchers in designing a rigorous study. Creswell (1998) asserted that qualitative research designs must ensure plausibility and accuracy through a variety of procedures. Traditional concepts regarding validity generally rely on “realist assumptions” (Riessman, 1993, p. 64), which are rendered irrelevant in narrative inquiry. Narratives and their analyses are not designed to be exact records “of what happened nor is it a mirror of a world ‘out there’” (p. 64); instead, narratives may always be read and interpreted differently (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Despite these limitations, there are several ways to establish trustworthiness and validation.

This study employed criteria established for qualitative and narrative research (Bruner, 1987; Creswell, 1998; Riessman, 1993). Qualitative researchers must design studies that are “believable, accurate, and ‘right’” (Creswell, p. 193). To do so, I utilized Riessman’s four approaches to establish trustworthiness and validation in narrative analysis—persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic use.

First, evidence from participants’ stories to support my interpretations and consideration of other ways to interpret the data as I wrote my field notes and research texts established “persuasiveness” (Riessman, 1993, p. 66). I asked participants for feedback regarding the accuracy of their transcripts. Riessman labeled this process as “correspondence” (p. 66) with participants, a second approach. For the third approach, three levels of “coherence” (p. 67)—global, local, and themal—were considered as my writing evolved from field notes to research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Global

coherence refers to the narrative holistically, local coherence refers to the interrelatedness of events and the narrative's structure, and themal coherence refers to the narrative's content (Riessman). All three levels of coherence emerged throughout my writing process. The act of writing is the act of analysis (Ouellette, 2003), which is inherently recursive and emergent. I recognized that my initial writing and efforts often did not work and that starting over was a part of this process. Finally, my participants' experiences were reported in a way that accurately explains their meaning and significance to others. Riessman terms this concept "pragmatic use" (p. 68) as a fourth approach to validate a narrative study. To accomplish pragmatic use, narrative inquirers must be able to provide information that will ensure their work is trustworthy.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter explained how I found meaning and significance in the stories of former and current English major presidents. I explained my theoretical framework, rationale for employing qualitative research and narrative inquiry, and the research design. I described a pilot project summary and the approval process. The selection of participants and the development of my interview guide have been described. I also indicated how I collected and analyzed my data. Finally, I considered ethical practices and detailed approaches to establish trustworthiness and validation for my study.

Narrative inquiry is the methodology that best fits the desired outcomes for my study. The data I collected from narratives provided the best answers to my research questions. Narrative inquiry gave me the latitude to share participants' experiences and to connect their experiences with my experiences as an English major. Their stories compared and contrasted with my own. Finally, narrative inquiry allowed me to describe

participants' journeys and beliefs from a holistic perspective that captures an ongoing context.

## CHAPTER FOUR – TELLING THEIR STORIES

When I began analyzing my participants' stories, I found myself in the midst of rich data that spawned both excitement and dread. I was excited because my interviews were successful and overwhelmed due to the amount of data I collected. I established a comfortable rapport with every participant whether I interviewed them via the phone or in person. I attribute this rapport to our common background as English majors and because participants received my interview guide prior to the interview. This gave them time to think about which stories they would share with me and to reflect about their journeys. I believe much of the mental preparation for our interviews took place prior to our meetings.

Because I received many details, stories, and reflections, I contemplated how I might present my data to reach an accurate retelling of participants' stories that others would find useful (Riessman, 1993). I initially thought I would separate my findings and analysis, but soon learned my analysis could not be silenced. I decided to combine my telling of participants' stories with my analysis and to present each participant's story individually to remain true to narrative inquiry principles (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For consistency, each story is presented in a similar order that emerged from the interview context, which was framed by my research questions.

For all participants, I used a holistic-content approach (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). I began my data analysis with the creation of a global impression. I used my research questions to identify five frameworks—academic journey, professional

journey, leadership, community college mission, and synthesis—to help me organize the data. In my global impressions, I included lengthy interview excerpts to present participants' stories holistically. During this process, I thought that using mythological and literary characters as pseudonyms would provide an additional way to understand participants' stories and to unify the themes found in their stories.

Once I completed six global impressions, I listened to the interview tapes again. I began to identify potential pseudonyms and to remind myself about my participants' voices. I easily identified literary characters for four participants, but struggled with two. Matching characters to people is imperfect. My choices reflect my impressions of personality traits, behaviors, and interpretations of experiences my participants presented. The pseudonyms are not intended to be the only way to understand their stories. After listening to the tapes again, I also began to identify additional metaphors and themes that I would use throughout my presentations.

The global impressions were an important step in my writing process. I needed to have something in writing to begin revision. Ouellette (2003) asserted that writing is analysis and that holds true for me. For two participants, this process also pointed me to their pseudonyms. I revised my global impressions extensively, sometimes randomly and always recursively, and eventually transformed them into the research texts I have presented in this chapter.

In this chapter, I retell participants stories individually, but use the same five headings for each participant—Prologue, Academic Journey, Professional Journey, Community College Mission, Epilogue. First, I introduce my participants, identify their pseudonyms, and explain why I chose their pseudonyms. After that, I present their

academic and professional journeys followed by their understanding of higher education's purpose and the community college mission. Finally, in their epilogues, I share how participants understand their experiences and their reflections. At the end of this chapter, I briefly discuss the biases and perspectives I brought to my findings and analyses.

### **Janus's Prologue**

My first participant agreed to participate in my study on the same day I sent him my e-mail inquiry. During our initial conversation, he shared that my study was one he had thought about conducting too, so it was easy to establish a rapport. In the profile sheet completed prior to the interview, I learned that he is a White man in his sixties who has a B.A., M.A. and, D.A. in English. For his first job, he taught junior high English, but later served as a community college English faculty member. He has been a community college administrator for 30 years and is in the 10<sup>th</sup> year of his third presidency at Midatlantic Community College, a pseudonym. I decided to name my first participant after Janus, an ancient Italian god, who presides over beginnings, entrances, and bridges, and is often shown with two faces so he may look "before and behind" (Morford & Lenardon, 2003, p. 626). I compare my first participant to Janus for four reasons. First, he helped me to begin this study. Second, he often structures his stories chronologically and recursively, looking before and behind. Third, the content of his stories involve the crossing of thresholds in both his actions and thoughts. Finally, he uses the metaphor of opened and closed doors to explain his journeys to me.

### **Janus's Academic Journey**

At the beginning of our interview, Janus identifies himself as a first generation

college student to set the stage for his academic journey. He describes his parents and their expectations for his academic and professional paths. He explains:

I grew up in a family where neither parent had ever been to college. In fact, they both had gone through eighth grade. My father was from Chicago and my mother was from a little town. And, long interesting story how they met and all that. But so I grew up in [the northern United States] because that's where they ended up living and they were very religious people in the reformed church. Now that may not make any sense to you, but it's like the Presbyterian Church only a more conservative group. So I had a very conservative upbringing and from the time I can remember cause I was the oldest child. ... I was say encouraged to go to college, but it was more than that. It was like there was no question that's where you're going. Now, it just so happened that the reformed church college or one of them was [near my home town]. ... So, I went to that school. It turns out to be a very good four year college, but that wasn't the reason I went there. I went there because they wanted me to go to school and they wanted me to actually go to school and end up being a Protestant minister. That's what their idea was and that just didn't work out. But so I went there maybe for all the wrong reasons. Now, I didn't go there because I wanted to particularly and I didn't pick out five schools and decide which one it was or anything of that sort. It was just that's where I was going.

Janus neither chose to go to college nor the college he attended. His parents approached higher education from a practical perspective. He went to a college because it was close to home and because he would learn what he needed to become a minister. Janus later reveals that this practical view of higher education shaped his understanding of academic life.

Janus describes the first two years of his undergraduate experiences briefly because he did not connect to the academic work or the collegiate environment. However, because he chooses a chronological structure, he presents his experiences from these years incompletely and generally so that he may move his story forward. He says: "And so I found when I got there that yes I could handle the work but I really wasn't very interested. And so the first couple of years I just floundered around. ... And so the first couple of years I barely made it through."

As he moves ahead in time, he reflects more specifically about his experiences. He connects with “superb faculty” in general and one faculty member particularly who “had a kind of peculiar influence in that she absolutely fascinated me with the literature.” Within the story, too, is a reconnection to his upbringing.

The third year I was getting very interested in a major that I decided after a lot of thinking to major in English. For a number of reasons. One is I could write fairly well. I knew correct grammar because of all things my parents having grown up in the North spoke standard English, just plain did. And so it wasn't like I had to think about it. It was just in my head. And I also liked to read. I've always had enjoyed reading from oh my parents read me books when I was three and four and five and six years old I mean they didn't have a house full of books but they understood that that's what they ought to do I guess and they did it with me and they did it with my siblings ... I had grown up in a family that was extremely practical. My father was an electrical contractor. And I had learned the electrician business totally. In fact I had a journeyman's card when I went to college, when I was in college. I could have taken over his business without any trouble. He wanted me to. And there was this conflict of wanting me to on one hand work with my hands and on the other hand well you ought to develop your brain. And it's been an interesting conflict which I have solved by working in technical and community colleges cause now I can have other people work with their hands although I'm basically working with my brain, not with my hands. The college environment just seemed to be so esoteric and removed from reality. There's certainly the reality that I had grown up with. That it just seemed like it was, to me, it was a tool I guess a skill set, you would say now, for me to get what I thought what I would like and that was teaching.

Throughout Janus' descriptions of his academic journey, he attempts to reconcile the conflict between working with his hands and working with his brain. Here I am reminded of the god Janus, who looks backward and forward. My participant cannot explain his future without acknowledging his past.

In the next segment of our interview, Janus first uses the metaphor of an open door to evaluate his education. He contrasts his reflections with the collegiate stories others have told him. He also goes into more depth about his first two years of college. He tells me he was a commuter student at a residential campus, which helps me

understand why he felt so disconnected. He explains:

I think the most important thing was getting the degree. So that that would open the door to a teaching career. It was that simple. It was as they say a very practical family I grew up in and work ethic was excellent and all that kind of thing. And I was taught that from the time I was little, but ... when I actually got into the academic environment, it just it didn't. That same work ethic didn't connect. Let's just put it that way. (laughs) Not for a couple of years. It took a couple of years for that to happen. I guess I was ... I had been ok in high school. It wasn't that I hadn't but ... college just didn't seem like something that you know I talk to other people and they talk in glowing terms about their academic experience and their total experience in going to college and ... I look at it as ... just a method, just something I had to do to get where I wanted to be. Which is very different than what a lot of people feel were their experience. Now I wasn't a resident student. I was a commuter student at a residential college. There were others of us there that did the same thing. So I lived at home. I didn't live in the dorms or anything. And so in a sense missed out on that, but I got in on some of that because I think I was a sophomore when I started in it. There was a radio station at the college and I began in it as an announcer for a program. I just had my own music program. And ... the next year, I had shown apparently so much ability that I was asked to be the program director for the station which meant I had to find about 60 people to do various programs, schedule everything for them, make sure they were there, if they weren't find a substitute, or do it myself, on and on and on. And it's where I really started to learn a great deal about leadership, what it takes to get a group of people to do something. Even when they say they want to do it. That isn't always the case of course. So if I look back and say I think it was one of your questions what was a key thing or experience? That extracurricular experience I think probably was almost as important as anything that happened curricularly for me during that time period.

In his transitional expressions, Janus continues to use a chronological structure and reveals that an extracurricular activity, rather than an academic experience, gave him a way to connect his education to his practical upbringing. He shares that this experience also established a foundation for his leadership skills.

Although Janus does not become the Presbyterian minister his parents wanted him to be, he summarizes that “undergraduate for me was one, the first two years getting my head on straight and graduating” and “finishing the baccalaureate degree was like climbing a mountain and getting to the top of it and saying ok I'm through climbing

mountains.” Each educational step along his journey appears final for him at the time, but he moves forward. As he journeys further into academia with a master’s degree and doctoral degree, I believe he understands the relationship between the concrete and abstract outcomes of a higher education. He tells me: “I walked out of the [university] with my doctorate and I said you know this isn’t bad at all. I understand it now. I’ve got it straight in my head.”

His bachelor’s degree and later degrees opened doors for his career path and transformed him. He examines his life from a broader perspective:

Holistically just very simply it opened doors that wouldn’t have been opened otherwise. I wouldn’t have been able to teach in junior high. I would not have been able to teach at a community college. I wouldn’t have later been able to become a college president. So the education ... it still I look on probably as quite a practical thing that opens doors if you’re interested you can then open those doors and walk in the room and do something. Now ultimately it’s what you do that makes the difference.

Janus finally makes a bridge between working with his hands and working with his brain. He began undergraduate work without a clear direction and had no idea his career path would lead him to a community college presidency. He establishes his identity as a first generation college student who successfully crossed academic thresholds in both his thoughts and actions. Throughout the presentation of his story, he looks forward and backward, like the god Janus.

### **Janus’s Professional Journey**

Janus does not clearly delineate a separation between his academic and professional journeys. In fact, the stories are intertwined. Janus took a traditional path and rose through faculty ranks to become president. He gained more experience with each job he took until he reached the presidency. This may be connected to the description he

provided about climbing to the top of the mountain as an undergraduate. All along the way, his descriptions revolve around the practical action of doing something to move farther along in his journey. Once Janus made a conscience decision to become a president, he embarked on a fairly straight path to meet that goal.

Janus began his professional career as a junior high English teacher and believes he would not have transitioned to teaching English at a community college if a colleague had not laid that path before him. He says:

We would work together very much with what he was teaching and what I was teaching, kind of collaborated on things. And he went off the second year because he kind of got into it with the principal and he went off, went back to school, and then got a job at a community college. And then he was back to me saying ... this is you have to come this is absolutely fantastic. This is way beyond teaching in public schools. (laughs) And so I said ok and went after my master's because of that. And then actually applied to the same school he was in and got a job there because back in those days that was 67 I guess community colleges were sprouting of course as you probably know and they were looking for people and they were looking for people who had experience. And here I was with three years under my belt kind of thing. So got the job. And then once you got it that's fine now what are you going to do with it once you're in it?

In this segment of our interview, Janus again uses a chronological structure to give me a time line for his professional journey. In the content of this segment, Janus shares his commitment to action, something he learned early in his life. Thus, while looking forward, he looks backward, too.

Janus's professional story is never completely told as he abruptly shifts his thoughts from his teaching experiences to his administrative experiences. There are gaps in his time line. He lists his professional roles and then shares a story about his role as faculty union president.

I had also become the president of the faculty union. But it was [an] education association union and the last year I was there I was the negotiator for the contract from the faculty side. And I had worked in that school then for over three years. I

was you know I was doing a good job in what I was doing. I was department chair and I felt like I knew what was going on in the school. When I became negotiator for contracts that's when I learned way beyond where all the power lied in the school, what really made things happened. (laughs) Where it was going where it wasn't and who had all the cards in the deck except for one. And that was sitting across from the table. I had one card. It was called the strike card. And that's the only card I had and as hard as we worked as you probably know if you've been involved in a union situation. Oh the whatever the faculty end up getting or the staff end up getting is basically ... well they can either threaten strike or they can be extremely convincing in trying to get whatever they want but it's usually always a trade off. Ok we'll give you that but you're going to give us this. After I left [there, another state] had a union but that wasn't much of one. It's when I went to [the South] a right to work state so of course it had no union at all. I went to [a northern state] and fell into as president, a situation where we had a faculty union, a classified staff union, a mid level manager union, and a building and grounds staff union. And they all negotiated separate contracts that didn't necessarily have the same things in them. So it was fun. (laughs)

Janus tells his story using transitions that mark time, but the content of his story does not accurately depict a linear, chronological order. Janus formulates many of his leadership principles from this experience. As he reflects on his experience, he clarifies his understanding of leadership, power, and compromise that was not necessarily understood during the experience. Later in our interview, he merges this story with another story about one of his presidencies.

Janus also shares his practical approach to becoming a president. He reads about how others became presidents and emulates their paths. He explains:

Again, I was being very practical about the whole thing. I read about people who became presidents and how they became presidents and almost always in community colleges if you read George Vaughan's work you're going to find 60 to 70% of all people who are community college presidents came up through the academic ranks. That's just the way it is. ... So I was reading a lot of that material and realizing that if I was seriously interested in a presidency then I'd have to go through the academic ranks which was fine as far as I was concerned. So when I left [one state] I went to [a southern state] as a division chair. And within the first year I was there. The second year I became dean of general studies and business. And then a year or so a year and a half later became dean of instruction for the school. It was a little school. I had wanted something more and so I started

looking all over the country. Interviewed in a number of places for a dean's job at that point because vice-presidents really weren't in vogue yet and ... found the job I was looking for 35 miles down the road ... And I stayed [there] for about 13 years. So I started there actually as an assistant dean for a year. I knew the guy who was dean was going to leave and they wanted someone to move up inside the school. So I think it was about 9 or 10 months after I went there I became dean of instruction. ... And so I made a pretty good mark at the school as the dean and then they reorganized the school some. And I got at that point considered for vice-president which was for academic affairs and student services I think. It was something like that. It was that kind of title. I was over those two areas.

With each position, Janus prepares himself for the presidency, which he continually describes as a practical application of what he has read.

Although Janus served under an ineffective president, he approaches his new boss with a proposal for a new position, accepts a compromise, and gains further experience.

He shares:

And so when the new president came in, I said look I just want to be very practical about this. I said the vice-presidency for development is open. And I said you probably want your own academic person. And if you do I would be willing to slide over to that position if you could work that out. And he said ok and he came back later and said, yes, I can do that but he said with one change. And that one change is he said our vice president for finance now has all the facilities the administration, for all the facilities. He said I want to give that to you. And if you'll accept that with the development job then I'll put you in that position. I said ok you've got a deal. So then I was in charge of fund raising, grant writing, and the entire set of facilities. What was coming up what was there what had to be repaired everything. So I got my head down into the real practical stuff that is behind the scenes on the campus which broadened my background. Cause now my background was academics, my background then somewhat in development and fundraising, grant writing and facilities. So after about three years I guess I said look I'm very interested in getting a presidency and I think I've got the background to do it and he said yeah I think you do too. So I started looking all over the place and ended up [in a presidency in a remote location]. ... Yes and that of course if you read George Vaughan, George says you go wherever the presidencies are, right? So that means you go to the hinterland that's where you go of course that was kind of the hinterland.

Janus ends this story where he began, with a description of what he read about presidential searches. He loops his chronological structure, which allows him to evaluate

his experiences from a holistic perspective. Janus's traditional path of rising through the faculty ranks is illustrated in the story of his professional journey, but within the story's layers are unique challenges in that rise to the top of the mountain. Time gives him a way to tell me about the actions he took to obtain a presidency, but he is unable to use time to discuss the transformations in his thoughts. Like the god Janus, he looks forward and backward to understand where he has been and where he is going.

Janus's understanding of leadership has its foundation in a practical skill set that he developed over time. From reading about leadership and based on experiences, he identifies eight essential leadership skills.

So, I ... did a lot of thinking of course an amazing amount of reading on leadership because having an English background that wasn't part of the reading I had to do. So, I did that on my own. And I've come up with a formula that I find no matter what I read, it comes it focuses on these things. And there's seven of them. Well, actually eight, eight. Number one you gotta know your mission, you gotta have a mission. If you don't have one, get one. If you don't have one, you're just gonna die. It's not gonna happen. Ok, let's say you gotta a mission. Do we have one at the community college? Yes. We do. We're set. Second, you gotta have vision. That's either somebody has to come up with the vision or the community itself, the school itself has to come up with that vision. ... And then the third thing, if you just know what you're supposed to do and you've got a vision for what you want to do how you want to get there, that's where strategic planning comes in. So, you've got to sit down and we do it annually. Sit down annually and decide not only what we're doing in the coming year, but we also develop five year goals for the school ... The other thing that happens when you do good strategic planning is that and tactical for the coming year, sorry to be so military but as you get the faculty, staff aimed together in the same direction, particularly if you allow them to help you do it which is what we do, but they then become interested and sometimes, in fact a number of times, they will find additions to what you want to do or spin offs of the directions or income sources that you haven't even thought of. To help go in that direction because they know that's the direction that we're going to go in. They also know that they can get their ideas into that process. And by now I mean it's just kind of a thing people say around here. Someone comes up with a new brilliant idea. They say well put it in the strategic plan next year (laughs). It's just an automatic reaction that happens here. So mission, vision, planning, those are the real basis. Then if you want to lead you gotta do four more things there I actually five. Number one you gotta listen. So you gotta set up ways for people to be able to talk to you,

communicate with you. You gotta have two-way communication going on. From the administrators to the faculty to the staff to everybody. To students it doesn't really matter. You gotta listen. And any time you study leadership you're going to find a chapter on that or maybe more. Secondly, if you really want to lead, if you're the person in charge you have got to be organized beyond anybody's belief. Because you have got to know what's going on all over the place. You don't have to do it. And you don't even have to try to control it, unless it needs to be but most of the time it doesn't because people know what the general direction is. But *you* have to know. And so you organize your life. Tremendously. I started that when I was vice-president. People here have often made comments about how well organized I am. I say yes, but I have to be. And why aren't you? If you're interested in doing any kind of administrative work here you better be or you're dead. Third thing you gotta do is to develop positive working relationships with everybody as you possible can in the organization. You're not going to do 100% . Impossible absolutely. You absolutely have to have 51%. And I try to be somewhere in the 80 to 90%. But positive working relationships. ... Fourth thing is persistence. You have to be one of the most persistent people in the world. You just never take your eye off the prize. You never slow down. You never stop. You look for alternatives every which way you possibly can. You find ways to get what you want. When I was first here I would say we built a brand new building that everybody told me couldn't be done because it was going to cost 10 million dollars. And they couldn't figure out where that money was coming from. And they said it can't be done. I said look guys let's understand something. Don't ever tell me something can't be done. Tell me how I can do it. Now I may not want to do it cause it's too difficult (laughs) or it's you know not impossible but my gosh we can't put that much energy or time or money or whatever it's going to take. But I said tell us how. Then we can decide whether we want to do it. Then we can move ahead. ...But when you're leading persistence, persistence, persistence. And then finally what I've already talked about which is why I kept saying there's one more thing and that is if you really want to lead you have to become totally committed to that. So it's 24/7 if that's what it takes. ...And if you really get into reading about those who have been very successful leaders, you find that that becomes their life.

Janus does not separate reading, experiences, and relationships as he discusses his understanding of leadership. Although he lists eight skills, his presentation of those skills is much more complex than a simple list as he juxtaposes skills, stories and literature.

### **Janus's Community College Mission**

When Janus is asked to describe his understanding of the community college mission, he simultaneously describes higher education's purpose for individuals and communities. Janus believes the mission has three components.

The three focuses are first of all students themselves. So you're helping people who want to move from point A to point B. Now that might be they're a college transfer student so you're helping them get the academic background. It might be they want to become a welder so that you're giving them the practical experiences to how to do that the trainings do that. They may want to be in the health area maybe a respiratory therapist so you get the people set up to have labs get everything set so that they can do that. So you're probably biggest focus of course is working with individual students. ... Two, the second focus is working with the business community or the community itself, but it usually ends up the business community because that's who you can react with the most logically and you can give the most benefit to. And so, working with the business community is the second thing. The third thing. The first two help you ... allow you to help people now. You're allowing getting the students the degrees and the background or whatever that they need now to do what they want to do. You're helping the business community to become successful in what it's doing now. The third thing the third focus though is economic development. And so you I think it's critically important so that the schools are involved with what's coming next. What's down the road. ... So the three things you deal with the students, you deal with the business community, you deal with economic development. Most of the people who work in the school only hear that we do something with economic development because basically it is administrators that are working with that. Or you can make the argument that we're helping economic development because we're putting so many of our students into the work force here.

Janus embraces the practical power of higher education for individuals and the business community. Janus believes the community college mission is the bridge between the present and future. Students are receiving degrees that will afford them employment opportunities. In his description of the mission, Janus does not mention the transformation of thought that takes place during the educational process. Janus also explains that a community college serves to benefit the current business community. In both instances, for individuals and the community, Janus places emphasis on the practical

benefits associated with community colleges. Finally, Janus focuses on the future with economic development efforts. For Janus, the community college mission is practical, concrete, and dynamic rather than abstract and static. Higher education is a beginning for students and communities and serves as a stepping stone to their futures. Like the god Janus, my participant presides over beginnings.

### **Janus's Epilogue**

Janus describes education as a key that has opened doors. He understands the relationships among his academic and professional journeys, his beliefs about higher education's purpose, and his beliefs about the community college mission in terms of this metaphor. He cannot view his life in separate segments, but rather describes a melding of experiences and beliefs that make him who he is today. He explains:

And people here have asked me time and time again how in the world is it that you always know what to do? Part of that has to do with my experience as president. Part of it has to do with the academic background. In that, as you go through as an English major you learn so much of course you've got to be able to communicate so writing, speaking, yes, part of a show you just have to do it and most people I find even in leadership positions here of a big business or something they're not particularly good writers or speakers but they ought to be but they aren't. So those two things come and the other is the study of literature which helps you understand people and how different they can be, what a pain in the neck they can be, and how wonderful they can be, and it helps immensely as a college president! It just so all that background that I sort of see as the academic background as practical has been very, very helpful as well in making me a rather successful president in the schools that I've been involved with.

Janus recognizes that his English education has given him practical tools—writing and speaking—to perform effectively in his presidential role. He also understands that his academic background in literature has provided him with the ability to understand people.

Janus sees his education as the foundation for the opportunities his life has brought him. He uses the metaphor of an open door to help me understand his journey.

The simplest metaphor I've used today is that I see the education as key. It opens doors that can't open otherwise. I mean I can't be a college president without a doctorate. Well there's probably some schools somewhere that I could but that isn't happening in you know to any degree anymore so. That was an absolutely critical thing and that was the same in getting into the community college and originally getting into junior high school. Those were all keys that allowed me to get there. And then once you're there once you're in that room if you will now you've got to figure out what you're going to do to be successful as a junior high school teacher, or as a community college faculty member, or as an administrator. And then you're back probably to the most important thing that me or anybody else learns in college in that is you learn how to learn. That is so utterly critical because otherwise what would you do? You would get to a certain point and say alright I'm peter principled out here. I just can't go any further. I probably will I will not because I'm too old but I'll never become a chancellor of a system. But if I were somewhat younger that would be my aim. To say ok that's what I want to do. Why would I want to do that? Because I can affect now not just the number of students and the faculty and the staff that are in the school I'm with now. But now, there would be a whole set of schools that I could assist with. And one of the biggest reasons that I went into administration to start with was probably for some of the same reasons I went into teaching. I observed when I was in college I observed practicing teachers and wasn't too impressed and thought I could do the job better than they could. And it's the same thing I saw in the 60s and 70s as I watched administrators. I said I can do the job better than you're doing. And so you just ... have I guess some kind of experiences that just let you know that you could do it. Now could I become a successful chancellor of a system? Yeah, I don't have any doubt that I could do that. I just won't get the chance to do it. But back to learning how to learn. That is just critical because you don't have to go back to somebody and say well how do I do this? A lot of people put great faith in mentors and a lot of people have gotten spectacular help from mentors and I've acted as a mentor. ... And then I look in my own life and say who mentored me? Nobody. (laughs) Nobody. There really wasn't anybody that ever did that. And so I have always from my perspective seen it as things that positions and whatever that I've wanted and that I've found ways to get there. I guess if I worked at it hard enough but I'm not that interested. I probably could find a chancellorship or whatever now somewhere. But I probably my wife and I have just kind of decided we'll stay here and I by the way will see whether this happens. I'm planning to work until I'm 75. So in this state you can do that. So if my brain remains operational and my body doesn't give out on me that's probably what I'll do because I just like doing it.

The practical, work ethic that emerged during Janus's childhood is still firmly rooted as he describes the end of his career path simply because he has contemplated his mortality. Imbedded in his metaphor, though, is the transformative, abstract power of his education

and experiences. He “knew” he could do it better, and his story is incomplete. Like Janus the Italian god who presides over entrances, beginnings, and bridges, my first participant ends his story with the beginning of another possibility.

### **Athena’s Prologue**

My second participant was among the first responders to my inquiry regarding participation in this study. She has connections to Wyoming, which we discussed. This allowed us to establish a rapport before the interview. She is a White woman in her sixties who has been the president of her community college for the past 15 years. I named her institution Eastern Community College. She has spent the majority of her career, 31 years, as a community college administrator, but did begin as a community college English faculty member. She holds a B.A. and M.A. in English and a PhD in Higher Education Administration with an emphasis in Community College Leadership.

I have chosen Athena as the pseudonym for my second participant. Athena is the Greek goddess of wisdom and strategic war (as opposed to the carnage of war represented by her twin Ares, god of war), and arts and crafts, particularly weaving. Zeus’s favorite daughter is one of the virgin goddesses and represents the importance of the female perspective in a world dominated by male leadership (Morford & Lenardon, 2003). Throughout her descriptions, my participant understands that the acquisition of wisdom is an ongoing process. In her stories, she battles to overcome barriers and shares reflections about how those barriers helped form her identity. The content of her stories often highlights gender issues and the structure of her stories weaves her experiences together.

### Athena's Academic Journey

Athena begins the story of her academic journey abruptly. She chooses not to share any information about her life prior to attending college. Athena does not give any reasons for choosing to attend a large state university. However, she details her life as a college student who excelled in leadership roles. Her academic journey, as she describes it, weaves experiences within and outside the classroom. I italicized words in her story to showcase her active participation in campus life, which she gives more attention to than her classroom experiences. She begins:

I attended a large state university. I lived on campus my freshmen year, pledged a sorority, lived in the sorority house my final three years as an undergraduate. So, sometimes it's hard to separate my life outside the classroom from my academic experience, but it's all one part and parcel of the whole thing. ... It was a wonderful experience. I have very, very fond memories of those days. I was happy with my college choice. My classes were challenging. I was happy with my living circumstances. I had many opportunities to *participate* in lots of activities. I got *involved* in what is now I'm sure a non-existent organization just because the need isn't there. But it was called Associated Women's Students at the time and it was kind of a governing body for the university, for women and behavioral issues and things like living conditions. In those days we had closing hours in the dorms and of course somebody had to decide how to handle the girls who violated the closing policies and that sort of thing. I was on the judicial board. So I ended up ... being *involved* in a lot of disciplinary issues with my peers. And that was a little weird ... but it was a good learning experience. I also got quite *active* in the sorority and held a variety of different offices. I got *involved* in the union governing board and the union program council and by the time I was a senior that led me into a leadership position in Mortarboard, which was a senior women's honorary. It's co-ed now, but when I was in college it was women only. And I was *elected* president of that organization so I had many opportunities to *practice* leadership and to *work* with groups of people to try to get different people working together to *develop* good listening skills. And I had wonderful faculty in the classroom. And all and all it was just a terrific experience.

Athena's academic journey contains more abstract reflections than anecdotes. She highlights her roles in organizations for and about women, including a sorority. Her incomplete story references a particular experience involving the discipline of her peers,

which she describes as a “good learning experience.” Like the goddess of wisdom, my participant makes formal, authoritative judgments about her peers’ behavior. I believe that learning leadership within predominantly female environments helped Athena develop self-confidence. Athena appears to trace her understanding of leadership back to undergraduate experiences as she underscores how she learned to lead collaborative efforts and to listen to others.

As I listen to her reflections, I encourage Athena to share why she became an English major. At this point in her story she delves, albeit briefly, into her academic life before college. She liked to read and to write, which logically fits with the academic work of an English major. However, Athena also chose to be an English major because her desired career was closed to women. She answers my question about why she chose to major in English with a specific reason and then shifts to the larger societal context.

Why did you pursue English as your undergraduate major?

Because I like to read. (laughs) It’s really that simple. I had been a camp counselor in the summer. So the summer before my freshmen year I was unable to attend freshmen orientation where you get to select an advisor or where you are assigned an advisor and that person talks with you about your major, etc. So, I missed out on that whole experience. When I got to the campus in August right after I guess during or after rush week, I had no advisor, I had no idea what I was going to do. And I remember when I was going through rush, people would ask me what are you going to major in and I said well, I might major in philosophy. But in the end it was kind of a path of least resistance decision. With nobody to advise me, I liked to read. I knew I was good at it. I was a fairly decent writer even coming out of high school. I had taken advanced placement English my senior year so I was coming into an honors English class. And ... my other choice which was to become a forest ranger was thwarted because women were not allowed in the forest service. So since I couldn’t go in that direction as a career choice which would have led me more into the sciences ... I stuck with English as major and ended up with history as a minor.

Athena’s academic journey juxtaposes her lack of direction and her self-sufficiency.

Without an advisor’s help, she matched her abilities to a major. At the time, Athena

accepts her limited career options and recognizes that a particular career path was closed to her simply because she was a woman.

Throughout her story, Athena confidently embraces academic challenges that were of her choosing. She has a desire for self-sufficiency and for knowledge, which are also characteristics she shares with the Greek goddess, Athena. When asked if she enjoyed being an English major she says:

I did. I loved it. Because it really was an excuse to read everything I could get my hands on. And I really enjoyed it. A couple of things happened early on ... again because I didn't have an advisor and ... didn't go talk seek one out or talk to anybody. I thought well I can figure this out on my own. I ended up as a freshman taking some courses that really were reserved for sophomores, juniors, and graduate students. And my freshmen and sophomore years I ended up in some pretty advanced English classes. So it was really a challenge. I had one professor who gave me a C my first semester, but I liked him so well I took him again. And I was again with mostly juniors and seniors. But the challenge was worth it to me because I knew I was **learning** something. And it wasn't until my senior year that I finally got an advisor.

Her classroom experiences gave her a chance to learn something, which she describes as a process.

Athena's professional journey is woven into her academic journey. Her academic journey helped form her professional and personal identities. Looking back, she reveals that her college experiences transformed how she thought about herself and her abilities.

.... Well, I think it was a chance to ... the chances that I had to ... jeez I hate to say this as a college president. It was probably as meaningful what I was able to do outside the classroom as it was academically. Yeah, I had so many opportunities. I got to go to Salt Lake City to a leadership conference through this Associated Women's Students. I got to meet important people who came to campus to make speeches because I was involved in the union program board. Gee, I got to usher for a Johnny Mathis concert. I actually got to meet Johnny Mathis. You know it was those are things that seem a little mundane at this point in my life, but at that time I was really spreading my wings. And college helped me figure out that I was the only one who would ever place limitations on me. That anything I didn't accomplish was only because I didn't try or I didn't envision things for myself. Not because anybody else was holding me back. Later

in my career I did run into some gender issues, but again ... I think I figured out in college there wasn't anything I couldn't accomplish or overcome if that was what I wanted.

During this time in her life, Athena spread her wings, took risks, and discovered barriers to her dreams would be of her own making. Athena cannot separate her academic and extracurricular experiences. Her descriptions explain the transformative effects of higher education.

### **Athena's Professional Journey**

Athena's professional journey is full of movement and pauses. When she begins teaching, she does not look broadly to the future, but I believe the way she shares her professional experiences illustrates her learning process. With each story, she appears to weave past and present experiences together to make sense of her journey to the community college presidency.

Athena begins her journey by invoking battle imagery, which I have italicized, to describe a particularly poignant experience along her path to the presidency. She reflects:

It [being a president] was not a goal that I ever envisioned when I first started teaching. I can remember when I was a faculty member ... right after graduate school when I was teaching ... my first community college experience ... we were involved in this exercise and we were supposed to envision where we would be five years from that time. And the most I envisioned at that point in time was maybe getting involved as a member of the school board or something. But never did it occur to me to be a college president ... in those early days. I think some of my the turning points were what grew out of essentially negative experiences or what could have been negative experiences. First of all, I got into a tenure *battle* at my first college and I'd had been was one of the only female or one of two females in my English department. And I got into a real *battle* with some of the good old boys and ... I was 28, 29. I was fairly arrogant. And thought I knew what I was doing. And got *slapped* around a little. *I fought back*. I was not recommended for tenure by my department chair and the president followed his recommendation. *I fought back*. *I won that battle* but decided I didn't want to stay. So having made that decision to leave my first English teaching position then I had to decide what I was going to do next.

In this segment of our interview, her tenure battle was a professional turning point which created a ripple effect for Athena's professional journey. She actively resists what she perceives as an injustice, which forces her to choose a path. She does not accept her tenure denial in the same way she accepted her limited career choices. Her academic and professional journeys again weave together. Her reflections about herself, as arrogant and inexperienced, capture an ongoing story. Even the Greek goddess Athena is prone to arrogance. She transforms the mortal woman, Arachne, into a spider when she discovers Arachne weaves as well as she (Morford & Lenardon, 2003). Like the goddess, my participant has a hollow victory; winning is not all that is needed. She receives tenure, but I believe the battle created a culture she could no longer work in, which links to her early reflection about her need to work where she is comfortable.

Athena's professional battles remind me of Athena, the goddess, who often wins battles against her brother Ares, the Greek god of war, because of her cunning tactics, even though the Olympian structure is patriarchal (Morford & Lenardon, 2003). Despite her tenure victory in the world of men, Athena retreats to graduate school, but learns she cannot escape from her battle.

And what I did next was go to graduate school to get a PhD in English at [Western] but realized very early in the first semester I was there that that was not the program that was not for me. I was either in the wrong program or the wrong place. I was at the [Western] University just kind of on a lark. A friend of mine was moving there so I said sure I'll move. And I had been denied admission into the graduate program at [Eastern] University, which is where I thought I wanted to go. So it seemed like a door would close and send me in a different direction. ... So I ended up in [the West], hated it ... tried to leave. I was supposedly hired to be a division chair back [East] at a community college, sold all my furniture, had packed up and was moving out and got a phone call saying gee we're real sorry the job is we're retracting our job offer, the chancellor did not approve it. I found out the chancellor had been in touch with my former college president who told him I was a trouble maker. So I had no job, no furniture, no place to live and wandered around for a while and that's when I ended up [in the West]. I went to

visit ...a friend of mine who'd moved there to teach English at Central College. And I loved it, I loved the countryside, I loved the people, I got a job there for a few months and applied for a counselor vacancy because one of the counselors was going on sabbatical. The dean of students liked me, hired me for this one year replacement and the next year another counselor went on sabbatical. I was hired to take his place for one year. The third year the dean went on sabbatical and I was hired to replace her. And served as acting dean of students then for a year and it was at that point that I met the person who was eventually was my mentor who suggested to me at that time get your ass to graduate school, get your doctorate and then you'll have more choices than you have here.

After a short stint in a graduate program, Athena pursues an administrative position. She is denied this position because she believes she has been blacklisted as a trouble making female. Yet, Athena's metaphor of closed and open doors help me capture the essence of her story. Closed doors open other doors and create different opportunities.

Nothing seems stable in this segment of her journey, but Athena's wanderlust has the unintended consequence of helping her create connections with others. Friends help her, and she finds a college that employs her in a series of temporary positions, which give her experience and the time to reflect on what she needs from her professional life. As her third temporary position at the same school is ending, Athena decides, based on the advice of her mentor, to seek further credentials.

So it's at that point that I went back to the [a university] in their community college leadership program and ... through those connections, you know it's a long story I've moved around a lot, but through those connections I ended up, well my mentor was doing searches at that point in time and he was hired to be the consultant for the search at [a community college]. By then I was living in [the eastern United States] because I kind of got into a battle [in my job] as well. So I quit my job there and finished the dissertation and moved across the country to [an eastern state]. I was living [there]. And got this phone call from my mentor who said I'm doing a search. I think you ought to apply for the job. I said no way. But he said yes. Just send in your resume and a letter. So I did. And one thing led to another. I was contacted by them to say you're one of our eight finalists and we're inviting you up here for an interview. So I knew at that point I was their affirmative action candidate because I was the only female in the search. They had been told they had to add at least one woman to their pool and I was it. And I knew as soon as I had that first interview that that job was mine. It just something

just clicked. So that's kind of an abbreviated version. And a long abbreviated version for how I got to the presidency.

In this excerpt, Athena also briefly refers to a second professional battle, which she expands upon later in our interview. At this point in her story, I see a connection to her earlier academic and professional journeys. Her gender is now an advantage that expands her professional opportunities rather than limits her choices. Throughout her professional journey, Athena takes risks and opportunities and does not look too far into the future. With no clear path before her, she does not settle easily, which actually opens doors for her.

Athena offers her evaluation of her journey to the presidency and her understanding of leadership. She weaves her experiences together to understand herself.

It was not in my original plan but because a series of things happened in my career, I ended up making different kinds of choices. And it's easy for me to see now that ... it really worked out for the best. And I appreciate what I went through in those positions because it has made me much more empathetic to situations that people find themselves in now that I'm a president. I worked for so many idiots, in my opinion, and people who taught me how I did not want to behave and how I didn't want to do things that I think I have become a better president as a result of what I went through.

The struggles she endured during her professional journey are not forgotten. She embraces a collaborative leadership style that she developed from antithetical examples of leadership. She appreciates that her negative experiences have honed her leadership style. She explains:

I love my job! This is my second presidency. I must say it was much easier the second time around. But I remember being asked this same kind of question when I was interviewed by a radio station. When I first got to [my first community college presidency], I was their third president first female blah, blah, blah. And I got this phone call from some reporter. Well, what's it like to be a female president? And I said well to borrow Pat Shroder who at that time was senator from Colorado said to borrow her phrase I said I don't know because I've never been a man in this position. But I said what occurs to me off the top of my head is

that the higher you go in an organization the more people there are to tell you how to do your job. And a second thing that I learned was that because of your position your words are heard more loudly than perhaps you ever intend them. So you need to be very, very careful about what you say because you control what you say you don't control what other people hear. And people hear president's remarks in capital letters. ... So I learned those two lessons early in my first presidency.

Her reflection mirrors her earlier evaluation of her academic journey. The learning process is woven into her stories.

Throughout our interview, she moves back and forth in time. She even returns to a specific story about her first presidency and moves into a discussion about her current presidency. This story and its placement is another example of her holistic perspective. She describes the processes she learned during her first and second presidencies.

It was a very difficult time. We went through that was the last time there was an economic meltdown in the late 80s and I had to go through layoffs, I was getting death threats ... in the paper all the town ... It was a very, very adversarial role that I ended up being in when the last thing I ever got to think about was education. When the opportunity arose to pursue another presidency but close by when the [Eastern] job came up I applied for it. And ironically the president whom I had replaced at [my first college] was on the search committee. He had come to [a state] and he was on the search committee [in this same state] and he and I had become friends. And so anyway I managed to get an interview down here. And I was selected for this position and accepted right away. And that was 15 years ago. I will have completed 15 years in month in two weeks actually. So I'm now entering my 21<sup>st</sup> year as a president, my 16<sup>th</sup> year at the same institution where the average tenure of a president nationwide is three to five years. You may have run across that research somewhere. But I love my job! What it's like for me now is different from what it was at the beginning. A president always has a certain amount of a honeymoon. I forget who I quoted. I wrote a book and quoted this person ... now I can't remember who it was I was quoting but he said that a president has a chance to make a real impact at least twice in an organization once upon arrival and once upon departure. And I've never forgotten that because I think at the beginning you do have a certain honeymoon you can if you do in the right way you can start sending out the signals about the direction that you think the institution needs to go in. You can start helping people get where they want to go and it takes five to seven years to see any results, I think, positive or negative. And then after that it's an interesting process of ... continually staying on point and I mean I love my job because I have really finally gotten to think about education and think about what's going on in the classroom and think about what

we are doing with and to and for our students. And I've spent a lot of time on those issues.

Athena spends the first half of her career moving among professional positions and the latter half as a community college president at the same institution. She is a president, writer, reader, and teacher who is able to focus on what matters most for her, the education of herself and others. Throughout Athena's professional journey, there is no clear, easy path set before her. She wanders, moves backwards, forwards, and even sideways, but her journey is one of learning, reflecting, and making connections.

Athena's professional journey is ongoing and incomplete and contributes to her understanding of leadership. She views her role as a leader similarly to her role as a teacher and learner. She explains:

For me the most important effective leadership is being able to set the conditions to make it possible for others to excel. I do not think a leader is always the one who is in the front of the room. Often the leader is the one behind the scene, setting the stage. I think leadership is about bringing out the best in people. It's no different with our students. I see teaching as leadership. Just perhaps with a different angle. But mostly it's about helping others achieve all they're capable of achieving by making connections, by getting the right people in the right place at the right time to make that happen. ... I think that classroom teaching is a very good training ground for leadership. It can be used that way. If the teacher sees the students as a part of the process and not just as passive recipients of knowledge from on high. That has never been my style. I didn't ever think I knew that much.

For Athena, leadership is much more than managing people. She works with and for people and expresses that leadership is a reciprocal, ongoing process between the leader and the led. She believes she facilitates connections to make this reciprocity successful. Like the goddess Athena who disguises herself as Mentor in Homer's *Odyssey*, leadership is about guiding others to meet their potential. Rather than directing Odysseus to take a certain path, the goddess Athena guides and teaches Odysseus to listen and learn

from his men (Lattimore, tr., 1967). I believe this is how Athena, my participant, understands her role as a leader. She, like Homer's Athena, gives others the opportunity to lead and often positions herself in the background.

### **Athena's Community College Mission**

Athena's relationship to education provides the context for her understanding of higher education's purpose for individuals and communities and the community college mission. She believes higher education has practical and abstract benefits. Individuals gain a skill set for a job and are given experiences to help them live fulfilled lives. Athena prioritizes the abstract consequences of a higher education in her description.

*I want [students] to leave our institution not only with the kind of subject matter knowledge and information they need to make them employable. I want them to have the skills and abilities to make them successful people. We have now spent a lot of time now at [Eastern] we kind of adapted a model from [another college] our abilities based education model and we have really transformed our whole curriculum. And infused into that curriculum are nine basic abilities. We're boiling them down into three right now. Communication, critical thinking, and citizenship. But under each of those areas we are concentrating on student's abilities to read information, to communicate about that, to communicate with each other, to think critically, and analytically, to be able to express themselves in a meaningful fashion, to work in teams, all of those things that employers say are missing from recent college graduates in some circles that I've been reading. We're trying very hard to make sure our students leave us prepared to **live**.*

Athena believes communities and even the world will benefit from a well-educated citizenry. She weaves her academic and professional journeys with the journeys of the students and community she serves. Education benefits individuals and communities.

*I am so worried in many ways about the future of this country and of the world. It is teetering on the worst kind of chaos. It seems all of the time. And if students are not able to make critical decisions about themselves and have a global perspective and understand other cultures, understand how they got to be the way they are. ... If they are not people who are dependable and know how to work with others, they won't be employable, they won't be able to live on their own. And ... that worries me a lot. So that's what I want for our students. It's a very holistic kind of*

view and very optimistic given where many of them are starting from who come to us.

Her optimistic, holistic view about education's purpose segues into her understanding of the community college mission.

I understand the community college is for many their only educational option. In a world where 70, 80, 90% of the jobs will require at least an associate's degree level of education and training. If we are not there for our students, I don't know where they will go. I worry, however, about our capacity to deal with students who seem to be coming out of public schools less and less well-prepared. For a wide variety of reasons and I don't know what's it's like in Wyoming these days since it's been a while since I've lived there, but I know on the East coast that we are facing major challenges with non-English speaking students, with dire poverty. ... To survive and maybe perhaps even thrive in this kind of century I think our universities and many private institutions are going to be in for a very rough ride. But I do believe our community colleges are in a better position to well not only to prepare our students but kind of help lead the way. To be that bridge between employment and adolescence. That bridge between ... settling for what is versus dreaming for what could be. And if we're not there, many of the students who are coming to us won't live the life that they could and they should and that they deserve.

Athena places primary emphasis on the access mission. I believe this prioritization connects to her experiences as a student who was denied access to particular careers and to her professional journey where doors closed and opened. She wants more for students just as she wanted more for herself. For her, access to higher education defines the community college mission. She describes community colleges as bridges between what is and what could be not only for students, but also for the world.

### **Athena's Epilogue**

Throughout my interview with Athena, I look at the metaphors and imagery she has used to capture her understanding of the relationships among her academic and professional journeys, her beliefs about higher education's purpose, and her beliefs about the community college mission. Her experiences not only open doors for her, but they

also close them, too. She faces battles that she loses and retreats from and battles that she wins, but she always grows from such experiences. Her evaluations about her journeys demonstrate a steadfast determination to value both what is and what could be for herself, her students, and her community.

Athena, at the end of the interview, chooses to share her adolescent dream of becoming a missionary. She returns to earlier experiences to understand her present beliefs.

I alluded to this earlier. I think that ... I believe that one of my strengths as a president is the ability to articulate what community colleges are about. The passion that I feel for it. I am able to express to others who don't know who we are and what we do and ... I think that my academic background again as a teacher and as a counselor and as a dean and as a campus director, all of those things I ever did before I got to be a president and my experiences that I went through when I felt like I wasn't being heard have helped me ... not only speak from whatever pulpit I've been given but help others do the same And it's been my goal also to mentor others who have come along and help others become leaders. And well that's part of the teacher in me I think. ... It all blends together in a way. But I think that some of the strengths that I developed in my own academic career and through my own experiences really have helped me do some things that might not have been possible otherwise. Or in other words a point when I was in high school that I wanted to be a missionary. Until my boyfriend said well what if others don't want to believe what you believe. I thought oh yeah you've got a point there. But now I feel like I still am a missionary about different things. I think in community colleges we're all missionaries. We have to be. It takes a lot of passion and energy to do this work. And to stay focused and not to I think we could ... this may be a bad image ... we could fall over the edge of whatever cliff we're on into a social work agency mentality. Which we shouldn't do. I believe we ought to have very high academic standards and expect our students to get there because they can. They will live up to our expectations of them. And if our expectations are low, their achievement will be low. I'd like to think that if we expect the best we will get the best that everybody's capable of giving us. So that's more specific to community colleges than any other branch of higher ed. in which I have been engaged. Or anything that I've gone through.

As Athena evaluates her experiences, she suggests that all types of experiences whether positive or negative have contributed to her personal and professional transformation. In a similar way, Athena wants students to have transformative experiences and views her

role in transforming students' lives optimistically and passionately. She is a missionary for community colleges.

In this next excerpt, Athena embraces the literary practice of the “willing suspension of disbelief” because she believes in the community college mission. She weaves her academic and professional journeys to create a holistic perspective about herself and the community college mission.

... Well, I think that one of the most important skills that a president needs to develop is that of listening to what others are saying. Kind of like reading in between the lines if that makes any sense. ... I think that ... one has to be optimistic and good natured and have a sense of the absurd because life is indeed absurd. You know in literature we call it that willing suspension of disbelief. That sense that what's happening makes absolutely no sense, but it's happening anyway so you really do have to believe once in a while that pigs can fly and that it will all make sense in the end. The other thing that I tell students and others is that one of the things that I've learned from my own career is that as I put it, you get where you're going in spite of your best efforts but not because of them. ... As I mentioned earlier, my career has not been all rosy. This was not easy. And there were many times when I thought oh my god I'm tainted merchandise, I will never have the opportunity to do what I think I'm capable of doing simply because I will be judged as that trouble maker or that mouthy female or whatever. But I've been fortunate enough to find myself in positions where people did believe in me and where I could ... could learn from what happened. ... As I look back now on what happened early on in my career when I got in that tenure battle ... I used to think it was just those evil people who were there who couldn't stand the fact that I was different from them and that my students liked me and that I was doing a good job in the classroom. But I see now that it was that I was as responsible for that debacle as anybody else and that it was my attitude and my arrogance. So I learned from that. I learned how to deal differently with conflict.

She evaluates how her experiences transformed her life and how she was able to learn to react and lead in different and even better ways. She shares one last story and again evaluates the importance of challenging experiences that help her understand where she has been, who she is now, and who she will be later.

My situation [at a community college] ... briefly ... a board of trustee's member got his back up about the basketball coach living on campus and being a dorm

supervisor. I don't remember all the details but I do know that the president ordered me because he had been ordered by the Board of Trustees to remove this person from his supervisory position in campus housing and I wouldn't do it because it was the wrong thing to do. And the Board wouldn't talk to me about it and we went through a great rigmarole and I just ... I was insubordinate, I wouldn't do it. It was wrong. So they met and the Board ended up demoting me and asked me to start reporting ... from dean of students I was now to start reporting to the dean of academic affairs whom I thought was a real idiot and I said thank you I'm not going to do that. And I quit. As it turned out that president was given a vote of no confidence and he was gone within three months. The whole thing it was unnecessary but there were times where I felt I'm the one who has to look at me in the mirror in the morning and I need to do what is right regardless of what the consequences might be. And I've done that two or three times in my career and have always come out better as a result. So something I try to tell people don't be afraid of conflict, don't be afraid of the negative. You have to be willing to do what's right and what's in the best interest of the greatest number of people. You may not always make the popular decisions and again when I was in [my first presidency] and ended up having to lay off a lot of people. I laid off 52 people. I didn't want to do that. But the long term health of the institution depended upon making some very difficult financial decisions. And somebody had to do it. And if the president is the one who has to be there, then you have to be willing to stand by those things. But listen to the voices around you and take the best advice that's there because you cannot ever predict totally the outcome. But you can always learn from it. So it's you know being a president is a very high mortality profession in a way. So I'm feeling very grateful that, I've had a successful time at [Eastern], that things are still going well. That we are still really doing wonderful things with our students here. I'm very grateful for that but I think I couldn't be who I am now if I hadn't gone through what I went through in all those other positions. So I tell people don't shy away from what's difficult because you'll get where you're going.

Difficulties are necessary for anyone who has a desire to learn. I and Athena believe learning cannot take place without challenges. Athena chooses to stand by her values despite personal sacrifice. Her experiences have taught her to teach others. She personifies Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, weaving, and war. She learned how to deal differently with conflict. She is flawed, but she believes in herself and others. Her life is a tapestry that is still being woven.

### **Aeneas's Prologue**

My third participant agreed to participate in my interview within a week of my

initial e-mail inquiry. We were able to meet in person for this interview, and he seemed pleased to help me with my study. He is a White man in his fifties who has served as a president at Western Community College, a pseudonym, for the last two years. This is his second presidency. In total, he has 15 years of experience as a community college administrator. He began his career as a ninth grade English teacher and later became an adjunct faculty member at both community colleges and four-year institutions. He holds a PhD in Education with an Adult Education emphasis as well as a M.A. in English education, and a B.A. in English.

I have chosen Aeneas, Vergil's epic hero, as the pseudonym for my third participant. Vergil was commissioned to write the *Aeneid* in order to create a distinctly Roman epic. In doing so, Vergil created a hero who personifies Roman *pietas*, a "virtue that includes a sense of duty and service" (Morford & Lenardon, 2003, p. 648). Vergil's Aeneas is destined to be a leader who serves the greater good, and his behavior is meant to be valued and emulated by the Roman people. I compare my third participant to Aeneas because he uses his experiences and reflections to teach me, and subsequently others, about his values and why they should be emulated. Like the character Aeneas, my third participant also believes he is destined to lead and to serve others.

### **Aeneas's Academic Journey**

Aeneas gives me a brief introduction of himself to set the stage for understanding his story. In this introduction, he identifies his religious denomination, describes himself as a non-traditional student, gives a short anecdote about a high school experience, and explains why he chose English as his major. Like many non-traditional students, Aeneas's experiences before entering the collegiate arena influenced his goals. He enters

college with the long-term goal of becoming a lawyer and is able to delineate specific reasons for his choice of major.

Because I was kind of a late bloomer. I didn't go to college after high school. I actually went to serve a mission for my church. In South America. My high school now this is the irony of my journey ... because my high school counselor one I never met with because I was a very good student, never got into trouble. So when ACTs came out and then SATs he said, well I've always been very high in math, and he said you know math is really a good degree. Stay away from the language arts. I was not offered a scholarship, nothing of the sort. So I went to South America for a couple of years. Came back. Didn't have any money so I worked until fall. So I started out as an accounting major thinking ... well I was pre-law because I wanted to be a lawyer but accounting seemed like a good fit at that point. And I also took accounting courses. But I found it a very boring topic. That column would add up and that column would add up . But English, I kind of liked English because you know you can kind of create your way. You know a little bit of creativity. So I said you know I'm not going to do accounting. I'm just going to do English. Well, I worked for a law firm. English seemed like the deal because the lawyers I worked for spoke well, wrote well, communicated. English seemed to fit because several of them had English degrees. So that's kind of the focus I went through. I got my bachelor's in English. I thought about philosophy but decided that's not really what I wanted to do. Because there in the mean time, there were some cases in the summer time mostly medical malpractice and workmen's comp. You know we worked for an insurance company and it wasn't necessarily whether we were right or wrong. It was how much can we actually get out of. I was like I don't want to do this for the rest of my life. So anyways I went to law school and said no that's not what I want to do.

In this introduction, Aeneas also jumps ahead in time and shares the reason why he decided not to become a lawyer. Aeneas' brief anecdote illustrates his deep connection to his values. He leaves the law profession because he cannot abandon his ethical beliefs. Aeneas refers little to his undergraduate experiences in this segment of his story.

However, later in the interview, Aeneas shares two undergraduate experiences.

These particular experiences helped reinforce and shape his values. He narrates:

I had [a female professor who was] my advisor. Now at that point I think she was the highest ranking female. Kind of sad that as associate dean you're the highest ranking female in the *entire* institution. But she made it very clear that her expectations, she was referred to as the battle-ax. (laughs) Yes, I know that's not an appropriate term , but the woman was intense she taught all the Shakespeare

classes. And then in another Shakespeare class we had a guy who didn't have the minimum qualifications. She took him out of the class – battle-ax. That to me was when I learned specific consequences that you really had to rise to the occasion and really increase your skills. Well, I thought I was a pretty decent writer, according to [her] I was not. I was a C- writer. At the end of that semester I got an A-. And she said A- a worthy work. I still have that essay in my file because I got an A in the class, but I will tell you that A- said to me ... you have gone to a different standard. And simultaneously, I had another professor ... who was from India. And he was one of these gentlemen who probably has one of the greatest minds. He could quote anything, anytime, anyplace. He knew all the old card catalog numbers from the back of the book and where to find it in the library. But the thing that was key for me was here's [my professor] who had a master's degree in India. When he came over to the U.S. they made him do his master's degree over because they didn't think it was worthy. So he had to do his master's degree over to be faculty. Literary criticism was his big thing. He had written a marvelous textbook on criticism and the irony was the professor who he took literary criticism over again used his textbook. So to me that meant no matter what the odds are that you're going to prevail if you put in the amount of time. I knew I needed to put in more time and effort. At that point in time, I was taking 21 credits per semester in English and working 30 hours a week at the law firm. And working in a church. So sometimes my tolerance level for young people who say 12 credits and no job is tough is low. I say, tell me what the problem is. ... So those two experiences showed me that A. there are standards and B. you can be a whole lot more.

Aeneas remembers two professors and the lessons he learned from them as people and teachers. Hard work, dedication, and perseverance are themes found within his anecdotes. Aeneas uses these stories to make connections to community college students. They, like him, should work hard despite challenges, including discrimination. Education provides opportunities, but students have to do something with the opportunities they are given, just as he did. He shows little empathy for students who choose not to work hard. Just as Romans strived to emulate Aeneas's values, my participant wants students to emulate his path. He has high standards for himself and others, which has allowed him to achieve success, and, he believes, will allow others to succeed.

### **Aeneas's Professional Journey**

Aeneas rarely compartmentalizes his experiences so it is difficult to separate his

academic and professional journeys. Rather, Aeneas's experiences meld together so that the way he tells his story helps me understand where he has been, where he is, and where he will be. He followed his chosen path to law school and realizes his values were not suited to this profession. He then takes a different path, which is not necessarily a choice. Teaching is what English majors do. There is little said about his teaching experiences, but I see his professional journey as a quest to find a place where his values and professional environment fit together. Similarly, Vergil's Aeneas embarks on a quest, not necessarily of his choosing, to found a city, Rome, and establish a Roman identity.

Aeneas uses time order to structure his professional journey, but he leaves out details to move forward in his journey. Within the content of his journey, I learn more about his values. He shares what he learned from his parents and applies that to his early teaching experiences. His experience with a teacher's strike also helps him make a decision about his career and his future. He shares:

So I came back and finished my master's degree in English education and said I'm going to go teach because at that point that was all I was counseled to do was teach. And when I went to ... well I taught ninth graders which 95% of the time I really liked to do. And the other 5% of the time you wanted to kill every single one of them because they just didn't behave the way you thought they should behave. I knew that if I didn't behave it would beat me home and I would be in deep trouble. So I was not a behavior problem. But after that I thought do I want to be a superintendent or something? At that point in time well I need to get a doctorate. Because I already had a master's degree. Do I want to stay in K-12 and be a superintendent or do I want to go into higher education? And I had a professor in the graduate school who said there are three things you need to be a college president. He said you need a P., you need an H., and you need a D. (laughs) I said I can do that. So I think one of the turning points for me in the K-12 sector that kind of pushed me to the higher ed. side was when I was in [a northern state] we had one of the longest teacher strikes not by choice but because I was a part of that union. Which I'm not a fan of unions in the first place but I refused to cross the line. I don't like what you're doing. I got everything ... I wanted. Anytime I asked I received. But my colleagues at my school. Let's just say not everyone was treated like that. When one of my most favorite students of all time came out to the line and said ... this guy does not know what he's doing.

He doesn't know enough English to teach. She said you have got to come back in and teach us. I said I just cannot do that, unfortunately. So she went back in. The strike ended. And a note to me at the very end of school said, "You are my most favorite teacher and always will be, but I will never forgive you for leaving us." And I thought about the leadership piece that I was experiencing, the inequities, giving things to this person but not that person, and I said surely I can do better than this. And consequently then I went to a college down the road and became a manager of a division.

Aeneas identifies a cause and effect relationship with this experience. He decided to leave the K-12 system because of the teachers' strike and the poor leadership practices he witnessed. This experience also helped clarify his belief that he could be a better leader than those who were leading him. Seeking a doctorate was a practical, traditional way for him to become a leader in higher education.

Aeneas also explains his rise to the presidency was not traditional because he was never a vice-president. In this segment of our interview, Aeneas evaluates his professional choices rather than providing particular stories about his experiences.

I went to higher education and became a division manager. And then I became a dean at that institution. Then I jumped from dean to associate vice-president because there were only two vice-presidents, the provost and the finance person. And at that point, and maybe this is just me, well why do I need to be a vice-president position? I mean I could do it. I've done all those things. I didn't think at that time I needed to be a vice-president. I felt what am I going to gain doing that? I'm sure I could have learned some things. But in terms of leadership do I need because I think I'm a pretty good academician, a pretty good faculty, a pretty good teacher. And what else am I going to learn? So when I jumped, I didn't see the transition. I didn't follow the normal path. Does that make sense?

Yes.

And I didn't feel that I had to. Because I don't believe people have to. ... So do I think you need that extra step? Maybe, if you haven't been a teacher or done the things needed. But you know when I interviewed at [my first college] I was a president there for five years and here you know when I met with the Board, they didn't ask me about my positions. They asked, can you lead this institution? Can you go to the legislature and capture money for us? Can you do these other leadership type things? And simultaneously, the number one question was can you get along with others? Whether it's externally or internally. Because that's

where presidents get into trouble. If you don't get along, you're doomed. And the community needs this, too. So my thoughts are pretty good that I try to get along with others. Not everyone. I don't care who it is (laughs), but I feel like I get along with pretty much everyone. There may be a few who may not like the decisions you make, but our philosophy is to move forward. If you do not progress, you're retrogressing. So for me, I didn't necessarily feel I needed to be a vice-president. You see, that's the traditional way. But I grew up doing non-traditional things. And yes I'm used to rules, and laws, and regulations but no one said to me ... if you're going to be a president you have to be a vice-president. You have to have a PhD. You don't need the deanship, you don't need a vice-presidency, you need leadership skills. And if you can sell those skills to the people that you're interviewing and they say you can, you get the job. So I did. And I'm here.

Aeneas provides a long justification for skipping a step in the traditional path to the presidency, including the fact that his life from childhood to adulthood has been non-traditional. I sense that this explanation stems from other experiences that he chooses not to share. Aeneas chooses to explain that he needed two things to become a president— a PhD and leadership skills. A PhD gives him access to leadership positions. He also believes that the ability to form positive relationships with others is the most important leadership skill, which he implies is a skill that is not necessarily learned.

Although he possessed the necessary leadership skills, Aeneas discusses some of the difficulties he encountered in his rise to a presidency. His degrees allow him access to leadership roles, but other factors denied him this access. He explains:

Well I think the journey was this is what I wanted to do. I said ok I want to be a college president. And unfortunately in some cases you've got to go up through these ranks. And so I went to meetings with vice presidents and I thought if he can be a president surely I can. Does that make sense? And even in some conversations I was a dean and I was actually they didn't even interview me (for the presidency) and the person they hired I thought what does he have over me? I mean I was young. Ironically, what's interesting I said maybe it's because you don't hire within the institution. That's a real challenge. Sometimes you don't hire within your institution. You may be the best candidate but they don't hire within. So the first college, I saw what happened there. And I thought do I have to go to a vice-presidency or provost if I wanted to be a president? I didn't think I needed

to. Maybe that was my egocentric philosophy. But I've been a leader my entire life. Ever since I was 12 years old. So yes, I was an English major but I felt that I had the leadership qualities to become a president. I was involved in some regional activities. I thought I could be a president. So I did. I applied for presidencies, got a couple of interviews, got a job, and here I am.

Aeneas's path to the presidency was consciously chosen. In his quick summary, he reflects that, despite being an English major, he has leadership qualities that took root early in his life. At this point in his story, Aeneas appears to believe that leaders are born, not made. He refers to his childhood and tells me he has always been a leader. Like Vergil's Aeneas, my participant views leadership as his destiny.

In his discussion about leadership, Aeneas fleshes out the story of his childhood and the relationship between early experiences and future ones. The past and present merge and provide the foundation for his leadership practices.

Let me talk about how I understood leadership when I was younger. And then I think I can make a better connection with how I understand leadership now. Let me give you a generic view and then how I learned that. To me leadership is being able to do the "do" and making people understand the "do." That's a real generic, technical view. I refer back and I don't know what religious persuasion you are, but in our church at 12 years old males there are opportunities for leadership in priested activities and in scouts. I was an eagle scout. So you have to do certain things to guide young men to do whatever they're going to do. And then I went on a mission. I served as or in a variety of positions. I just had leadership positions all along the way. And even before I went to get a doctorate I was a Bishop in my church. So when I think of leadership I think you're an example for the folks you lead. Because there is nothing that I would ask you to do that I wouldn't do or have done myself. Secondly, I would never ask you to do that unless I give you the tools or help you gain the tools to become whatever you want to do. What you do ultimately reflects on me. And so there's this reciprocation. Kind of you've heard this team. We're this team. I've played. There is a team where you always make sure. My thought is I want to hire first round draft picks. No second round for me. You get the best you possibly can. And personally I've been very successful in hiring very good people who are much smarter than I am. You know I'm just a potato guy from Idaho. That's who I am. But you learn because when you're sent out by your Dad to go cultivate potatoes and they've got to be pretty straight rows. You've got to make sure it's done in a certain time frame. You know you've done specific things. You know we had cows to milk, things you had to do, but incorporated in all that we still had scouts,

we still had school, we still had church, we still had all those activities. Because the leader has to multi-task.

Aeneas understands leadership and connects his role as a community college president directly with his religious life and his farming background. In this segment of his story, Aeneas appears to understand that his life as a White male in a patriarchal church provided him with access to leadership opportunities. He emphasizes, however, that he took full advantage of those opportunities and rose above his humble background. This is especially poignant when he remarks “I’m just a potato guy from Idaho.”

Aeneas believes leaders should serve others, be an example to others, and successfully multi-task, which he has done throughout his life. Aeneas structures his understanding of leadership by using definitions and examples. He defines a leadership skill and then uses an illustrative example from his childhood and current role as president. He explains:

So anyway as I take a look at leadership and what I’ve learned as a young man that A. you have to multi-task and B. you have to depend on a lot of people, C. you have to be a very good example. The best way to be a good leader is to be a servant. Servant leader, I knew that way back when. But I didn’t make money off that concept. But we’ve always been a servant leader because you *serve*. I served two years as a missionary in Southern Chile. On my own dime. On my own time. But I gained great experience. One of the things I gained ... was you know I can hold my own even though you grew up in a rural farming community. You know all of a sudden sometimes when you think of leadership because a lot of people say it’s a narrow focus but in reality because of the experiences we have when we’re young and how we integrate those and how we even juxtapose those ... all of a sudden your world gets a little wider. That’s why I say all students ought to do something in a foreign country. Or get out of Dodge. Because I learned a great deal being away from home. And being away from really a very comfortable life. Even though we weren’t rich, we weren’t poor either. But I didn’t know anything differently. And when I moved away into a foreign country that to me was an exercise in a different type of leadership skill. It became just a part of what I did. Does that make sense? Because church had a very, very important part in my life. A very important part in how I did leadership. Because when I was a Bishop I had 540 people in my congregation. I had to work full-time, but I also spent numerous hours. Again both ends of the stick doing what I needed to do, counseling because

you know as president you spend a lot of time in this chair looking at that chair, counseling. So it was not an abnormal thing for me to do. It was just something that I learned over the years and it wasn't a big transition for me.

Aeneas views leadership as a fundamental part of his background. His background affects how he understands what was important for himself and influences what he believes is important for students. He does not separate his experiences from the experiences he wants students to have. If students follow his path, he believes they will learn to be successful.

### **Aeneas's Community College Mission**

Within Aeneas's reflections about his higher education and his professional journey, I see a direct link to his understanding about higher education's purpose for individuals and communities. This link serves as the backdrop for his understanding of the community college mission. Higher education has given Aeneas the degrees needed to progress in his career. As a first generation college student, he accepts his access to a better life and embraces the values and work ethic he learned from his family. His values have not changed, but his opportunities have. He explains:

From a standpoint holistically, it is for me I've been able to do things that I probably wouldn't have been able to do. Because with higher education I was the first one in my family to get a degree. My father was a high school dropout and my mother just went through ninth grade. My father always used to tell us, there were eight children, you know people are not going to hand you anything. And so for me getting the degree was a big thing for our family. Getting the second degree was even bigger. And then a doctorate unheard of. So but the other piece for us so we going back to the service allowed me to serve both sides of the fence. I can serve the college and the students. But it has made me a more well-rounded person in terms of being able to understand people and academics. You know writing I do a bit of writing not as much as I would like to. I mean real writing. I do a lot of other types of writing for sure (laughs) but it's the other part I think I only published one poem last year. But holistically it's kind of made me a person that's been able to be more balanced. With my education, it allows you to earn

maybe not as much money as you would like to earn, but you earn enough money that you won't have to worry about food, shelter, and that sort of thing. That you can actually spend time to serve people. Whether it be church or to do other things that you would never do if you spent all of your time working three jobs. Service is important for me.

Aeneas's higher education has broadened his view about education. He believes higher education has allowed him to make a living that affords him the opportunity and even obligation to serve others. Like Vergil's Aeneas, he embraces *pietas*. My participant clearly understands his duty is to serve.

Higher education is transformative not only for individuals, but also for communities. Aeneas believes higher education gives individuals a practical skill set that has abstract benefits. Aeneas connects his experiences to what students should experience. As a community college president, he supports service-learning initiatives.

That's why when I came to this institution every student in the next five years hopefully where every student will have a service learning project at this institution. Why? We have a lot of people who never did boy scouts, girl scouts or church things. They don't serve at all. They don't know how to serve people. You know you go to Kiwanis or Rotary they're a little gray haired. So where are the young people? Who is going to take over these service opportunities? Anyway so for me it's allowed me to be able to serve.

Aeneas's story becomes the story for students and communities. For Aeneas, the primary mission for community colleges is to serve the community, which is a theme found throughout the descriptions he shares about his life as a missionary, student, and professional.

Community colleges serve as the bridge to transform what is to what can be, which is also what higher education affords individuals. Although Aeneas believes in the comprehensive, community college mission, he prioritizes responsiveness to the community. He discusses:

Talking about that mission well [my state] can't quite capture the idea of a *comprehensive* community college. My thoughts are that we do everything from 18 month olds in our childcare center we have 121 students there and we also have 80 year old students. You name it; we're doing it. So our philosophy is what do we need to be doing for the community? Everything from GED/Adult Basic Education all the way to transfer education and everything in between. Because our role as a community college we have the community ... .But we serve the community and I say Community upper case. Not community lower case. Because our community is both an internal community and our external community. And also our region. ... But our community college has been [here] for a long time. We're not just work force development; we're not just training; we're not just transfer. And when people say junior college I say you don't say junior college. It's not what we are. So that's really the role of community colleges is that you serve that community.

In this description, there is no direct mention of students as individuals. They are a part of the constituency he describes, but they are described generically. In serving the community, students are served. Like Vergil's Aeneas, my participant believes he is a representative for his community.

### **Aeneas' Epilogue**

Aeneas understands the relationships among his academic and professional journeys, his beliefs about higher education's purpose, and his beliefs about the community college mission holistically. He returns to his upbringing to understand his current role as a community college president. He reminds me:

Remember my academic background started in rural Idaho.

Right.

There was no question where I was going to school if I went to college. I mean it was 50 miles down the road, but it was a two year college. Did I ever think it wasn't a four-year college? That was never a question in my mind. I had a mother the other day, I get side-tracked, whose little darling is going to come to play soccer. And her husband's a doctor and she asked me this question. This kind of goes with your question. Now my son wants to be a doctor, do you think he should come to a community college? Even though for me English was my major which is *academic* but I had a great experience at [my state university]. It was a big university. But it still had small values. It was [originally a junior college] and

it still had some similar values. And I didn't granted it was an academic career but I was still rural. I didn't sense because of my English degree I'm better than somebody else because my values, my work ethic, how I was raised. My father remember he's a high school dropout and so I knew he had gone back and got his GED. I knew that [my university] did GEDs. To me the academic background to me English gave me a degree. I mean you can't read some literature I mean the *Huck Finns* and *To Kill a Mockingbirds* and not understand people. But the key of it is that that has allowed me to see both sides of the coin.

Aeneas describes himself as rural. He clings to his rural values despite moving beyond a rural profession. He has never forgotten his roots. With his English degree, I believe he recognizes that his societal status has risen above his father's.

My participant connects the literature he read to his rural upbringing and its relationship to his present role. The characters he analyzed during his undergraduate years resonate with his rural background.

You wrote about the Daltons of the world and you wrote about the Bigger Thomases of the world. And so when you get that range of people you get to see I mean because all good leaders have their fallacies. They all do. And the question is, I think I know most of my fallacies (laughs), but I think that for me was taking what I have learned because, in my opinion, and I do this every semester when I teach, my job is to take what you know and help you make the connection to what you don't know. And I think if you take the literature piece and all of the other experiences I've had I know about that. But how do I take what I know about cultivating potatoes and make that into something that I don't know anything about. Because part of it is, as I look at that analogy is that when I knew something is planted in that row sometimes a little top coming out about that deep my job was to make sure that when I cultivated I had straight rows and it came up to a point where the potatoes would grow. So my role when I am helping new students I can see maybe being a little tough, but the question is how deep are your roots? My job as a community college leader and as an English major and I don't know it could be any major maybe but my piece is how do I help you develop your skills. Because if you don't have deep roots when you get above ground the sun will kill you. Because you don't have enough stuff at the bottom. So you know I took all these analogies because it's all allegorical because everything you do allegorical. You have a surface level meaning, you have another meaning, and another meaning. And it all goes on together. Because you utilize the things you're going to need even in the classroom but also with the literature piece how do I help the Daltons and how do I help the Bigger Thomases? And we have the Bigger Thomases.

As Aeneas uses the farming analogy to describe what education does for individuals and communities, I believe he is also describing what his education has done for his life. With his roots firmly established, he thrives and grows. Just as Vergil's Aeneas leaves his homeland, my participant leaves the farm, but they both find a new way to pass their values onto others.

Aeneas chooses to end our interview with a story. This story illustrates that leading requires a reciprocity with the leader and the led. He narrates:

One that probably is ... In one of my classes. I also taught all the remedial education. And I also taught when they had the Hispanic kids come in I taught them they never had an ESL program. One kid in my class he always wore a Levi jacket and he always came to my class and put his head down on his desk. *Always*. Nice kid. Well, one day during my free period he comes in with a plate of lemon bars that he had made in home ec. And I said, gee thanks I love lemon bars. He said my teacher asked me if you have any comments to just write them down. I said, hey I'll do that. And he trundles out and these are really good. So I write these are some of the best lemon bars I've ever had. And the next day in class, the head's up and he does all of his work. Gets a B in the class.

Aeneas uses his relationships with people as a way to connect his rural upbringing, his religious background, his understanding of leadership, higher education's purpose, and the community college mission.

People provide the context for his story. His story cannot be understood without understanding relationships and connections with and to others. He reflects:

But I think the key for me is that I guess when you look at students and you can make the analogy students, faculty, or staff they always have a point where you can get them to do things that they may not want to do. But it's not by force you can do it but by telling them how good their lemon bars are. And when you look at students my philosophy is if you don't learn in this class or you don't learn at this institution then that's your problem. Because we're going to do everything we possibly can. As a teacher, I'm going to do everything I possibly can to help you be successful. As a faculty member, I'm going to try to give you all the tools I can possibly give you to be successful. Now, if you choose to use them that's great. If you choose not to then don't come by and moan and groan. Because [my institution] has money. We do staff development. We let you go do lots of stuff.

Now if you choose not to play, you won't move up on the salary schedule. Don't moan about your salary. If you've been an M.A. plus 0 for 20 years, that's your problem. And if you redline, that's your problem. Because I'm going to give you opportunities to develop.

Not only must people have deep roots, but they must also have a desire to thrive. They may be cultivated by others. However, they themselves must use the sun, earth, and rain to forge their opportunities. Aeneas pulled himself toward the sun but would not have been successful without firmly established roots. He emphasizes his humble roots to show others how far he has come. He believes if he can do it so can others. Like Vergil's Aeneas, my participant believes he has led and continues to lead a life that others may and should follow, which ultimately serves the greater good.

#### **Atticus's Prologue**

My fourth participant contacted me a few weeks after my initial inquiry. He agreed to participate once he learned we could complete the interview process prior to his retirement in January, 2009. He is a White male in his sixties who has spent his professional career in the same community college system—22 years as faculty and 18 years as an administrator. He holds a B.A. in English and a M.A.T in English from a prestigious, southern university. He has PhD in Educational Administration with an emphasis in Community College Leadership. I named his institution Southern Community College, where he has been the president for the past 10 years.

After much contemplation, I have chosen Atticus Finch as his pseudonym. Atticus Finch, the father and attorney in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mocking Bird*, is an inspirational literary character who transforms race relations in a small, Southern community and teaches his children and community to understand other perspectives. In the content of his stories and reflections, my participant underscores the transformative effects of his

educational and professional experiences for himself and others. Like Atticus Finch, he is a Southerner whose leadership is inspired by his loyalty to students and the community college mission.

### **Atticus's Academic Journey**

Atticus takes me back to a specific turning point in his life to set the stage for his academic journey. He describes the transition of moving from a small town to a city when he was 16 years old. He believes that this transition prepared him for later transitions.

Well, I ... going back to earlier times. I went to elementary and grammar school and junior high school in [a] small, [Southern] town. And then when I was 16, the family moved to [a Southern city]. So I went from a fairly small community into a bona fide city at least by [Southern] standards. I entered ... high school as a junior, which was a bit traumatic coming from a school where I knew everyone at the school to a school where I didn't even know everyone in my classroom. And certainly not my class, certainly not the high school. So that took some adjustment, although I was only there two years. And then I went to [Southern] University ..., which of course was several standard deviations larger than [the high school I attended]. But I think that having been through that kind of transition, once, I was able to make this second transition.

The transitions from small to ever larger communities show me that his reflections are not seen in terms of separate experiences but a process of experiences. Atticus did not provide stories to illustrate the transitions, but uses them as a way to help me understand how and why his world view expanded.

As I listen to his journey, he does not share reasons why he attended his university or why he chose to go to college. Atticus enters college as an undecided major, and he abandons aspirations for the ministry in his first semester.

... I did not enter college with a clear idea of what I wanted to major in. I had a notion that I was going to become a Presbyterian minister. But that did not ... that was not sustained through my first semester at [college]. Just too many temptations and too much worldliness to sustain that goal. So, basically I began

taking the general education classes that were assigned just the traditional math, English, electives ... those kind of things. And really toward the end of my sophomore year, my advisor said you've got to declare a major when you go into your junior year. And we looked at the courses that I enjoyed the most were the English courses. And looking back I can see that was because the study of literature in particular was an intellectual challenge, but it was a challenge that did not have a necessarily right answer at the end. And so it was an opportunity to actually engage with the professors and other students in an intellectual debate where no one or the other could necessarily be proved right or wrong. It just really had to do with the strength of the argument. But for whatever reason I was making better grades and enjoying English courses so we decided to declare that as my major. And so I finished my college career as an English major. I took an education course, but I was not planning to become a teacher. Frankly, I didn't know what I was planning to do. But then during my senior year as the university was threatening to graduate me, it was necessary for me to figure out what I was going to do. And ... I looked around and realized that I was not really prepared to enter the job market in terms of having any skill set that was particularly tailored to a job or career.

During the end of his sophomore year, an advisor assists Atticus with choosing a major that matches his abilities and interests. He does not indicate if there was a discussion about career choices, too. As he makes sense of his journey, he describes his need for intellectual challenges and engagement with others. Atticus, as an undergraduate, lived more in the moment and gave little thought to his future. He shares that as an English major, he did not have a skill set for a specific career.

Because he is not prepared to enter the workforce, Atticus chooses to enter graduate school to obtain a teaching license, which is a practical and traditional solution to gain a skill set and also allows him to postpone his future.

And so I stayed for graduate school. They had a program that was fairly new at that time called the Masters of Arts in Teaching, which you've probably heard of because most universities have that now. And it was basically a way of getting 18 graduate hours in English and getting the requisite 12 hours in education that enabled you to qualify in [my state] for a teaching certificate. And once again that program, since I was enrolled in it. I had the opportunity or the necessity to teach ninth grade English as part of the Masters of Arts in Teaching. And ... that was in 1967 and 68; it was back in a small town in [a Southern state]. We had, in addition to the teaching, we had seminars with the university professors once

every week, one evening every week. And ... I was one of three White teachers in an otherwise all Black school. And because of my Southern roots, that was, of course, a significant challenge for me culturally and the ... weekly seminars with professors enabled me to process all that I think in a positive way. But it certainly was transformative. It was an incredible year. But the one thing that I was very clear about early on in that year was that I was not cut out to teach ninth grade. I'm glad that there are people who are and those people deserve some special reservation for heaven. But I'm not one of them.

Atticus enters graduate school for a practical purpose. Without telling a specific story, he briefly shares that this part of his journey was transformative. As a White teacher in an all Black school, I believe he gained a perspective as an outsider who until this point had always been an insider in a dominant culture. He explains that his Southern roots had not prepared him for this experience, but, with the assistance of others, he is given the opportunity to process how his racial identity fits into a different context. He also discovered what he did not want to do—teach ninth grade English. I believe both discoveries provided him with greater clarity about his future.

In the next segment of our interview, Atticus describes his academic journey as it relates to his professional journey. He enters another culture, the world of community colleges, which contrasts with his experiences as a traditional, university student. He evaluates his journey based on how his academic experiences differ from the experiences of those he teaches.

And I had heard about this ... in [my state] this fairly new higher education phenomenon called community colleges. They had been ... the community college movement started in [my state] in 1963, so ... it was still a fairly young movement. And I applied to one ... And was offered a job and was given a job teaching technical English, which to me was a come down from my lofty ... training in literature and that sort of thing. But it ... literally changed my life. The classroom that I walked into fresh out of my graduate master's program did not at all resemble any class that I had ever taken at [my college]. These were working people. I was the youngest person in the class. They were not ... they wanted to get on with it. They were very committed to getting the work done and moving on. But it was challenging and exhilarating and so I never wanted to be in any

other line of work. And I was perfectly happy to be a faculty member. In fact, enjoyed being a faculty member because of the immunity that you have from line authority and the latitude that you have to really challenge and debate and explore ideas and those kinds of things. But then about 20 years later, there was a change in administration, changes in my life, and so I moved into administration and, at that time, was encouraged by the new president that we had to go ahead and get the doctorate, which to me seemed way out of reach because I had a family at that time and certainly lots of obligations. But I was able to work out an opportunity to have a residency at [a university]. And so in 1989 and 90, I went back to school after that long a time from being in college ... went to [a university], really glad that I had some administrative experience under my belt because basically what that graduate program did for me was give me some clarity and some vocabulary with which to deal with the experiences that I'd already encountered. So it really made sense a lot of the things that I was looking at. So that was a very enjoyable time. Probably the most enjoyable educational experience of all my years. I finished my undergraduate degree at the University ... with a low C average, which is what they predicted I would have. I didn't understand the whole student thing. One thing out of the master's program and there was more I won't say equality but anyway an opportunity to talk with the professors more one to one level. I did very well there. But I really caught fire in terms of learning in an academic setting in the PhD program. So that's my academic journey.

Atticus blends his academic and professional journeys using a common structure. He structures his journeys as a series of transitions not only from smaller to larger communities but also from smaller to larger cultures. Then he evaluates the transitions he describes in terms of how they transformed his world view. The world in which he finds himself is constantly changing as he discovers his values. His need for intellectual stimulation also unites his journeys. He did not understand what it meant to be a student as a traditional undergraduate because, I believe, he needed additional experiences. He views his undergraduate and graduate experiences as transformative when he connects them with his professional life in a community college setting. His pattern of thought is not linear, but rather emerges as a series of layers that build upon one another.

Upon further questioning about his undergraduate years, Atticus chooses to tell me two stories, one academic and one social, about his life during that time. Each story

provides me greater insight about him. He narrates:

I remember a lot of em [stories]. One of the ones that has to do with the academic area. It was in an American Literature course. The teacher's name was Dr. [Smith]. The book we were studying was *Moby Dick* and the particular problem or issue that we were discussing was the phrase in *Moby Dick* where Captain Ahab stabs the ... harpoon into the whale and the phrase was that he stabbed into the morass of the whale or something like that. Morass was the word that was used. And we were standing outside. I was waiting for some friends to come by, probably going to drink beer or whatever we did back then. The professor walked by and I was standing there. And I said, you know, and I gave him an idea, which is not particularly relevant, but he looked at me and he scratched his black beard and he said, that is a good idea. That is an interesting idea. It was the first insight that I had that my ideas had some merit ... outside the dorm room. It was very ... I felt like the education was working. So obviously I still remember it that many years later.

In this segment of the interview, Atticus emerges as a story teller. The level of description brings me back to this moment in his life. I visualize where he stands and hear his conversation with his professor. For the first time in our interview, he positively evaluates his undergraduate experience. In this story, he reflects about how a particular academic experience connected to his self-image as a learner, who often felt disconnected from the collegiate experience.

In his next story, Atticus shares an event that serves as another transition. I believe this event may have been the first time he began to question his place of privilege as a White, Southern male, a theme that has already emerged in our interview.

Also, I had another experience. I mentioned the racial thing. The University of [...] had integrated, although there were very few African-American students. And it happened that there was one in our dorm. And one night after cramming for a final exam or whatever, we decided, I had a car, we decided we'd pile into my car and go get some coffee. It was two or three in the morning. So we all piled in my little Rambler and we headed over ... to the Donut Dinette. And we knew it was open all night. We walked in. Of course, we were college kids, two or three in the morning, there were some red-eyed sleepy truck drivers and a few other night people sitting around drinking stale coffee and eating donuts. We walked up and each one of us sat down at the counter. And they walked right up to Jimmy, the little Black kid who was in our group, and said the law says we have to serve

you, but you can't sit down. And that was my first upfront in your face experience with blatant racism in kind of a culture that I had somewhat taken for granted. So that was a memorable experience.

This story is short, yet significant. He does not develop a comprehensive plot, but concludes with an evaluation of this experience. This event may have set the stage for transforming his perspective. Atticus opens his mind to others' perspectives and begins to put himself in their shoes. Similarly, the character, Atticus Finch, teaches his children to understand: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view ... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it" (Lee, 1960, p. 30). Up until this moment, my participant did not recognize his life as one of privilege. Racism is illustrated in this concrete, external experience, which I believe gave him an opportunity to explore his cultural and racial identity from emotional and intellectual perspectives.

At the end of this part of our interview, Atticus evaluates his education from another perspective. Although he explained earlier that he believed his English degree did not give him a skill set for a particular career, he focuses on the abstract outcomes of his higher education. He reflects about how his way of thinking changed:

For me personally, it was that ... transformation from ... you know a person who had a good education through [school] and all that. I learned what people in high school learned. But from that elementary, sophomoric kind of notion that things are either right or wrong ... things have right answers and they have wrong answers. That kind of natural conservatism which young people have about those ideas. And the gradual erosion and fading away of that to understand the world on a much more abstract level. To develop that analytical quality to take an idea or thought and take it through all of its possibilities rather than the immediate concrete kind of outcome. So I'm very pleased with my education. I'm sure your familiar with Flannery O'Connor's everything that rises must converge and the obnoxiousness of the woman's son feeling like he was smarter than everyone else. I actually felt dumber than anyone else. But I think the end result of the education was developing a feeling of intellectual competence.

Atticus tells me that his education within and outside the classroom broadened his world view. He explains events from this time in his life using transitions as a way to structure his journeys. He prioritizes the abstract outcomes of his higher education and spends no time summarizing a concrete skill set.

### **Atticus's Professional Journey**

Throughout our interview, Atticus looks within himself to make sense of his life. He tells me about his personality traits and how they connect to his professional journey. He wants me to know who he is both as a person and a community college president.

Well, there are two things that probably have to do with my personality. And then at least one that has to do with the college [where I was employed]. The two that have to do with my personality. I get bored doing the same thing more than about five years looking back on my career I had to do something different in about every five years. Now even staying at [my first community college] and this is a characteristic of that school. It was large and growing and fairly cosmopolitan for a [Southern] community college. And so there were opportunities. So every few years even though I still had my duties in the classroom, but there was an opportunity to engage in some project that was very stimulating and rewarding. So I was able to stay there because I could keep reinventing myself while staying in that environment. The other thing about me is I am a very loyal person and loyal even to ideas. And I told you how I felt stepping into my first classroom. I really solidly believed in the enterprise of community college education. All aspects of it. I mean I just bought the whole package. And ... was committed not only to being in it but to affecting it and so in the course of my young years, one of the reasons I enjoyed being a faculty member, and I mentioned the immunity, is we had a very autocratic president, but one whose heart was absolutely in the right place in terms of what post secondary education means to individuals. Its life changing properties. So he and I agreed on that but disagreed on many other things. Now I became president of the faculty senate. The president (of the college) and I would debate and it was just great fun. But my intent always was to do what was right for the college so that it could serve the students better. And so from real early days I was very involved in the college life. The running of it, the administration of it, I had no line authority, I did not want line authority, I wanted to stay in the classroom where line authority really couldn't get to me even though we don't have tenure in our system. But it allowed me the freedom to just really participate on that level.

Atticus examines his life internally. His self-reflection shows me that he knows himself.

The theme of transformation emerges here, too, as he describes his professional life in terms of reinventing himself. His expressive loyalty to community college education, I believe, resonates with his earlier aspirations to become a minister. The enterprise of community colleges gives him something to believe in. Serving students is at the forefront of his professional descriptions.

In the next part of his story, Atticus describes how a new president allowed him to see himself as a leader. She gave him the opportunity to reinvent himself again and to recognize that he could remain loyal to community college education as an administrator.

Sometime around the mid 80s, we went through a change in the department head role at about the same time that we changed presidents. And the new president was much more collaborative and that leadership style, without me knowing it at the time, but I had this feeling. It resonated more with my own style and so I became president of the faculty senate again the year that president came on board. So we worked very closely together because she was very interested in the faculty point of view and ... she was the one that then encouraged me to go back to school. The department head position came open the second year she was there and so I applied and was given it. That was the first time that I thought that maybe that I would like to be a lined administrator. And I found out that I enjoyed that as much as I had enjoyed teaching. Because it was an opportunity to be creative. It was an opportunity to affect more students, though indirectly rather than directly. And the ... it was an opportunity to engage with my colleagues from a leadership position more than just a peer position. That meant I could direct some of the dialogue. I could actually have an impact on kind of the culture of the department and changing that. I just really enjoyed doing those things.

His transformation from a faculty member, to a Faculty Senate President, to a department chair occurred in a chronological order. However, Atticus examines these experiences from a holistic perspective. Like Atticus Finch whose crusade to save an innocent Black man transforms the lives of many individuals directly and indirectly, my participant embraces administrative work because he is able to transform the lives of more people. Like Atticus Finch, my participant sees himself as an agent of change.

Atticus's satisfaction with his administrative career quickly disappears when he is

forced to adjust to a new president who does not value what he values about community college education. Because Atticus knows himself so well, he takes an opportunity to move to another institution. Rather than seeing this as climbing the ladder to the presidency, Atticus emphasizes that his professional roles must connect to his values.

Then another president came and his idea ... he was all about growth of the college and expansion and those kinds of things. And I began to feel like a square peg in a round hole. It just wasn't fitting very well. And so then I had an opportunity to go to a small mountain college as a dean/vice-president and so I did that and realized that I really enjoyed the smaller venue. So I became dean and that transformed into a vice-president position and that president left, and an interim president came, another president came, in fairly short succession and I just felt like I'm doing all this adjusting to new presidents, I ought to go out and let people adjust to me. So I applied for a presidency that I didn't particularly want. I was just kind of interested in what would happen. All of a sudden they were calling me back for interviews and I was a finalist ... it scared me to death. And so I backed away from that but that said I've got the experience that apparently other colleges would be interested in so I found an opportunity that I wanted and applied for that and that's how I got here.

Atticus discovers without it being an end goal per se that he has the leadership skills and background for a presidency. He first applies for a presidency just to see what would happen. When others consider him a viable candidate, he internalizes this possibility and seeks a presidency at an institution that is right for him. I am reminded about his story as an undergraduate who felt "dumber" than everyone else. His fear of a presidency did not, however, hold him back. As an undergraduate, he learned from a professor that his ideas mattered. Likewise, others saw him as a president. In both cases, others believed in him, which led him to believe in his abilities.

Atticus's understanding of leadership is illustrated in his practices. Leadership is not about getting one's way, but rather about doing the right thing, which is also similar to why Atticus Finch defends Tom Robinson. My participant provides me a glimpse of his daily life as a president as well as a glimpse of what he has internalized about

leadership. The external and internal concepts of leadership emerge simultaneously in his descriptions.

It's a very different job. It's not rocket science. It's amazing how wide the span of qualitative differences between those who fail at it and those who are extremely good at it. But it's a different job in that you really have to rely on other people for the management piece of it. In most situations, certainly here, I'm drawn externally a lot more. I never thought that I would be an external president because my heart has always been at the actual classroom level. Teaching and learning that's what that's where I focused all the way until now. This job does require a great deal of community work and external work so that's a transition of I think every administrative position. And I've written some articles. Even in your position you have to kind of abdicate some of your own personality things. Faculty have to do that too. They don't have the luxury of blowing up at a student just because they feel like it. There's a certain obligation of leadership that where you have to often do the right thing rather than the thing you feel most like doing. Well, that gets magnified at the presidential level because there's no place I can go in this community that I am not the president of the college. Except perhaps the home and sometimes my wife accuses me of being that way there as well. But the fact is you are in a role and you must play that role, even when cocktails are passed around, even when you're out eating in a local restaurant or with some friends from out of town. The people at the table next to you know who you are. That's ... well you have to be prepared for that and you have to be able to switch gears instantly because you may be talking to the press one minute, a county commissioner 30 minutes later, and one of your deans about a problem with a student in the next 30 minutes.

Atticus describes his life as a president in terms of external realities. Yet, the reality of switching from one role to another because of differing audiences reminds me of his need to reinvent himself. He is also leading a professional life that allows him to do something he believes in. His loyalty to the institution is found in his descriptions.

Atticus understands leadership in terms of values for himself and others. The reciprocity between leaders and followers must be ongoing and future-oriented. He explains:

Well, leadership is first of all you can't lead in place. Leadership means you must be going someplace. ... And so leadership means having a long view, a view to the future, a vision, if you will of where you want to be. Leadership cannot be separated from followership. And people will follow a path for different reasons.

They can be compelled and driven in a direction but I don't think community colleges and higher education in these competitive times can really rely on for the long haul of trying to compel people to go in directions where they themselves don't want to go. So for me leadership is also about not only knowing where you want to go but being able to articulate that from a values base to the other people in the organization so that they too understand and believe that that's the direction they want to go. So they're following because it fits with what they themselves believe is right. And that's pretty easy to do with faculty if you're tapping into their value of serving students. And your other employees if they're working for a community college they also have that commitment. You just have to bring that out of them. And third the whole issue of personal integrity and character for a leader to me is vitally important. Because it's important people within the organization to want to follow the leader not only to go in that direction but because they want to be where that leader is. There has to be an almost personal kind of relationship that might not be I don't mean personal in the sense of social but one of the reasons why when I left the large [community college] and went to the smaller southwestern community college in the mountains and why I landed here and stayed for 10 years is I can walk these halls and call most of the employees by name. These are not the people that my wife and I socialize with, but they know me as a person and I know them to a certain extent as a person. And some people are able to effect that kind of thing through charisma even in large groups where it's impossible to know each other. But I think it's important however it's done that people look at a leader and say that's a person I admire and I would like to if that person's going here that's where I want to go too. So those are three leadership things that I believe in.

In his understanding of leadership, Atticus believes leaders must inspire others with their integrity. Although Atticus has developed his integrity over time, there is also a sense of timelessness in his understanding. It is here that I am able to make the greatest comparison of my participant to Atticus Finch. Atticus Finch inspires all of us to look within ourselves and ask whether or not we would sacrifice ourselves and our families to do the right thing for another human being. Atticus Finch is compassionate about his community's inability to look beyond the status quo but helps them to do so through his actions. Like Atticus Finch, my participant believes in his ability to inspire others through personal connections that must be internalized and then externalized.

### **Atticus's Community College Mission**

Atticus's understanding of higher education's purpose for individuals and communities is found in his reflections about his education and the community college mission. Atticus examines the abstract consequences of higher education. He describes his transformation and also generalizes about the transformation of others. He explains:

Well, ... I am much, I think I'm a more open person. I think the intellectual challenges have made me a more analytical person. ... I think the experience of having to adapt and survive in increasingly larger social and intellectual venues has made me better at dealing with and interacting with people. And I think the pursuit of higher education makes you smarter. But I think I'm smarter, I think my mind is larger, broader, and deeper than it would have been without higher education.

He believes the pursuit of higher education is a process that gives individuals the chance to develop their intellect.

Atticus understands that the community college mission serves individuals and communities. He underscores the fact that he spent his professional career in one community college system and will retire at the end of this year. He has no regrets about his career. He describes the mission with reverence. He begins with an abstract description and ends with a concrete story to illustrate his understanding of the community college mission.

Ok. Well, I feel fortunate to have begun and will end in the [same state] system. ... but I just always felt [this] system it was all I ever wanted. It has in [my state] I guess two basic or fundamental missions and one is to provide opportunities for individuals to improve their lives through higher education and training. And the second mission is to raise the economy of [my state] specifically through work force training. And my first love, what I fell in love with that first class is individuals who have made a decision and committed themselves to making a better life for themselves and their families. Unlike my classmates as a freshman at the [university] who were there primarily because they could be and everybody has got to be someplace so they might as well be in college. These people were committed, and I know there are many people in our classrooms many students who don't have a clue and they're just hanging out, but for the

most part our community college students are serious about wanting to get ahead. In fact, I remember a colleague of mine that first year came in and showed me a paper that a student in his class had written and in the sentence he pointed out the word *another* that the student had spelled n-u-t-t-e-r anutter and my friend said it's ridiculous that these people are in college. I remember thinking then and I said to him you are what stands between that person and the future he wants. So it's your role to get him past *nutter* and to *another*.

For Atticus, community colleges provide individuals with access to a better life. I believe Atticus may have also transformed the life of his colleague in this interaction. Essentially, Atticus questions his colleague's commitment to the community college mission and offers an optimistic perspective about the effect professors may have on students' lives. Atticus contrasts his undergraduate experiences at a university with community college students' experiences. This contrast illustrates a key component of Atticus's understanding of the community college mission. He believes in the mission of transformation for both individuals and communities.

Atticus also contrasts the community college mission with universities. He explains:

But that's the mission that I support and I continue to promote. And that's what we celebrate at graduation, which we just recently had. We celebrate it during our academic awards night and all those. But the other mission in [my state] being a reasonably poor agricultural manufacturing low wage type state. The power of community colleges in [my state] we are very locally based. I serve a one county area. We have 58 colleges in [my state]. So all of our programming needs to have a direct impact back to the community. All programs need to show work force need in our immediate area. So we aggressively work with small businesses, local industry, any entrepreneurs in order to increase the prosperity of our area. Therefore, our community colleges are major players in our local regions. Universities ... their presence has an enormous impact on whatever community they happen to be in. But their focus is not necessarily there. Our focus is there.

Atticus inspires others to celebrate the community college mission. His inspiration comes from his loyalty and service to students and the community. His community college meets the needs of a small, one county community. He directly

affects the prosperity of his community with the programs his institution supports.

Universities may help the community in which they reside, but they do not focus on community in the same way the community colleges do.

### **Atticus's Epilogue**

At the end of his career and I believe throughout his career, Atticus engaged in self-reflective practices to make sense of his life. He presents himself holistically. He reflects on the relationships among his academic and professional journeys, his beliefs about higher education's purpose, and his beliefs about the community college mission. His academic major provides a foundation for his leadership style.

My academic background in English has humanized me and I guess you have to be careful with the use of that word. But there's a certain, through the study of literature, ... there is a ... an embracing of humanity if you will. There's the ability to empathize. ... There's compassion. ... There's all those things that I think just come from spending four years intensely and deeply involved in the greatest literature of our time. And so, a leader who lacks those qualities and there are people in leadership positions who lack those qualities so I can't say that you can't be a leader. But for me personally, my leadership style is shaped by those things. I am compassionate about the people in the community who have less than others. I'm compassionate about the students who are struggling either academically or financially or whatever. You know those qualities are there. My value for individuals who come to our doors from myriad experiences ... that all I think has come from my solid grounding in the humanities as part of my early education.

My participant examines his life from an internal perspective that has external consequences. Like Atticus Finch, he is a crusader for those who are less fortunate than he. He is able to view the world from others' perspectives because of his academic and life experiences. He is the timid student, his friend Jimmy whom he took to the Donut Dinette, a faculty member, a confident graduate student, and a community college president simultaneously.

As our interview draws to a close, Atticus, because he is so close to his

retirement, is able to provide a sense of closure. He is looking back to the present, not the future.

I see [my experiences] more as a gestalt than as a linear thing of saying academic background has led to leadership which has led to community colleges or that sort of thing. I think the academic background you know ... I think that people are mentally and emotionally predisposed to one line or another or another. And so I think my intellectual make-up naturally gravitated toward the English and literature classes. So there was something inherent in me and the other people in those classes that calls us to do that rather than major in chemistry, pre-med, or those kinds of things. ... But then the nurturing that came about from being in that particular academic program you know caused the intellectual growth that probably would not have happened on my own or in a math major for me for example. The ... when it came time to get a job there I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do, but I had developed a resume or a CV if you will that made me qualified to go into teaching. You know I had one bad experience. The students were great in the ninth grade that I taught. That just didn't resonate with me. There was not much of an intellectual challenge there. It was more of a discipline you know those kinds of things. But anyways so I got into the community college simply because my academic background had given me the credentials that enabled me to do that. Now I stayed in it because, once in the community college, those same you know intellectual skills and that emotional ... grasp of the human condition. That resonated. I mean it didn't matter you know what I had studied in terms of literature. There I was in a classroom with people whose individual stories were equally as dramatic to any that ever had been penned by an author. Whose lives contained as much adventure just trying to survive and feed their families as any that had been in literature. So my feeling like I had come home to where I belonged in the community college was probably a large part because of the way my mind and soul if you will had changed through my academic area. And then once fully grounded in the community college and fully committed to what it means ... I took one step after another. I had the intellectual ability to be successful as a department head, as a dean, as a vice-president, and some would say as a president.

Atticus's reflections reveal his belief that people naturally belong somewhere and that finding where he belonged allowed him to grow and develop as a person and as a leader. Atticus may have become a "minister" after all because he embraces the humanity of the community college mission.

Atticus ends our interview with a story that brings his life full circle. I imagine him speaking to internal and external constituencies and inspiring them to grow and

develop as he shares this story.

In my first class there was a guy whose last name was [Peaks]. It was an evening class and his attendance had been less than stellar to say the least. And since I was from an environment where three cuts and you're out, the professor's the authority, I was determined that I was going to tell him that he was going to fail the class for over cuts. So after the class one night, I said Mr. [Peaks] could you see me after class? I was using my teacher voice. And so he came up after class and he said I know I've been missing a lot, but the fact is my wife is pregnant and she's having some problems and so she's in the hospital and sometimes I can get away and sometimes I can't, but I'm going to do the best I can to try to get here as much as I can. But that's why I've been missing classes. I realized then and it never left me that these students in community colleges are students second, or third, or fourth. They are fathers first, they are husbands first, they are workers first, but they have lives and if we don't accommodate that then we're not doing them a service. So my whole idea about my role and their roles changed with that event. The other thing that happened 20 years later. I was in a class. It was a good class and I had a good time. It was the first class meeting of the semester we had a pretty good time of it you know learning each other's names and all that. And there was one student in there and I noticed his last name was [Peaks]. So after class, I stopped him as he was going out. I said Mr. [Peaks], are you kin to so and so [Peaks]? And he laughed and he said yeah, he's my Dad. I was born when he was in your class. And he said I couldn't take English until I got in your class and I've been waiting until I could get in your class. So I thought well that made me feel real old but I think with that I learned that we do have an impact when we don't know we have it and it's incumbent upon all of us to realize every engagement we have with a student ... you know we are participating in their journeys. And it's just ... we need to take it seriously. Not take ourselves too seriously but take those moments very seriously.

Atticus never forgets students and connects his story with their stories. At any given time in our lives, we connect and interact with others. He believes we participate in one another's journeys. If we forget this, then we break connections that are vital to transforming ourselves, others, and our communities. Atticus is loyal to students and the community college mission.

### **Robin's Prologue**

My fifth participant responded quickly to my inquiry about participation in this study. At the onset of our interview, she also requested a copy of my dissertation. We

gained an immediate rapport, which I attribute to her warm, inviting personality and her sense of humor. She is a White woman in her fifties who has been the president of her community college for the last two years, but has been employed there for most of her career. I named her institution Southwest Community College. She has a B.A. in English and sociology and holds a PhD in American Studies from a southwestern university.

I have chosen Robin Hood as the pseudonym for my fifth participant. Most prevalent in her stories are descriptions of experiences with personal and social barriers associated with her gender. Her experiences as a disadvantaged, first generation, female college student link to her professional motivations to educate others about social justice. Like the character Robin Hood, she seeks redress and justice for the disadvantaged (Ibeji, 2001). Finally, she emerges as the “Robin Hood” of higher education because she believes access to education will transform the lives of those who have the least.

### **Robin’s Academic Journey**

Robin sets the context for her academic journey as a first generation, female college student. Robin explains her uncertain feelings about her future in the months leading up to her high school graduation. She knew she did not have the skills to enter the work force or the familial support to go to college.

Ok. Well, I was one of those kids whose parents didn’t particularly encourage me to go to college. They thought that I would get married and have babies. They have two daughters and that’s what they thought we would both do. And if you know we turned out to be old maids ... (laughs). It was kind of an unspoken but you know sort of an expectation we might end up being English teachers or nurses or something appropriate to the female gender. And ... I had no idea what I wanted to do. All I knew when I graduated from high school was that I wasn’t prepared to go to work. I felt like I had been going to school all my life and I guess I really had and my parents hadn’t talked to me about college. The only person who had ever given me any sort of encouragement to do further study was an attorney who I baby sat for right before I graduated who said you’re a bright young woman you should think about court reporting. And I don’t know if there

was some budding feminist in me or where it came from, but I mean this was late 60s. It wasn't even you know the woman's movement hadn't even begun, but something in my little mind said he's an attorney, I'm at this critical stage in my life, why is he telling me I should go study court reporting? I said, what's that? He said they type up everything we attorneys say. That just didn't sound very appealing to me. So I kind of tucked that away and I just thought well I'm just going to go to the university and stall having to go to work because you know I didn't even know you had to have an education or training or anything to get a good job. I was completely naïve about the ways of the world.

In her story, Robin shares how she felt when a male attorney suggested she choose court-reporting as her profession. Her internal voice seemed to help her resist gender roles, although she is not quite sure about the cause of her resistance. Having gone to school her entire life, Robin chooses to attend a university. She did not have a clear understanding about college, but she knew more about a school setting than the world of work.

Robin enters a university as an undecided major. During this time, she remembers that she recalled an elementary teacher who praised her reading ability, which made her think she could be an English major. When I listen to her story, I wonder where she would be now if that teacher had not given her encouragement.

And so anyway I ended up at [a university] just kind of completely lost and in this huge place. And I had always done very well in English since I was in like second grade. My second grade teacher told me I was a good reader. And I didn't get a lot of praise at home. So I was so thrilled by that to be acknowledged as the greatest reader in the second grade. (laughs) I thought you know I'm going to take some English. Of course I had to anyway, but I was always kind of motivated in English. So I did take an English class and I was fortunate, again as I had had in all through school, I had a stellar English instructor in high school. But again I got good English instructors and continued to love English, took an introductory sociology class and realized I loved sociology as well. And ... so I just you know you have to choose the major and the minor and English I knew I could ace, sociology I wasn't quite sure because I thought you might have to study statistics or something having to do with math. I've always believed there's an English brain and then there's a math brain. They're usually not mixed up together in the same brain. And they certainly weren't for me. But I anyways so I pursued both of those and had a really rewarding experience and I'm trying to remember when I ended up ... you see I ended up getting involved in the honors program only by accident. I was a fry cook and worked in a cafeteria as a work study student. And

someone told me they were in the honors program. I said, well, what's that? And they said, oh it's just really fun; you're already making good grades so I know you'd qualify. We'll all just hang out together and you should take honors. So I got involved in the honors program and did really well in that and it just really ended up building my self-esteem because it was more, a lot of reading and I was taking a lot of literature classes and just loving them.

Robin describes a natural affinity towards English in the same way she described an intuitive resistance to designated gender roles. Her belief in these natural inclinations lays a foundation for her intellectual growth. She has the ability to take and resist risks. Her accidental entry into the honors program helped her garner much needed self-esteem that did not seem to appear in her memories about childhood or high school.

Robin also contrasts her love of literature with the reality of what it means to be an English major. She relates that professors had unrealistic expectations for students with her background. Unlike her peers, she had to support herself financially, which she believes affected her ability to fulfill her reading obligations. However, she overcomes this barrier.

The only bad experience I had with literature was I had these crazy faculty members who thought even though you were, I mean they didn't make me take 21 credit hours, that was my fault. I wanted to get through quickly and I wasn't working full-time and I just loved school so I was taking a whole lot of credits. So I was working a little bit, and I think I wasn't the kind of student they were thinking of. I think they were thinking of kids that were being supported by their parents. And so they'd give us these reading lists of 18 books for a semester and one of them would be *Moby Dick* or something. (laughs) And I thought I can't read all this stuff, are they crazy? I mean I don't till this day I don't know if anybody could have read all the books that they assigned. But I became very good at acting like I had read all of the books. (laughs) And I could go in and discuss literature theoretically and pick up on threads of the conversation. And I felt like I was still learning you know about various issue and the books themselves. You know to this day I feel like I have read some of the books that I never read. (laughs) But I read as many as I could. [My university] is not one of those name brand schools where they have you know really rigid standards or really difficult tests, but you could get a great education there if you put a lot into it. And given the kind of schedule I had, I did put all of my heart and soul into it. It just wasn't humanly possible for me to read everything.

In this excerpt, Robin seems to have gained self-confidence. Even though she pretends to have read books, she is still learning and recognizes that she is transforming. She thinks about her education as a process. In some ways her family's lack of support or perhaps knowledge about her college journey worked to her advantage. I believe that she was no longer bound to their expectations and was able to experiment intellectually and emotionally.

Robin successfully graduates with a bachelor's degree and once again is faced with the choice to enter the workforce. However, this time she is less naïve. She believes she wants to teach because she knows this is an acceptable career path for English majors in general and for women in particular. Yet, she also connects teaching with positive, life affirming moments. Her role model was her high school English teacher. Here she combines her academic and professional journeys.

But I continued to get good grades and I got my four year degree, my bachelor's degree, oh somewhere along the line I thought I think I might want to be an English teacher. Surprise, Surprise. (laughs) Because that's the only thing I ever heard talked about for women pretty much. And so I graduated with my major in English and minor in sociology and I also always liked high school students. So I kind of got in my head I might want to teach English because I had had such a great experience with it, and a fabulous role model in high school. And so I went out into the world not having any idea that English teachers in the early 70s were a dime a dozen and that with no experience and very little student teaching experience. Well one thing I did was I took the alternative, I forget what it's called, it wasn't like a whole major in education you just took the bare essentials to be able to teach and so that's what I did. So I ended up without a ton of student teaching experience, although a little bit and I was still really young. Gosh at that point I was probably like 22 or something. So I graduated with my four year degree and I take my degree down to the ... public schools thinking I'm going to get a job.

Robin soon discovers, though, that wanting to be a teacher is not enough. Landing a job in a competitive market as a young woman was not easy. As this part of her story

continues, she narrates two more stories in quick succession. She ties these stories back to her high school experience, which illustrates the recursive nature of the life story

(Riessman, 1993). She explains:

And I had well I guess this was the second sort of instance, well I don't know if I should use the word sexist but that's how it felt the sexist experience you know the one with the attorney I think he didn't really know what he was doing. And this next one, the guy didn't know what he was doing either. Oh, and at graduation there was one too. We were packed in there in this huge gymnasium and the guy giving the graduation speech said now blah, blah, blah and gave this great inspiring speech about what people can do now that they were going out into the world. And then he said now that's for all you guys. He said we know you girls are just here to get your M.R.S. degree. I was pretty shocked at that too. By then the feminist movement was starting so I was starting to be sort of sensitized toward stuff like that. And when I interviewed for my first job as an English instructor, I don't think there were really many jobs, but I kind of wish the guy had told me that. But anyways what he said was well we don't tend to hire young women of child bearing age because they tend to quit and have kids. And I was shocked, I didn't know what to say. I was very green. This was probably my first major interview. And I said well and this was completely true I said I'm not really intending to have kids for a long time you know I'm not even thinking about that. I just really want to teach. And then he said well why not? My wife and I have two kids and we think they're great. So I thought to myself I can't win with this guy. I might as well just leave. And so I finished the interview, I left and I went home and thought real hard. I thought, you know, I'm not going to get anywhere.

At the end of this excerpt, Robin implies that she will not get anywhere because she is a woman. In her reflections, Robin does not blame the men for their attitudes and appears to accept that they are merely reflecting the social values of the time. At this point in her life, Robin believes she cannot overcome this social barrier.

Because Robin cannot land a high school teaching job, she pursues a graduate degree to gain more experience and better credentials. In graduate school, Robin develops a way to connect her experiences as an outsider and first-generation female college student to the academic world. Without realizing it, I believe Robin wants the high school students she hopes to teach to have experiences that she never did. She wants

students to bond with literary characters who may also serve as their role models.

And I found out I could combine literature and sociology, which is what I really wanted to do. I had this theory that if you taught. And I was still visualizing teaching high school students and I thought in terms of really difficult sociological issues like racism, poverty, and crime, and things that people tend to have closed minds on or very rigid positions that if they are able to bond with a character in a novel who is dealing with a particular issue then it kind of cracks their heart open a little bit more to the issue than if they're just reading pure sociological theory about why some people are disadvantaged. And so that was my idea was that I would teach literature. I would teach sociology but I would use literature as a way to open people's hearts and minds to it.

Within this part of the interview, I see Robin emerging as Robin Hood. She has a desire to teach others about the disadvantaged and to transform their beliefs. Instead of stealing money from the rich to give to the poor, Robin views knowledge as the commodity. If students are taught about the disadvantaged from a more personal perspective, they may be less likely to hold on to their stereotypes.

Robin continues to discuss her personal and social development in graduate school as an outsider who is trying to navigate an unknown landscape. Within the story of her dissertation journey, Robin shares that a new administrator makes an either/or judgment about her role as a mother or scholar. He thinks she should choose to be a scholar or a mother. Despite the disapproval of this male administrator, Robin is able to be both a mother and a scholar. She describes a supportive environment until she attends her dissertation defense. As she describes her dissertation defense, I am reminded about other instances where she lacked support and faced gender discrimination. Again, she places emphasis on her lack of understanding about the dissertation process; she still seems to describe herself as an impostor in the academic world.

So I had written my dissertation and I was pretty happy with it and I'd gotten feedback and people seemed pretty supportive. And I think that's the whole point of a defense. When you get to the defense, they plan really tough questions for

you to see if you rise to the occasion. But I, again I was naïve, I really hadn't had people explain it to me. I didn't know what I was going into. And I only had this one woman on the committee kind of extra supportive. And so ... oh boy you're not going to be able to print this, but I will figure out some way you can print it. I went through the whole defense and people, the guys mostly, just kept asking me. They said, we don't get it; we just don't get what point you're trying to make. What is this thing about trying to teach sociology through literature? We don't know what you mean. And to me it was as plain as the nose on your face. And I explained it every which way but loose. I got very frustrated. And just towards the end of the interview I said well or actually I think I ended it prematurely. Well, ... when the novel called *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, which was the first novel Alice Walker ever wrote .... Still not many people have heard of it but I really love that novel. And really the whole theme of it. Well a couple of themes. One is the oppression of Black women especially by Black men and their mates. And the other is a person who has lived an oppressed life in the case of the male character can change and grow as a human being over time and that they might end up being a completely different person and a better person than when they were young due to some difficulties they had. Anyway so I don't even know if these guys had read the book, but I explained the whole thing in the dissertation so I assumed they knew what I was talking about. Finally, they asked me for the fourth time, what do you mean? We just don't get it. I said well when Mem, Mem is the main character, the female character in the book and she's the oppressed wife and she's actually beaten by her husband. So when Mem picks up the rifle and points it at Brownfield's crotch (laughs) but I didn't say that I said balls (laughs) and says I'm going to blow those off if you call me Black bitch one more time. I said at that moment, it was really illustrative of how oppressed Black women felt in their own homes and by society and how tired they were of being insulted and not supported, and abused. And when I said that all of the men went dead silent. And I think the woman might have been over there smirking in the corner a little bit. (laughs) But it really kind of wrapped it all up. They didn't have any other questions after that. I was a little shocked at myself because I was still pretty young and naïve and nice to everybody, but I was so frustrated that's all I could think of to say. And I really don't know to this day if they got it or if that just shut them up. But anyways it was a funny story I like to tell a lot.

I believe Robin uses the story of her dissertation defense to illustrate her frustrations with gender issues. She was a mother and a scholar. She used an oppressed literary character to set a context to explain her oppression in the academic world. Like the main character in the novel she describes, Robin explains how she was insulted and not supported. Her experiences, I believe, provide her subsequent motivations to help the disadvantaged and break down barriers for others.

### **Robin's Professional Journey**

Robin's professional journey is intertwined with the descriptions of her academic journey, but in this section the focus is on her professional experiences. Her professional path is also not a traditional path to the community college presidency. Again, most prevalent in her descriptions are the barriers she faced because of her gender and her lack of teaching experience. She explains:

Well, I was a phlebotomist after I graduated with my doctorate. That's the only job I could get. Because it was easy to get jobs in the health care industry. I still could not get a job as an English instructor, which is what I wanted to do. So I ended up making at least livable money as a phlebotomist in the hospital and then I saw in the newspaper that a community college was opening up in [my area]. And I didn't know a thing about community colleges. I'd only been to the University. The article in the paper kind of explained the idea that they're very open. You know it's open access, open admission, meant to really open the doors of education to anyone, at any level, and provide opportunities to people. Of course since I'm a bleeding heart sociologist I love all those concepts. And I thought to myself, I want to be a part of that. So I immediately went down and started applying and I thought maybe I can be an English teacher here if they don't want me in the high schools. And of course I couldn't get in the door there either.

Robin cannot land her dream job of teaching and must make a living in the health care industry. She recognizes that she wants more for herself. She happens to read about community colleges and realizes that their mission resonates with the values that she developed in her academic work as a sociologist. She makes a decision to apply at this new college, but faces a tight, competitive job market, another barrier.

In the next segment of her story, Robin explains how she eventually received a job interview at Southwestern Community College. She abandons her "do it yourself" perspective, which I believe was formed because of her academic experiences. She decides to use professional connections to get an interview.

And somebody at work told me you are never going to get in that place unless you have a connection. I said to myself oh my god that's immoral, what do you mean connection, that sounds political or something. I would only want a job on my own merits. They said ok you have the merits but you need the connections because there's too much competition. Nobody knows you and everybody else is using connections so you just have to do it or give up on the idea of working there. So after I kept butting my head against the wall for a while, I thought, I've got to do this. I've got to do it fast because the college just was clamoring to start up. They were approved to start and given funding in June of 1983 and they were opening the doors in August. So everything was happening fast and I kind of felt like it was now or never. So I found out that the guy who interviews for part-time English instructors was a friend of a guy that I'd taken a class from in graduate school. And the class was interesting. It was called the American Male and the guy was [Joel Jones] who had ... I think he was an American Studies major. Anyway, I had done really well in his class. And I thought well he doesn't know me really that well, but he'll remember me as a good student and he's buddies with this guy who's interviewing so I'll see if he'll help me. So I called him and asked him if he would help me. He remembered me. He said of course I'll help you. So he called and the next thing I knew I had an interview. And I couldn't even get an interview before. And so whoever gave me the advice was right that the connections help, but the guy interviewing me, [Adrian] said you know normally this would work against you because I don't like having pressure from my friends (laughs), but he said I'm going to give you a chance. So why do you want to teach? I was very green with the interviewing and the work place and all that, but I think maybe he saw enough passion in me even if I couldn't show that I had the experience and this was a really good buddy of his and he thought you know it's just an English class, just one part-time English class so I might as well take a chance. And he did. And I just worked very hard at it and performed well. But I looked around and it looked like I could work for 50 years as a part-time faculty member. I could tell that there was just a small core of full-timers and the part-timers didn't necessarily get their foot in the door to really get a real job. They just kind of were marginalized just like they are today.

Despite her hesitancy to do so, using connections worked. Robin successfully lands her first adjunct teaching position, but she is still marginalized as a part-time faculty member. The door to teaching has not opened far enough.

Robin decides she does not want to continue as a part-time faculty member.

Confusing everyone because she has a doctorate, she applies for a secretarial position because she will have an inside connection to other opportunities. Although quite

lengthy, I chose to leave this excerpt of Robin's professional journey intact to capture the

retelling more holistically. She shares:

And so, I saw that they had a secretarial position open and I applied for it. And so then everybody got really confused. They said you've got a doctorate, why are you applying for this secretarial job? I said because I just want to be over here full-time. I just really want to be a part of this college and it doesn't matter that I have a doctorate. I'll just start wherever you have an opening you can hire me, and I know I'll be a good secretary and I'll wait for other opportunities to come up. They said, well, ok. So they hired me as a secretary and I did that for about a year and then a job came open for a director of corrections education. It was a brand new program, running educational programs for inmates all through the state, about four correctional facilities. And I got kind of lucky on that one because of my sociology background. I also studied criminal justice and juvenile delinquency so I could really show that I knew about that. I didn't have any administrative experience but the other plus was that hardly anybody wanted to work in corrections. And again being a bleeding heart sociologist, that interested me, the idea of working with inmates and helping the most disadvantaged. But other people just wouldn't touch it. So I didn't have a lot of competition. I studied really hard for the interview and I got in. So that was my first administrative job. And that was a great way to learn administration because we were again starting up something really fast, very complex, and I just asked for help when I needed it and learned by the seat of my pants. I had to order equipment and hire faculty and get things organized and go out to the prisons and supervise and just monitor the budget, write grants, just kind of learned everything the hard way. You know people were pretty supportive and nobody was watching me very carefully so I could make mistakes and learn along the way. And it was a great job. It was one of my favorite jobs ever because I just I don't think I could ever do a job that didn't have some sort of social meaning or purpose in it. And that's just got it built in. You're dealing with people who've been left behind or who've really had a hard start in life and maybe back out on the streets within a couple of years. So you might as well come out with an education. So it was very rewarding and I learned a lot and then eventually the college was growing and they had a position open for running an occupational program which is what I did for corrections for students on campus. We hadn't really done that in a serious way. We'd been doing more transfer education. So they asked if I wanted that job and I said yes. So I stopped running the prison programs and started running occupational training programs for students on campus and in the community. And I did that sort of thing for a long time. And learned a heck of a lot more about how to do needs assessment, and how to interface with the community, and how to start up new programs, and get enrollments, how to hire and evaluate faculty and all that kind of stuff. And then eventually a position came up. I had worked for one dean of instruction who was very supportive and he became the president and he knew I was a hard worker and a quick study so he asked if I wanted to be his assistant, to the president. And so I said yes because I had seen assistants to the presidents at national conferences and I could see that they pretty much knew everything a

president knew. They were out there doing a lot of that same work. And I thought it would be a great learning opportunity.

Robin overcomes a barrier and gains access to professional opportunities by initially serving as a secretary, a traditional female career. In the above description, her career takes many turns. She finds opportunities in positions that connect with her values. Like the character Robin Hood, she finds purpose in helping the most disadvantaged, prison inmates. She also finds a supportive environment that gives her autonomy and allows her to make mistakes and learn from them. I believe her experiences as a first generation female college student prepared her to embrace the autonomy she was given. She moves into another administrative position as a dean for occupational programs. In collaboration with others, her skills are recognized and developed. A dean who later became a president serves as her mentor. As a presidential assistant, she gains further experience. Robin recognizes that these varied positions gave her opportunities to learn more about herself and her abilities.

At this point in her career, Robin begins to think she may have the desire and experience to become a community college president. Immediately following this reflection, she brings me back to the actions she took to apply for her current presidency. She moves back and forth between evaluation and action.

And I think at that point it might have occurred to me just a little bit in the back of my mind that maybe someday I could be a president. And that would be a good training ground. So after that I was assistant to the president for three presidents in a row and then the last president made me executive vice-president. And then at that point when he left I thought oh my god do I want to work for another guy? I know I can do everything these guys are doing. I just don't know if I want to calibrate and work for somebody. And I know how to do this and I know they will not take me seriously just because of my history here. But I ought to go for it. I thought what do I have to lose? I can retire in a couple of years anyways. And I've got some stuff that I always wanted to do that I was never able to do or ever able to talk anybody into. And so I just thought well I got along with all the board

members who would be in charge of hiring. And so I started talking to them. And a couple were supportive, but they were all pretty determined that it would be a national search. And I was a little hurt by that because they put in the last guy; they had just put him in the job. And I thought, they could've easily done that with me because by that time I had amassed quite I don't want to say impressive but a pretty impressive resume. I was known on national boards and I was published and had all kinds of skills, but, basically, they didn't know anything about it. Because to them I was just like little [Robin] who started as a secretary (laughs). And ... they just didn't take me seriously and I don't have a real aggressive blowing my own horn personality. I know it doesn't sound like that during this interview. But (laughs) I just want to tell you the truth. And I just and so they said ok well we'll give you a chance but you'll have to compete. And most of them were pretty skeptical and that hurt my feelings a little bit. But I thought don't let it psych you out and just go in there and do the best job you can as you have with everything else in your life. What will be, will be. So because I was on the inside it allowed me like a year to prepare for the presidential interview. And I knew so much about presidential searches and about what people look for and the process because I had helped with two or three searches before. And I knew the whole culture of the institution, I knew where all the skeletons were buried, I knew all the issues and part of what happens during a presidential search is you try to match up somebody with, you try to make sure they understand the issues and they have good solutions and that they fit within the culture of the institution. And one of our unique aspects is that we have a strong culture of shared governance. Which I had helped demand when I was in my earlier years at the college. I felt that the institution had been very autocratic and didn't take input of people so I had been one of the movers and shakers on getting shared governance. So I knew I could honestly go in and say yes I have experience with shared governance, I believed in it, and I support it and could make it even better. They had had a divorce with the foundation during the whole process. During the previous presidencies they had split with their foundation and it ended up in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that was very controversial in the community. So I knew all the insides of that. I knew that there were wounds that needed to be healed and reconnection with that community. I knew that whole issue and I could talk about it. I mean I could really anticipate about every question they were going to ask. And I had lots of time to prepare for it. So I did really well in the interview and in the end I almost lost to a guy. There had only been male presidents up to me and there were a few board members who really wanted a guy. And remaining people both in the community and internally who just like one of my best friends at the college who was normally very nice to me and supportive and always came to me with anything, she said well I know you're going to run but I want you to know I'm going to support this guy. (laughs) I was really hurt. And her rationale was she just thought he was really smart and he'd been president of a private institution and I just wasn't that experienced in her mind. And I appreciated her being honest with me about it. But there were pockets of thought about like that. I just had a real uphill battle with a lot of people. And also I don't have a real formal personality. I'm real down to earth.

I've never dressed in a three piece suit. I don't golf. I didn't fit the type at all. So in many ways it was a huge uphill battle. But then there were a couple of board members who were very open minded about it, who actually wanted somebody different and realized the culture hadn't been that healthy and realized that we needed something different. So that worked to my advantage with a couple of people. But in the end I think it was just the fact that I slammed that interview. I did so well. And I did really well in the interviews with the community and with the internal people. You know a lot of people who had known me for a really long time and had trusted me. And I was the person they went to when they had a problem. And so eventually I got the job. (laughs)

In this last segment of her professional journey, Robin structures her rise to the presidency using the barriers she overcame to mark several transitions. First, she decides to seek the presidency because she does not want to work for another man. Second, she finds a way for constituents to see her as more than the secretary. She also needs to see herself as more than a secretary. Third, she must overcome hurt feelings when board members tell her she will have to compete nationally. Fourth, she prepares for the interview and examines the institution's culture carefully. Many within the institution want a man rather than a woman for the presidency, including those closest to her. Fifth, she does not fit the presidential type with her informal personality. Finally, she lands the position and attributes her success with her year-long preparation for the interview. Despite all the barriers up until the interview, Robin successfully transformed from a secretary to a president. She has become one of the advantaged, but has not forgotten her experiences as a disadvantaged first generation, female college student.

### **Robin's Community College Mission**

Robin believes her role as a leader is to serve others and build awareness about the disadvantaged in her community. She finds meaning in what she does for others and believes in the community college mission. Robin's understanding of higher education's purpose for individuals and communities is found in her descriptions of herself, her

community, and the community college mission. For individuals, Robin believes higher education opens doors that are otherwise closed.

For me it was what I think of it as is a ticket to success, a ticket to the world. Even though I started as a secretary (laughs), I had the doctorate and people were aware that I was qualified and perhaps destined for more, so while opportunities didn't fall in my lap, I was ready. You know what's that old saying success is opportunity and I can't remember that saying. But you have to be ready to do the opportunity and when a doctorate is a requirement for certain high level jobs you're not going to get anywhere without it so it was like my ticket. Not only was it a ticket, it was something that enriched my life too and helped me be a better leader, be a well-rounded human being. I think I've enjoyed a lot of success as a mother. And a rich relationship with my daughter and I can't separate that from all of the wonderful stories in literature that I've read about mothers and daughters and ... and other readings too like in psychology and just it just helps you improve yourself.

Higher education has transformed Robin's life. She has the degree needed for a higher level career and has become a better person and mother. Ultimately, the benefits that she enjoys from her education are the same benefits she desires for her students and community.

Robin wants to save the most disadvantaged in her community and build awareness about her community's elitist assumptions. She believes higher education should break down barriers in communities between those with privilege and those who need education to survive. Similar to the character Robin Hood, she wants the rich to understand and serve the poor. She believes her role as a community college president is to promote this awareness. She links her understanding of the community college mission to her core values.

Yeah, it is kind of what I've been talking about you know way back to the beginning when I read about how the community college was open access, open door, it takes people who come out of high school who are getting sub-standard education and may not be ready for college level work or may not be ready for the large environments, kind of make or break atmosphere of the university, or who may just be timid or you know or afraid or insecure or just not ready in many

ways, or who can't afford the tuition at private colleges or universities or even public universities. So I guess the mission to me is making sure that those most disadvantaged people have a leg up in the world and have a place to start. And it's like a gateway you know. I always tell people education is your ticket to the world. You ... really can't get anywhere without education and if you get a good education or good training you can go places with it. You've got to always be mindful that life-long learning is important. And the community college does that. It offers something for everybody. So I think our primary mission, if we had to cut out everything else that we did, I would say serve the most disadvantaged. We could give up all those fun things like community art classes or whatever. But don't forget those people who really need help. But the nice thing is we don't have to choose between them and we do offer things for students who aren't that disadvantaged. You know some of them come in and they are into transferring to other colleges and universities or they've done well, but they just want to start in a smaller environment and it's very affordable. And we're joking some of the presidents that we're the new graduate school because we also have a lot of people coming in who already have graduate degrees and they're just coming back to retrain or have fun or whatever. So we almost have to be everything to everybody, but when you really boil it down and you ask me what's the most essential I would say it's that gateway for the most disadvantaged who really need the additional help and support and the open door.

Robin's reflections about her experiences connect to her understanding of the community college mission. She previously explained that she could not do a job that did not have social meaning or purpose. Like Robin Hood, the character, she seeks redress and justice for the disadvantaged, but, unlike the character, education rather than money is her medium. She is a missionary for the social justice underpinnings of the community college access mission, in a community where there is wide socio-economic disparity among its citizens.

### **Robin's Epilogue**

Robin describes the relationship among her experiences as an English/sociology major, her experiences as a leader, and her experiences with the community college mission as interdisciplinary. The relationship she sees is one of integration rather than separation.

You know it's really the same concept as interdisciplinary studies that attracted me, American Studies. It's interdisciplinary. You know one feeds the other; it's like ... they're all related. They're not separate. It's like a holistic thing that works together so I you know I would see them as really being integrated and enriching. And ... I've been telling somebody lately that his skills in the political realm translate well to the higher education realm. I guess I would say that about all three of those areas is that they all translate well to the other.

Robin continues to see her life as a holistic journey. She maintains a consistent identity in each story she chooses to share with me.

Robin believes her role as a community college president is to transform not only the lives of particular students, but also the lives of students in general. She sees herself as the "Robin Hood" of higher education, which should be available to all who seek the opportunity, particularly the disadvantaged.

Well, just one of my success stories and I was talking about how rewarding it is to be the president and how you can lift your little finger and make a difference. That's a huge joy, but also a huge responsibility in knowing that in that you have to act on it. And the thing that illustrated that for my first year as a president was a guy came into my office. I was interviewing him because he had competed in a Phi Theta Kappa thing and had won an award for the honor society on campus and he was graduating. I just wanted to have him in my office and congratulate him for his success. And he came in and he was a returning student. He was older and he was a single father supporting a couple of little girls and I think he's in his mid to late 30s. And he looked really bummed out. I kind of wanted to get at that. I said you know I'm just really proud of you, what are your plans next? And he said well I really want to go to the [private college], but I just there's no way I can afford it. ... There's no public four year institution anywhere in the vicinity. And in order to finish up your degree you have to make a major life change which would be hard for a guy with a couple of little girls. And he was trying to work and go to school. ... And I just thought that is so tragic that he can't afford to go there. I'm going to go to the [private college's] president and see if he can cut a deal for this kid. He's so deserving. And so you know I was a little intimidated by it because I had never met with another president formally yet. And I knew they were all more experienced than me and I was very new. But on my drive over there I thought you know so what if you're intimidated? And also do you think this kid is the only kid who needs this kind of help? There's hundreds of kids who go to Southwestern Community College who would love to go to the [private college] who have no prayer of ever going there. So I thought I'm just going to ask for all of the kids. I will say if they get a degree at Southwestern Community College you know can they give them a big tuition discount or do a special

scholarship or something? It is funny that you get to be president and you're still kind of intimidated by that. But you know all the other presidents they're all guys and they're all those traditional guys and they still don't take me seriously. You know I hadn't been in power for a very long time and they didn't know me. So I was headed off to meet this stranger and this guy is perceived to be much more experienced than me and I didn't know if it was appropriate that I asked him that. But I was just passionate about it. So I went and I took along my marketing public relations director because she used to work there and she knew him. And we pitched it to him. And it was really funny. I just think that it was dumb, blind luck because he was quitting and he could make the decision to do this monumental thing and then leave town and let somebody else take the fall out. But it made him really open to the idea and said I'll make a big splash with this. And then I'll leave town and it will be somebody else's problem. So he said ok I'll do it. I'll give a 80% discount to any student who gets a degree with you. And I just about dropped my chin. Because that got it down to lower than the University's tuition. It was just a phenomenal gesture on his part. And I thought what if I'd chickened out? What if I'd never thought of that? What if I let myself get busy with other stuff? Because when we announced that, it hit the newspapers. Both my college and his college became overnight stars. You know the kids who heard about it were just dancing in the halls. We saw one girl race down hallway and grab the phone and call her friend. She was jumping up and down, yelling oh my god I can go to the [private college]. And it was just kind of a palpable way of seeing how you can help people and help them change their lives. So that was a really powerful thing for me.

Robin brings her story full circle. In her new role as a president, she has not lost her passion for social justice. She uses one student's story to illustrate how she has changed the lives of many students with just one request. She shares that at times she feels like an impostor in the role because she is not a "guy." I believe her perspective as an outsider has given her an advantage in her journey.

Robin sees that her journey is intertwined with students' journeys. She, like Robin Hood, has never felt a part of the dominant culture, but her entry into the culture gives others the same entry. If she fails them, she fails herself. Our journeys connect with others even in the most ordinary way. The extraordinary does indeed emerge out of the ordinary.

### **Antigone's Prologue**

When my sixth participant contacted me the day after I sent her my e-mail inquiry, she said she would love to participate in my study. Recognizing her busy schedule, I was not surprised when we had to reschedule our phone interview. However, once we met, we were able to establish a rapport, and we discovered we knew some of the same people professionally. My sixth participant is a chancellor and never served as a community college faculty member. She is an African-American woman in her fifties who has served as a chancellor for the past three years. Prior to the chancellorship, she served as a president for seven years in the same community college system, which I call Pacific Community College District. She has 22 years of experience as a community college administrator, but began her career as a high school English teacher. She has bachelor's and master's degrees in English and holds a PhD in English with a concentration in rhetoric.

I have chosen Sophocles' *Antigone* as her pseudonym. *Antigone* is an inspirational literary character, who sacrifices her freedom and life for what she believes will serve a greater purpose. According to Morford and Lenardon, (2003), "*Antigone* is a heroine who is willing to incur a lonely death rather than dishonor the gods by obeying the king's command" (p. 399). My participant makes sacrifices in different ways than the character, but I believe she serves the greater good, students, and she inspires others to follow her. Finally, she uses Sophocles' *Antigone* to teach others about leadership.

### **Antigone's Academic Journey**

At the onset of her academic journey, *Antigone* identifies herself as an African-American woman. Her racial and gender identities give her a lens to view the world. Her

early academic experiences at a segregated high school and a historically Black college allow her to make comparisons about segregated and desegregated environments.

As an undergraduate, I was at a historically Black college ... . That college has now closed. It was ... the way I chose my major was that I looked, I didn't really know what I wanted to be. I wanted, in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, I wanted to be a nurse until I worked in a hospital. You know and I thought oh no I can't do that. So ... I went ahead and I went to college and I just looked down the list of majors that they had to offer. I saw English and I thought well I like English. And so that's where I ended up. And in my four year experience I had a double major in English and Spanish, but I've never ever used the Spanish and it's so old now I just don't know any Spanish because I never ever used it. But it was a historically Black college with a very small English department, very few majors, and one of the things that I remember most was an indelible memory for me during that time was we had a, and it was the first time I ever heard of a PhD or knew what a PhD was, there was nobody in my all black high school who had a PhD. I didn't know anything about these degrees. So I went to so I formed a relationship, we had an African- American professor in our department who received her PhD ... . And she became my model. She was just one of the most brilliant people I have ever met in my life. She was just incredible. So ... I just ... wanted to be an English major.

Like many students, Antigone begins college without a specific major or career goal. She explores her options and reflects about her lack of familiarity with the academic world.

In this segment of our interview, Antigone reveals that she chose to attend a Black college. Having come from a segregated high school, this choice makes sense even if she does not provide me reasons for it. She surrounds herself with people who are similar to her racially and culturally and chooses an African-American female professor as her role model.

Although I chose to divide this story into two sections, Antigone constructs her story deductively. She begins with general reflections about her undergraduate years and ends with a specific story about a Shakespeare class in the excerpt that follows. Antigone tells me a story about her experiences in this class. I liken her retelling to a Biblical parable because the lessons she learned are timeless and multi-dimensional.

She had said to us in our Shakespeare class that one of her dreams was that she would have one of her classes do a presentation or act out one of the scenes from Shakespeare. So we decided; there were about 10 of us in the class and we decided we were going to surprise her and do this and we told her. And she was just elated. We were taking Shakespeare in the summer. And it was so much trouble and then she put up all the money. She said she wanted us to do original costumes and all this stuff. We'd gone to a costume shop and we were like this is way too much trouble. So we came back and told her we changed our minds.

She said that was fine and she gave all of us I's, incompletes. (laughs) Until we put on that production and then we had to get really serious about it. And we did it. We didn't have a real theater in the college, but we had a chapel and they would they could put a platform at the front of the chapel. And they went to all this trouble, and set up this platform. We did the last act of *Othello*. She just cried. She was so. We did a great job. I was Desdemona and they really thought he had stabbed me. I mean it was really we had a lot of fun doing that. And that just kind of sticks in my head. So I had a really good experience as an undergraduate at that very, very small college. We had a strong English department comparatively speaking, I think, although I didn't have much to compare it to at the time because we were all African-American students from all over the country. And most of our teachers were White. We had a few African-American English teachers in the department. And all of them did have PhDs. It was a private, historically Black church related. It was related to the Baptist church.

In this simple story, Antigone learned several lessons. First, her professor and role model taught her about keeping her word. Second, the most difficult tasks may turn out to be the most rewarding. Like Sophocles' Antigone, she discovers that her sacrifices or troubles serve a higher purpose. She is able to fulfill another person's dream. Finally, she and her peers worked together to do something that mattered. Antigone was successful because her peers were successful. I believe this experience lays a foundation for Antigone's understanding of the sacrifices required for leadership and for the implementation of the community college mission.

As her academic journey progresses, Antigone continues to identify her professors as African-American women and classifies her undergraduate curriculum as traditional, which I believe she would define as White or other. In juxtaposition with her positive memories, Antigone also briefly refers to some academic challenges, but returns

to a more in-depth description of her relationship with her role model.

Well, we had another instructor who well that's where I got my in high school I had the standard junior English, senior English, you know junior English 11<sup>th</sup> grade and senior English 12<sup>th</sup> grade, but I had never heard of anything like linguistics. I hated it. I had this instructor who had a PhD in it and she was an African-American woman. But I struggled in linguistics because I just couldn't, could not, I couldn't get it. Now I used to love diagramming sentences. That was just one of my favorite things to do (laughs). ... But I couldn't get with the linguistics. I think I got a B, probably in that. I just met the minimum in that regard. But, just all of the that's where I really became closely acquainted, it was a very traditional curriculum. Because all of the Afro-centric focus at that time I was in college from 68 to 71, I finished in three years. And at that time there was not so much focus on African-American lit., although I did have one African-American literature course. But it was traditional; that was where I developed a fondness for Chaucer and of course Shakespeare, which I took from Dr. [Smith, my role model]. And she did her dissertation on Swenberg and I read some Swenberg and I thought how did she ever get into this? But anyway that was a very good experience for me. And three of us who studied under her I think ... she died a couple of years ago and her daughter called and asked me to write her obituary and I did write it ... she had such a tremendous influence on us and it was a small college. Three of us who studied under her ended up getting PhDs. ... just a wonderful, wonderful person. And that's where I learned even more about grammar and punctuation and all that. They didn't drill it, but through correction you know, I learned a lot more about that, about those areas.

In this part of her story, she is past, present and future-oriented at the same time. She moves recursively through her journey. She reflects about her difficult linguistics class, the traditional curriculum, her relationship with her role model and professor, and her knowledge of grammar and punctuation. Yet, these reflections are not presented chronologically and when taken together give me a sense of Antigone's identity as an African-American woman, student, and leader.

Antigone ends the story of her academic journey with an evaluation about educational environments. She believes a supportive environment gave her opportunities for a successful life. When I asked her what was most important for her from her undergraduate experiences, she explained:

The fact that I was in a caring and nurturing environment. I attended a school that was focused, whose primary focus was on the African-American student. And their goal, I mean, like the goal of no other institution community colleges come pretty close was to make sure you succeed and so I felt so supported in that educational environment. There was no failure for me. I had the same kind of experience in my high school because I went to a segregated school. All of our teachers were Black; everybody in the school was Black and everybody knew us and cared about us. And it was similar in [my college] with the exception that we did have White instructors. But all of our students were primarily from America, African- American, and we had a few Nigerian students.

Antigone evaluates her experiences holistically. She compares the mission of the historical Black college she attended to the community college mission. Both missions aim to help students succeed and serve a higher purpose.

### **Antigone's Professional Journey**

Antigone transitions to her professional journey, but does not view it as a separate journey. She explains that becoming a chancellor in a community college system was not a career aspiration. Like many English majors from this time period, teaching was the career choice. Thus, she began her career as a high school teacher, but for unspecified reasons chose to leave the profession after seven years. This choice serves as the turning point in her professional journey.

It's not anything I ever designed or planned for myself. All I wanted to do was be a teacher. And that's how I started my career as a high school English teacher in Dallas. And after my seventh year, I was pregnant in my seventh year, in 1979 and I just went to the principal's office. It was May. My son was born in July. And I said I'm not coming back. And he thought I was joking. He said, what will you do? I said, I don't know. I just know I don't want to do this anymore. And I quit. And my son was born, and I was out with him one day. I was married at the time, and I ran into this woman. I told you about Dr. [Smith, my role model]. She had been my English professor at the college. And she asked me what I was doing. I told her nothing. She said, come and see me. So they hired me at the college. They needed a laboratory, a communications skills lab, and I set up their first lab to help students in reading and writing. And that was my first job and I ended up being department chair of English there incredibly. That was something I definitely had not desired because and it was English and modern languages and we had a new president. He had been their dean of the chapel when I was a

student, and he sent for me one day. And I'm thinking what in the world does he want with me? He said, I want you to chair the English department. I said I don't, what are you even talking about? I've never been a manager and I don't, I can't chair the English department and all these people who were my teachers. They all have PhDs. I cannot. This is crazy! And he said, you're the only one they like. They all hate each other, but they all like you. So that's how I got myself this management job. And he was right. They were just happy that none of the rest of them was the chair. ... Oh, yeah. I became chair and that's how I got my ... first taste of management experience. I then, the college really got itself into some really bad financial straits and was about to close. And it was just the best job for me. I would probably still be there if things hadn't gone so badly.

Because of the relationship she formed with her professor and role model, Antigone was asked to join the faculty at the English department where she had been a student. She soon emerged as a leader because of her ability to build trust even among the most difficult constituency, her former undergraduate teachers. I believe she inspired her teachers to follow her. Antigone does not share specific stories about how she made the transition from student to department chair, but I believe she was successful because she describes this job as her dream job.

Antigone's next career transition is not one of her choosing, but gives her access to the community college environment, which she described earlier in our interview.

But I had started teaching part time at the community college that was just a few miles from the other college in their continuing ed. division. And the division dean job came open and I applied for it and I got it. I mean I needed a job. I was probably going to end up back in public schools. But I got that job and I did that for four years. And in those four years from 86 to 90, I finished up the PhD, I had a new job, I was writing on a dissertation whatever stage I was in at that point, and the 89-90 academic year at the beginning of the 89 academic year, I got into a community college leadership program. And it just exposed me to community colleges nationally and I thought, I can do more than I'm doing. And I'm doing it. I decided I wanted a different job. I wanted to be at a higher level than a division chair.

Although her entry in community college leadership was initially practical, Antigone discovers that she wants more professionally just as she wanted more for herself

academically. Antigone sets a goal, meets that goal, and then sets another goal.

Within this context of change, Antigone remains true to her values. When she discovers that her values do not fit with the professional environment where she finds herself, she decides to look for a job elsewhere.

But I became a dean at [Pacific] and it's in the district I'm in right now. And I discovered that I didn't like it there at all. I thought I'd done my homework. I thought oh my god what am I doing here? I need to get out. And I started trying to find jobs and I couldn't get out. And my children were miserable. They hated it here. And we had a new chancellor and he found out I was trying to leave and he sent for me one day and it was similar to my experience at [my first college]. I hear you're trying to leave, why? I said because these people are very selfish. They only think of themselves. All they want is money. They hate managers. I don't like this environment. I do not want to work here. These people don't even have e-mail. I have made a huge mistake. And he had just gotten here too and he said well I want you to help me change it. And I said, I don't know. This is just not an environment that is conducive for me and my values. So I couldn't get a job anywhere else. So I took his job. I came to this office, this building where I am now, as associate chancellor and then became the first vice-chancellor for educational programs and services. And I guess what I ... the advantage for me here was that I didn't have any baggage. And the people in the district, the three colleges just didn't trust managers, but somehow there was something about me they trusted. So I got that job first, the vice-chancellor job, and then the president at the college where I had been dean passed away. And the board and chancellor sent me over there to be the interim president. And then they got a permanent president and then I came back to the district office in my vice-chancellor role. And then the president at [Pacific West] College was removed and they sent me over there as interim and I liked it over there. And I applied for the permanent job. And I got that job and stayed there for seven years until 2005 as president, at which time they let the chancellor go, and I did a lot of thinking about it and I just ... hmmm. Because I was applying because I decided seven is my magic number. When I hit seven, I've got to go. And ... I moved then, too. I applied for a job in [another city] as vice-chancellor because I've always had this yearning to go back. And I applied for this. And I was a finalist for both jobs and this chancellor job came through first. I got the [other] job, too, but he just called me too late. So I got this job. Here I am.

Antigone tries to leave her position, but is unsuccessful in her job search. She agrees to help her chancellor change the climate from one of contention to one of collaboration.

Then she finds herself in a series of interim presidential positions within the same

community college district. Her ability to build trust among a difficult constituency is replicated in this district. She also is able to reinvent herself and set new professional goals for herself. She does not seek the status quo and understands her need to move into different positions in the upper echelons of community college administration. She is now a chancellor, the highest hierarchical position. Perhaps this position will provide enough challenges for her to satisfy her need to accomplish goals and move on to other goals. There is an ongoing transition between the temporary and permanent within Antigone's professional journey. Implicit in her descriptions is her ability to inspire others, which becomes a critical component in her understanding of leadership.

Antigone understands leadership abstractly, but includes the concrete elements needed to create a climate for successful leadership. She embraces a collaborative leadership style.

What that means for me ... the leader has to create an environment in which students can succeed. And that I mean it's such a multi-faceted, oh, what shall I call it? There are so many prongs to it because you have the people piece. I think there are several components, but you have to have the right people. And these are people. These have to be people who like people. Because if you don't like people and you know there are people out there who don't like working with people. They just don't like being around people that much. Education is not the right place for them. You have to have the right people. Those people you have working for you have to have the right resources. They have to have the commitment to the mission, which is helping these students reach whatever their educational goal is. And in some cases to determine what their educational goal is. And the financial resources, I think, are key and the leader has to be committed to that mission and willing to make sacrifices of him or herself in order for that mission to be achieved. It is, in my mind, this job involves quite a bit of sacrifice.

In this excerpt, I am reminded of Sophocles' Antigone who sacrificed her freedom to teach us to aspire to a greater good. My participant understands that personal sacrifice goes hand in hand with the implementation of the community college mission, which she believes serves the greater good. Students' needs, not hers, should and do drive the

decisions made at her level. She believes leaders must be committed to students and often must make sacrifices to allow students to meet their goals.

### **Antigone's Community College Mission**

Antigone does not separate her understanding of higher education's purpose for individuals and communities from her understanding of the community college mission and her academic and professional journeys. For individuals, higher education is a process that is linked to a series of goals. As she describes her pursuit of higher education, I gain a greater understanding of her need to help students meet their educational goals even if they are different than her goals. She explains:

I think ... higher education with everything I did related to education I always had a goal. And I think in pursuing anything, the joy for me is in the pursuit and once I achieve a goal, it's kind of like well what am I going to do next? That's kind of what happened to me once I got the PhD. I mean I got the high school degree and of course I wanted more. I went to college and got the bachelor's degree. And then I was dissatisfied, I'm always ... I love being in educational environments. And I've been fortunate to have worked in educational environments for all of my careers. And to have finished a bachelor's, I started teaching public school and I wanted more school. So I started pursuing a master's degree and then after I got that, I wanted more. So there was a lot of joy even though there's lots of frustration in going to school and meeting those challenges. It fed something, pursuing education, higher education especially, met some need that I apparently had. This yearning for knowledge and being in an educational environment, having discussions around topics that matter, pursuing an education gives you all that. And I kind of miss it now because in administration you just don't get to do much of that because I'm putting out a lot of fires. But I really do enjoy the pursuit of education because in that process you really have some wonderful intellectual challenges and in the job then you're trying to apply some of what you learn. I do a presentation. I haven't done it in a while; I did it last year, though, on what literature teaches about leadership. That's one way I kind of turned things around for myself. How after the PhD I tried to find a way to use all this reading and learning that I had done with literature. So I developed presentations using Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and also using *Antigone*. What those pieces teach us about leadership. So that it's just the pursuit is just gratifying for me. It's just made me I think a much better educator, a much better human being, all around.

Higher education has transformed her life. She is able to apply her love of learning to all

aspects of her life. Her education makes her human, which I believe is what she wants for the students she serves. Her academic background informs her professional life in numerous ways. She is a life-long learner and teacher, and she uses literature as a tool to understand herself, others, and leaders. I chose to use Sophocles' *Antigone* as a way to understand her, thereby attempting to emulate her practices.

*Antigone* also understands that education not only transforms individuals, but also transforms communities. She believes a community college contributes to the well-being of a community because of its effects on individuals who reside in that community. Like Sophocles' *Antigone*, my participant serves the community and a higher purpose in her role as chancellor. She defines the well-being of a community in terms of economic stability and residents' quality of life. When I asked her if her community is affected by her institution's presence, she reveals:

I think it is greatly affected. Whenever I speak in our community our district is celebrating 60 years of service to this community this year. And whenever I speak somewhere I just do my little random poll, how many of you have attended one of our colleges? It's always more than half the people in the audience. And many of them take us for granted, but others show I mean appreciate the great value that we have in the community. So I think there's a lot of support. We've had two bond measures to pass. They haven't passed by huge numbers, but the passage rate hasn't been low because people don't support us. It's just that people just don't want to pay. I mean it affects their standard of living in a way. But what we try to say to people to talk about is the value-added of having a college in their community.

*Antigone* clearly recognizes the effects her community college district has for the community. Community members have attended the colleges in her district, and although some community members pay little attention to their value for the community, many more support the colleges through the passage of bonds and other ways that she does not identify.

Antigone understands the comprehensive community college mission and the difficulties with its implementation. She believes the needs exceed the resources she is given. She explains:

It [the mission] is entirely too broad. It's the America of education. When I say that I mean bring me your tired, your poor, your dispossessed, and the expectation is that we are able to repair or strengthen or whatever all of these people to meet all of their needs. It's an unrealistic goal. No one institution with the level of resources that we are given can do that. But that is the mission. That is how I understand it. It's an egalitarian institution in this broadness, open access, no requirements, you want to lose five pounds, you come, you want to increase your salary on your job, you come. I mean that's huge. If you can't read or don't know how, you come. If you want to transfer to a four year college, you come. That's a lot. And so that's how I understand it and all of us in it are just crazy enough to think we can do it. And are committed to it. ... They all have to be because they are all parts of the mission. And I see myself being in the position to try to create the environment where all these students we get can succeed. So that means providing the financial resources to the point that much of that can be done and to the point that it's done to such an extent that the morale of the employees is good. I won't even say high, just good. Because if the employees aren't happy, that mission is not going to be met very well.

In understanding the mission, Antigone returns to student goals. Community colleges and the people who are committed to the access mission want the most disadvantaged students to succeed and to define success for themselves. Despite inadequate resources, Antigone lives the mission and believes mission implementation requires a communal effort.

### **Antigone's Epilogue**

Antigone understands her present story in terms of her past and future. She identifies ways in which her academic journey and her professional journey interrelate to inform her leadership practices and her understanding of the community college mission. She describes the interaction among these segments of her life. She explains:

I think that .... English majors are required, I guess most people are, especially English majors. I think the thing that or what ties the three together I guess for me

are my or is my ... ability to think critically. To look at a situation and be able to manage it to the point that it can be resolved. And I think being an English major helped me with that piece probably more than anything else because there is so much critical thinking involved in being an English major. And so that kind of carries through to being a leader because it is essential and to the community college mission and my trying to implement that. The other piece that's linked here and maybe not so much, but it's certainly required of leadership and that is to be inspirational. And I don't know any other major that can equip you better for being, maybe religion I don't know, inspirational than being an English major. Because you have at your disposal if you approach it in the right way and depending on what you've been taught ... you have all kinds of resources on which to draw for inspiration. And in my especially in a lot of the old and middle English pieces you look at if you just look at the word "inspire" it means to breathe and that's to breathe life into it and all that. And I think about that. I think about that a lot. If you don't have the ability to inspire people as a leader, then ... you've got a problem.

Antigone details what it means to think critically, often a consequence of a liberal arts education (Goyette & Mullen, 2006). She is able to draw on literature as a resource to help her inspire others. She inspires others to trust and follow her. Her story is linked to the stories of her students, her constituents, and literary characters.

Antigone returns to her academic foundation to help her and others understand that literature teaches us about leadership. She believes fictional stories teach us about who we are and who we want to be. This is why Antigone believes she finds many leaders who were English majors. This academic background taught her and continues to teach her about people.

Well, it's just because my academic background is literary. I mean it's just like those I mean I use literary allusions all the time (laughs). I compare myself to these characters I've taught and read about and all of that. All of that's instructive for me. When we did, when I first came up with this idea of what literature teaches us about leadership. I got two others of my English major colleagues and we presented nationally. Elaine did *Moby Dick*. Bill would do a different Shakespeare play and I did *Invisible Man* the first time we did it. And the room was packed. There are so many English majors in leadership positions. But it was just ... you can learn so much just from what we see in literature. And so, that has really helped me to focus. And especially the Bible as literature. I mean there are just leaders everywhere. And then you look at Shakespeare and the tragic flaw

and you know the pride and all this stuff, I mean it has just helped me so much!

Antigone uses her understanding of literature as a way to understand her world view. She evaluates herself and others through comparisons to leaders in literature, which is one way I have presented her story. Their mistakes and successes teach her about her mistakes and successes. The border between fiction and non-fiction blurs. In retelling her story, Antigone uses a literary landscape that is never static. Every reading yields a different idea or interpretation.

Antigone closes our interview with an evaluation about her present life. Her academic and professional journeys will continue. She finds herself in an educational environment, where she is most content. She reflects:

But I have I say that being a chancellor is as close as I can get to my dream job because what I like most of all the things I've done in my life is going to school. And so with this job, I get to be in an educational environment all the time. And I do not as much as I want to I get to interact with students. But with faculty members to talk about what they do. Serving students. And so I guess for me on most days it's the next best thing to actually being enrolled in school is being in the environment. When I was on a college campus it was much, much better because I could walk around and talk to students. I'm in a job now where I'm not on a campus. It's just strictly administration. But I get to the campuses as much as I can.

Although Antigone describes her current role as chancellor as a dream job, I see a contradiction. Her administrative work removes her from students' journeys. I hear a longing in her voice. Her dream job is an illusion, and she, like many authors, tells an incomplete story, which is why the end of our interview is not the end of the journey, but only a stopping point along the way to another moment. Although Sophocles' Antigone is a fictional character, she gives me a way to understand how and why my participant is able to sacrifice her needs to serve her students.

## Conclusion

The presentation of my findings and analyses is not objective. I could not separate my journey from my participants'. My experiences as an undergraduate and the literature I studied influenced my retelling of their stories. I retold their stories from the lens of my experiences as a White, female first-generation college student who majored in English and began my professional career as a junior high English teacher. Still, I retold their stories and their evaluations. I used their words to describe their experiences and demonstrated that I made every effort not to de-contextualize their interview data from the context of my research questions and the interview process (Bruner, 1987). I remained aware that my role was not to judge participants' beliefs and experiences. I also made my voice transparent as I presented my findings and analyses.

I presented each participant's journeys individually to capture their voices and experiences, and especially to highlight the differences in their experiences. In doing so, I believe I honored their voices. Their pseudonyms invoke unique parallels to their lives, but they are not meant to be understood as synonyms. Throughout my writing and thinking, I found myself making comparisons and uncovering differences across their journeys. In Chapter five, I pay special attention to the similarities of my participants' experiences and reflections to synthesize my findings.

## CHAPTER FIVE—INTERPRETING THEIR STORIES

Chapter four detailed my findings and analyses for each participant. After I finished retelling their stories, I contemplated how I would interpret their journeys for my cross-case analysis and answer my four research questions. As I listened to their voices, reread their transcripts, and my findings and analyses, many similarities in their journeys emerged. Nonetheless, their differences must not be ignored. Riessman (2008) asserts, “just as interview participants tell stories, investigators construct stories from their data” (p. 4). Keeping this in mind, I decided to focus on common threads in participants’ journeys to capture another story for my audience. I recognize, like Riessman (2008), that I am persuading my audience to accept my interpretation, while simultaneously acknowledging that other interpretations may exist.

Throughout this chapter, I create my interpretations holistically and rely on three themes—boundaries, connections, and transformations—that I inductively drew from the data to synthesize my findings. My persistent and consistent examination of the data makes me confident about my theme selection. However, settling on these themes was not easy especially because other themes are silenced in this process. Although participants’ experiences and reflections differ, I find commonality through an examination of the themes and how they are interwoven in their experiences and reflections.

I begin this chapter with a description of my participants’ demographics followed by the definitions I use for each theme. I use my three themes as an interpretive

framework to answer my research questions and to make connections to the academic and research literature I reviewed in Chapter two. To answer my first research question, under the heading *Academic and Professional Journeys*, I explain how English major presidents construct the stories of their academic and professional journeys. Then, I combine the answers to my second and third research questions under the heading *Higher Education's Purpose and the Community College Mission*. After that, I answer my fourth research question under the heading *Relationships*. I conclude this chapter with a summary about my findings.

### Demographics

Table 1 shows my participants' demographic information that is relevant for this study. This information was gathered from profile sheets that participants completed prior to the interviews and from participants' revelations during interviews.

Table 1

#### *Demographics*

Participant	Age	Gender	First Generation College Student	Graduate Degree	Secondary Teacher	Community College Faculty
Janus	61-70	M	Yes	D.A. English	Yes	Yes
Athena	61-70	F	No	PhD Higher Education	No	Yes
Aeneas	51-60	M	Yes	PhD Education	Yes	Yes
Atticus	61-70	M	Yes	PhD Administration	Yes	Yes
Robin	51-60	F	Yes	PhD American Studies	No	Yes

Antigone	51-60	F	Yes	PhD English	Yes	No
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All six of my participants hold bachelor's degrees in English and were or are currently community college presidents. Three participants are White men and three are women, two of whom are White and one who is African-American. Half of them are in their fifties, and half of them are in their sixties. All have earned doctorate degrees; three are academic and three are administrative. All except one participant were faculty members at community colleges. These demographics are similar to those presented by Vaughan and Weisman (1998). However, five of my participants are first generation college students, four began their careers as junior high or high school English teachers, and one began as a secretary in the community college where she is now president, demographic information that is not included in Vaughan and Weisman's (1998) book *The Community College Presidency at the Millennium*. This demographic information, which is relevant to my study, presents a profile of community college presidents' academic and professional backgrounds that is not presented in the academic and research literature I reviewed in Chapter two.

### **Definitions**

Once I determined that boundaries, connections, and transformations were recurring themes in my data, I knew that I was defining these abstract concepts in a particular way. I turned to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* to achieve better clarity about the concepts at the most basic level. Although each word has multiple meanings depending on its context, I chose the definitions that most closely matched my thoughts about my participants' data. I present the definitions as follows:

Main Entry: **boundary**

Part of speech: *noun*

That which serves to indicate the bounds or limits of anything whether material or immaterial; also the limit itself.

Main Entry: **connection**

Part of speech: *noun*

The condition of being related to something else by a bond of interdependence, causality, logical sequence, coherence, or the like; relation between things one of which is bound up with, or involved in, another.

Main Entry: **transformation**

Part of speech: *noun*

A complete change in character, condition, [thought, or action], etc.

The above definitions bring clarity to my interpretations. The use of the themes in my presentation is not solely based on their dictionary definitions, but is also based on the context of the interviews. For every participant, I see the themes as prisms that reflect in multi-dimensional ways. As a researcher, I continue to question whether these themes might be more prevalent in the stories of English major presidents because of their experiences and whether they would emerge in the academic and professional stories of other community college leaders. What I do know is these themes give me a way to understand and synthesize my participants' stories.

### Academic and Professional Journeys

Tables 2 and 3 show my cross-case analysis of participants' academic and professional journeys and provide an answer to my first research question: *How do English major presidents construct the stories of their academic and professional journeys?* Tables 2 and 3 reveal that my participants cross boundaries, make connections to ideas and people, and experience transformations in their thoughts and actions. These tables also are illustrative of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) descriptions of narrative thinking that link interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present and future), and situation (place). I include a sample of interview excerpts to show how I linked my data to each theme and to illustrate how I understand my interpretative framework.

Table 2

#### *Academic Journeys*

Participant	Boundaries	Connections	Transformations
Janus	<p>I grew up in a family where neither parent had ever been to college.</p> <p>The college environment just seemed to be so esoteric and removed from reality.</p> <p>That same work ethic didn't connect.</p> <p>I was a commuter student to a residential college.</p>	<p>The third year I was getting very interested in a major that I decided after a lot of thinking to major in English.</p> <p>I think the most important thing was getting the degree. So that that would open the door to a teaching career.</p> <p>And it's where I really started to learn a great deal about leadership, what it takes to get a group of people to do something.</p>	<p>That extracurricular experience I think probably was almost as important as anything that happened curricularly for me during that time period.</p> <p>I walked out of the [university] with my doctorate and I said you know this isn't bad at all. I understand it now. I've got it straight in my head.</p> <p>So the education ... it still I look on probably as quite a practical thing that opens doors if you're interested you can then open those doors and walk in the room and do something. Now ultimately it's what you do that makes the difference.</p>

Participant	Boundaries	Connections	Transformations
Athena	<p>I was unable to attend freshmen orientation where you get to select an advisor or where you are assigned an advisor and that person talks with you about your major, etc. So, I missed out on that whole experience.</p> <p>And ... my other choice which was to become a forest ranger was thwarted because women were not allowed in the forest service. So since I couldn't go in that direction as a career choice which would have led me more into the sciences.</p>	<p>So I had many opportunities to practice leadership and to work with groups of people to try to get different people working together to develop good listening skills.</p> <p>And my freshmen and sophomore years I ended up in some pretty advanced English classes. So it was really a challenge. I had one professor who gave me a C my first semester, but I liked him so well I took him again.</p>	<p>But the challenge was worth it to me because I knew I was learning something.</p> <p>It was probably as meaningful what I was able to do outside the classroom as it was academically.</p> <p>And college helped me figure out that I was the only one who would ever place limitations on me.</p>
Aeneas	<p>Because I was kind of a late bloomer. I didn't go to college after high school.</p> <p>Stay away from the language arts.</p> <p>I was not offered a scholarship, nothing of the sort.</p> <p>Didn't have any money so I worked until fall.</p>	<p>But English, I kind of liked English because you know you can kind of create your way.</p> <p>The lawyers I worked for spoke well, wrote well, communicated. English seemed to fit because several of them had English degrees.</p> <p>I had [a female professor who was] my advisor. But she made it very clear her expectations.</p> <p>I had another professor ... who was from India. And he was one of these gentlemen who probably has one of the greatest minds.</p>	<p>It was like I don't want to do this for the rest of my life. So anyways I went to law school and said no that's not what I want to do.</p> <p>That to me was when I learned specific consequences that you really had to rise to the occasion and really increase your skills.</p> <p>So to me that meant no matter what the odds are that you're going to prevail if you put in the amount of time. I knew I needed to put in more time and effort.</p>
Atticus	<p>I entered ... high school as a junior, which was a bit traumatic coming from a school where I knew everyone at the school to a school where I didn't even know everyone in my classroom. And certainly not my class, certainly not the high school. So that took some adjustment.</p> <p>I did not enter college with a clear idea of what I wanted to major in.</p>	<p>But I think that having been through that kind of transition, once, I was able to make this second transition.</p> <p>And we looked at the courses that I enjoyed the most were the English courses.</p> <p>And so it was an opportunity to actually engage with the professors and other students in an intellectual debate where no one or the other could necessarily be proved right or wrong.</p>	<p>And looking back I can see that was because the study of literature in particular was an intellectual challenge, but it was a challenge that did not have a necessarily right answer at the end.</p> <p>It was the first insight that I had that my ideas had some merit ... outside the dorm room. It was very ... I felt like the education was working.</p> <p>And that was my first upfront in your face experience with blatant racism in kind of a culture that I had somewhat taken for granted. So that was a memorable experience.</p>

Participant	Boundaries	Connections	Transformations	
Robin	<p>Well, I was one of those kids whose parents didn't particularly encourage me to go to college. They thought that I would get married and have babies.</p> <p>And ... I had no idea what I wanted to do. All I knew when I graduated from high school was that I wasn't prepared to go to work.</p> <p>I was completely naïve about the ways of the world.</p> <p>And so anyway I ended up at the University ... kind of completely lost and in this huge place.</p> <p>Somewhere along the line I thought I think I might want to be an English teacher. Because that's the only thing I ever heard talked about for women pretty much.</p> <p>And I had well I guess this was the second sort of instance, well I don't know if I should use the word sexist but that's how it felt the sexist experience you know the one with the attorney I think he didn't really know what he was doing.</p>	<p>And the ... weekly seminars with professors enabled me to process all that I think in a positive way.</p> <p>The professor walked by and I was standing there. And I said, you know, and I gave him an idea, which is not particularly relevant, but he looked at me ... and he said, that is a good idea.</p> <p>We walked up and each one of us sat down at the counter. And they walked right up to Jimmy, the little black kid who was in our group, and said the law says we have to serve you, but you can't sit down.</p>	<p>For me personally, it was that ... transformation.</p> <p>To develop that analytical quality to take an idea or thought and take it through all of its possibilities rather than the immediate concrete kind of outcome. So I'm very pleased with my education.</p> <p>But I think the end result of the education was developing a feeling of intellectual competence.</p>	<p>It wasn't even you know the woman's movement hadn't even begun, but something in my little mind said he's an attorney, I'm at this critical stage in my life, why is he telling me I should go study court reporting? I said, what's that? He said they type up everything we attorneys say. That just didn't sound very appealing to me.</p> <p>And I felt like I was still learning you know about various issue and the books themselves.</p> <p>People tend to have closed minds on or very rigid positions that if they are able to bond with a character in a novel who is dealing with a particular issue then it kind of cracks their heart open a little bit more to the issue than if they're just reading pure sociological theory about why some people are disadvantaged.</p> <p>And so that was my idea was that I would teach literature. I would teach sociology but I would use literature as a way to open people's hearts and minds to it.</p>

Participant	Boundaries	Connections	Transformations
Antigone	<p>And this next one, the guy didn't know what he was doing either.</p> <p>I thought, you know, I'm not going to get anywhere. Maybe I'll go back to graduate school because I must have been exposed to graduate school when I was there somewhere along the line. And that was completely alien to anything my family had ever done.</p> <p>The way I chose my major was that I looked, I didn't really know what I wanted to be.</p> <p>We were like this is way too much trouble. So we came back and told her we changed our minds.</p> <p>But I struggled in linguistics because I just couldn't, could not, I couldn't get it.</p>	<p>And I found out I could combine literature and sociology, which is what I really wanted to do.</p> <p>As an undergraduate, I was at a historically Black college</p> <p>I just looked down the list of majors that they had to offer. I saw English and I thought well I like English.</p> <p>So I went to so I formed a relationship, we had an African- American professor in our department who received her PhD . . . . And she became my model. She was just one of the most brilliant people I have ever met in my life. She was just incredible. So . . . I just . . . wanted to be an English major.</p> <p>I had the same kind of experience in my high school because I went to a segregated school. All of our teachers were Black; everybody in the school was Black and everybody knew us and cared about us. And it was similar in [my college] with the exception that we did have White instructors.</p>	<p>So I had a really good experience as an undergraduate at that very, very small college.</p> <p>And that's where I learned even more about grammar and punctuation and all that. They didn't drill it, but through correction you know, I learned a lot more about that, about those areas.</p> <p>The fact that I was in a caring and nurturing environment. I attended a school that was focused, whose primary focus was on the African-American student. And their goal, I mean, like the goal of no other institution community colleges come pretty close was to make sure you succeed and so I felt so supported in that educational environment. There was no failure for me.</p>

Table 3

*Professional Journeys*

Participant	Boundaries	Connections	Transformations
Janus		<p>We would work together very much with what he was teaching and what I was teaching, kind of collaborated on things.</p> <p>So I was reading a lot of that material and realizing that if I was seriously interested in a presidency then I'd have to go through the academic ranks which was fine as far as I was concerned.</p> <p>So I got my head down into the real practical stuff that is behind the scenes on the campus which broadened my background.</p>	<p>When I became negotiator for contracts that's when I learned way beyond where all the power lied in the school, what really made things happened.</p> <p>I had wanted something more and so I started looking all over the country.</p> <p>So after about three years I guess I said look I'm very interested in getting a presidency and I think I've got the background to do it and he said yeah I think you do too. So I started looking all over the place and ended up in [in a presidency in a remote location].</p>
Athena	<p>It [being a president] was not a goal that I ever envisioned when I first started teaching.</p> <p>I was fairly arrogant. And thought I knew what I was doing.</p> <p>I was either in the wrong program or the wrong place.</p> <p>We're real sorry the job is we're retracting our job offer, the chancellor did not approve it. I found out the chancellor had been in touch with my former college president who told him I was a trouble maker.</p> <p>I think you ought to apply for the job. I said no way.</p> <p>It was very, very adversarial role that I ended up being in when the last thing I ever got to think about was education.</p>	<p>I think some of my the turning points were what grew out of essentially negative experiences or what could have been negative experiences.</p> <p>So it seemed like a door would close and send me in a different direction.</p> <p>I went to visit a friend of mine who'd moved there to teach [at a community college]. And I loved it, I loved the countryside, I loved the people, I got a job there.</p> <p>I met the person who was eventually was my mentor who suggested to me at that time ... get your doctorate and then you'll have more choices than you have here.</p> <p>But through those connections I ended up, well my mentor was doing searches at that point in time [and helped encourage me to apply for a presidency, which I received]</p> <p>I worked for so many idiots, in my opinion, and people who taught me how I did not want to behave and how I didn't want to do things.</p>	<p>And I knew as soon as I had that first interview that that job was mine. It just something just clicked.</p> <p>And it's easy for me to see now that ... it really worked out for the best. And I appreciate what I went through in those positions because it has made me much more empathetic to situations that people find themselves in now that I'm a president.</p> <p>I think I have become a better president as a result of what I went through.</p> <p>I love my job because I have really finally gotten to think about education and think about what's going on in the classroom and think about what we are doing with and to and for our students.</p>

Participant	Boundaries	Connections	Transformations
Aeneas	<p>So I came back and finished my master's degree in English education and said I'm going to go teach because at that point that was all I was counseled to do was teach.</p> <p>I didn't follow the normal path.</p> <p>Sometimes you don't hire within your institution. You may be the best candidate but they don't hire within.</p>	<p>But after that I thought do I want to be a superintendent or something? At that point in time well I need to get a doctorate.</p> <p>And I thought about the leadership piece that I was experiencing, the inequities, giving things to this person but not that person.</p> <p>And simultaneously, the number one question was can you get along with others? Whether it's externally or internally. Because that's where presidents get into trouble. If you don't get along, you're doomed. And the community needs this too.</p> <p>But I've been a leader my entire life. Ever since I was 12 years old.</p>	<p>I said surely I can do better than this. And consequently then I went to a college down the road and became a manager of a division.</p> <p>Well I think the journey was this is what I wanted to do. I said ok I want to be a college president.</p> <p>So yes, I was an English major but I felt that I had the leadership qualities to become a president.</p> <p>I thought I could be a president. So I did. I applied for presidencies, got a couple of interviews, got a job, and here I am.</p>
Atticus	<p>Then another president came and his idea ... he was all about growth of the college and expansion and those kinds of things. And I began to feel like a square peg in a round hole. It just wasn't fitting very well.</p> <p>So I applied for a presidency that I didn't particularly want. I was just kind of interested in what would happen. All of a sudden they were calling me back for interviews and I was a finalist ... it scared me to death. And so I backed away from that.</p>	<p>I get bored doing the same thing more than about five years looking back on my career I had to do something different in about every five years.</p> <p>And the new president was much more collaborative and that leadership style. So we worked very closely together because she was very interested in the faculty point of view and ... she was the one that then encouraged me to go back to school.</p> <p>But that said I've got the experience that apparently other colleges would be interested in.</p>	<p>So I was able to stay there because I could keep reinventing myself while staying in that environment.</p> <p>That was the first time that I thought that maybe that I would like to be a lined administrator. And I found out that I enjoyed that as much as I had enjoyed teaching. Because it was an opportunity to be creative. It was an opportunity to affect more students, though indirectly rather than directly. And the ... it was an opportunity to engage with my colleagues from a leadership position more than just a peer position. That meant I could direct some of the dialogue. I could actually have an impact on kind of the culture of the department and changing that. I just really enjoyed doing those things.</p>

Participant	Boundaries	Connections	Transformations
Robin	<p>Well, I was a phlebotomist after I graduated with my doctorate. That's the only job I could get.</p> <p>And of course I couldn't get in the door there either.</p> <p>I said to myself oh my god that's immoral, what do you mean connection, that sounds political or something. I would only want a job on my own merits.</p> <p>But I looked around and it looked like I could work for 50 years as a part-time faculty member.</p> <p>Because to them I was just like little [Robin] who started as a secretary . And ... they just didn't take me seriously and I don't have a real aggressive blowing my own horn personality.</p> <p>And I just and so they said ok well we'll give you a chance but you'll have to compete. And most of them were pretty skeptical and that hurt my feelings a little bit.</p> <p>I just had a real uphill battle with a lot of people.</p>	<p>The article in the paper kind of explained the idea that they're very open. You know it's open access, open admission, meant to really open the doors of education to anyone, at any level, and provide opportunities to people. Of course since I'm a bleeding heart sociologist I love all those concepts.</p> <p>And somebody at work told me you are never going to get in that place unless you have a connection.</p> <p>And so, I saw that they had a secretarial position open and I applied for it.</p> <p>And again being a bleeding heart sociologist, that interested me, the idea of working with inmates and helping the most disadvantaged.</p> <p>And he became the president and he knew I was a hard worker and a quick study so he asked if I wanted to be his assistant, to the president. And so I said yes because I had seen assistants to the presidents at national conferences and I could see that they pretty much knew everything a president knew. They were out there doing a lot of that same work. And I thought it would be a great learning opportunity.</p>	<p>I just felt like I'm doing all this adjusting to new presidents, I ought to go out and let people adjust to me.</p> <p>So I found an opportunity that I wanted and applied for that and that's how I got here.</p> <p>And I thought to myself, I want to be a part of that. So I immediately went down and started applying and I thought maybe I can be an English teacher here if they don't want me in the high schools.</p> <p>So after I kept butting my head against the wall for a while, I thought, I've got to do this.</p> <p>And so whoever gave me the advice was right that the connections help.</p> <p>And I think at that point it might have occurred to me just a little bit in the back of my mind that maybe someday I could be a president. And that would be a good training ground.</p> <p>And then at that point when he left I thought oh my god do I want to work for another guy? I know I can do everything these guys are doing. I just don't know if I want to calibrate and work for somebody.</p> <p>You know a lot of people who had known me for a really long time and had trusted me. And I was the person they went to when they had a problem. And so eventually I got the job.</p>

Participant	Boundaries	Connections	Transformations
Antigone	<p>It's not anything I ever designed or planned for myself.</p> <p>All I wanted to do was be a teacher.</p> <p>I said I don't, what are you even talking about? I've never been a manager and I don't, I can't chair the English department and all these people who were my teachers. They all have PhDs. I cannot. This is crazy!</p> <p>Then, the college really got itself into some really bad financial straits and was about to close. And it was just the best job for me. I would probably still be there if things hadn't gone so badly.</p> <p>But I became a dean at [Pacific] and it's in the district I'm in right now. And I discovered that I didn't like it there at all.</p>	<p>I just know I don't want to do this anymore. And I quit.</p> <p>I told you about Dr. [Smith, my role model]. She had been my English professor at the college. And she asked me what I was doing. I told her nothing. She said, come and see me. So they hired me at the college.</p> <p>He said, I want you to chair the English department. And he said, you're the only one they like. They all hate each other, but they all like you.</p> <p>And we had a new chancellor and he found out I was trying to leave and he sent for me one day.</p> <p>And he had just gotten here too and he said well I want you to help me change it.</p>	<p>So that's how I got myself this management job. And he was right. They were just happy that none of the rest of them was the chair.</p> <p>I got into a community college leadership program. And it just exposed me to community colleges nationally and I thought, I can do more than I'm doing. And I'm doing it. I decided I wanted a different job. I wanted to be at a higher level than a division chair.</p> <p>And the people in the district, the three colleges just didn't trust managers, but somehow there was something about me they trusted.</p> <p>Because I was applying because I decided seven is my magic number. When I hit seven, I've got to go.</p>

Janus, Athena, Aeneas, Atticus, Robin, and Antigone share unique experiences that have universal qualities. The underlying themes of boundaries, connections, and transformations are made manifest in the stories of their academic and professional journeys. The themes were consistently present as I synthesized how they constructed their stories. They made choices about what to include in their stories, and I made choices about how to present their stories, but I believe my choices do not overshadow theirs.

In their academic journeys, all participants faced boundaries from within and outside of themselves. They went beyond the scope of my question "Tell me about your academic journey as an undergraduate" to set their boundaries. Some went back to their

childhoods or high school, and some moved forward to their graduate education. Some struggled with self-doubt or low self-esteem, and others struggled with boundaries that are associated with first generation college students, gender, and race. Most entered college as undecided majors who did not envision that they would become community college presidents.

All participants were able to cross boundaries in their academic journeys because they made connections to ideas and people. For example, they found ways to relate to their academic work, extracurricular activities, and the collegiate environment. They all highlighted the learning process in their descriptions. Aeneas, Atticus, and Antigone described their relationships with professors. Others mentioned their extracurricular activities, which, according to student engagement theory, is a critical component in undergraduate education and contributes to student success (Astin, 1999). Janus managed a radio program, Athena led women's groups, and Robin joined the honors program. Whether it was with professors or peer groups, my participants formed relationships with others and, in doing so, began to develop some of their leadership principles. The connections my participants made transformed their views of themselves and others. They made discoveries about their motivations and abilities, which are essential to their professional lives.

In their professional journeys, many participants faced challenges. Only one participant did not appear to have major boundaries impeding his professional path. Once Janus determined that he would seek a presidency, he appeared to rise easily through the faculty ranks, a traditional path (Sullivan, 2001; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998). Aeneas skipped being a vice-president and believes he was passed over for a presidency because

he was an internal candidate. According to Vaughan and Weisman (1998), about 50% of community college presidents were academic vice-presidents and 33% were internal candidates at institutions where they first became presidents (p. 52). On the other hand, two women, Athena and Robin, shared that their gender was a boundary they had to cross to become presidents. Atticus and Antigone revealed that self-doubt and lack of fit with their professional environments were boundaries. Kempner's (2003) and Eddy's (2003) studies confirmed the importance of fit between community college presidents and the institutions they serve, which were explicit goals for Atticus and Antigone. Although my participants faced different challenges in their professional journeys, they found ways to move beyond the boundaries they and others placed before them.

In the descriptions of their professional journeys, my participants explained how their connections with others helped them cross boundaries and continue to inform their leadership style and practices. Janus, Aeneas, and Atticus described their leadership practices as collaborative (Romero, 2004). They enjoy working with and serving others. Athena and Aeneas explained that other leaders taught them about how they would or would not behave as leaders. In particular, their experiences with antithetical examples of leadership influenced their leadership style and practices. All participants, except Janus, identified role models or mentors who helped them develop their leadership skills. In their current positions, all participants believe they are mentors to others. They help grow other leaders, an essential leadership skill Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) identified. Finally, all participants explicitly and implicitly traced the foundations of their leadership styles and practices to their academic and professional experiences.

As a group, I believe my participants prioritize people in their decision-making

processes and leadership practices. My participants appear to approach leadership from a human resources frame. Bolman and Deal (2003) asserted that leaders who use this frame create a sense of community and examine the effects of their decisions upon people. Aeneas, Atticus, Robin and Antigone also believe they inspire trust, which I link to Bolman and Deal's symbolic frame. Leaders who use this frame have charisma that allows them to connect with others inside and outside of their institutions. The reflections on their experiences revealed that my participants are connected to others, and they used inclusive language to describe how they make decisions and how they practice leadership.

My participants used their boundaries and connections as tools of transformation. The process of transformation occurred in both their thoughts and actions. They moved beyond the limitations they and others placed upon them to emerge as leaders. Janus, Atticus, Robin, and Antigone decided they wanted "more" for themselves and pursued leadership opportunities that would give them more. Janus, Athena, and Aeneas believed they could be better leaders than those who were leading them. Their transformation is a consequence of personal and social interactions with ideas and people, of their recursive understanding of past, present, and future realities, and because of their situations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Had they not crossed intrinsic and extrinsic boundaries in both their academic and professional journeys, I believe they would not have been able to make connections and to transform their ways of thinking about themselves and others to become community college presidents.

### **Higher Education's Purpose and the Community College Mission**

Table 4 shows my cross-case analysis regarding participants' understanding of

higher education's purpose and the community college mission, which provides answers to my second and third research questions: *How do English major presidents understand higher education's purpose for individuals and communities? How do these presidents understand the community college mission?* The three themes—boundaries, connections, and transformations—were found in my participants' understanding of these phenomena.

Table 4

*Higher Education's Purpose and the Community College Mission*

Participant	Boundaries	Connections	Transformations
Janus		<p>The three focuses are first of all students themselves.</p> <p>Two, the second focus is working with the business community or the community itself, but it usually ends up the business community because that's who you can react with the most logically and you can give the most benefit to.</p>	<p>So you're helping people who want to move from point A to point B.</p> <p>The third thing the third focus though is economic development. And so you I think it's critically important so that the schools are involved with what's coming next.</p>
Athena	<p>And if students are not able to make critical decisions about themselves and have a global perspective and understand other cultures, understand how they got to be the way they are. ... If they are not people who are dependable and know how to work with others, they won't be employable, they won't be able to live on their own.</p> <p>So that's what I want for our students. It's a very holistic kind of view and very optimistic given where many of them are starting from who come to us.</p> <p>We are facing major challenges with non-English speaking students, with dire poverty.</p>	<p>But I do believe our community colleges are in a better position to well not only to prepare our students but kind of help lead the way.</p> <p>And if we're not there, many of the students who are coming to us won't live the life that they could and they should and that they deserve.</p> <p>I understand the community college is for many their only educational option.</p>	<p>I want [students] to leave our institution not only with the kind of subject matter knowledge and information they need to make them employable. I want them to have the skills and abilities to make them successful people.</p> <p>We're trying very hard to make sure our students leave us prepared to live. To be that bridge between employment and adolescence. That bridge between ... settling for what is versus dreaming for what could be.</p>

Participant	Boundaries	Connections	Transformations
Aeneas	<p>Because with higher education I was the first one in my family to get a degree.</p> <p>They don't serve at all. They don't know how to serve people.</p>	<p>From a standpoint holistically, it is for me I've been able to do things that I probably wouldn't have been able to do.</p> <p>I can serve the college and the students.</p> <p>With my education, it allows you to earn maybe not as much money as you would like to earn, but you earn enough money that you won't have to worry about food, shelter, and that sort of thing.</p> <p>That's why when I came to this institution every student in the next five years hopefully where every student will have a service learning project at this institution.</p>	<p>But it has made me a more well-rounded person in terms of being able to understand people and academics.</p> <p>But holistically it's kind of made me a person that's been able to be more balanced.</p> <p>That you can actually spend time to serve people.</p> <p>Anyway so for me it's allowed me to be able to serve.</p> <p>So that's really the role of community colleges is that you serve that community.</p>
Atticus	<p>But the other mission ... being a reasonably poor agricultural manufacturing low wage type state.</p>	<p>It has in [my state] I guess two basic or fundamental missions and one is to provide opportunities for individuals to improve their lives through higher education and training. And the second mission is to raise the economy of [my state] specifically through work force training.</p> <p>So all of our programming needs to have a direct impact back to the community. All programs need to show work force need in our immediate area.</p>	<p>And I think the pursuit of higher education makes you smarter. But I think I'm smarter, I think my mind is larger, broader, and deeper than it would have been without higher education.</p> <p>And my first love, what I fell in love with that first class is individuals who have made a decision and committed themselves to making a better life for themselves and their families.</p> <p>So we aggressively work with small businesses, local industry, any entrepreneurs in order to increase the prosperity of our area. Our focus is there [the community].</p>
Robin	<p>It takes people who come out of high school who are getting sub-standard education and may not be ready for college level work or may not be ready for the large environments, kind of make or break atmosphere of the</p>	<p>And a rich relationship with my daughter and I can't separate that from all of the wonderful stories in literature that I've read about mothers and daughters and ... and other readings too like in psychology.</p>	<p>Not only was it a ticket, it was something that enriched my life too and helped me be a better leader, be a well-rounded human being.</p>

Participant	Boundaries	Connections	Transformations
Antigone	<p>university, or who may just be timid or you know or afraid or insecure or just not ready in many ways, or who can't afford the tuition at private colleges or universities or even public universities.</p> <p>So there was a lot of joy even though there's lots of frustration in going to school and meeting those challenges.</p> <p>It [the mission] is entirely too broad. It's the America of education. When I say that I mean bring me your tired, your poor, your dispossessed, and the expectation is that we are able to repair or strengthen or whatever all of these people to meet all of their needs. It's an unrealistic goal. No one institution with the level of resources that we are given can do that.</p>	<p>Yeah, it is kind of what I've been talking about you know way back to the beginning when I read about how the community college was open access, open door.</p> <p>So I guess the mission to me is making sure that those most disadvantaged people have a leg up in the world and have a place to start. And it's like a gateway you know.</p> <p>And the community college does that. It offers something for everybody.</p> <p>I think ... higher education with everything I did related to education I always had a goal. And I think in pursuing anything, the joy for me is in the pursuit and once I achieve a goal, it's kind of like well what am I going to do next?</p> <p>I wanted more.</p> <p>But I really do enjoy the pursuit of education because in that process you really have some wonderful intellectual challenges and in the job then you're trying to apply some of what you learn.</p> <p>But what we try to say to people to talk about is the value-added of having a college in their community. And so that's how I understand it and all of us in it are just crazy enough to think we can do it. And are committed to it. ... They all have to be because they are all parts of the mission.</p> <p>Because if the employees aren't happy, that mission is not going to be met very well.</p>	<p>It just helps you improve yourself.</p> <p>I always tell people education is your ticket to the world.</p> <p>You've got to always be mindful that life-long learning is important.</p> <p>So I think our primary mission, if we had to cut out everything else that we did, I would say serve the most disadvantaged.</p> <p>But when you really boil in down and you ask me what's the most essential I would say it's that gateway for the most disadvantaged who really need the additional help and support and the open door.</p> <p>It fed something, pursuing education, higher education especially, met some need that I apparently had. This yearning for knowledge and being in an educational environment.</p> <p>It's just made me I think a much better educator, a much better human being, all around.</p> <p>And I see myself being in the position to try to create the environment where all these students we get can succeed.</p>

Found in my participants' understanding of the mission is their understanding of

higher education's purpose. The connections they made from their academic and professional journeys inform some of their beliefs about the community college mission. They all embraced the comprehensive community college mission, which includes offering transfer, vocational and developmental education combined with an emphasis on open access, innovation, community responsiveness, teaching, and learning (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). As English major presidents, they collectively emphasized open access as a way for individuals and communities to cross boundaries, make connections, and transform.

Without access to community colleges, many individuals would not have the opportunity to make transformative changes in their lives, which, according to my participants, is the fundamental purpose of higher education for individuals and also underscores higher education's purpose for communities. My participants seemed to agree that the mission's key role is to support the private and public benefits of higher education (Fyre, 1994). Individuals use their community college education to transform their socio-economic status and their ways of thinking about themselves. Higher education affords them the opportunity to live comfortably and to lead fulfilled lives. Furthermore, their community's needs are met through the development of an educated citizenry and with work force training.

Unlike the mission literature I examined from the 1980s to the early 1990s, my participants did not engage in a debate between transfer and vocational education. They wanted individuals to have access to an education of their choosing. Some participants, like the mission literature from the mid 1990s to early 2000s suggested, examined the relationship of the mission to local and global economies. They believed their role is to

transform the local economy by strengthening their institution's connections to the business community and providing workforce training to individuals. In contrast to what I discovered in my literature review of mission literature, this group of English major presidents had a fairly uniform understanding of the community college mission. They agreed that the access mission was the heart of the comprehensive community college mission, and the access mission included responsiveness to the community. I believe this emphasis may be a consequence of their experiences with higher education. Whether it was because they were first generation college students or because of their gender or race, my participants crossed boundaries, made connections, and transformed in their academic journeys. Similarly, they want their students to transform their lives with higher education and that may only be accomplished if such education is accessible.

### **Relationships**

As I listened to my participants' descriptions, I heard how they think about themselves relationally. They implicitly understood that their identities are personally and socially constructed (Nash, 2004). They connect themselves to others and recognize that they are participating in their lives. They continue to engage in an on-going process of personal transformation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 30). My participants have helped me see their experiences holistically. The boundaries between their academic and professional journeys blurred. They intertwined their journeys, their beliefs about higher education's purpose, and their beliefs about the community college mission. My participants moved among their experiences recursively. Their undergraduate experiences connected to their professional lives, which was described in their perceptions of the community college mission and their leadership practices.

I continue to use boundaries, connections, and transformations as an interpretative framework to answer my fourth research question: *How do English major presidents understand the relationships among their academic and professional journeys, their beliefs about higher education's purpose, and their beliefs about the community college mission?* However, the three themes were used holistically to emulate the way my participants understand the relationships among their experiences.

My participants traced their understanding of themselves to their past experiences. Riessman (2008) explained "... narrative constitutes past experience at the same time as it provides ways for individuals to make sense of the past" (p. 8). In their descriptions, I learned about their boundaries. All except Athena were first generation college students, a boundary they successfully crossed. Still, Athena crossed boundaries. She says: "As I mentioned earlier, my career has not been all rosy. This was not easy. And there were many times when I thought ... I will never have the opportunity to do what I think I'm capable of doing simply because I will be judged as that trouble maker or that mouthy female or whatever." Participants became or wanted to be English teachers because they were counseled to teach. They became administrators often because they thought they could do better than those who were leading them. Aeneas was the only participant who felt he was destined to lead. The boundaries my participants crossed may be compared to the boundaries they see for their students and their communities.

My participants looked back to their undergraduate experiences and forward to their professional experiences. As English majors, they linked a learned, concrete skill set—writing, speaking, critical thinking—to their professional duties. For this group of English major presidents, their undergraduate degree has served as a pre-professional

degree that has prepared them for their professional work in what is viewed as an unrelated field, community college leadership (Beidler, 1985). However, for these presidents, their English degree is directly related to their professional work. Janus remarked that “as you go through as an English major you learn so much of course you’ve got to be able to communicate so writing, speaking, yes, part of a show you just have to do it.” Antigone asserted that “there is so much critical thinking involved in being an English major. And so that kind of carries through to being a leader because it is essential and to the community college mission and my trying to implement that.” My participants looked forward and backward to understand themselves and to create their identities.

As English majors, my participants believed that their study of literature helps them understand people and informs their leadership practices. Atticus explained: “There I was in a classroom with people whose individual stories were equally dramatic to any that ever had been penned by an author. Whose lives contained as much adventure just trying to survive and feed their families as any that had been in literature.” Literary characters often served as role models for my participants. Antigone said: “I compare myself to these characters I’ve taught and read about and all of that. All of ... that’s instructive for me.” From characters, they have learned how to behave and how not to behave. They also compared and contrasted characters to their students and colleagues. Aeneas explained: “Because you utilize the things you’re going to need even in the classroom but also with the literature piece how do I help the Daltons and how do I help the Bigger Thomases? And we have the bigger Thomases.” Janus asserted that “the study of literature helps you understand people.” My participants appeared to recognize the

interdependence of thought and action, a consequence of liberal education (Williams, Zdravkovich, & Engleberg, 2002). I believe descriptions of their journeys and the comparisons they made to literature, whether deliberate or even intuitive, are part of their on-going transformation in the ways they think and the actions they take.

My participants embraced the access mission of community colleges because they know that this may be an individual's only hope for a higher education that will transform his or her life. They have a desire for such transformation because they, too, have been transformed. My participants focused on teaching and learning (Boggs, 2003). Atticus said: "I learned that we do have an impact when we don't know we have it and it's incumbent upon all of us to realize every engagement we have with a student ... you know we are participating in their journeys." Robin understands her experiences as a student, a teacher, and a community college leader as interdisciplinary. She sees how she "can help people and help them change their lives. So that was a really powerful thing for me." My participants believe their role is to help others understand their passion for the community college mission.

### **Conclusion**

Although I synthesized my participants' stories in this chapter, I remained committed to a "case-centered" (Riessman, 2008, p. 74) analysis. I used my research questions to structure this chapter. The three themes-- boundaries, connections, and transformations—informed my interpretive framework and helped me synthesize my findings. However, the structure and the themes I used are only one way to understand the data. Other researchers may have considered alternative interpretations, but I believe I

have presented my synthesis in a way that closes a gap I uncovered in the academic and research literature I reviewed in Chapter two.

My participants told me stories about their experiences, and I attempted to honor their voices. My participants' educations have given them the degrees needed for their professions, but have also given them the passion, empathy, joy, and inspiration they need to communicate the community college mission effectively. They have engaged in critical, self-reflective practices (Eddy, 2003). They have the ability to think critically and have learned how to learn. They believe the community college mission has the power to transform individuals and communities. According to Goyette and Mullen (2006), "training in the liberal arts is believed to strengthen a student's character and to develop qualities such as reason, judgment, and a sense of social obligation" (p. 498). These qualities were found in my participants' descriptions of their experiences and reflections. Atticus shared "my value for individuals who come to our doors from myriad experiences ... that all I think has come from my solid grounding in the humanities as part of my early education." I believe their stories have illuminated how this group of English major presidents understands themselves and the institutions they lead. Their understanding may be traced to their academic and professional experiences.

## **CHAPTER SIX--CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to discover how English major presidents constructed the stories of their academic and professional journeys. Questions that ask “how” are linked to qualitative research (Creswell, 1998), and I chose a qualitative research paradigm generally and narrative inquiry specifically because I wanted to focus on participants’ views. Participants’ stories were presented individually and their views were revealed in Chapter four. In Chapter five, my data analyses and interpretations uncovered relationships among participants’ experiences, their beliefs about higher education’s purpose, and their understanding of the community college mission. I believe my study has provided access to leaders’ self-understanding about how their academic and professional experiences affect their perceptions and descriptions of community colleges and their leadership practices.

In this concluding chapter, I reflect on my study’s trustworthiness and validation, briefly summarize my expected findings and new discoveries, look at ways my study may spawn future research, and detail the study’s contribution to community college mission and leadership research. I end my dissertation with my own epilogue.

### **Trustworthiness and Validation**

Using my interpretative framework, the English major presidents in this study crossed boundaries, made connections and transformed because of their academic and professional experiences. However, the findings in this study are not able to be generalized. Instead, narrative inquiry provides researchers with insight into others’

experiences, but the experiences may never be duplicated in the telling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I have made every effort to make readers aware of “what it is like to be this person in this situation” (p. 168). My study gave me the opportunity to hear, record, and explain multiple voices, which I then used to create another story for my readers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Throughout this study, I described data collection and analysis transparently.

To establish trustworthiness and validation in my narrative analyses, I used four approaches that Riessman (1993) described. I used excerpts from interview transcripts to establish “persuasiveness” (p. 66). Participants reviewed transcripts for accuracy, which Riessman calls “correspondence” (p. 66). In my writing, I used three levels of “coherence” (p. 67) by examining participants’ stories holistically. I examined content and structure separately and then relationally. Finally, I explained the meaning and significance of my participants’ stories to my readers, which Riessman labels “pragmatic use” (p. 68).

Throughout my study, I remained aware of the ethical considerations in my role as a researcher and participant in data collection and analyses. I protected my participants’ confidentiality as established in the consent form and used pseudonyms to conceal participants’, institutions’, and communities’ identities. I identified the biases and perspectives I brought to this study, but believe I gave participants the opportunity to tell me their stories. I partnered with my participants to create an accurate, useful report that details the lessons I have learned from and about them (Weiss, 1994).

### **Expected Findings and New Discoveries**

When I first contemplated conducting this study, I did not know specifically what findings I would uncover. Because I eventually chose narrative inquiry as my methodology, I remained open to what my data would reveal to me rather than having pre-conceived expectations. Therefore, my expected findings are brief. I expected that my participants would be open to an exploration of their backgrounds and views about themselves and the institutions they lead. They chose to participate in my study. Thus, I knew I would establish a rapport with them. I expected that our similar academic backgrounds would help me understand and access their experiences. I knew my participants would be able to speak well and present their ideas clearly to me and their constituents. Janus speaks to groups about leadership, and Antigone conducts leadership seminars using literature. I also suspected that they would be writers. Aeneas writes and publishes poetry, and Robin just published her first novel. Athena, Aeneas, and Atticus have published books or articles about leadership. In their descriptions and reflections, my participants actively pursue learning opportunities and may be called life-long learners.

In understanding and accessing my participants' experiences, I made new discoveries about English major presidents. I did not expect participants to describe their academic major as practical because the outcomes of a liberal arts education, English in particular, are often described more abstractly and in opposition to the practical outcomes associated with vocational education (Vaughan, 1985). Four participants also had aspirations for the ministry, and five were first generation college students. All

participants prioritized the access mission of community colleges perhaps as a consequence of their experiences as students and leaders. I thought they might favor the transfer function because of their academic backgrounds, but they did not. None favored mission restriction even though they believed the comprehensive community college mission is difficult to implement. All in some way connected their study of literature to their understanding of people. They believed that their ability to understand people makes them successful leaders. As a researcher, I was also able to link participants' leadership practices to two of Bolman and Deal's (2003) four leadership frames. Participants described their leadership styles and practices from a human resource frame and sometimes a symbolic frame. I additionally believe they shift to the other two frames—structural and political—when needed, although this is not explicitly revealed in their descriptions. The above discoveries would not have been uncovered had I not remained open-minded about my data.

### **Future Research**

As I reflect on my findings and interpretations, I am struck by the many possibilities and directions for future research that this study yields. The most obvious next step would be to emulate, to the degree that this is possible, this study for math or science major presidents. What might a similar study reveal about them? What about first generation community college presidents? Are they more or less likely to have majored in English or the liberal arts or other disciplines? Would most community college presidents prioritize the access mission? In other words, I also envision quantitative studies that could survey community college presidents across majors and then examine correlations among the responses. The survey(s) may even be developed from the

findings in this study.

Four participants—Janus, Athena, Aeneas, and Atticus—reference the work of missionaries or ministers. Janus and Atticus had aspirations to be ministers, where Athena wanted to be a missionary, and Aeneas served as a bishop in his church. Two others, Robin and Antigone mention social justice and the inspiration associated with religion, respectively, as they communicate their understanding of the community college mission and leadership. Goyette and Mullen (2006) explained that a goal for liberal arts education is to develop a student's sense of social obligation, which is found in my participants' descriptions about the community college mission and their leadership practices. This may be a topic for future exploration in another qualitative or quantitative study. In what ways does the work of ministers or missionaries compare and contrast to the work of community college presidents? Are English major or liberal arts major presidents more likely to have aspirations for the ministry or that sense of social obligation than math or science major presidents? I believe the above would be a fruitful area for researchers to explore.

In addition to having aspirations for the ministry and a desire to meet social obligations through their implementation of the community college mission, my participants revealed that their study of literature helps them understand people. They perceived themselves as empathetic and sensitive because their study of literature was a study of the human condition, an outcome often associated with a liberal arts education in general (Goyette & Mullen, 2006) and I believe literature in particular. This understanding helped shape and inform their leadership styles and practices. What might math or science major presidents reveal from their academic backgrounds? Would they

connect their academic backgrounds to their leadership practices? If so, what would their connections reveal about their academic major? I was also able to connect Bolman and Deal's (2003) human resources frame and symbolic frame to my participants' descriptions of their leadership practices. Would this emerge in other disciplines or for community college presidents, in general?

Finally, is there a commonality of experiences among English major presidents that is not found in other disciplines? Would community college presidents typically describe self-reflective practices in the stories of their academic and professional journeys? Would community college presidents in general describe and reflect on their experiences in terms of boundaries, connections, transformations—the themes that emerged from the findings in this study? My thoughts regarding future research are not comprehensive, and, therefore I encourage other researchers to connect my research to theirs.

### **Contribution**

My findings and analyses suggest that community college presidential paths are not and perhaps have never been monolithic. As more diverse leaders rise to the community college presidency and diversity in definitions of leadership are accepted, paths to the presidency have broadened. My study confirms this. Participants' academic and professional journeys also revealed that the reciprocity among leaders' values, constituents' values, and the institutional environment are paramount to the successful implementation of the comprehensive community college mission. Those considering community college leadership would do well to explore the foundations from which they formed their values including their academic experiences. This exploration may lead to a

better understanding of their biases and greater awareness about how their values inform their decision-making process, their leadership practices, and their understanding of higher education's purpose and the community college mission.

In this study, I made connections to academic and research literature for my reader and closed a gap in the literature that does not report on specifically described academic and professional journeys that move forward from undergraduate experiences for community college leaders. The English major presidents who participated in this study suggested that their experiences as students affect their understanding of students' needs and institutional mission. In particular, they believed their English degrees contribute directly to their ability to understand and exhibit empathy for their students and colleagues. They suggested that their understanding of people, which developed from their study of literature, influences their decision-making processes as community college leaders.

## **RESEARCHER'S EPILOGUE**

The act of conducting this study has transformed me. I understand my academic and professional journeys relationally. I think about the responsibility that comes with the power I have to transform students' and colleagues' lives. As my participants suggested, we participate in one another's journeys. Because of my academic background and professional experiences, I believe leadership is about understanding and connecting with people.

Although I still ponder how I ended up being an academic division chair at a community college, my participants have taught me that this is not such an unusual path for English majors. Like them, I did not specifically set out to do what I am doing now, but my journey to this point in my life makes more sense than before I conducted this study. My academic and professional experiences have shaped me in ways that I had not previously considered. I am now better equipped to answer why my ability to understand Shakespeare is important. My participants have helped me connect my understanding of literature to my ability to understand people and myself. I believe my compassion and empathy for students and colleagues may be traced to my early academic experiences as well as my professional experiences.

Knowing myself better makes me a better teacher, leader, and citizen. I continue to defend the abstract outcomes associated with a liberal arts education (Goyette & Mullen, 2006) and recognize that community colleges may provide some students with the only access they have to higher education. My academic and professional experiences

inform my understanding of students' needs and institutional needs. I want students to have the same access I had to higher education and to learn to become active citizens. I respect that they will choose different paths than I, but that, I, in known and unknown ways, am participating in their journeys.

This study has confirmed my love of English and the liberal arts. My story has not ended, but, like my participants, I have crossed boundaries, made connections, and transformed as a consequence of conducting this study. I often had doubts about whether I could complete this study and have considered whether or not I should pursue further leadership opportunities. I identified with my participants' experiences as first generation college students and shared similar boundaries as a woman. I remember myself as an undergraduate who was unsure about my placement in an academic setting. Like my participants, my intellectual and personal growth may be connected to my early academic experiences. Being an English major gave me critical thinking skills that permeate many aspects of my life as a wife, mother, teacher, colleague, and division chair. I have transformed from thinking I could never become a community college president to thinking about the possibility.

I reluctantly put my data away and close my books. I remember my first trip to the First Friday of my doctoral program. Before that journey, I spent two years deciding if I wanted to pursue a doctorate in community college leadership. Why did I wait so long? I cannot answer that question in a definitive way. However, many First Fridays later I can say I am glad I took this journey. I had forgotten the joys and challenges of being a student, and I needed to be reminded. My peers, professors, and participants have

become a part of my story. Perhaps my data will not be put away, and my books will remain open.

I am an English major community college leader with a story to tell.

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## Appendix A: E-mail Recruitment of Participants

TO: President Insert Name

Subject: English Major Community College Presidents

You have been identified as a potential participant for my study about community college presidents who were English majors. I am a doctoral student in the Community College Leadership Program at Colorado State University. As a fellow English major, we have something in common. My study will give you an opportunity to reflect on your experiences as a student and a professional in an interview that will last between 60 and 90 minutes or if you prefer two 30-45 minute interviews. I may also ask you to participate in a follow-up interview with a similar time frame. I will be sending you a letter with more details about my study and your role as a participant. I look forward to working with you. If you have any questions or would like to participate, please contact me by responding to this e-mail [tfrankland@caspercollege.edu](mailto:tfrankland@caspercollege.edu) or calling (307) 268-2495.

Sincerely,

Tammy Frankland

## **Appendix B: Letter Invitation to Participate in a Research Study**

This letter will be on Colorado State University School of Education's letterhead.

I recently contacted you via e-mail regarding my dissertation research on Community College Presidents who were undergraduate English majors. You have been identified as a potential participant. If you decide to participate, I would like to interview you in person or via phone at an agreed upon time. The total interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes and may be done in one block of time or two 30-45 minute blocks. I may also ask you to participate in a follow-up interview with a similar time frame. You will be given the opportunity to review a transcript of the interview for clarifications. This transcript will be sent to you electronically or via mail.

The questions asked will focus on stories about your undergraduate experiences as an English major and on your professional journey to the community college presidency. Other questions focus on your perspectives regarding higher education's purpose and the community college mission. I am including a copy of the participant profile sheet and the interview guide for your perusal. If you decide to participate, you will not be required to answer questions you do not want to on the profile sheet or during the interview. I will not use your name, your institution's name, or your community's name in my dissertation.

The benefits of your participation are that you will be given the opportunity to reflect on your experiences as a student and as a professional and to contribute to the growing knowledge base about the community college mission and community college presidents.

If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime. If after reading this letter and the enclosed profile and interview guide, please let me know if you decide to participate by e-mail [tfrankland@caspercollege.edu](mailto:tfrankland@caspercollege.edu) or phone (307) 268-2495. If I do not hear from you, I will contact you for your decision within two weeks.

I hope you will consider participating in my study. Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for your time and assistance on this project.

Sincerely,

Tammy Frankland

### Appendix C: Participant Profile Sheet

Directions: please fill in the following information:

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. Email address:

3. Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

4. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ 30 or younger

\_\_\_\_\_ 30-40

\_\_\_\_\_ 41-50

\_\_\_\_\_ 51-60

\_\_\_\_\_ 61-70

\_\_\_\_\_ 71 +

5. Name of institution(s) where you received your undergraduate degree:

Undergraduate degree(s) and major(s):

6. Name of institution(s) where you received graduate degrees:

Graduate degree(s) and field(s):

7. Number of years you have been the president at your current institution: \_\_\_\_\_  
years
  
8. Number of total years as a community college administrator: \_\_\_\_\_ years
  
9. Number of years as a community college faculty when not an administrator:  
\_\_\_\_\_ years

## **Appendix D: Interview Guide**

Tell me about your academic journey as an undergraduate. What was this journey like for you?

Tell me what led you to pursue English as your undergraduate major. What was that experience like for you?

What were some of your most memorable moments (positive and negative) from your academic experiences? Why do these moments stand out?

Tell me what you think was most important in your undergraduate experience.

Tell me about how your pursuit of a higher education impacted your life. Can you recall particular times when you felt this impact?

Tell me about your career path to the community college presidency. What was that journey like for you?

Tell me what it is like to be a president.

How do you understand the community college mission?

How do you think your community is affected by your institution's presence?

How do you understand leadership?

How has your academic background contributed to your understanding of leadership?  
The community college mission?

How would you describe the relationship among your experiences as an English major, your experiences as a leader, and your experiences with the community college mission?

What other stories or experiences would you like to share?

Follow up questions:

Describe an undergraduate experience that you often share in social and/or professional situations.

Did you envision career choices as an English major? If so, what were they? If not, why not?

How do you think students who graduate from your institution will be affected by their educations? Tell the story of a particular student being affected by his or her education.

What do you hope today's students accomplish in their lives?

How have your professional experiences contributed to your understanding of your institution's mission? Your leadership?

## **Appendix E: Participant Consent Form**

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

Title Of Study: English Major Community College Presidents: A Narrative Inquiry

You are invited to be in a research study of English major community college presidents' academic and professional journeys. You were invited to participate because you were an English major and are a community college president. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

If you agree to be in this study, I, Tammy Frankland, the researcher, will ask you to do the following:

Complete a brief participant profile sheet

Participate in one 60 to 90 minute interview or two 30-45 minute interviews in person or via telephone

Potentially participate in one 60 to 90 minute follow-up interview or two 30-45 minute interviews in person or via telephone

Review transcript(s) of the interview(s)

The records for this study will be confidential. Any published report will not include identifying information for any participant, institution, or community. Interview tapes will be erased after they are transcribed. Your name and profile sheet will be kept separate from your research records, and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key. Only the researcher will have access to the records. An electronic transcript of the interview will be sent to you for review at an e-mail address of your choice or via mail if you choose.

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

The benefits of your participation are that you will be given the opportunity to reflect on your experiences as a student and as a professional and to contribute to the growing knowledge base about the community college mission and community college presidents.

If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Page 1 of 2 Participant's Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

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.

You may ask any questions now or in the future by contacting me, Tammy Frankland, at (307) 268-2495 or [tfrankland@caspercollege.edu](mailto:tfrankland@caspercollege.edu)

If you have any questions or concerns about this study that you would like to address with someone other than the researcher, contact my faculty advisor and principal investigator, Dr. Laurie Carlson, at (970) 491-6826 or [Laurie.Carlson@ColoState.EDU](mailto:Laurie.Carlson@ColoState.EDU) or Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at (970) 491-1655.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated above and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing two pages.

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

Signature of Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Page 2 of 2 Participant's Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_