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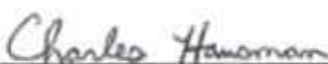
EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF FEMALE PRESIDENTS IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION: A JOURNEY OF ASCENSION TO THE RURAL COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE PRESIDENCY

BY


PATSY JACKSON

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Date: 4.9.19

EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF FEMALE PRESIDENTS IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION: A JOURNEY OF ASCENSION TO THE RURAL COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE PRESIDENCY

BY

PATSY JACKSON

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Eastern Kentucky University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION

2019

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## DEDICATION

More than anything and anyone, I owe my deepest gratitude to my Lord and Savior for being ever-present in caring for my soul and directing my mind as I pursued this dream. To my sweet husband, David Jackson, and our four adorable children, Lakin, Chelsey, Laramie and Calloway, I dedicate this work of heart. Thank you for tolerating my insatiable thirst for knowledge, my hunger to grow personally and my desire to lift others to do the same. You know it is simply who I am to be passionate and to go for it when I am! Also, in memory of my dearest parents, James Harm Taylor and Josephine Elizabeth Taylor Hopson who were not able to see the finished work, thank you for believing in me and pressing me to be strong, independent and compassionate to the fiercest degree. You made me who I am. May this work inspire others to believe they can rise and make a difference in the world in which we live, learn and lead.

*Patsy Jackson*

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Thank you Dr. Bill Phillips for your direction and your guidance while serving as my Committee Chair. Thank you Dr. Charles Hausman for serving as my advisor and for being the first connection I had with this program at ECU. In addition, thank you Dr. Norman Powell for taking me on at the final phase and joining my committee so that I could continue to success. Finally, for all the participants, the strong women leaders across the country who served in my study, thank you for paying it forward; for reaching back and bringing me forward. You live and lead what you believe deep inside. I am sincerely grateful for the investment you made in me and my future dreams.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to investigate the lived experience of females who ascended to rural community college presidencies. This study explores their perceptions of barriers and facilitators that influenced their success in capturing a rural community college presidency. Lastly, this study aims to examine their leadership approach and their intended leadership legacy. An imminent leadership crisis exists for community colleges and has created an uncertain future for these open access institutions. The number of qualified applicants to fill the presidential pipeline is declining and sitting presidents are retiring at alarming rates, threatening the sustainable of community colleges across the country. Women, ascending in leadership, are often overlooked for senior leadership roles, including presidential positions. A plethora of evidence exists to support the notion of the persistent glass ceiling in higher education and research, investigating the factors contributing to this glass ceiling, need to be explored to enable women to successfully navigate the leadership ladder. This qualitative, phenomenological study explored the lived experience of 10 women who successfully captured the presidential position in various community colleges and investigated experiences impacting their ascension. Study findings depicted a circuitous ascension pathway for these women, multiple challenges with work-life balance and career delay and diversion. Additional findings reflected the value of emphasizing authenticity in leadership, finding the good fit in a presidential position, and committing to mentoring other women. Findings did not reveal geographical binding and rurality as major issues of relevance for study participants. This research may be of value to help



determine specific strategies to empower women through mentoring, networking and leadership development opportunities.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction to the Problem

Today, higher education faces a myriad of challenges that can prohibit ascending leaders from seeking the top leadership positions, including the office of the college president. Leadership capacity is sometimes perceived as synonymous with male dominance or male-centric characteristics, traits and capabilities. Rather than considering leadership as a neutral domain, requiring a genderless skillset, many institutions embrace male-centrism as the standard to which all potential leaders are assessed for advancement potential (Magrane, Helitzer, Morahan, Chang, Gleason, Cardinali, & Wu, 2012) and allow sexism to go unchecked (Wagner, 2014). Higher education institutions are not immune to this misconception and often prohibit the advancement of qualified female leaders, especially in smaller communities and faith-based organizations where male dominance persists (Dahlvig, 2013; Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study is to examine the experiences and perceptions of women who have successfully ascended to the rural community college presidential role. In addition, the study examines the leadership approach and intended leadership legacy of these female presidents. Through this phenomenological investigation, barriers and facilitators to women's ascension are identified and can be used to guide the advancement of women with presidential leadership capacity, contributing to the resolution of the impending leadership crisis.

There are approximately 1,462 community colleges dispersed throughout the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). They provide immediate access to educational opportunities that would not be available apart from the local community college. Regardless of the many needs addressed by community colleges, these institutions of higher learning are in peril. Unfortunately, community colleges are promoted as open-access, but often operate with limited funding and resources. Administrators of these colleges struggle to meet the varied demands of internal and external stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, boards, community members, accrediting bodies and legislators. It is a challenge for community college leaders, mainly the president, to lobby for funding and support while leading the day-to-day operations of the institution. Role complexity for the community college president, coupled with the outmigration of current leaders and shrinking projections of future leaders in the applicant pipeline, create a grim future for community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2001; Floyd, Maslin-Ostrowski, & Hrabak, 2010; Hassan, 2008).

The myriad of challenges faced by today's community college president may help to explain the limited number of qualified applicants willing to enter the presidential pipeline (American Association of Community Colleges, 2001; Association of Community College Trustees, 2014; Hassan, 2008). In 2001, the American Association of Community Colleges recognized the impending crisis created by limited presidential candidates. The leadership gap created between the future supply and predicted demand was attributed heavily to an aging presidential population and an increased number of planned retirements among sitting presidents. In response, the American Association of

Community Colleges (2001) redefined their mission statement to address the identified shortage trends and provided leadership development strategies to enhance the presidential pipeline. Strategies included the development of a national clearinghouse to advertise prospective leaders and defined leadership programs to prepare mid-level leaders with the capacity to ascend into senior leadership positions (American Association of Community Colleges, 2001). The leadership crisis continues to threaten the sustainability of community colleges and remains a key priority for key higher education leaders for Achieving the Dream initiative, the American Association of Community Colleges, the Aspen Institute, the League for Innovation, and the Association of Community College Trustees (Trueheart, Bumphus, Wyner, Santos, & Brown, 2014).

Recognizing the reality of the impending leadership crisis (American Association of Community Colleges 2001; Vanderwoude, 2005), every opportunity to improve the demographics of future presidential candidates must be considered. Seemingly, prospective leaders, regardless of race, ethnicity and gender should be valued and cultivated to meet the oncoming leadership crisis facing community colleges. However, despite the availability of many qualified women who are credentialed and willing to serve, women are not ascending to the presidential level at the rate of men (American Council on Education, 2017). In the age of justice and equality and the reality of a higher education leadership shortage (American Association of Community Colleges, 2001), obvious questions arise regarding potential reasons women are lagging in senior leadership service and factors contributing to the issue of gender parity (Johnson, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2017).

Higher education is changing. The successful community college president must remain cognizant of the local, national and international trends impacting institutions of higher learning. The community college president must be able to face complex challenges, such as personnel issues, financial constraints, competitor aggression and legal/ethical challenges, on a daily basis. Successful leaders must be experienced, knowledgeable, consistent, confident and reliable to survive in rapidly changing organizational environments, including business and industry, governments, social establishments and higher education institutions. Regrettably, leadership is not viewed as a genderless skillset (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Heilman, 2012), but is often identified through a male-centric lens, skewing the perception of women's ability to lead as effectively as male colleagues and limiting the engagement of women in senior leadership positions (Heilman, 2012). The constraint of women, ascending in leadership, can be attributed to multiple factors such as the stereotyping of leadership characteristics. Traits such as assertion, strength, confidence and decisiveness are often attributed as positive characteristics in men and negative traits in women (Heilman, 2012).

Although great strides have been made in diversity concerning elements of race, age, and some gender prejudice, not all areas of injustice and discrimination are being addressed equally. Legislation, such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, offers protection from discrimination based on elements such as race, color, religion, sex or national origin, but women still suffer issues of equality in the workplace (U.S. Department of Labor, 2018). American society has historically revolved around a male-centric philosophy and male dominated employment network and worldview. Yet, statistics indicate the near future will reflect a much different gender mix in the United



States as women pursue major leadership roles (Bastedo, Altbach, & Gumport, 2016). Unfortunately, despite these predictions, women are still viewed through a different lens than their male counter parts in many facets of life including educational, political, economic, social and leadership capacities.

Stereotypical assumptions persist regarding the personality characteristics, leadership styles, and professional competencies of women compared to men (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Reid, Palomares, Anderson & Bondad-Brown, 2009). Although more women than men are advancing their education and preparing themselves for leadership roles, women are not advancing into senior leadership positions at the same rate as men and are not receiving equitable compensation compared to their male counterparts when performing in the same professional leadership roles (Johnson, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2017).

According to Carnevale, Smith and Gulish (2018), women earned more associate degrees than men by the 1970s, more bachelors and master's degrees by the 1980s and more doctoral degrees than men by 2000, yet are not advancing to senior leadership roles in business and industry and academic institutions at the rate of men. Despite their credentials, misconceptions persist that women advance because of their gender and not because they *merit* promotion to senior leadership roles (Perdue, 2017).

Women comprise 50.8% of the U.S. population, approximately 47% - 50% of the American workforce, hold 52% of the professional jobs in the nation and 49% of the college-educated, entry-level workforce positions (Pew Research Center, 2017; Warner & Corley, 2017). Based on data from the Pew Research Center (2017), between 1950 and 2010, the percentage of women in the American workforce steadily increased to

47%, representing a 17% increase during this 60-year period. Since 2010, the number has increased by only 3%. Although employment numbers continue to increase for women, the rise does not reflect success in women's ascension in senior leadership roles. Of the 50% of women in the American workforce, only 5.4% of serve in senior roles of Fortune 500 companies, 20.2% of Fortune 500 company boards and 30% of higher education presidencies, increasing from 26.4% in 2011. Additionally, the political landscape reflects similar gender inequities with women comprising 21% of U.S. Senate positions, 19.1% of U.S. Congress positions, 24.8% of state legislative roles, 21.1% of US Cabinet seats and 8% of Governor positions (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Twenty-five percent of women indicate they have earned less than a male colleague for the same job. Multiple resources validate the lack of gender parity experienced by women in the workplace (Carnevale, Smith & Gulish, 2018; U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). Although the median income for women increased to \$16.00 per hour in 2016, an increase of \$3.50 per hour since 1980, women are still earning, on average, \$0.81- \$0.83 cents for every \$1.00 earned by men. Although this is an improvement from the \$0.57 on the dollar earned by women in 1975, the inequity remains obvious (Carnevale, Smith & Gulish, 2018).

According to the American Council on Education's Pipelines, Pathways, and Institutional Leadership Report (Johnson, 2017):

One of the clearest indicators of the glass ceiling is the persistent pay gap between men and women at the same faculty rank. Overall, during the 2015–16 academic year, male faculty members made an average of \$89,190.00, and female faculty members made an average of \$73,782.00. No matter the academic rank, men

make more than women and are more likely to hold a tenure track position. (p. 8)  
Annually, within faculty ranks, women continue to be compensated less than male counterparts by \$14,000 in *public* institutions and \$18,000 in *private* institutions (Johnson, 2017).

As purported by Carnevale, Smith and Gulish (2018), twenty-three percent of employed women reveal they have been treated as incompetent because of their gender, versus 6% of males suffering the same discrimination. In STEM-related jobs, the rate is much higher with 50% of women indicating some form of workplace discrimination related to their gender. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of women in STEM positions indicate pay inequity earning only 80% of the male wage. Twenty-nine percent indicate they have been treated as incompetent because of gender and 18% express lack of supervisor support for performing the same job as male counterparts. In addition, women are twice as likely to be overlooked for promotions and fail to capture more lucrative senior level leadership positions. Women often experience a decline in earnings during the first 10-15 years of their careers and face greater challenges with work-life balance. They are often required to work part-time to provide care for children or other family members, experience stop-outs in their career trajectory, impeding their ascension through a career pathway (Carnevale, Smith & Gulish, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2017).

Multiple sources of empirical data indicate the gender gap continues to be a valid issue challenging our society. Data, trended over time, demonstrates women are not advancing at a pace equal to male counterparts in many dimensions of measurement such as political governance, professional leadership advancement and economic equality in

the workplace. The only dimension in which women have closed the gap and surpassed men is in the domain of educational attainment. The Gender Gap Index, as part of the overall Global Gender Gap Report (2017), provides trended information related to the global movement of nations in closing the gender gap. The report's data, accumulated over a decade, involves measurement of domains such as economic participation, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment in 142 countries. Based on the report's outcomes, women in the United States are lagging in political empowerment due to the gender gap of women in ministry, but are outperforming men in educational attainment. Globally, the workforce is shrinking but is reflecting a sharper decline for women in the workforce compared to men. Although both sexes are gaining in higher wages, men are gaining at a rate faster than female counterparts despite the fact that women are out-credentialing men in educational attainment. Ironically, the increase in educational attainment does not coincide with leadership advancement to senior leadership positions with only 22% of women serving in senior managerial roles (Global Gender Gap Report, 2017) and approximately 30% of higher education presidencies being filled by women (Pew Research Center, 2017).

#### Background/Problem Statement

Achieving justice is a major impetus and aim for educational reform, curriculum and academic delivery. Through education, learners can begin to achieve a broader worldview, embrace the value and worth of all, and appreciate the differences that make society rich and healthy. Yet, in academic environments which should promote equality and inclusion, elements of bias, stereotypes, discrimination and injustice still flourish.

These elements include gender inequities for female leaders aspiring to presidencies or other senior leadership positions.

Women aspiring to presidential positions face many challenges, including the gender bias and discrimination potential that still exists for rising women. Higher education presidents of any college are the leaders and the representative voices of their institutions. Regardless of the title or the type of organization, the president or CEO is the individual primarily responsible for “maintaining the institution’s academic integrity and reputation” (Bastedo, Altbach, & Gumport, 2016, p.161) by ensuring appropriate use of resources, appropriate strategic planning, and effective communication of the historical context and future trajectory of the institution. To be effective, presidents must function within the culture of the organization, assert appropriate power and influence and establish legitimacy among college stakeholders.

Although presidents vary regarding their focus on internal versus external stakeholders, one major focus of the presidential role is securing fiscal stability for the institution. Still, based on his or her ability to achieve the appropriate ‘balance’ of internal and external demands, presidents may be evaluated as “exemplary, model or failed” (Bastedo, Altbach, & Gumport, 2016, p. 163). Such labels range from the exemplary president’s ability to lead forward while maintaining appropriate balance in the internal and external dynamics of the institution versus the model president who continues to focus on managing day-to-day operations, but can’t create a sense of engagement, cohesion, and direction within the college. Lastly, the failed president is reduced to an “adversarial relationship with the faculty” (Bastedo, Altbach, & Gumport, 2016, p. 163) and becomes basically ineffective in leading, managing, creating consensus

and providing meaning and momentum for the college. Considering the magnitude of this leadership challenge and the assertions that need to be exerted to achieve this balance, women are exceptionally vulnerable to scrutiny that often shrouds the legacy of a female president.

When aspiring to major leadership positions in higher education, women also perceive gender inequity, especially in situations of work-life balance and tending a family. According to the American College President Study (2017), thirty-two percent of women have altered a career path to the presidency to care for a family member or dependent. Other barriers such as typical stereotypes regarding women, excessive scrutiny of women leaders, and the lack of female leaders to serve as mentors for aspiring female leaders, can contribute to fewer female leaders (Longman & Madsen, 2014; Morley, 2013; Smith, Crittenden, & Caputi, 2012).

Based on the American College President Study (2017), women within institutions of higher learning, are not represented equally in leadership compared to their male counterparts as indicated by the clear divisions of women leading in certain colleges and universities, including private and faith-based colleges. Women are more likely to lead colleges granting associate degrees than colleges or universities offering graduate degrees. The American Center for Education's Pipelines, Pathways and Institutional Leadership Report (Johnson, 2017), only 22% of female presidents lead universities offering doctoral degrees. In addition, they are more likely to serve as president of public and special-focus institutions, instead of private entities. Over time, in higher education presidencies, the numbers of minority and female presidents remain consistent proportionally, but are still disproportionately low compared to male

colleagues. Whereas, the rate of male presidencies and the rate of earnings for these male presidents are increasing compared to female counterparts, reflecting an assumption that leadership is a male prerogative (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Wallace, Budden, Juban, & Budden, 2014).

Even though policies to ensure gender equity may be initiated, these policies do not ensure the actual upward promotion of females into senior level positions. Women in senior leadership roles can be perceived as feminist and are not always willing to admit or challenge the female bias or gender oppression they experience (Broido, Brown, Stygles, & Bronkema, 2015; Christman & McClellan, 2012; Wagner, 2014). Often, gender-based policies establish a quota-type selection for overall leadership, but not for senior leadership. Women often perceive that males will receive the ultimate authority positions while women will be selected to fill sub-authoritative positions, providing the balance of gender, yet keeping women in positions of lesser authority (Peterson, 2011). According to the American College President Study (Johnson, 2017), the majority of women serving as presidents also served as a dean or chief academic officer prior to capturing the presidential position. This career trajectory is not as evident in men. Often, a perception of greater workload accompanies these subordinate appointments. Ultimately, "gender mix policy might be a necessary condition for reaching quantitative gender equality, but not a sufficient condition to reach qualitative gender equality" (Peterson, 2011, p. 626).

Regardless of policy, true gender equity cannot be legislated in decision making processes internal to higher education organizations. The subjective nature of a presidential search promotes a continued risk for gender bias and subliminal gender

discrimination for ascending female leaders. Although there have been many strategies implemented to address inequity, bias and the lack of inclusiveness in education, politics and the workplace, much remains undone. Efforts to equalize human value and to protect individual rights are an ongoing pursuit as new threats arise continually. When society arrives at a place where people are not more privileged or valued because of characteristics such as socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, or gender then true democracy can exist.

### Conceptual Model & Theory

Females are often stereotyped with gender labels such as weakness or powerlessness when compared to male counterparts (Heilman, 2012). Various models exist and are relevant to understanding gender gaps and inequities. Barriers are often categorized into areas related to individual characteristics, organizational or social influences that may impose barriers for women ascending in higher education leadership. Consistently, such models reflect the convoluted matrix of variables that women face when ascending in leadership. The framework identified as relevant for this phenomenological study including the intersection of the individual/discrimination/social model and the role congruity theory, with the major emphasis on the latter.

*Individual/Discrimination/Social Model.* According to Growe and Montgomery (2010), these barriers are considered in the framework of the meritocracy/individual model, the organizational/discrimination model and the woman's place/social model. In this framework, the meritocracy model focuses on the female gender stereotypes related to personal perceived weaknesses in assertion and strength that limit women's ascension in leadership. Additional impediments for females advancing in leadership are perceived



within the organizational structure based on possible discrimination that prohibits women from advancing regardless of individual aspirations. Lastly, social and cultural norms may present barriers to aspiring women by forcing men and women into expected role functions and pathways that either facilitate advancement for men or hinder ascension for women.

Such organizational and social barriers are not always extrinsically imposed. Female leaders can become an accessory to such workplace discriminations by failing to recognize or challenge biases that exist. Female leaders may not recognize or admit real gender biases exist in their professional environments, thus contributing to self-directed stereotyping and alienation in leadership advancement opportunities. Some women are accustomed to traditional male-centric practices and do not acknowledge the subliminal sexism that can exist in professional work environments, making it hard to ascertain the realities of stereotypes, biases or discriminations that may exist in the culture of higher education and may choose to accept and overlook the discriminations suffered in the workplace (Broido, Brown, Stygles, & Bronkema, 2015; Christman & McClellan, 2012; Wagner, 2014).

*Role Congruity Theory.* According to Cauadrado, Garcia-Ael and Molero (2015) and Ealey and Karau (2002), role congruity theory posits followers will perceive more positive leadership effectiveness when leader attributes and behaviors align with and are congruent with leadership attributes stereotypical of a certain social role. Males are often evaluated positively in leadership effectiveness based on the demonstration of masculine leadership traits, whereas women must demonstrate both masculine and feminine traits to be evaluated as successful leaders. Traditionally, stereotypical role expectations for men

lean heavily toward “self-assertion, dominance and achievement orientation” (Heilman, 2012, p. 123) which are often perceived as synonymous with leadership effectiveness. Contrarily, female leadership role functions are consistent with communal traits of nurturing, relationships and mentoring which may not be evaluated as effectual in leading complex organizations (Cuadrado, Garcia-Ael, & Molero, 2015; Ealey & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2012). The “descriptive and prescriptive” (Cuadrado, Garcia-Ael, & Molero, 2015, p. 237) traits of leadership often define the metrics for successful leadership, creating prejudice and placing women at a disadvantage when seeking advanced leadership responsibilities.

Reid, Palomares, Anderson and Bondad-Brown (2009) purport role congruity theory proposes male and female stereotypes as often guiding the descriptive and prescriptive characteristics anticipated and accepted for both genders. Male gender, perceived as agentic resulting in dominance and power, are frequently viewed more positively regarding leadership prowess and finesse when compared to women who ascribe to communal characteristics such as nurturing and trustworthiness in social and professional dimensions. As a result, leadership is defined in terms of influence and power and strength, attributes of agentic behavior, creating a prejudice against women in leadership. According to Reid, Palomares, Anderson and Bondad-Brown (2009), “disparity between the communal-female stereotype and the agentic-leader stereotype leads to two forms of prejudice. First, women’s potential for being endorsed as leaders is less than men’s potential because the male stereotype is closer to the leader stereotype. Second, women’s actual leadership is evaluated less favorably than men’s actual leadership because women’s assertive behavior is perceived as undesirable or threatening,

particularly to men” (p. 468). Garcia-Retamero and Lopez-Zafra (2006) indicate such prejudice can coerce women into role identification and performance more aligned with their prescribed female gender role and may perpetuate male dominance and monopolization of senior leadership roles in “male-congenial business environments” (p. 52).

Research suggests men and women frequently make career decisions based on factors related to “life choices and social pressures” (Barth, Guadagno, Rice, Eno & Minney, 2015, p. 503). According to Barth et al. (2015), career decisions based on life choices are derived from emphasis on relationships and family commitments, a desire to help others and an aspiration to gain status or compensation through career advancement. Based on the research, women demonstrate an affinity for the first two variables, while male counterparts focus more on the potential for leadership achievement, position and status within organizations. Consistent with role congruity theory, women tend to internalize role expectations and diverge into career choices defined by communal commitments, not frequently including STEM fields. Based on the research on women in leadership and role congruity theory, more women would lean toward higher-paying careers if these opportunities embraced communal traits such as goal affordance: family connections and opportunity to positively impact others.

### Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to investigate the lived experience of females who have ascended to rural community college presidencies. This study examines their perceptions of barriers and facilitators that influenced their success

in capturing a rural community college presidency. Lastly, this study aims to examine their leadership approach and their intended leadership legacy. Hopefully, through this study knowledge will be gained regarding the unique challenges and opportunities facing women who desire to serve as rural community college presidents and will help reveal any tenets of inequality and bias that may exist for women aspiring to senior leadership roles. Through the knowledge gained from this study, women who seek a community college presidency, can understand the reality of the lived experience of the presidential pathway and will gain insight into navigating the pathway to the presidential role. Considering the challenges and opportunities that exist for women in leadership, potential leaders can apply knowledge gained from this study to more effectively navigate the leadership pathway successfully and to narrow any equity gaps existing for women in leadership.

When aspiring to major leadership positions in higher education, women perceive gender inequity, especially in situations of work-life balance and tending a family. Other barriers such as typical stereotypes regarding women, excessive scrutiny of women leaders, and the lack of female leaders to serve as mentors for aspiring female leaders can contribute to fewer female leaders (Longman & Madsen, 2014; Morley, 2013; Smith, Crittenden, & Caputi, 2012).

In all areas of higher education, including faith-based colleges, women are not accepted in major leadership roles the same way men are. Female leaders are more apt to possess the emotional intelligence needed to connect with others and to be creative and empathetic (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014), but are often overlooked because of a culture of male dominance that exists in many parts of society (Gallant, 2014), including higher

education. Over time, in higher education presidencies, the number of minority and female presidents remains consistent proportionally, whereas the rate of male presidencies and the rate of earnings for these male presidents are increasing compared to their female counterparts (Wallace, Budden, Juban, & Budden, 2014).

Notably, more women are achieving advanced degrees and pursuing top leadership posts than ever in the history of the country reflecting the potential for a tilt in the power and decision-making balance (Johnson, 2017). Yet, despite the commitment of women to prepare themselves for leadership and the implementation of equity legislation such as Title IX of the Educational Amendments in 1972, providing educational equalization of men and women, women still lag in achieving the leadership positions to which they aspire and for which they are qualified (Longman & Madsen, 2014). Regardless of preparation and aspiration, clearly masculine dominance still exists globally in higher education leadership and other social, political public facets (Morley, 2013).

#### Research Questions

What is the lived experience for women who ascended to a rural community college presidency in the 21st century?

Sub-questions:

1. What are the barriers to achieving a community college presidency for aspiring women, identified by sitting presidents or past presidents?
2. What are the facilitators for achieving a community college presidency for women, identified by sitting presidents or past presidents?

3. What is the impact or relevancy of gender for women who have achieved a community college presidency?
4. What is the value of mentoring and networking for women who have achieved a community college presidency?
5. What are the prominent leadership styles, traits or prominent leadership behaviors of women who have achieved a community college presidency?
6. How would sitting female presidents want to define their leadership legacy?

#### Definitions of Terms

Terms relative to women and leadership discussed throughout this dissertation include the following (Dictionary.com and Merriam-Webster dictionary):

*Ascension* – the act of rising to an important position.

*Emotional intelligence* – skill in perceiving, understanding, and managing emotions and feelings.

*Epoche* – A suspension of judgment, the act of refraining from any conclusion for or against anything as the decisive step for the attainment of ataraxy, or the methodological attitude of phenomenology in which one refrains from judging whether anything exists or can exist as the first step in the phenomenological recognition, comprehension, and description of sense appearances: transcendental reduction.

*Glass ceiling* - an upper limit to professional advancement that is imposed upon women, minorities, and other non-dominant groups and is not readily perceived or openly acknowledged.

*Role congruity theory* - the theory that posits the disconnect between the perceived incongruity between the expected leadership attributes of a successful woman leader and

the expected attributes of a woman based on assigned gender expectations

*Centric* - pertaining to or situated at the center; central.

*Phenomenology* – the study of phenomena.

#### Limitations

Limitations of the study include (a) a potential for bias; (b) a potential to be time-consuming; (c) a perceived lack of rigor; and (d) an inability to replicate the study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The literature review conducted for this study focused on topics of women in leadership and data/reports regarding (a) elements of rural community colleges and community college leadership; (b) women in leadership, (c) tenets of presidential leadership, (d) elements of gender and leadership, (e) barriers to women ascending in leadership; and (f) conceptual and theoretical frameworks pertinent to women in leadership.

#### Rurality, Leadership and the Community College

Rural communities tend to be smaller than urban counterparts and lack diversification in regards to businesses, services and resources. Rural communities that fail to engage and partner with regional, national and global entities often diminish in their capacity to be self-sustaining and progressive. Without connections to these regional, national and global markets, rural economies cannot advance. One of the major strategies for increasing the influence of small rural areas, is the formation of cooperative agreements, which include educational institutions. Through the collective potential of such relationships, rural networks can increase their leverage for resources and can improve their services. Inherently, educational institutions are often the cornerstone of rural communities and help to create a focal point or identity for the rural areas. Community colleges influence the movement of rural economies, enhance the educational preparation of the workforce, influence citizens to embrace democratic



processes and to engage in civic improvements that improve vitality and growth of their communities (Mathews, 2016).

Overwhelmingly, community colleges serve rural populations, which are often disadvantaged or underrepresented. These rural environments often have sociocultural and economic challenges inherent to their makeup. Due to out-migration of families, fewer students are available for community colleges to recruit. Of those who enroll and attend, fewer are academically prepared, requiring use of their aid to support them in developmental coursework. Such factors, combined with less state appropriations and greater operational costs and unfunded mandates, can cripple or create demise for a community college (Crookston & Hooks, 2012; Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007; Phelan, 2014).

According to Crookston and Hooks (2012), the impact of community colleges has waxed and waned since their inception in the twentieth century. Following periods of economic decline in the United States, the community college often surfaces as an opportune strategy to address the financial crisis and employment woes of small, rural communities. Community colleges are sometimes viewed as the gateway of opportunity for communities facing disparity. Community colleges often face challenges to their sustainability resulting from geographical isolation of potential students, stagnant economic and cultural growth, outmigration of the rural citizenry, and dependence on public funding grants and contracts. In turn, community colleges are often reactive to these shifting dynamics and remain in constant transformation in an attempt to remain relevant (Crookston and Hooks, 2012).

Because of the community college's ability to respond rapidly to changing dynamics of the workforce, leaders often rely on the community college to provide the

transformative experience needed for students seeking immediate employment or transfer potential. Yet, community colleges are not consistently viewed as the answer to these socio-economic challenges in today's globalized economy. Although community colleges originally developed to provide a foundational broad learning experience for students wishing to transfer into baccalaureate programs and beyond, economic impacts have helped to reform the community college into an entity shrouded in accountability for economic development. Yet, community colleges struggle with the imbalance of higher demand and accountability and less funding, resources and support apart from the state appropriations which help sustain the community college in its quest to improve economic conditions of smaller, rural communities (Crookston & Hooks, 2012).

Fluharty and Scaggs (2007) provide a stark picture of the challenges rural community colleges confront, such as limited resources and abundant challenges when serving students through a broad mission. Often rural institutions struggle in a no-win situation created by a disconnect between the demand on the college environment and the amount of support, resources and public policies that are available, but often insufficient, to support the demands imposed. Although community colleges are often seen as the hub for academic and economic development in rural communities, these organizations are often left to capture their own resources, to create their own opportunities and to establish their own relationships to create sustainable communities. Examples of five specific strategic imperatives, used in Mississippi to revitalize the community colleges and to link them more directly to the state's revitalization efforts, were detailed. These included efforts to "build human capital, nurture social capital and strong, healthy communities, work regionally, find a competitive niche, and promote a culture of entrepreneurship"

(Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007, p. 21). Such initiatives are consistent with the community college mission and can help to offset the reduced federal funds and grant monies available for these colleges, enhancing their chance at success. Historically, community colleges have served a tremendous need in reaching students who would not have an opportunity to pursue higher education. Through open accessibility, the community colleges have been able to meet the basic needs of communities through the provision of transfer opportunity, vocational/technical education and community service. Although the mission of the community college is a noble one, these institutions do not operate without challenges, particularly funding challenges. Since their inception, community colleges have struggled with unstable funding streams often growing or stunting based on state appropriation and political upheavals and agendas. Basically, the "discretionary nature of funding from federal and state sources" (Phelan, 2014, p. 8) have held community colleges captive and have driven their organizational design and planning.

Although no single variable can be identified to explain this quandary, the culmination of several factors such as " declines in enrollment and the resulting loss of tuition and fee revenue, even when tuition and fee rates rise, reductions in state aid, non-sustained incentives, unfunded mandates, and rising costs" (Phelan, 2014, p. 8) are to blame. Evidence supports the notion that community colleges are facing several issues that can only heighten the funding crisis in the near future. Obviously, community colleges are facing a decline in enrollment and a change in the makeup of the students they are attracting. Many community colleges serve rural populations, which are often disadvantaged or underrepresented on the national front. These rural environments often have sociocultural and economic challenges inherent to their makeup. Due to out-

migration of families, fewer students are available for community colleges to pull enrollees. Within those that do apply and attend, fewer are academically prepared, requiring use of their aid to support them in developmental coursework. These factors, combined with less state appropriations, increasing operational costs and unfunded mandates, can cripple or create demise for a community college.

Community college leaders are facing a challenge as they develop strategies to sustain the college environment in response to these threats and encroachments. No longer can the college president employ traditional decision making processes. Instead the president must learn to "think in multiple dimensions, embrace calculated risks, innovate, create, explore, develop new relationships, develop new capital, network, think competitively, leverage resources, tolerate ambiguity, and document and communicate achievement" (Phelan, 2014, p.13). Traditionally revered standards and metrics, such as standard grades, must be examined for their relevance to employers. Leaders must consider that employers value actual performance and skills opposed to basic grades. Community colleges who fail to appraise a position and respond accordingly and proactively may become the next casualty of the funding crisis.

Recruitment and retention of qualified faculty are also issues pressing rural higher numbers of adjunct faculty, loss of tenure and the weakening of faculty's exercise of academic freedom collide and stifle the strength of academe in community colleges. Increasingly, faculty are challenges to remain energized and engaged in the learning environment of the community college. Too often, rural community college faculty do not receive the same level of faculty development opportunities often afforded to larger, urban universities. As a result, faculty can suffer burn-out and apathy and may choose to

leave the institution altogether. Faculty development is one of the issues that needs to take priority to ensure the college environments stays progressive and engaging. Without this commitment, there is no real opportunity for rural community colleges to stay strong and competitive (Eddy, 2007; Wilson, 2010).

According to Wilson (2010), community colleges face a myriad of challenges when it comes to sustainability. Factors such as fewer full-time faculty, loss of tenure and the weakening of faculty's exercise of academic freedom collide and stifle the strength of academe in community colleges. Trends, such as the hiring of part-time faculty instead of full-time faculty, may occur as a financial decision, but may create an unstable academic environment in community colleges. Historically, adjunct faculty do not voice concerns over matters of the academy as full-time faculty would. Often, they perceive their jobs are unprotected and tend to comply with directives that full-time faculty may choose to resist if they are considered detrimental to the free exchange of ideas and the free flow of the teaching/learning environment. In addition, adjuncts may not be as vested in the organization and as engaged in creative teaching and learning techniques that may be perceived as atypical by the administration of the college.

Another negative force impacting the community college environment is the involvement in corporations in curriculum development. Too often, corporate influence in the academic environment can steer the learning processes away from the college mission and more toward individual organization's needs. Multiple examples of censorship or marginalization exist, including the removal of tenure from some higher education institutions. Inadvertently, faculty perceive these behaviors as a direct threat on the learning environment and as a communication barrier for dialogue between faculty

and college leadership. As a result, the voice of faculty has grown weaker and the direction of higher education is not perceived to be under the influence of the faculty.

Successful college leadership, including diversity, is another major issue threatening sustainability of community colleges. Often, rural communities are homogenous in composition and traditional in their practices. These traditional practices are not always receptive to the influence and disruption of female pedagogy and female leadership ascension in the learning environment (Wagner, 2014). Consistently, the literature supports the notion of a glass ceiling, gender inequity and gender barriers, these exist exponentially in small, rural environments.

Effective community college leadership requires a myriad of skills and competencies and a tremendous sense of flexibility. According to Hines (2011), community college presidents face challenges from within the college and from the outside of the college. Successful presidents learn to balance and to prioritize effectively, leading by example, rather than by fear. Too often, presidents fail to self-appraise and do not recognize their weaknesses and vulnerabilities when leading teams. As a result, presidents or other leaders may find themselves in the throes of controversy and confrontation. Ineffective and unsuccessful leaders often lack wisdom to recognize problems early and the courage to address them promptly. Issues such as negativity in the college culture, non-supportive board members, and lack of integrity within the leadership can contribute to the demise of a community college if left unaddressed. Inversely, successful community college leaders are those who recognize the strength in others, sacrifice to ensure others gain opportunity, model so that others can find the way,

display courage so that others feel confident, empowered, and enabled to take risks so that untapped potential can be realized and uncharted territory can be explored.

Rodriguez (2015) explains one community college president's perceptions of diversity and equity, providing suggestions for ways to improve the engagement and inclusion of students from all walks of life. Ensuring diversity is a collective effort.

Although the president of the college sets the tone for the organization, effective leadership will engage the entire college in diversity and inclusiveness efforts.

According to the Aspen Institute's recommendations, presidents need to possess certain qualities to embed diversity and inclusion, including a "deep commitment to student access and success; a willingness to take significant risks to advance student success; an ability to create lasting change within the college; a broad strategic vision for the college and its students, reflected in external partnerships; and the ability to raise and allocate resources in ways aligned with student success" (p. 21). One factor in creating these positive learning environments is hiring diverse faculty or faculty committed to embracing diversity.

Cejda (2012) clearly depicts the need to increase cultural awareness and competence in leaders who are serving in administrative roles in rural community colleges. Distinct differences exist in rural versus urban or metropolitan areas. Although Caucasians have historically been the ethnic majority, African-Americans and Hispanics are now re-locating into more rural areas, changing the demographic landscape. In addition, the rural populace is aging and continues to suffer poverty at rates higher than citizens or more urban areas. These trends are critical for the rural community college leader to understand. Rural leaders contend with fewer economic resources, fewer

qualified faculty to meet the mission of their institutions and more pressure to participate in "community and economic development" (p. 55).

Successful rural community college leaders are in tune with their local constituency and must exhibit basic leadership competencies such as "advocacy, collaboration and communication" (Cejda, 2012, p. 56) in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their organizations in fulfilling its mission. These competencies are instilled in potential leaders through local and national leadership professional development experiences, through mentoring and through pursuing advanced education to prepare for the role of the rural community college leader. Through professional development of aspiring leaders, rural community colleges can help improve the educational and economic gaps that exist in smaller, isolated rural communities.

The mission of rural community colleges contributes to the creation of diverse and inclusive learning environments. Community colleges are inherently open-access and take students of all ages and backgrounds and with a myriad of goals and pathways. Inevitably, this type of comprehensive mission and focus has the potential to draw students from many races/ethnicities and social, cultural and economic backgrounds. Still, even with the inherent tenet of inclusion embedded in the community college, diversity is sorely lacking in campus cultures throughout the nation's community colleges. Unfortunately, the race and socioeconomic gaps plaguing society are mirrored in the community college environment. Considering the culture difference that exists in rural communities when compared to larger urban areas, there is a tendency for females to have a greater difficulty when ascending in leadership. Often the rural communities are small and governed with traditional tenets that promote male dominance. Women are



often more reluctant to voice concerns regarding gender oppression as that is not always culturally accepted in these small communities as gender roles are culturally defined based on expected position and role function. These realities are stark reflections of gender-related diversity issues plaguing community colleges.

### Presidential Role

Successful community college leadership requires a myriad of skills and competencies and a tremendous sense of flexibility. Ultimately, the movement of the organization is led by the president. According to Hines (2011), community college presidents face challenges from within the college and from the outside of the college. Successful presidents learn to balance and to prioritize effectively, leading by example, rather than by fear. Too often, presidents fail to self-appraise and do not recognize their weaknesses and vulnerabilities when leading teams. Ineffective and unsuccessful leaders often lack wisdom to recognize problems early and the courage to address them promptly. Issues such as negativity in the college culture, non-supportive board members, and lack of integrity within the leadership can contribute to the demise of a community college if left unaddressed. Inversely, successful community college leaders are those who recognize others' strengths, sacrifice to ensure others gain opportunity, model so that others can find the way, display courage so that others feel empowered and confident, and take risk so that untapped potential can be realized and uncharted territory can be explored (Hines, 2011).

## Element of Gender

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2014), data from 2011 indicated 56% of community college executive/administrative/ managerial positions were held by women but only 36% of community college presidential positions were captured by females. Stifling the upward momentum of competent leaders, regardless of gender, poses a serious threat to the sustainability of higher education considering the impending leadership crisis facing the academe. Much of the disproportion can be attributed to various elements of gender expectation and stereotyping between male and female professionals in higher education.

Longman and Madsen (2014) provide an intense and expansive review of women's leadership in higher education considering the historic plight of women moving into leadership, the demographics and trends regarding women's movement into higher education leadership, an overview of the lived experience of higher education's female leaders, the barriers and strategies of female leaders in higher education. Using a compilation of chapters from various female authors, Longman and Madsen (2014) explored the common assumptions and conclusions often noted in the literature regarding the challenges women face in an ascension to leadership. According to their review, women are still relatively a small minority of the higher education leadership that exists despite the passage of Title IX several decades ago. This is particularly true of African-American women.

In the text, emphasis was placed on the changing trends that are occurring in higher education with academe moving it into a more business-model approach which has not boded well for women historically as they are assumed to gravitate more readily

to a value and ethics-based leadership approaches. Consistent with the empirical research, evidence in the book indicated women continue to bring strong interpersonal skills to the leadership workplace, but also continue to face historical barriers of stereotypes, lack of mentoring, male-centrism and limited opportunities to circulate within the upper leadership domain to gain insight and experience. Strategies that women were encouraged to employ to combat these barriers or adversities included seeking legal guidance, building trust and reputation among stakeholders, establishing a strong social, peer-professional network and identifying mentors to help build leadership capacity and competence. Internationally, higher education is still plagued with too few women serving in major administrative roles.

Men and women lead differently. Historically, in the academe and beyond, effective leadership is defined in terms of masculine influence and expectation and is not consistent with the leadership approach often exerted by female administrators. In general, women are often stereotyped as possessing more communal traits and behaviors such as caring and nurturing others opposed to men who are often described as strong, assertive and powerful. The latter traits of assertion and power are often viewed as salient and synonymous with successful leadership capacity, although the ability to form positive connections and maintain strong relationships are valued as positive characteristics of women (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristkari, 2011). Regardless of the positive perceptions surrounding communal traits, women continue to suffer gender bias and discrimination when applying for upper-level leadership positions (Heilman, 2012).

Undoubtedly, gender stereotypes exist that can impede career progress and cultivate discriminatory practices in hiring and promotion decisions. Heilman (2012) provided a meta-analysis of literature regarding gender stereotypes. Based on the review of the literature, gender stereotypes are defined as either descriptive or prescriptive. “Descriptive gender stereotypes designate what women and men *are* like. Prescriptive gender stereotypes designate what women and men *should be* like” (Heilman, 2012, p. 114). Gender characteristics are categorized as male or female dominated. Both categories of stereotypes provide an immediate decision making venue for reviewers to consider the leadership behaviors of a certain leader and promotes formation of first impressions based on expected results. Male dominated or agentic characteristics include attributes such as “achievement-orientation (e.g., competent, ambitious, task-focused), inclination to take charge (assertive, dominant, forceful), autonomy (e.g., independent, self-reliant, decisive) and rationality (e.g., analytical, logical, objective)” (Heilman, 2012, p. 115). Conversely, female attributes are slated as more communal in nature. “Communality, on the other hand, has come to denote concern for others (e.g., kind, caring, considerate), affiliative tendencies (e.g., warm, friendly, collaborative), deference (e.g., obedient, respectful, self-effacing) and emotional sensitivity (e.g., perceptive, intuitive, understanding)” (Heilman, 2012, p. 115).

According to Heilman (2012), such descriptive stereotypes can promote a positive view of women in day-to-day collegial relationships, enhancing her ability to form necessary connections to others in the institution. However, in women attempting to ascend in leadership, such biases can serve as detrimental to women’s advancement by creating a lack of fit perception. In the lack of fit model, three main precepts arise that

impact women in leadership or ascending to a leadership role. Precepts of *attention*, *interpretation* and *recall* can contribute to a form of “cognitive distortion” (p. 116) for evaluators that may negatively impact women advancing in leadership.

According to Heilman (2012), *attention* can be averted from *what is* to what is expected from a certain social group. Thus, preconceived notions of attributes and characteristics can shape the metrics by which evaluators form perceptions of behavior and leadership success. The element of *interpretation* is the assignment of *meaning* associated with certain behaviors. The assignment of meaning, regardless of clarification or attention given to misconceptions, leads to preconceived ideas about behaviors based on gender. For example, the same leadership behavior or response may be interpreted very differently depending on the gender exhibiting that action. Lastly, the precept of *recall* indicates that expectations are recalled more readily than actual behaviors contributing to the possibility of misguided evaluations and unfair decisions in promotion. “Biased expectations lead to biased evaluations, and these in turn become the basis of organizational decision making. The consequences can be damaging for upwardly mobile women” (Heilman, 2012, p. 117).

Throughout the literature, stereotypes of gender-specific leadership styles are apparent. Dunn, Gerlach and Hyle (2014), interviewed three female leaders serving in higher education leadership positions. During the study, the women shared their personal experiences and insights regarding perceptions and experiences of women in higher education leadership. The study emphasized the reality that effective leadership is often defined in terms of masculine influence and expectation and is not consistent with the leadership approach often exerted by female administrators. Relying heavily on reflection

and past experiences, female leaders indicated a calling for leadership due to their passion for higher education and a personal desire and commitment to influence positive change for those they serve. Through honest self-appraisal, the women in the study dispelled several myths regarding female leadership styles by emphasizing the importance of knowing one's self, reflecting on one's purpose for serving in administration, committing to achievement of work-life balance, creating strong networks for success, and ensuring adequate funding and resources for operations. Interestingly, the interviews discredited the notion that female leaders in higher education may lose their interpersonal edge in a male-dominated world of leadership. To the contrary, each consistently defined their own personal successes by the successes of those they lead and managed to achieve positive outcomes in leadership without functioning in the male-centric standard of practice and approach.

Dunn, Gerlach and Hyle (2014) focus on the assertion that women are often measured for leadership tendency based on the historically male-centric standard. Given the opportunity to express their sincere reasons for seeking leadership, these women consistently expressed a commitment to interpersonal connections, relationships, and sound business management. In essence, women do not lead like men or lead based on how men think they should lead. Instead, they maximize their own talents and function with the intent to lead successfully based on both the human factor and the corporate factor. The lived experience of women who have ascended in leadership and who have stayed true to their own convictions when rising and leading, reflects the balance that women can maintain between professional commitment and personal demands which is

sometimes shared in the literature as a major challenge for women who are leading or aspiring to lead.

Gallant (2014) explored the notion of underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership in the context of symbolic interactionism based on the theory's "three core tenets: meaning is central to our behavior, language allows us to negotiate the attributed meanings, and thought modifies our interpretation" (p. 206). Through interviews with eight women who just completed a formal leadership development program, it was determined that women often defined themselves by their relationship with other women and within the social context of higher education norms and expectations for women and their roles. Additionally, the article asserted that colleges often want to replace leaders with similar leaders with which they are familiar and comfortable, limiting the opportunity for diversity of administrative potential that could exist in aspiring women. Recommendations included the support of formal leadership programs for women, but with an emphasis on improving the focus on possible gender inequities and the positive impact of women's awareness of their social connections in higher education leadership. This article supported the common notion that women are not always considered equally by others. But, interestingly, this article also demonstrated that women can sometimes be their own oppressor. Too often, women allow themselves to be pushed into believing they should accept the lesser role, pressuring women to align themselves with other women in a social context, perhaps because of the uncomfortable nature of being a female in a male-centric environment. The potential benefit of these social connections can result in women developing mentoring relationships which are conducive to women ascending in senior leadership trajectories. The path to the top is

often a difficult one for women. Making connections, between women of similar interest, is key to ensuring women are prepared and considered equally regarding leadership capability and are supported to remain resilient and ready for leadership opportunity.

Christman & McClellan (2012) provided a qualitative, comparative study investigating the perceptions of male versus female leaders related to leadership resilience and gender. Within the study, a sample of male and female administrators were surveyed concerning leadership responsiveness based on constructs of gender perception, resiliency and the ability to navigate and overcome barriers in decision making. Overall, results indicated both sexes relied on the flexible use of masculine and feminine traits somewhat in their decision making. Although women participants reflected a more "multi-dimension feminism" (p. 659) emerging within their own leadership style, they continued to sense outside constraints of gender stereotypes and constraints from those around them.

Results of the study indicated that basic, similar leadership behaviors exist in both males and females and that both sexes infuse elements of feminine responses such as relationships and male responses such as autocratic decision making based on the situation (Christman & McCellan, 2012). Both sexes determined this to be a necessary survival tactic for successful leadership execution. Although their study demonstrated similarities in male versus female leadership approaches, the research did not adequately address that those same traits can be perceived differently by followers subjected to those leadership behaviors. Behaviors such as those involved in authoritative decision-making are sometimes perceived as a sign of strength in males, yet can be perceived as pushy or



bossy in females. In this study, results indicated leadership can be similar across genders, but is often perceived differently depending on the gender exhibiting them.

Gender stereotyping and prejudice against women ascending in leadership is not unique to corporate America or American higher education. These injustices are an international challenge. Peterson (2011) conducted a mixed methods study involving Swedish universities and colleges, investigating the movement of women into senior leadership roles. The study interviewed 22 senior female leaders regarding their movement into those senior positions, the impact of the gender mix policy as it influenced their ascension, and the untoward consequences of the gender mix, at the institutional level, on their movement into senior leadership. Participants in the study came from diverse backgrounds and were serving in roles such as Dean, Vice-Chancellor or Chancellor and held various faculty rank from lecturer to full professor. The interviewees provided transcribed interviews regarding their personal movement into administration and the impact of formal governmental gender policies and the informal gender mix policy regarding their upward promotion. Although the interviewees admitted the gender mix policy was not a formal established policy, it served as the unspoken rule in promotion decisions encouraging a mix of 40% on teams and in administrative positions (Peterson, 2011).

Unfortunately, the women interviewed perceived a process by which ultimate authority positions were filled with men and then sub-authoritative positions were then filled with women, providing the balance of gender while keeping women in positions of lesser authority (Peterson, 2011). Also, the women perceived greater workload in the positions perceived as supportive to the male role contributing inadvertently to a culture

of male dominance as barriers still exist in this new mix. "Ultimately, "the gender mix policy might be a necessary condition for reaching quantitative gender equality, but not a sufficient condition to reach qualitative gender equality" (Peterson, 2011, p. 626).

In a qualitative study, Smith, Crittenden, and Caputi (2012), investigated the perceptions of women in Australia regarding the notion of a 'glass ceiling effect' in organizational advancement in higher education. Using the two versions of a new Career Pathways Survey (CPS) instrument (34-item and expanded 38-item), the authors surveyed a total of 550 women (in two samples) and determined that women, overall, perceived gender inequity in women aspiring to major leadership positions, especially in women who decided to have children and balance life and work. Additional barriers identified were typical stereotypes regarding women, excessive scrutiny of women leaders, and the lack of other female leaders to serve as mentors for aspiring female leaders. Overall, the internal consistency of the CPS was reflected and the four factors shaping the women's perceptions of the glass ceilings in higher education leadership were in order of variance: denial, resilience, resignation, and acceptance. Through the resilience and denial domains, women reflected a more positive approach to recognizing the glass ceiling and maneuvering beyond it through specific career opportunities.

On the other hand, results of the scale indicated some women who did not acknowledge and manipulate the glass ceiling responded more heavily in the resignation and acceptance domains of the scale indicating they had resigned themselves to the fact that it existed and chose to avoid engagement in strategies to break through it and overcome it (Smith, Crittenden, & Caputi, 2012). Unfortunately, this article exemplifies the perception that women have regarding the glass ceiling that can impact the ability to

aspire and to achieve and provides insight into the common themes of impediment such as work-life balance and the lack of mentoring from other female leaders. As a result, women differ in their personal perceptions regarding leadership opportunities and leadership barriers. Some recognize the fact that the path of leadership ascension isn't easy and requires proactivity to successfully navigate through barriers. Others resign themselves to the fact that the path is difficult to navigate and choose to remain on the path of least resistance (Smith, Crittenden, & Caputi, 2012).

Although gender inequities are threaded throughout the literature concerning women in higher education, much of the research focuses on women in larger, urban colleges and universities. In a qualitative study conducted in Canada, Wagner (2014) investigated the differences that exist for females and feminist pedagogy and practices in rural colleges and universities compared to that of their urban counterparts. Rurality is defined to contextualize the setting of the study and to reflect the homogenous makeup of the females often found in smaller, rural colleges. Within these rural communities, distinct patterns of traditional practices emerged that are not always receptive to the disruption created by introducing feminist topics into the learning environment. Throughout the study, some resistance was met regarding the willingness of females to admit gender oppression or to embrace feminist ideals, reflecting the inflexibility of rural environments to change and accentuating the limitations of rural environments and residents to broader worldviews.

Although much of the literature supports the notion of a glass ceiling, gender inequity and gender barriers exist exponentially in small, rural environments. Considering the culture difference that exists in rural communities when compared to

larger urban areas, there is a tendency for females to have a greater difficulty when ascending in leadership. Rural communities are small and governed with traditional tenets that promote male dominance, discouraging many women from voicing concerns regarding gender oppression as that is not always culturally accepted in these small communities (Wagner, 2014).

### Gender & Leadership Style

Based on the literature, gender differences exist regarding leadership traits and styles exhibited by higher education leaders. These differences may influence the upward mobility of aspiring female leaders in higher education. Male leaders are more apt to lead with an autocratic style and resist forming engaging relationships with subordinates. The male's focus on "political characteristics – power, shrewdness, aggression" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 351) differs from the female's emphasis on the "people attributes – warmth, support, participation" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 351) of leading. Female leaders tend to gravitate to a collaborative, transformational or transactional leadership style and are perceived as emotionally intelligent and effective by subordinates when applying attributes consistent with these leadership styles and when focusing on achievement of goals and engagement of people (Folta, Seguin, Ackerman, & Nelson, 2012; Rosser, 2003).

Although women may invoke an autocratic style when necessary to lead effectively, this style is not viewed as a positive attribute when compared to its use by male counterparts (Rosser, 2003). But, autocracy can be the preferred leadership style females display when they feel coerced to display to assimilate into an organization as an effective leader (Acker, 2012). Too often, assertive or aggressive leadership is viewed as

overcompensation in women and simultaneously viewed as a sign of strength in men (Perdue, 2017). Such sexism prevents the unbiased consideration of women for personal leadership merit and capacity and prevents the upward ascension to key leadership roles in academe, politics and business and industry.

#### Barriers and Facilitators to Presidential Preparedness and Ascension for Women

Although it is well-established empirically that women do not advance to senior academic leadership positions at the same rate as men and are not compensated equally when compared to men (Magrane, Helitzer, Morahan, Chang, Gleason, Cardinali, & Wu, 2012), questions remain regarding the reasons these inequities exist and the glass ceiling persists. Reasons for this glass ceiling phenomenon relates to female stereotypes and biases that still exist, the challenge of balancing work responsibilities and personal obligations (Bolman & Deal, 2013), and the lack of female leaders in senior administrative positions to serve as mentors although mentoring has been promoted as one of the more effective transformative strategies for leadership development experiences in women (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Grole & Montgomery, 2010).

Women often define themselves by their relationship with other women and within the social context of higher education norms and expectations for women and their roles. Yet, colleges often want to replace leaders with similar leaders, with whom they are comfortable, limiting the opportunity for diversity of administrative potential that could exist in women (Gallant, 2014). Grole and Montgomery (2010) examined the leadership paradigm surrounding women aspiring to major leadership positions in higher education and provided suggestions for women pursuing such advancements. Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, the authors determined several theories related to

(1) potential gender-related barriers women experience when trying to advance, (2) common innate leadership traits and styles for many female leaders, (3) leadership behaviors demonstrated by female leaders, and (4) beneficial opportunities for women seeking advancement in higher education. Unfortunately, gender plays a more significant role in negatively influencing females' advancement than other personal demographics and capabilities.

Longman and Madsen (2014) provide an intense and expansive review of women's leadership in higher education considering the historic plight of women moving into leadership, the demographics and trends regarding women's movement into higher education leadership, an overview of the lived experience of higher education's female leaders, and the barriers and strategies of female leaders in higher education. Women, especially African-American women, are still relatively a small minority of the higher education leadership that exists despite the passage of Title IX several decades ago.

Changing trends in higher education, such as the movement of academe to a more business-model approach, do not bode well for women who historically tend to gravitate to a value and ethics-based leadership approach. Women continue to bring strong interpersonal skills to the leadership workplace, but also continue to face historical barriers of stereotypes, lack of mentoring, male-centrism, ineffective work-life balance and limited opportunities to circulate within the upper leadership domain to gain insight and experience. Such challenges may inadvertently impede the opportunity women have for participation in projects and for consideration for promotions. Strategies to combat these barriers or adversities include seeking legal guidance, building trust and reputation among stakeholders, establishing a strong social, peer-professional network, employing

appropriate delegation, embracing elements of the work environment conducive to female employees and leaders and identifying mentors to help build leadership capacity and competence (Longman & Madsen, 2014; Sandberg, 2015).

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

According to Houser (2018), the guiding principles for qualitative, phenomenological inquiry offers a “systematic approach to understanding the experiences of others” (p. 390) and serves to “gather data that illuminate the meaning of an event or phenomenon” (p. 387). Qualitative design does not establish a predetermined format, rather flows as an emergent process “based on a social construction of reality in which multiple realities are acceptable” (p. 388). Researcher bias is controlled through methods of bracketing, a “means of demonstrating an awareness of the potential assumptions and preconceived notions of the researcher (Houser, 2018, p. 395). Throughout the study, the researcher is required to apply intuition to assist in abandoning pre-conceived notions and focusing on total immersion in the phenomenon being studied, limiting bias and allowing for the essence of the lived experience through extensive interviewing.

#### Trustworthiness

Within qualitative designs, elements of reliability and validity are not considered as significant as establishing study *trustworthiness* through the venues of (1) *credibility*, (2) *transferability*, (3) *dependability*, and (4) *confirmability* (Houser, 2018; Terrell, 2016). According to Terrell (2016), credibility is considered the “equivalent of internal validity in a quantitative study” (p. 173) and is ascertained through various methods such



as “prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer de-briefers, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checking” (p. 174).

Credibility. Triangulation is a beneficial method commonly used by qualitative researchers. Triangulation is a “means of enhancing credibility by cross-checking information and conclusions, using multiple data sources, using multiple research methods or researchers to study the phenomenon, or using multiple theories and perspectives to help interpret data” (Houser, 2018, p. 395). It can be performed through use of focus groups or in-depth interviews and has been demonstrated to lead to enhanced exploration and understanding of the topic explored, as well as greater *trustworthiness* in the results and outcomes of qualitative research (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006).

According to Houser (2018), there are four types of triangulation methods used to help determine a more accurate reflection of the phenomenon under investigation.

*Data source triangulation* involves the use of multiple data sources in the study (e.g. interviewing diverse key informants to give credence to the findings).

*Investigator triangulation* employs more than one person to collect, analyze, or interpret the set of data. *Theory triangulation* involves gaining and using multiple perspectives from other researchers or published literature. *Methods triangulation* entails the use of multiple data collection methods (e.g. interviews, observations, and document review. (p. 395)

Transferability. Another method to help establish trustworthiness in qualitative designs, is transferability. The notion of transferability relates to the transfer of results from one group or situation to another and is achieved through purposive sampling, specification of inclusion and exclusion criteria, and “thick descriptions” (Houser, 2018, p. 394; Terrell, 2016, p. 174). Thick descriptions require in-depth explanations and reflections of actual words. Emphasis is placed on providing extensive details to enhance the readers understanding of the participant responses (Houser, 2018; Terrell, 2016).

Dependability. Dependability is another venue for establishing trustworthiness. The element of dependability relates to the reliability of the study and the possibility of replicating the study. Various tactics can be employed to achieve dependability and include detailing the research methods extensively, facilitating peer reviews, and establishing inter-rater reliability (Houser, 2018).

Confirmability. Lastly, confirmability is achieved when the researcher adequately ensures objectivity and neutrality in the study. This method of helping to ensure trustworthiness results from the researchers control of the study and assurance that the data reflects actual participant results, not unduly influenced by external factors. Confirmability can be achieved through use of audits, bracketing or triangulation (Houser, 2018; Terrell, 2016).

## Study Design

The design of this study was a phenomenological, qualitative approach investigating the lived experience of women ascending to community college presidencies. “Phenomenology does not dictate to phenomena, but rather it wants to understand how phenomena present themselves to consciousness and the elucidation of

this process is a descriptive task” (Giorgi, 2012). Multiple methods of data collection are appropriate for qualitative, phenomenological designs and may include (1) interviewing, (2) focus groups, or (3) observations (Houser, 2018). In-depth interviewing was employed for this study design.

## Methods

The qualitative, phenomenological design was used to ascertain a human phenomenon, a lived experience. Principles of phenomenology to guard against bias, such as bracketing, were applied prior to initiation of the study and continued throughout the study. Throughout the study, the researcher was required to apply intuition to assist in abandoning pre-conceived notions and focusing on total immersion in the phenomenon being studied. Use of intuition allowed the researcher to gain insight into the true meaning of the phenomenon as a holistic experience and not simply a reduction of the phenomenon into separate, individual parts. In this study, participant responses were ascertained through in-depth interviewing and interactions were transcribed into vignettes, allowing for ease of theme identification.

Member checking was employed for the purpose of allowing participants to review interview transcriptions for accuracy and to enhance credibility of findings. All participants were provided a full transcript of their responses and edits were incorporated into the final vignettes, prior to the concluding manuscript analysis and determination of emerging themes.

## Sample

This study was designed to include a purposive, convenience sample of at least 10 women who have served, or who are currently serving, as community college presidents. Participants were selected from female presidents from rural community colleges and one urban community college for comparison purposes. Inclusion criteria included (1) female gender, (2) age greater than 18 years, (3) at least one year's experience serving as a community college president, preferably in a rural community, (4) English-speaking, and (5) willingness to participate in an extensive interview process either by phone or in-person. The only exclusion criterion established included presidents who had served as interim status versus full-time related to the normal circumstance that interims are appointed, rather than selected following some type of career ascension pathway. The study included only the female gender related to the objective of the study to investigate the experiences of women in leadership. Demographically, the women varied in experience, ethnicity and geographical area. See Table 1 – Participant Profile.

## Data Collection

Initially, the prospectus proposal was submitted to a dissertation review committee for approval. Once committee approval was received, the prospectus was submitted to the Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. No study methods were employed until IRB approval was received. After approval was received, research procedures began with identification of potential participants. Participants were identified from employee directories and national organizations such as the American Association of Women in Community Colleges.

Additionally, participants were identified through referrals of consenting participants. After participants were identified, an initial email or telephone contact was made with each potential participant until the sample size of 10 was achieved.

With the initial contact, participants were provided a consent form articulating an overview of the research study and a full description of the research procedures, including description of the 60 – 90-minute interview requirement. See Appendix A – ECU Informed Consent Form. To establish trust and build rapport, participants were provided an introduction of the study’s principal investigator within the consent and were assured participant anonymity. Potential participants were asked to sign and return a digital copy of an informed consent document from the ECU IRB prior to collection of any interview data. The informed consent contained a permissive statement allowing the recording of interviews. Only the principal investigator (researcher) was permitted to obtain informed consent. No additional personnel were involved in the study. Participants were not restricted from garnering support from their own assistive personnel to transmit documents and schedule interviews related to the study. Several participants chose to involve their personal assistants in the process.

Once informed consent was obtained, a mutually-agreed upon date for the interview was established with each participant. During the interview sessions, the researcher established rapport with each participant. Prior to beginning the actual interview, using the actual interview questionnaire, participants were thanked for their participation. General demographic data garnered through biographies or interview responses included:

- current position title
- past presidential titles
- years serving in a community college presidential role
- educational background/credentials
- previous administrative titles prior to becoming a community college president

This demographic data was used for data analysis purposes only. After collection of demographic data, each participant was assigned a unique identifier such as P-1, P-2 to help protect anonymity. The interview was conducted using an EKU-approved list of interview questions, guided by a script modified from Delmont (2016).

Once the interviews were completed, the researcher listened to the recorded interviews repeatedly to ensure accurate transcription. The researcher manually transcribed all participants' responses obtained during the interview process. No transcription software was employed. Member checking was utilized to allow participants to review personal responses for accuracy. The few minor edits received from member checking were incorporated into the final transcriptions for each interview. The researcher listened to the interview recordings at least three times and took notes during these reviews. Finalized interview responses were analyzed and separated into common themes as they emerged from the typed responses and audio recordings. As common themes emerged, they were separated into the study findings.

#### Data Analysis

Results were reviewed by the researcher and an expert reader, who is prepared at the doctoral level, to accurately identify developing themes. Thematic interpretation is

common practice in phenomenological research aimed at garnering the actual lived experience of participants, without bias or influence. Expert reader reviews of the study and the research findings improve the trustworthiness of the study by inter-rater reliability (Houser, 2018). Member checking was employed to affirm accuracy of the findings. The process of member checking allows participants to review research transcripts to validate the accuracy of the report and to clarify any misconstructions within the study findings (Houser, 2018; Terrell, 2016).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS/FINDINGS

To reiterate, the purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experience of females who have ascended to rural community college presidencies and to attempt to answer the sub-questions:

Sub-questions:

1. What are the barriers to achieving a community college presidency for aspiring women, identified by sitting presidents or past presidents?
2. What are the facilitators for achieving a community college presidency for women, identified by sitting presidents or past presidents?
3. What is the impact or relevancy of gender for women who have achieved a community college presidency?
4. What is the value of mentoring and networking for women who have achieved a community college presidency?
5. What are the prominent leadership styles, traits or prominent leadership behaviors of women who have achieved a community college presidency?
6. How would sitting female presidents want to define their leadership legacy?

Conducting extensive interviewing, women who were currently serving as presidents of community colleges or had served as presidents of community colleges were able to provide rich reflections of their ascension to the presidency. Through intense review and analysis of participant responses, the main research question and the



majority of the sub-questions were answered regarding the lived experience for women who ascended to a rural community college presidency in the 21st century.

Interviews were conducted with ten community college presidents, nine rural and one urban for comparison. The participants included women from Eastern Central, Northeast, Midwest, mid-Atlantic, and Heartland regions (see Table 1). Multiple ethnicities were represented. Using semi-structured interviews, data was collected using an established interview questionnaire, while providing open response and summation opportunities to maximize honest reflection and divulgence of personal lived experience. See Appendix B – Interview.

Questionnaire. As a result of the interviews six themes emerged: (1) journey of ascension, (2) authenticity and the good fit, (3) networking and mentoring, (4) balance and gender implications, (5) mobility and geographical binding, and (6) rurality and visibility.

Interestingly, several participants began careers in corporate America and did not envision themselves in higher education, especially in the presidential role. Once entering the post-secondary environment, all participants described significantly rich and diverse backgrounds in higher education, reflecting expansive experience in a myriad of service areas, including student affairs, academic affairs, institutional effectiveness, marketing, recruitment, and human resources. Several of the participants are currently serving as presidents, while others have served in presidential roles and advanced to other leadership positions in higher education.

Table 1

## Participant Profiles and Demographics

Participant Code	Credentials	Past Titles	Years in Presidential Role	Region
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor in Radio and Television Broadcasting</li> <li>Masters in Organizational Communication</li> <li>EdD in Education Policy and Evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faculty</li> <li>Division Chair</li> <li>Associate Dean</li> <li>Academic Extensions</li> <li>Dean of Academic Affairs</li> <li>Chief Academic Officer</li> </ul>	1	Eastern Central
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor of Arts (Advertising &amp; Communication)</li> <li>Master's in Business Administration (Accounting)</li> <li>Doctorate of Higher Education Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faculty</li> <li>Director of College &amp; Community Relations</li> <li>Executive Director of Marketing &amp; Recruitment</li> <li>Associate Vice Chancellor</li> <li>Vice Chancellor</li> </ul>	4	Northeast
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor of Science (English and Speech)</li> <li>Masters of Science (Student Affairs and Higher Education)</li> <li>Doctor of Education (Community College and Higher Education)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faculty</li> <li>Director of Student Activities</li> <li>Dean of Student Development</li> <li>Associate Vice Chancellor</li> <li>Vice President, Student Development</li> <li>Executive Assistant to the Chancellor for Special Projects</li> </ul>	8	Eastern Central
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor of Science (Radio, Television, Film)</li> <li>Masters of Education (Counseling)</li> <li>PhD (Childhood Development)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faculty</li> <li>Senior Vice President for Student Services</li> <li>Vice President of Student Affairs</li> </ul>	4	Midwest
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor of Arts (Economics and History)</li> <li>Master's in Business Administration (Marketing)</li> <li>Doctorate of Business Administration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faculty</li> <li>Vice President of Academic Services</li> <li>Vice President of Administrative Services</li> <li>Dean of Human Resources</li> <li>Director of Institutional Research</li> <li>Previous Community College President</li> </ul>	1	Heartland
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor of Arts (English)</li> <li>Master of Education</li> <li>Master of Arts (English Literature)</li> <li>Doctorate of Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faculty</li> <li>Division Dean</li> <li>Associate Dean</li> <li>Vice President of Academic Affairs</li> </ul>	3	Mid-Atlantic
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Associate of Arts</li> <li>Associate of Science</li> <li>Bachelor of Science</li> <li>Masters of Arts (Education Administration)</li> <li>Doctorate of Education, (Higher Education Administration - Community College Leadership)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faculty</li> <li>Associate Dean for Continuing Education and Workforce Development</li> <li>Dean of College Centers and Workforce Development and Continuing Education</li> </ul>	1	Eastern Central
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor in Business Administration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faculty</li> </ul>	2	Eastern Central

Table 1 (cont)

Participant Code	Credentials	Past Titles	Years in Presidential Role	Region
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Master's in Business Administration</li> <li>• PhD in Community College Leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director of Financial Aid</li> <li>• Workforce Dean</li> <li>• Dean of the Technical Campus</li> </ul>		
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bachelor of Science (Agriculture)</li> <li>• Master's degree (Higher Education Leadership)</li> <li>• PhD (Educational Leadership)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty</li> <li>• Chief Academic Officer</li> <li>• Previous Community College Vice President</li> <li>• Previous Community College President (Interim)</li> <li>• Previous Community College President</li> </ul>	8	Eastern Central
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Master's in Higher Education</li> <li>• Doctorate (Educational Psychology)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provost / Chief Academic Officer</li> <li>• Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs</li> <li>• Dean of Academic and Student Support Services</li> <li>• Associate Director of the Office of Board Affairs and Government Relations</li> </ul>	1	Mid-Atlantic

The six themes identified were determined as a result of the participants' extensive responses related to their personal journey of ascension, the requisite of being authentic and pursuing the good fit when considering a presidency, the necessity of supporting other women through networking and mentoring, the importance of work-life balance and the implications of female gender, the impact of being mobile when pursuing a presidency and the considerations of rurality as a leader. The themes and supporting interview *excerpts* reflect a rich description of each leader's vantage point.

### Participant Vignettes

#### Participant One

Theme: Journey of Ascension

*Because what happened when I stepped into the office the first time, the Academic Officer position the first time, I said to myself doors of opportunity continue to open for me at this institution in education. This is not what I chose for myself but, apparently, this has been chosen for me. However, if I want to go any further I'm going to have to have the doctorate.*

*I for the most part, you know, it was the traditional route: Faculty – Chair – Associate Dean – Dean – Academic Officer. And this last time I served as Academic Officer, our President got an opportunity to serve elsewhere and I had to make up my mind at that point and time if I was going to apply for the position. And, after talking to my husband and a few others, I decided to do that. And, of course, was selected by the Board.*

*If anyone had told me that I would be in education, you know I would just not have believed it. As I mentioned, radio/TV broadcasting, I was supposed to be the next Oprah in my mind. But that was really what my goal was initially. It was my fourth year, well going into my senior year. I just decided that, you know, because I was getting more into, you know, reporting and all that good stuff, it's just not in my personality to stick a microphone in someone's face and ask them how they feel after a tragedy just for ratings. But, I didn't want to put my parents through that 5<sup>th</sup> year, so I went ahead and finished. I worked in our local hospital in marketing and, for a little bit, in PR. I worked a couple of years. That's when this position at the college opened up and I applied and received it and have been at the college ever since. I can remember them telling me when I arrived and moved more so into the faculty area, you know, hold onto everything because you are going to have to present a portfolio as you go up for promotion as you go up for tenure in about 6 years. And I said to myself, huh ok, and thank you but I don't plan on being here past a couple of years, because when you apply for positions, it always said you have to have the degree and two to three years of experience. So, my perspective I was simply here to get job experience so I could move to do whatever it is I had planned to do. But I will tell you, the reason I wanted to be the next Oprah, was I wanted to impact. I wanted my life to be meaningful. I wanted to be able to help other people and that's the way I saw her, you know, at that time. And what is so amazing to me is that, that part of my dream is or has come true.*

*Learn everything you can where you are. I promise you, it is preparation for where you are going. It's important for you to map out where you want to go. Set your goals and then prepare yourself to get there. But, I promise you, that what you are doing now is preparation for what you are going to do, even if it does not initially appear that way.*

*It is important for women to think about where they are and to learn everything they can learn. That is going to be important. Then, I think it is important to begin to prepare yourself, know as much about where you want to go as you possibly can and begin to prepare yourself that way.*

Theme: Authenticity / Good Fit

*Let me share this, one of the reasons I never saw myself in this position is because, and I didn't realize this until I started working on my doctorate. Even though I had studied a little bit about leadership before. I ascribed to the great man theory of leadership. In my mind, even though I knew there were other types of leadership, in my mind, the best leaders were the ones who had all of the answers. You know, they were visionary; they*

*were prepared as you mentioned earlier. I just did not see myself that way. I knew I didn't know all the answers. I equated that as not being smart enough to be a leader. I needed for other people to, you know, tell me the direction I needed to go in. That was something I really had to overcome. That was learning more about who I am and being comfortable with that.*

*It took me a little bit of time to realize it's ok that I am not what I keep seeing in others. That's ok. That's not who I am. So, I have to learn to be comfortable with who I am. So, I had to work on myself to develop both personally and professionally, to become as knowledgeable as I could, learn more about me, and learn to accept me. So, I think that has been the biggest thing that personal growth, as well as the professional growth. I read and I listened to podcasts. I attended various sessions at conferences and workshops and you know John Maxwell and various others who are experts on leadership. You know I read their writings and just in reading and really beginning to pay attention to what I was doing, I learned to accept that you know, their writings were true. There are different types of leaders. And just became more comfortable with who I am. So, that's the biggest thing I think in terms of the preparation. I again have to say, realizing who I am... that is so powerful because authenticity is so important. And, I have to be my authentic self. I can't do that if I (a) don't know who I am or (b) am not comfortable with who I am.*

*Just a quick example, in moving into this office, I you know, I think am a simple person. So, not trying to incur any additional expense or anything, we did have it painted, we did a couple of things like that. But, for the most part, I left everything pretty much like it was until I realized this is just not working for me. My assistant helped me to do that. And so we moved some things around. We made some, not expensive changes, they were very inexpensive changes. Our maintenance department was able to get them done. But, now the office suites me and my way of doing things. I bring that example before you*

*because that's the way I tried to operate, I think, I don't think; that's the way I tried to operate in the past. The examples set before me they were all men for the most part, with the exception, of one. You know, so I was trying to walk in the path that I thought they laid out. And true, it was a path that they had walked on as well. But I had to realize that I couldn't walk it the same way. So, just being my authentic self has been the best things I could do, not only for me, but for this institution.*

*I am an individual. I do not like negatively. I understand that life is not always peachy keen and hunky dory. We do face challenges, but I try very hard to look at them from the positive perspective. I believe it is important for us to encourage and affirm each other and so that's the approach that I bring to my leadership. And, not that the others did not, it's just that is so huge for me. Let's talk about solutions. Bring me the problem, I get that. But, how do we come out of this. We had a situation that occurred at the top of leadership here and the way that was handled really opened my eyes to remind me that people are human and fallible. But also the way we respond to various situations, to*

*questions, to concerns to complaints, um, can make a difference. Our willingness to listen and to truly understand what another individual is going through.*

*It can really make a difference. I saw where a leader from my perspective did not do that; did not fully understand and their actions, and as a result, things just went south quickly because of the response. Because that individual did not understand, how their action impacted another individual and did not respond with any type of empathy. You know that just caused things to go south and as a result we ended up with new leadership and it didn't have to be I believe. But, that taught me a big lesson. And then I suppose, this one just came to mind and perhaps it's a little bit better, maybe on a smaller scale and it really did have an impact on me. I remember a division chair sent me an email. He was disappointed in my response to a faculty member who had lost; he had a friend who also taught for us. Something happened and the friend was no longer going to be able to teach for us. My response was just matter of fact. I am embarrassed to really say this; maybe embarrassed is not the right word. I am ashamed to really say this. But, I had had several encounters with this individual and was at the end of my rope. I didn't know what else to do. Because it seemed like every time I tried to provide what seemed like the truthful explanation for my decisions, I was always questioned and accused of not being truthful and forthright. And this particular day I had just had it. When the faculty member emailed about something I just said, "yes that's just the way it is" and I moved on. And the Chair basically said I was disappointed in your response and my comment was "why". I answered his question but there was not empathy in it for the most part. This was something this individual was really heart-broken over and you didn't acknowledge that heart break and didn't acknowledge what that individual was going through. So that taught me a lesson to really, again, read between the line and try to understand what the individual is going through and to respond appropriately, acknowledging. In fact, I am getting ready to write a response to a complaint that I got from a formed student. It's a 6-letter, I mean 6-page letter complaint, where he detailed and there are various topics. You should see this letter. It is beautifully written. But one of the things I say as I was drafting a response, was I wanted to let him know that I received his evaluation of our program and as well as his letter of concern that he delivered to our college. I wanted to...I basically said I can tell from the descriptive language and the details that you have shared that you have put a lot of thought in drafting the response and you know your full explanation of your concerns and I go on to tell him I'm going to be working with my Cabinet to see what we can do. But I want to acknowledge. This man has put all of this energy and effort into writing me 6 pages, and telling me topic-by-topic you know what was wrong from his perspective so you know I want to try not to address each complaint, I think that is going to be way too much. Besides some of it I am not going to be able to. But to acknowledge the fact that this is serious to him and I'm sorry that his experience was not as positive as he would have liked for it to have been and that is should have been. But, I assure him that I am listening to him and working with the program coordinator as well as the Cabinet member to see what we should do to bring change. So, you know those kinds of things. Just to try to understand where the individual is coming from and to respond appropriately. I think that has really helped me.*

*I think it is critically important to identify someone that you can connect with that is where you are trying to go.*

Theme: Networking / Mentoring

*People poured into me and invested in me and I certainly want to do the same. That's why I responded to you. I was there. I needed to interview people. I needed to talk to people. I needed to conduct my research. People were there for me. I want to make sure I am doing what I can to assist others. I believe a life of service is the life best lived. And, if there is a way that I can serve someone else, I want to do that. I do currently mentor a couple of young ladies here. I cannot tell you, I think because I am an African-American female, I have had several phone calls of people who have just reached out to me to ask me my story, to ask me how I got, from my perspective, how I got to where I am. To ask me to look over resumes or listen to what their thoughts and their plans are, asking do I think they are on track. Sometimes it's just a phone call. Sometimes when they cross my mind, I try to email them, just to say "I'm thinking about you. Just a reminder that I'm here." There's a young lady here that reminds me of me. People go to her. She has a natural leadership, she's like a natural leader. She keeps finding herself overseeing projects and grants and things. So, I am kind of pulled her under and said "what are your thoughts and your plans. What do you see yourself doing? What do we need to be doing? What is it that you need to be working on from your perspective." I call her into the office from time to time just to check on her and to see how things are going. Because I know that it is so important...I want her to know that I see great potential in her and it's important for her to prepare herself if she believes, whether or not she stays here, or whatever she chooses to do, the preparation piece is so important. If I can be a part of that then I certainly want to be. It is so important for us to connect with people who have already been where we are trying to go. And I think it is equally as important to help people get to where we are, those people that aspire to be where we are...to help them to do that.*

*I think that is so important to try to connect with someone who is where you are trying to go. And, I would even say, you know, preferably another woman but I wouldn't necessarily limit myself to that. When I first arrived here, some of my best mentors were male.*

*I think that is important, preparing yourself, learning all you can where you are now and seeking out someone that can assist you; just answering questions, helping to guide you. I think that is very important.*

*As much as possible, shadowing or finding out as much as you can, from your president or from others, a little bit about the position, if there is an opportunity for you to go to some meetings, I think that is important to do.*

Theme: Achieving Balance / Gender Implication

*It is still, in many ways, it is still a man's world. We tend to lean that way. When I applied for this presidency it was me and two other men. We were the 3 finalists. And, the gentleman that dropped off the letter this morning, I am dressed...I have on a pair of black slacks. I have on a blue top. I am kind of dressed casually this morning. I had some tours to do. I am still neat and clean and all that, but I don't have on a suit, I guess, is what I am trying to say. I do have my nametag on. But when he came, when he walked through the door, I was getting ready to head out of the door, I said, "good morning." I could tell from his look; he wasn't sure where he needed to be or whatever. I said, "may I help you?" and he said, "do you sort the mail?" I said, "no, sir, I don't, but how can I help you. He said, "I need this put in campus mail". I said "well, let's walk over this way." So I walked over to our campus mail area. I reached out my hand for him to give me the letter. I was looking for the department that this was to go to. Because this department is in a different building, they didn't have...with the mailboxes, they didn't have that department listed; they had the building. So I couldn't readily find it. He said, "well she works in workforce". I said, "yes, thank you. I am aware. It just took me a minute to figure out which building." So his approach to me, his approach to me was...this is my perception.... his approach to me was different than if I had been a male. And, I saw it on different occasions when I traveled with previous presidents. We talked a little bit about the fact that, when I first came on board, that people were still calling me by my first name which I didn't have a problem with. But, other women pointed out, that when other presidents have been it has immediately been Dr. so and so. And, so, I don't know how much of that is the lens that we are looking through that we realize those kinds of things. I just think that, unfortunately, for us, if you will, that male figure is still dominant and, many ways, preferred even with women, because that is what they know and have grown accustomed to. And I do think women could be a lot like I was in some cases, not really confident in their ability to actually perform the job; or, actually, maybe, thinking they could, but a little fearful in stepping out to actually see. I think there could be a number of variables. On one hand, you have that preferred or sticking with the way it's always been. Then on our part, getting over some fears and some insecurities and stepping out. You know one of the things my mom told me...I've been in so many meetings where people say stuff and you just want to turn around and say, "did that really just come out of your mouth?" You know when I would tell her, "I just told her I didn't want to say something wrong and she said, "honey you won't be the first one." I can't tell you how many meetings all of us have been to and sometimes people just want to say that they contributed or make themselves think they know something and want to share with somebody else. And it's just as crazy and dumb as what you might say, but the only difference is that they are bold enough to say it. And, so, we just need to get a little more of that in us. Some of us are there and some of us have not quite gotten there. I think those are some of the factors. I went my first week to an open house for one of our industries. They were offering tours. I couldn't take the tour because I was wearing sandals. I was wearing sandals because I had just gotten a pedicure. And I made the comment, "this is a problem that a male president would not have." You know it's those little things, in some cases that really point out those differences between us. In some ways, it's easier for them.*



*In the first meeting for a new building, the expansion piece of another building, I walked into the room....as I mentioned earlier I try to speak to everyone.....I am coming into your presence now and I am going to, at least, say hello. And so I walked into the room, granted these two gentlemen were talking and I didn't necessarily want to interrupt them, but I just said, hello. Of course they paid me no attention. So, I continued to go around the room and some I was able to converse with others not so much. So, I took a seat and I don't typically sit at the head of the table. I just sit at the table. So I was down on the far end and they said, we are going to start with introductions. And, everybody was introducing themselves. The contractor here, the general manager there...and so on.*

*When it came to me, I said, I am Dr. so and so, President. And I didn't say anything else. And someone said, so that's all huh? And someone else spoke up and said, that is all she needs to say. She is the decision-maker. I said nothing else. But, the face of the matter was I walked into the room, I was trying to greet everyone, not necessarily as the president; but you are on our campus. You are welcoming you to our campus and all that good stuff. But it was just this room full of testosterone. I just simply sat down and said all I thought needed to be said, president. From that moment on, when the conversations were held, they began to look my way. And so it's those kinds of things that we have to deal with just in using...it's important for us to use as much wisdom as we possibly can, and patience...just realizing you can fight a battle and even win sometimes without being loud and disrespectful.*

Theme: Rurality

*I think, we are supposed to naturally be nurturers; that nurturing, encouraging piece is so important. In the rural area, it tends to be small. We tend to know everyone or have seen them for the most part.*

## Participant Vignettes

### Participant Two

Theme: Journey of Ascension

*I started out in actually the private sector, I started out in banking. I was a product manager for a manufacturing company. Then I went into higher ed. When I went into higher ed, at that point, it was really the only way to go through to become a president was to go up the academic side. Because I was more business and student, I really never even thought I would be a president, because nobody who really had my background was a President.*

*I started out in a community college as the director of marketing and communications. Then that was before enrollment management came to be. So, as that started to develop into a discipline, they added recruitment and admissions to my purview and then I started*

*taking on enrollment management tasks. Then I moved to another college and did marketing communications and then assumed all of the student services enrollment management piece. And then I moved to another city in that same job, then Vice Chancellor. Both were multi-campus, large institutions. Now I am at my current institution as the President.*

*Get experience in as many areas as possible. You can speak to that experience and fall back on that experience. You don't have to be an expert in everything but you have to know enough to be able to ask the pertinent questions and to get to the bottom of things.*

Theme: Authenticity / Good Fit

*So, I'll just say one more thing...Not just for this position, but for every position I have ever applied for. I don't just apply for positions just because of the title. So, I'm always...probably said this a million times...it's about fit. I try to figure out what positions have what I can offer and I feel like I can make a difference. Those are the positions I apply for. Not everybody is a fit everywhere at any given time. It is time-based as well. So, that's also how I tried to prepare myself before I interview for positions. That's what I did for this position. When I did my research on the institution, it just seems like what they needed was what I was also good at. I also try to make sure, when I got this position, I tried to hire people who were different than me, who had a different skillset than me and different ways of thinking about things so that could balance me out. Surrounding yourself with people just like you are is a self-fulfilling prophecy.*

*I don't know if this would just be for women...I believe, in general; just be yourself. I tell people, if I don't know something, I'll get back to them. I will admit when I am wrong and tell them what I am doing to correct it.*

*I think what I said in the beginning about making sure that it's always a good fit, so whether that is what you can offer the institution. It's also a timing issue and whether, culturally, you fit. Just because they are looking for X and you have Y doesn't mean you are a failure. It just means you are not a fit there at that time. There are a lot of positions out there so keep doing research upfront before you apply to try to determine where you could be the best fit.*

*Get experience where you can and don't ask for more money and all that kind of stuff, just take it as the gift it is...you are gaining experience and interview for the job you are going for and do your homework to make sure you are a good fit.*

*I wish I could go back and tell my younger self that it's ok to not do it all really, really well. You always want to strive to do your best. The one good thing about getting older is that it is really liberating. It is ok being yourself and owning that; giving people permission to speak to you frankly and to tell you what they are thinking. I think about the rural experience I think I mentioned to you before, is not to impose what I believe to be the case upon this institution of anybody, but to have them tell me. I'm the one who*

*has moved in and has to fit into the environment. Now, that doesn't mean we can't change the culture to meet the needs of our students. But we don't change the culture to meet my needs.*

Theme: Networking / Mentoring

*I have been so blessed. Truly, I don't even...I feel like I have to pay it forward every day. I have had people who believed in me as I mentioned before and have challenged me and supported me even when I screwed up. They have seen it as a learning opportunity and have supported me in that journey. You know I have worked for some doozies as has everybody, but I think you learn as much, or more, from that experience as from any, as you learn what not to do. I have still today a mentor that brought me into higher ed and he is still...will pick up the phone when I call...answer emails...just say hey this is what I am thinking or what I would do and I have to kind of think whether that makes sense for me because we are all different people. But I think again it has made me pay it forward...So, if somebody reaches out to me I try to help in any way I can because I feel like people have lifted me up. I also feel like I worked for a female Chancellor only once in my career which is kind of interesting in itself. And she retired when I was at the institution, and then I ended up getting a mailbox. I said to her my mother who is 74, it's only because of women like yourself that I am even in the position to be able to work it is only because of women like yourself that I am even able to be in the position I am working for you. I am grateful that you paid that price. It wasn't as easy for me...as the path is for me. People just kind of seeing things in you and kind of nurturing that....and still having people help and support me every day. I do feel like there is a number of people I could reach out to and they would be there for me and I am grateful for that.*

*If women reach out to me and they are struggling I always say moving up is not necessarily where everybody should be. You have to find what makes sense for you in life. But if you like to I'm happy to help. One of the VPs here now worked for me in my previous role and she applied here and you know she has small children. She was pregnant with her second child when I hired her in her previous job. We talk about the challenges of being a working mother and wife and all of that. I try to give her space to be a mother and a wife and not have to choose. If your kid is sick and you need to go get your kid, that is what you need to do and we will cover for you here. It should not be a choice you have to make between work and your family. If you want to have all of those things then you should have someone like me, a supervisor or someone who gives you space to do that. Because you will be happier and your kids will be happier. If she walked in here tomorrow and I'm quitting and I want to stay home with my kids, I would say you're going to be the best damn stay-at-home mom you can be and I am totally fine with that too. If you ever want to enter the workforce again, call me; the door is open. Stay in touch. There's no judgement.*

Theme: Achieving Balance / Gender Implication

*I don't try to operate like a man and I don't make any excuses if I have emotions. I just left a retirement party for a woman that has been here 43 years and I just spoke at her*

retirement party. I got choked up; I got tears in my eyes. They may not be something a man would or would not do; I don't know. But I'm not going to apologize for it. I felt like it was an emotional moment. She's a great employee and person and I wanted her to know that. So, I got emotional. Now that's not to say that I cry at everything. I cry when it is important to me. I'm not going to be apologetic about it. If someone wants to say that is because we have a female president, well ok....and...moving right along, right? They're just not going to make me feel bad about being me. I am honest, hard-working ethical and transparent and I'm fair. I'm also wrong. I am a work in progress, I am a wife and mother and president. All of those can be happening at the same time. So, I embrace that in other people. I don't compare myself to other people. I wish the best for all. I think that women should be ok being who they are and being a woman is just fine.

Again, I have tried to build relationships outside in this community and I can just be me. That means I can be really good at my job, or try...again, I'm wrong every day. I try to do things always for the right reason. I admit when I'm wrong. I am super-honest. I think people start to see who you are as a person. The gender roles tend to fade. But, I'm also not super-sensitive. I've got some folks who sit on the college board or the foundation board who are in their 80s. They will call me 'hun'. It doesn't bother me because I also know they have been extremely supportive of what I'm trying to achieve and they believe in what we are trying to do so I just don't get really super-sensitive about any of that. You know, again, if we are doing the right thing for the right reason and we're telling folks why and how and what...then I hope that's going to be good enough.

I've had men...gosh just a recent example of a man...basically looked at a president's job where he believed they would pay him what he believed he needed to be paid. That really was his criteria. It didn't verbalize it, but it was very obvious. It wasn't about fit; it wasn't about the college; it wasn't what he thought he could do at the college; whether he thought he could be successful. It was literally about money. I have also known men who wanted to be the highest paid, right. So, I have a philosophy about that...when a board pays you a lot of money relative to others in the state or that region, they may be ok with it in the beginning...they are constantly looking for you to prove yourself in a way that is above what is required of other people who would get paid along the same lines. I think as a long-term strategy that doesn't bode well. I just think in the back of their minds, in the back of some board members' minds...Is that person really worth that?

I will never be the highest paid. I wouldn't want to and I would actually say no. I wouldn't want people ever doubting and having that little inkling for nothing other than the fact that they paid me more than anyone else. I think there's resentment too. The one gentleman I am thinking of negotiated this crazy salary. There was always some resentment going on with the board members. Even though they said yes I think they didn't think they could say no.

When I came here. I tell you...I was like the only woman. I am surprised that they hired me because it didn't go over very well. Again, I'm so...honestly I look back and thought damn I'd be better if I was naïve. Because, I wasn't even aware that this existed in the country anymore. There was a group of men who was in the kind of boys' club and that

*is what they called themselves with the former president. The president retired and they hired me and the rest of these guys were here. I was getting word that they were making fun of me essentially, calling me Tuesday/Wednesday. Saying things like...I have a couch in the office and I won't even start one day in that office with a couch. I said it has to go. Now if I were a man I would never have said that. As the first female president, I said not one day will I work with a couch. So then there were jokes going around, like why doesn't she want that couch in there. Is that how she got this job, all kinds of crazy stuff. You know what? That's ok. When opportunities came up, they wanted those. I had to say to them...Here is what I am looking for...people who are a member of a team and who doesn't put themselves first, don't have an agenda, who can work collaboratively and you haven't demonstrated any of that. In the past they basically just got positions because of who they were. I never brought up a single, solitary time what I heard, what I thought they did. I just stuck to the skillsets that I was looking for and how I had not seen evidence of them demonstrating those skillsets. So, if they wanted to be considered for the positions here's what they needed to showcase.*

*Over time, many of them left. Obviously, that's fine. What is started to do...the people who worked for them started coming forward; felt empowered to say these people have been doing this and this...Honestly some of it was illegal activity and some of it was bullying and other things. None of that is pleasant. All of it has been addressed immediately and investigated. The one encouraging thing in all of that is that people felt safe enough now to step forward and to end the years and years of having it be whatever the select few at the top thought they wanted to do. That's regardless of gender really; it just speaks to people. None of that lines up with who I am as a person and what we want this institution to be. It's changed now. Just by happenstance, we have an equal amount of men and women executives here and that is the first time in history. But again, it wasn't necessarily by design on gender, it was strictly the exactly what skillsets I needed on positions and I wanted everybody to be different from one another. That does kind of lend itself to having gender equality as well.*

*I think in addition to all of the things I shared before like competencies and good fit and all of that, is there...for instance, I asked the search firm, before I ever came in for an interview...I know I'd be the first woman president and is that going to be ok....Or, what am I facing here. I need you to be honest. So, I think it's ok to ask the questions, right? I asked the question is it ok to have school-age children, or is that going to be frowned upon because I'm not able to devote myself 110% to the job. I want to spend time with my children as well and attend their activities.*

Theme: Rurality

*The rural part...this is the first job I have had that is in a rural area. I have had to learn from that...I will tell you...a pretty significant learning curve because my kids, my husband and myself...we tend to be more urban-minded and so I have really had to not impose...We moved here and so...I need to embrace that. That is a decision we made. I need to be aware of the fact that I need to listen to their needs and move forward*

*according to what this institution needs and what this area needs. Because, it is always about the mission of the college. It is not about me. I have to be honest. It's definitely not something that I fully understood the differences between being that urban and a rural community college. I guess, in hindsight, it feels kind of foolish to say that but that was the reality of it. I am still learning and probably always will be and that's fine.*

*Again, I think it was a lack of understanding the differences right? So, and having to be cognizant of not imposing my value system which is different than the majority of the area we serve. And I'm not sure I am explaining that correctly. I'm not sure how else to say. The fact that...for instance...everybody knows everybody here. Everybody grew up here. Nobody moves in or out. So, that was very new to me. I have kind of had to learn how that works, right? So, you know I keep my mouth shut a lot. You don't know who knows who or who grew up with who and who doesn't like who since second grade...that type of thing. That was just something I wasn't used to. Most places I have been very transient and more urban. The things that people care about are very different. For me, I happen to think it has given me a much greater understanding of a lot of different things that have helped me grow as a person.*

*Initially, I think I came in with little to no understanding of that. I quickly got corrected and have to be much more cognizant of it.*

*I am the first female president. This institution was almost entirely led by men until I came. I'm on a board and when I walked into the room, there's like 40 middle-aged white men and me. I had never experienced anything like that in my lifetime. And I think it's more predominant in this rural environment than I had seen where women don't feel as empowered as women in other places I have lived. This was a new kind of phenomena for me, right?*

*If you have grown up in a rural I would imagine being a rural community college president would be like anything else; you understand the culture. So, it's a matter of having the appropriate skills.*

## Participant Vignettes

### Participant Three

Theme: Journey of Ascension

*Formally, I have a bachelor's, master's, doctoral degree all of them earned in the 70s before I was the age of 30.*

*I also studied leadership with the League of Innovation in their executive leadership program and I'm a graduate from Harvard's leadership program for Institutional Management. I've also attended a number of other leadership programs, including in the 80s the Leadership Executive Program.*

*I graduated with my bachelors in slightly less than 3 years and I was then employed as a graduate assistant in the Dean of Students' office. I was at the time the first woman and the only woman who was not in a secretarial position. That was in the middle 70s. Then when I finished with the masters' degree. I went from that position, to west Texas to a Director of Student Activities which was a line position. I actually supervised staff which was highly unusual at my age. There were connections to help me get the job because it was a better-paying job than anyone who was in my class.*

*I did that a couple of years and realized I wasn't going to advance without a doctorate. So I looked around. At the time there was a lot of training programs for community college folks.*

*As far as my work career, my first formal exposure in higher education in an employment manner was as a graduate assistant in a Dean of Students' office.*

*I was in one of their training things, and they went around the room and asked 'why do you want to be a President?' When it came to me, I thought it was ridiculous. I said I don't want to be a President. I'm only here because this is in Arizona and I wanted to come. One of the women sort of picked me out as her project and said this woman knows what the presidency is and she took me on as her project.*

**Theme: Authenticity / Good Fit**

*Research the different types of presidency...The title doesn't necessarily reflect what the job is. If you want to be a President, make sure you understand what they job is. That title is used in different ways. Also, to pick and write down the pros and cons of the position.*

**Theme: Networking / Mentoring**

*Ask someone to mentor you; don't be a burden but let someone mentor you. The informal part of it is the role of mentoring is very important.*

**Theme: Achieving Balance / Gender Implication**

*There are elements of matching the job that you get with the appropriate piece of the job you can do. It was a time in the late 1980s to the early 1990s, there were very few women that were community college presidents, very few women who were even Vice Presidents. They were still expected to do lots of things...like who makes the coffee. If you don't play along then you are not a team player.*

*There was also a lot that was occurring...a period of time where there were folks spent some of their time using substances beyond alcohol and sexual relations with more than one partner. If you go to a professional conference...there was a lot of that activity going on. Women knew about it, but they didn't want to talk about it.*

*If you don't get the job, you don't get to do the job and men controlled who got the job. That's how it worked, like it or not.*

*I know women who were extremely qualified and should have been in positions but were not.*

*When I showed up for work my first day as president, they had no furniture for me in the office. There was an office and no furniture. I remember getting one of those big metal desks and a telephone and putting it in there. On my first day, the President of the local Chamber of Commerce called and he wanted to speak with the President. He wanted to speak with the President. I answered my own phone. I said ok... 'speaking'. He said no, I want to speak with him. That's how it got started. That was my first day. I had that experience...Realizing the him was me. That's how this thing got started.*

Theme: Rurality

*I would not recommend a single woman to go into a rural community college presidency because of the things that she may endure. The only possibility for that is if you are from that area. I am a tough fighter. I am a tough person. I can make things happen and I am not a quitter. But, that was a tough situation. It was a challenge for me to go to a college where I could feel their pain; I didn't understand it, but I could feel it. It is probably also hard for a single man.*

*But when you are in a rural area and you have a long term president you are replacing, the cards are stacked against you.*

*Some women have husbands that are supportive. Some women have husbands that are not. The optics of having a husband make a very big difference in a rural environment.*

*You have to be careful in a rural area, because people talk. Your board is not your therapist, that is not their job. Don't tell you VP, that is not their job. I have written about wounded leaders.*

*First of all, it is important to look at the success rate, if women can get a job, other than a rural community college presidency, they are probably going to do that. Unless they are from that rural area, the question is 'what does that community offer them'. A simple thing like getting your nails done is difficult there. Not that there aren't people there to do it, but you are always on. You never get to be off. I remember answering the door one time and I didn't have any makeup on, I scared the hell out of the guy. You are living in a fishbowl. It is hard to live in a fishbowl, it's hard to live in a fishbowl when you are in a museum. You go to an aquarium and you see these little fishes swimming around with people poking at them. That's what you get to be as a rural community college president. So, I don't recommend rural colleges for women at all. If that's the job they can get to get their foot in the door, fine. But, if they are going there because they want to make a difference and it's their Peace Corp mission...It's a very difficult place. If you have lived there and you have family there, a husband or you have connections there, of course. But, you will have no anonymity there. You won't be able to do certain things.*



*You will be in the fishbowl; that aquarium and you will be looked at all the time. But, you are from a rural area and that puts you in a different position to make a unique difference. If you are married, you get a lot of points. There is a level of leadership...a thing about leadership. You can only be a leader up to the point that people will accept you. You can be on the edge...if they accept you that is great.*

## Participant Vignettes

### Participant Four

Theme: Journey of Ascension

*I have a PhD; a Master's degree in counseling. My PhD is in child development. My undergrad is in radio, television, film. I am a President of this college; have been a Senior VP; Senior VP of Student Development; and Dean of Student Services.*

*I like to learn and so I enjoy professional development. I enjoy building myself, filling my gaps. I ask for help and support to understand things. Informally, I would say I learned budgeting because I raised my hand and said to a CFO at a college, as a department chair, I need to learn how budgets work. He took me under his wing and taught me how to do it.*

*I wanted to help students that were high risk...that were single parents so I decided to get a PhD in child development. They had the program where they had working to learn from 0-24 years of age. That helped me be able to connect and understand because at that time I wasn't married and I didn't have a child and I knew I wanted to help those individuals.*

*Speaking and communicating better. I had a degree in journalism and broadcasting. I wanted the practice of being able to speak off the top of my head. I took different opportunities where I would have to speak. I'm just that kind of person. When I see there is something I need, I just go towards that. I do that. As far as leadership, I have watched good leaders and I watched bad leaders and I took notes in my head...this works and this doesn't....and I have learned over the years when you talk the first to the last, I've learned to embrace who I am as a leader which is facilitation. I'm very good at facilitation. I am a very good facilitator. I can mediate, negotiate and facilitate and so it was embracing that and using that as my leadership style and putting that with kindness and caring because that's the kind of person I try to be...to lead and serve. When I first started out I gravitated to servant leadership and what they meant because I found out that kind of matched who I was as a person. To lead and to serve...That's who I am.*

*Everything I have done in my previous background, I use. One of the things people are amazed about is having a journalism or broadcasting background is probably one of the single best things I have ever done. You've got to be able to communicate and you've got to be able to get people to feel what you are feeling. So, I have taken the knowledge from*

*everything I have done in my career. And I have done steps; it has not been big leaps. I have taken steps up the ladder. And with each job I have been able to pull something I have gleaned from doing that....to understand how I have to move in the role as the president.*

*I never wanted to be a president. It wasn't what it was about.*

*I had a great, great President who was awesome to work for. I was able to help her set her vision and to move culture to where it needed to be. And so, I was like her right-hand person in doing that. But it was actually a head hunter that told me I needed to do this. I didn't want to leave her. She helped me to make the decision that I could do more as the President in this job that I am. I have been able to do that.*

*For me, it is of great value that I went step by step up the ladder and I did not do the huge jumps that people are doing now because what happens is they have gaps and when situations occur, they don't know how to navigate them. They can't pull out of their toolbox that they have experienced anything like that. I encourage people to take the time and take those steps and learn...and really ground themselves as a leader and what really works for them.*

Theme: Authenticity / Good Fit

*I have the ability to pick up on brokenness in the organization and to target and isolate what is creating that brokenness and to rebuild that area so that people feel as if they are heard and that they are important. And I am a servant leader which means I can do just whatever I ask anybody else to do and I am going to work right along beside you. That has worked for me.*

*I found that I loved helping students get to where they wanted to be and to get their dreams. It was always really, really special for me to do that. I've always been a person to help the underdog. That's kind of my personality as well.*

*Today, I would say...this is going to be really, really cliché...but I think the first is to find your voice...To know who you are as a person...What works for you? What do you value? Who are you as a leader? Craft that. As the kids say now...what's your brand? I hate that so I don't want to say that...But it really is...You got to know who you are and find your voice. That's one strategy...I cannot say that enough.*

*Always with every dealing that you make...make sure it is with honesty, integrity, transparency, with care and concern for employee and the students.*

Theme: Networking / Mentoring

*It is critically necessary. I think mentoring means different things to different people. I would say I support a lot of different women. I am a listening ear for a lot of different women at various points of their lives.*

*The major thing for women is building confidence so that they know they can, giving them opportunities; giving them the ability to listen so they can understand that they can do probably more than they believe they can do. So, that is a really big thing is that women develop confidence.*

*The second thing I would say with mentoring you help them put together a realistic program plan of helping them to develop where they see themselves and how to get there.*

*The third thing would be introducing them to the right people.*

Theme: Achieving Balance / Gender Implication

*So, you have the one side of the personal issue...women having the biggest role of having to be the responsible person for the family. Regardless, that's our society is and we do have that so you have the balance issue going. How do you do that with the balance?*

*You have especially younger, and some old ones. They talk like I don't like politics. I don't want to deal with politics. You have that going.*

*Then you do have certain women when they get to a certain place and space, they don't see the need to reach back and pull forward. They have made it. They don't see that there is a difference in male and female so they don't...they don't open doors. You have those that....they want to be the only female. They don't like competition. They will take you out if they see you as competition.*

*Then you have the other side which is the societal side. You are still judged by a different standard as a female...Females and males sometimes do it unconsciously. They have different expectations for the female just looking at her what they think she can and cannot do and so that bias comes through...and then that bias comes through. If you look at boards that hire presidents, if you look around...they are male. And, they are usually older males and they have their own perspectives of what it means to be a female and so they don't hire you. Because they put their own perspectives and expectations on you.*

*This is the year of women. I would hope people are on their better behaviors than they have been in the past.*

*But, I have been bullied. I was a single parent. I needed the job because I was a single parent. So, I took it. And, I took it until I got out. Because I couldn't do that. I don't know. I think...you are asking me when you had to take things in order to move up because you didn't want to stifle your career. I have been sexually harassed as well. I was able to maneuver out of those situations. In this job, I am in a space where it is brand new for women to be in leadership. It is a male-dominated area. We are cars...we are unions...It is a male space...a white male space...And, I am African American female. With that, you learn when to pick your battles and when to fight with professionalism intact. You learn when you know you need that check that's coming from that person...So, you have your line of your values, what you will accept and what you won't accept.*

*So, if anybody calls me a word I don't think is acceptable, I would have to make sure I called them on that and get up and walk away because that would be against my values. But, you know if some older gentleman, 'you're a pretty woman'...And he is writing me a \$100,00.00 check, I'm going to be honest...I'm going to take the check.*

*I am in leadership male-dominated field. Probably, my most trusted people around here are males and it's because I can get from them what I need to know and do to get somebody else to do what I need them to do. I will give you an example, when I am in the community...it is male-dominated. So, I have as my advisors, internally, some males that I can say, 'so what should I be over... how do I get what I need for my college?' They can tell me the ins and outs of how to work with that male that I wouldn't think about because I'm a female.*

*Like right now, I didn't have the sense enough...I didn't know...I am not a golfer and I don't want to be a golfer and golf is big here. But we are having a tournament. And, I got the invitation for some little passes to go to the tournament. So, I reached out to my golfer, internally, and said...Ok, I don't even know how to golf. What am I supposed to do here? If I show up at this because I know I have to show up. What do I do? How do I navigate this? The person started talking to me about everything because I know it's a culture. I need to know what to do and how to act. We discussed it. He said they didn't give you anything...They just gave you some tickets. You're the president of the college, you don't get tickets; you supposed to be in the hospitality tent with the PTA golfers... You supposed to be where they award they things...where everybody sees you. That's not a ticket...you need a pass. I said, oh ok. You're right. So I wrote, 'where do I pick up my pass'? I got passes coming from 2 or 3 different places because I know what to say. But had I not known, I would have been not where I needed to be as the President of this college.*

*That's a small thing, but it's helpful to have some allies that are males because it is tough...to navigate these types of systems because you really are...you're working for older men. That's what the boards are; they are older. You have to know how to navigate that and to manage those boards. So, you've got to have those peoples...those allies that can help you move things.*

## Participant Vignettes

### Participant Five

Theme: Journey of Ascension

*I have been in higher ed. about 23 years. I started my career in IR (institutional research). Before I came to my current college, I spent my entire career at another college which is a rural community college in west central Illinois...I spent the bulk of my career...all of my career there...I did various jobs there from institutional research to human resources to Vice President of Administrative Affairs and also Vice President of Academic Affairs before becoming president there.*

*My academic background...I graduated from a rural community college.....as a first-generation college student ....I did a bachelor's degree in economics and history....and then I did a MBA...my Doctorate is in Business.*

*I think the formal thinking behind it was that I could see early on that I would need a doctorate and I didn't have one at the time when I started.*

Theme: Authenticity / Good Fit

*Women come to leadership with different skills and capability...maybe the ability to know what your weaknesses are so you can work on those...and then what your strengths are...might be the most important thing you can do.*

*Get help where you are weak. Every woman I have worked with had different strengths and then different things they should work on obviously. I think it just depends. It is that ability to know where your comfort is...where your comfort is...is probably where you are good. Where you don't have a lot of comfort is probably where you need to work.*

*You can't really have these roles, I don't think...unless you are authentic and you understand yourself...because they are pretty tough roles to have. You have to be pretty grounded in your own strengths and weaknesses. I am probably one of my worst critics...which probably isn't health. It's that ability to say 'I am just not any good at this' or 'I need help with this' and then trying to get yourself the help that you need. It might be in developing a skill. Some women have trouble speaking off the cuff. That was something that was really difficult for me. I like to be really prepared when I speak. And, so a lot of things you have to speaking is really off the cuff....and so getting the help...you need to be able to do that...practicing...So, that is an area where you are not any good...that's ok...you can practice that and get better at it.*

*Just really being honest with yourself on where you are strong and where you are not...And then just trying to get yourself help in areas where you are not...and build those skills so you have some confidence with it.*

Theme: Networking / Mentoring

*In order to be the first female you have to have a male somewhere along the way to give you an opportunity or you can't be the first. I was the first female VP at that college, the first Cabinet officer that was a female and, ultimately, the first President. Ultimately, without him giving me an opportunity to be a VP or a Cabinet member, I would probably have not been a President. He did the most with providing me opportunity. He provided me the space to volunteer for all of these things. He had been at 3-4 institutions. A couple had been rural and one had been urban. He had a breadth and depth of experience and he knew I was constrained to get. So I was going to have to get the breadth and depth of experience in my own institution and he understood that.*

*I try to do that as much as I can. I think it's interesting because I don't like to stereotype but typically women tend to be under-confident and they tend to want to wait until they are ready or feel that are ready to take on leadership roles...Myself included in that...But, what I have found is that I seldom am ever ready for a leadership role. But, I tend to just go ahead. So I think mentoring women...a key piece to mentoring women is to encourage them to take on a leadership role before they feel like they are absolutely ready. I don't know that you are ever absolutely ready. You just have to do it and then, sometimes...you learn as you go.*

*I teach the leadership course still at a university in their doctorate program...on community college leadership. I obviously try to mentor women within there as well. I am presenting at a conference in Iowa for women who are aspiring leaders. So I try to do that in ways that make sense, whether it's in my institution or wherever, whether it's students or the community at large.*

*I want to try to help bring women along. We need more women at the highest levels. We are starting to see a lot more women at the VP level, but we are not seeing them at the presidency. To be fair, it's a tough job. It can seem, some days, not highly rewarding, but what I can say is if you take the big picture and the long haul, it is very rewarding.*

*You have to have someone to help you in today's times. If I had not had the President before me...I would never have had the opportunity...So that's the thing. You need people to help you. You need people to be really honest with you on what your strengths and weaknesses are so you can work on them. None of us are perfect. You have to think about that.*

*As a teacher, for the leadership course at a university, what I have found and what we talk about as faculty is that many of the women do not intend to be a president. I often ask them why. It's because they don't want this 24/7/365 position. They just don't. They are willing to go to a VP level, but they don't want that increased scrutiny, particularly in a small community where you are on all the time. In today's times, the media...there's so much scrutiny with the media...They just don't feel like it is worth it. I think that is part of it.*

Theme: Achieving Balance / Gender Implication

*I wrote a second paper for the League talking about why women should want it and ways to think about how you could do it and manage it. Because we do need women and it is rewarding. So, I don't want to just always talk about the challenges. Part of it is in convincing women that it is worthwhile and that it is worth it, particularly in a small area, in a small school.*

*When I was at the other college I was the first female VP. I was the only female. It was, I think, awkward. You don't know how to interact...It was just awkward. What became interesting, no conscious choice for this, but what happened was I became President and the new VP was a female. We ended up having 3 VPs, we had 2 males and 1 female and me so we were evenly distributed. One VP left and I did not fill that position; we ended up distributing the duties out...so we were 2 females to 1 male. I remember asking the male do you ever feel like we are picking on you or you are not part of the group? He said 'oh no' and I said, 'well I did feel like that sometimes and I just want to make sure the reverse isn't happening to you'. So when I came to my current college, we ended up having 7 male VPs and 1 female and me. So, I am back to that dynamic where there are more males than females, but I am in the presidential role. I have been remarkably pleased. They have been fantastic. So, I think part of it is the times have changed a bit. That would have been 12 or 15 years ago when I was the first female...probably 15 years....so there is, more openness to women in leadership, obviously, in that 15 years. And much more cultural awareness on how we interact.*

*If you are in a male-dominated field, I think it makes you want it more. You work harder and you are more driven. That is a motivating factor obviously.*

*When I talk to doctoral students, I say please don't rule it out. Please don't have your mind made up because I think you can make it work. They cite things like I have children; aging parents. I wrote a paper for the Leagues and it's about being a female president and all those challenges that go with being a female president. You can care for aging parents while you're a president. It's not easy, but you can. You can care for children while you're a president. It's not easy but you can because you're not the sole person holding up the whole institution. You have VPs and you have Deans. It's a collaborative effort. Everyone in their life, men and women, kind of ebb and flow with challenges. Men have challenges too. They typically, however, have a wife at home that's maybe not working that helps. And so, I even say, 'some days I wish I would have had a wife'. I don't say that in a derogatory way. I mean, I wish I had another person to pick up the dry cleaning and get some groceries and all of those things. But, you can get help for those things and so you do. But, you have to explore it and you have to figure it out. I'm in this new city and I don't know where to go for my dry cleaners and my hair...so, I found a dry-cleaners who actually picks up dry cleaning and delivers it. In my small town, I never had that. So, it's that kind of thing. You just have to get in and say I'm going to do it and you can find solutions. There are people who will help you get through the challenging times in your life.*

*Life goes on. It is challenging at times for everybody, whether you are a President, a VP or a Dean. It's going to be challenging at times. It is for everybody. You have to embrace it and rely on others who support you to get through that tough time. I see some women opting out and I don't like that.*

Theme: Mobility Factor / Geographical Binding

*I knew it was likely that I could not move around. My husband has a business and it isn't easy for someone who is self-employed in their own business to just pick up and move. So I knew that I was probably not going to be able to have additional opportunities at other institutions unless they were in commuting distance. So I knew if I really wanted to advance...And I thought that I did...I wasn't thinking about the presidential role. I did want to advance. I was going to have to get that experience at the college. So I volunteered to lead projects and to chair committees; to be the chief negotiator. I volunteered for those things. Those were not usually jobs people want to do because, you know, they aren't easy necessarily and they are time consuming. But I knew that I could get a lot of experience if I did them. So, that was a conscience decision. So much so that when I did become president, one of the board members talked about that. He said he had watched my career. He was on the board during my whole career and had watched that. He's still on the board to this day. He's been on the board 33 years. He watched and knew I was always the person who volunteered to do things and that I did them well. He knew I was the person who always volunteered to do things and he noticed that. I knew I wasn't going to be able to get experience anywhere else so I knew I would have to get it here. I also took part of course in the AACC Leadership Academy and I took part in other leadership academies. I did those types of things too. But within my own institution I had to have a little bit different strategy.*

*It is hard to be the internal candidate. Because I had been in the institution my entire life. You obviously have had conflicts with folks along the way. When you are the internal candidate, people know your flaws and your strengths. I think that is sometimes difficult and it's hard to make the transition from being a colleague and a peer to being the President when you've been part of an institution. That's hard too. Both of those were the most difficult part of becoming the President in a college where I had done my entire career. There are positives for that. Obviously, you know the institution so well. There isn't that time that it takes to get to know the institution...To learn how this college works...How this state works. It is going to take me a year probably to do that. So you skip that when you have an internal candidate. There are definitely pros and cons to being the internal person.*

*Everyone thinks the internal candidate has the upper hand. That is just not the case. No, it is not. It's a hard role even if you are the candidate to make the transition with your peers. It becomes very uncomfortable for them and for you. The old adage that 'it's lonely at the top' is really very true, because almost immediately you get alienated because people see you as the President...and are wary. Even close relationships that you thought wouldn't be affected...they are.*



*I said you know I am not going to leave my home institution. I am going to retire here. I talked to my husband and he said we have a plan and this is not our plan. He has a business. But he said he thought I should go and check it out so I did. This college is only an hour and 45 minutes from my home so he comes over on Thursdays or Fridays and I go home on the weekend. So, we can make it work. Is it ideal...probably not ideal. But that is the thing about women today and trying to take these jobs. It is not ideal but it is certainly workable. We've been married 35 years so it's not like we can't make it work. And it's not like we can't make it work. Both our kids are grown. And he said the second day, 'if they offer this to you you'd be crazy to not take it. This is a phenomenal opportunity and what a great way to end your career. You are going to end your career at a big institution and one that is doing all kinds of great things...and why not?*

Theme: Rurality

*The thing with being in a rural district....is that you are going to be a President 24/7/365. It doesn't matter if you are a grocery store...because people are going to notice you at the grocery store...or if you are at a college function. I know some people resist this kind of notion...they like to think that when they are on their own time...they're on their own time....and I have a different opinion about that. If you sign on to be a president in a small community...you are that President, regardless. There's a level of expectation that you are going to uphold that office. So, it is a full-time job. You have to be really mindful...I quit going to the grocery store after I worked in the garden. I actually wrote a paper for the League for Innovation where I talked about what I wish I had known about being a President before I became one. This whole piece was one of that...How much you move into a very much fishbowl kind of existence and so you have to come to grips with that and figure out how you can manage it. And I didn't run into the grocery store without makeup on and I didn't do a lot of those things once I became President.*

*What precipitated that was that they had announced my presidency and put some pictures in the paper. I was in the grocery store one day, about a month later or so. I heard people whispering, 'that's the new President'. And I looked down and I had on shorts and flip-flops. I didn't look presidential...at all. It was at that moment that I realized that there are going to be all of these people that are going to know who you are because of your picture being everywhere. You don't know them, but they are looking at me as the President, not as a woman on a Saturday getting groceries...and you have to be mindful of that. You don't have that so much in a more metropolitan or urban area because there are so many people.*

*But in a small, rural area, you are in a fishbowl and your family is too. What's interesting though...I think there is a greater scrutiny for women.*

*What's interesting is a private, liberal arts college that is located close by....it is nationally ranked. The President there was leaving and he gave me his notes that he had given to the board of what they should look for in the next President. He spoke to this very piece as well...that he never went out anywhere without being shaven...without being dressed...whether he was dressed formally...or even if he had jeans on...He looked*

*nice because he felt like he was always reflecting his college when he was out...regardless of what he was doing. He felt it too even as a man...I think women have even greater scrutiny...but he felt it too...But there's even greater scrutiny for women. He said that is something the next President would have to come to grips with because it is very difficult to feel like you are on the time...Whether you are or not, you feel like it.*

*You really have to be mindful of the public and how you interact with the public, particularly if you are in a rural area.*

## Participant Vignettes

### Participant Six

Theme: Journey of Ascension

*I probably am an abnormal case. I am a native Chinese. Came to US in 1989. I have a Doctorate in Higher Education Leadership. My first love is literature, I was an English major and I taught for all of these years until probably 4 years ago I stopped teaching because I don't have time.*

*I never dreamed to be a President and that's the truth. It just kind of happened. My training I think I should trace back to the 1993 when I was offered my first job to work as a special assistant to a community college president. It was on the job training; very, very valuable.*

*I know no one can design your career trajectory, too many surprises and turns and twists happen along the way. If you could be an assistant to a college President that is the best training you can get. No degree can replace that. That's sort of informal.*

*Formal trainings like many people, I go to leadership; academy stuff listed in my resume. I attended quite a few of those things...They are very valuable to me; not only from the contend but also from the network. I cannot emphasize enough about that. Networks are so important.*

*Leadership is very lonely especially on the top. You can't talk to too many people about the challenges you face; the thoughts on your mind. This kind of professional network provides you invaluable support. Sometimes nothing else is just the airing...there are times you just need to air it out and have someone to pay attention and listen to you.*

*That's very true to not just leadership, but to being a decent human being. If you are out there for yourself then you will make bad decisions for the organization and the people you intend to serve. If you are out there for others it will be much better.*

*Leaders have to be selfless; leaders have to be devoted; leaders have to have the right purpose, as I said, when you are going in there. Some people go into leader positions for the wrong reasons; not some, I would say probably a lot...they say 'Oh a title...I'm going to be the president. I'm going to make all the decisions. I'm going to have all the power to hire the people I like and fire the people I don't like' and all that kind of stuff. That's not what a true leader is. A true leader is a servant. You go in there and serve a purpose that's larger than yourself. If you don't have that straight, you go in there with all kinds of different thoughts... 'I am more powerful than you; I am more famous than you. I am making more money than you' ...That is all the wrong ideas. That is definitely going to err your role as president. We have plenty of examples around us.*

Theme: Authenticity / Good Fit

*I teach leadership myself to doctoral students and undergraduate students at all levels. One thing I emphasize is that leadership must be from within. You lead from the value you believe and from who you are; not from theory. Because to begin with, if you don't have a value to support you, your decisions are going to be made based on whimsical, political ideology or political wind or emotional thoughts then it's not going to sustain. It will not be good for the institution you lead. So if you have the values that jive with the mission of the organization you serve, then it is not going to be as difficult for you to make the tough decisions. If there is one thing I could emphasize that is really important for everybody who is thinking about going into leadership position...you should have a clear understanding of your own value system and what matters to you. Go into leadership with a clear purpose. If you don't know your purpose then you are going to be astray...either by your own choice or by default, you are going to go off. That is when corruption happens and things happen; doesn't mean people with values won't make mistakes but they won't make mistakes that are fatal or detrimental to the organization. They have the values to guide them. I call it a moral compass so that is very important.*

*Be yourself. Be who you are. Be comfortable in who you are. Be confident in who you are. Be clear about what you want to do and who you want to become. Don't be swayed by whatever the societal expectations or prejudices are. It is definitely uncomfortable when you don't fit in but some uncomfortableness is necessary for innovative leadership.*

*Be who you are! Give yourself permission to be who you are. It's not easy to do; it's easier said than done. But, really...really make every effort to be who you are. I just think that everybody's road to a presidency is different. There are no fixed roads to go. I think I was very true to myself all the way and that probably helped me. You have to be a good human being before you can be a great leader; you have to be authentic. It is more about focusing on our inner strength; our self-development. Only then can we serve the organization we lead better. You cannot make a good institution if you are not a good person yourself.*

Theme: Networking / Mentoring

*I don't believe you need to revere one person; you need to revere qualities of people...Find competent people who can help you navigate.*

Theme: Achieving Balance / Gender Implication

*I think women have some similar challenges as men, but women have additional challenges that are different than men. When men accept leadership position, it is accepted right off the bat. When women accept this they have to prove herself. You will receive all sorts of challenges, myself included, at every step along the way. For example, years ago when I first became Dean, I was very young...so my appearance was that I was a lot younger than I actually was...So when I went around to visit campuses people would not believe I was the real Dean. Even where I lived people thought I was the secretary working at a college. The fact was I was not a secretary. Now as President, the same thing happened. When I was trying to find a room on the largest campus, people thought I was heading in the wrong building. So there are things like that...that we...have to not be distracted and not complacent about it...Be prepared and be ready to deal with those unfortunate challenges. Women need to be more self-confident...so that you don't get discouraged...and say, 'Oh my God, these people are doubting me if I am good or not good? Maybe I should or I shouldn't. So those are the kinds of things women, who are heading into leadership, need to think about as they go into leadership. You need to be mentally prepared and emotionally ready to handle that. Otherwise, you will be surprised.*

*I think women need to prepare ourselves and be ready to deal with...once again I go back to our own value system. If you are very confident and firm and resolute in your own value system and you are very comfortable in your own skin, your own gender, you won't have much doubt in yourself when most of the people around you are doubting you. Because as a woman CEO you are bound to walk into most of the occasions where you are the minority...sometimes you are the only one. In my case I am always the only one because I am the only Asian at the table. I wasn't born in this country... English is my second language...I don't look like anyone else.... All of those things. So, I don't think it's the training...It's more like a mental exercise.*

*I don't think it's a community college issue...a rural versus an urban issue...It is a societal issue. It is deeply-rooted in our culture. It's our view about women. When a man is like a dictator and assertive and making fast and furious decisions...they call him a strong leader. If a woman does that kind of stuff, then they call her a bitch. It is the same thing if a man does it...it is a positive and if a woman does it...it is a negative. That has nothing to do with leadership. It has everything to do with culture. It is a cultural expectation. So until those cultural expectations are adjusted, the norm is adjusted, then this resolution cannot happen. For me, my role is not to advocate for women to get this position or that position but is to change the culture. But is to say it is not a man or woman thing. These days there are people that are both. They are not more masculine or more feminine, they are just who they are.*

*How do we change our society from a culture of tribal value systems...men making money; protecting the family; bring bread home; women care for children; protect the family; take care of everyone. If we could move away from this and start to treat men and women as equal partners in life, in work, in society, in communities, we would have a whole host of prejudices wiped out. Women are usually good at that. 'Wow this woman is different. This woman is different'. Our standards are different.*

## Participant Vignettes

### Participant Seven

Theme: Journey of Ascension

*I would never have suspected I would become a community college president. I didn't like high school. I realized if I had ambition and wanted to get ahead I had to get a degree. I saw people who were getting jobs and they had a piece of paper and I didn't. I said if that's what it takes I'm going to go back and get that. So I moved. I went to school part-time at first and then full-time. Once I started going to college I was challenged; I was enthusiastic about it. I started out working as a student assistant on the switchboard. From there, every time I got a different degree I got a different job. I graduated with two associate degrees then transferred to get my bachelor's degree. From there I waited a few years to think about getting my master's degree because I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. A female colleague of mine was in a master's program and she encouraged me to sign up for it. So I did. I'm really glad I did. I got through that program. So I thought I'm graduating with my master's degree...what's next?*

*What was next was I had a baby. So I had to put my formal education on hold for many years. What I ended up doing was...every time I went to a booth at a conference...like Walden or Capella or other educational institutions, I would always stop by and talk to them because I knew eventually I would want to get my doctorate degree. But I waited until my daughter graduated. I started taking some classes through Capella online but that wasn't working out...the timing was off on it....so I put that on pause and I continued to look at all the various organizations that were offering doctoral degrees with an emphasis on community college leadership programs in them. One of them...I was very fortunate that I stopped by a booth and talked to the Department Chair at the time. He was telling me about a program and we stayed in touch. It just so worked out that he recruited me to attend there. So, I quit my job and went there. I asked for a sabbatical. I was told if they could do without me for two years...then they could probably do without me. So I decided to take that plunge. It worked out for me in the long-run because the man who was the Chair of the department...I don't know what his exact title was...left to become a President. So, what I parlayed that into an internship with him. I shadowed him for almost a year...everything he was doing; visiting all the community colleges. So, I got a really good picture of what was going on across the United States.*

*What I did was I sought it out...Because where we were at there weren't a lot of female leadership positions. Trying to find...I mentored myself or I created my own Board of Directors I called them. What I did is...I looked at the next level that I wanted to be and I used that as a checklist to make sure I had those skills and experiences. Every college was different and they wanted different things...When I was looking at my school where I was...I was using that as a checklist...at one point...the college said to be a Dean you had to having teaching experience...at that point I didn't...So I sought that out and was teaching college credit classes. So, it just paid off in the big picture of things. I actively sought out people that I liked what they were doing...and how they were doing it. A lot of times when you see people you see what you shouldn't be.*

Theme: Authenticity / Good Fit

*You don't grow by things being easy. You grow by things being challenging. I just think it's a matter of stepping up to the challenges. And I build on those...In fact, I have learned more from my mistakes than I have from my successes. It's being honest and fair. Some of those you learn over time because it's a small world. People know a lot that's going on...but just trying to be as transparent as possible. There's a difference in transparency and confidentiality. Some things you can't say. But what you can say...and Be transparent because it all comes out in the end. I try to do that. I try to listen. The ultimate decision is mine but I like to hear people out. I can be convinced otherwise. People can change my mind. But I just need to hear it out and be transparent. For me, that's a biggie and being able to trust people. Trust is a big issue too. It's the foundation of everything.*

*Well, they listened and they answered with what was their opinion not what I wanted to hear. It is important to be open to constructive criticism. You need to find somebody who can be honest with you and tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear. For me, it's when someone has a comment for me, I try to take it back and find out or self-reflect...Is there any truth to it? Sometimes there is and sometimes there's not. But it's having the strength to have somebody that can tell you like it is and not take offense or feel offended by them or emotional to them because if it is done with constructive criticism and you asked for it...Because there have been many times...people have asked me for my opinion and when I told them, they got mad at me. Because, I didn't give them the answer that they wanted to hear. So, for me, finding somebody like that who does it with kindness and has sincere intentions, then, for me, that's the most helpful.*

*There are a few people back in my home state that I still talk to and we are always exchanging ideas. They are looking at presidencies and I am sending them information and saying you need to look at this and consider that. People don't know what they don't know in terms of the presidency. I enjoy doing that. For instance, in getting the position here, what people don't know is that I applied maybe a half a dozen places and part of it is the fit. They are looking for a specific skill set of people and you can't take the rejection badly because it just is what it is. It comes down to the fit for the college. So, I*

*try to shepherd people through that process too because the first one you get it's devastating and then they next few, you're just like, ok it's just not a good fit. It's unfortunate that a lot of times you don't get any feedback from the interview process so you don't know where you could have tweaked your presentation or anything like that.*

*Most important is to be a role model. As I talk to students around campus, I don't know they see women in leadership roles. Being able to chat with them and tell them my story. It is important that they know they can face challenges and remove barriers.*

Theme: Networking / Mentoring

*You can have the credentials, but unless you have the connections...and have the input from other people to support you. You need people around you to get ahead. I feel strongly about it because I think women have to help other women get ahead. I think other women do need to help each other out because there are barriers that we have that, perhaps men don't have. If you don't have a lot of women in leadership positions to talk to, then you feel isolated and alone. It is very important to have conversation with other women to help steer them in the right direction and help them in meeting their goals.*

Theme: Achieving Balance / Gender Implication

*I think life gets in the way sometimes. When I was raising my daughter, I kind of put my career on pause so we could just skip through and keep my focus on her and my husband. I just wanted to make sure that those kinds of things are taken care of.*

*When you are trying to get your doctorate and you're working full-time, it's a juggle and a struggle.*

*The longer you are at an institution; people remember you from back when. I started out as a student and so trying to progress through the ranks at that institution I was at for 30+ years...It was just a matter of people remembering me as student versus me as the Dean. So some of those put a little skid on it but I was persistent and consistent about what my goals were. I knew what my vision was; what my mission was and why I was there. That's a barrier when you have been at a place for a long time. We have baggage against people and people have it against us. You have to work through that because the higher you want to rise, you have to be able to look at things objectively and put the emotions aside. You need people around you to get ahead.*

*Well, as I look around the leadership in the community there aren't many women. All the mayors are male, all the police chiefs are male, all the superintendents are male. So I just need to keep pushing forward.*

*A lot of women want families in their life. Women tend to have competing demands. They want to still focus on their families. And some people can't flip that switch. They need to be with their family and be with the college. Like I said, it can be challenging. I had to*

*wait until my daughter graduated before I felt comfortable going back and getting my doctorate to go to the next level because I needed to make sure they were taken care of. I think that may be a big difference between men and women. Are they capable? Absolutely. If they have the opportunity, I still encourage people to do it. There are a lot of support systems we're not aware of that can help get you through if you have young children at home or if you're just not sure. It's important to have that confidence to go out there and do that. I sometimes think women lack the self-confidence to do it because they are not sure what the job looks like...what the real job looks like. But as the president you need to be up here...not down in the nitty-gritty. So find out the realistic expectations of the job and sometimes people don't go down that road. Some women aren't comfortable with the financial aspect of it. I was comfortable with that because I was used to building my own budget. Try to reinforce they can do it; they have those skill sets. Some get scared off by that.*

Theme: Mobility Factor / Geographical Binding

*When I left to get my doctorate, I knew the next level I needed to have was a Vice Presidencies or a Provost title. Because I knew when they are scanning resumes, they are looking at titles. So, I remember one gentlemen who said I am going to apply for the presidency but I don't think they will consider me because I just have a Dean title. There was some truth to that. They were looking for experience at a higher level. For me, I had to leave that school to get my doctorate to then go to another place to then get that. Because, even when I was working at the college, the same people were in the same leadership positions five years later. So, even if I stayed, there would have been nothing available. So I had to bite the bullet and leave and get that experience elsewhere. I don't think that's uncommon. One place I attended, they did a women's group that wanted to become presidents. When we went around the room and told who we were and what we did. The question became, did you have to leave your job; did you have to move to get to the next level. A good percentage of them had to do that. I experienced that myself.*

Theme: Rurality

*Coming from outside this region, I have to establish credibility. People have lived here most of their lives and there's very deep relationships.*

## Participant Vignettes

### Participant Eight

Theme: Journey of Ascension

*I hold a Bachelors in Business Administration. My emphasis area or focus area was accounting. I first thought I was going to be a CPA. But I kind of got into education and went a different route. I also a MBA. I did 18 hours in CIS and 21 hours in*



*management. I knew if I was going to be useful in higher ed., I needed to do something with technology so that's what I did.*

*Later on, I went back...The opportunity arose...I went to an orientation session that a university was doing...I thought I'll just go see what it is about. Before I knew it, I had signed up into an educational leadership program. They actually focused on community college leadership. The President of my college at the time had gotten the program together at that time and so myself and about 11 or 12 others started. About 6 of us finished that program. I can't remember when we started. That was where I finished my PhD. I was in one of the earlier cohort groups. I finished my PhD pretty early. There's a lot more opportunity out there now that are really good...more than once was when I did mine. But I'm glad I finished it early.*

*As far as my background, I started out on the tech side. I started in the business office and doing business receipts and things...doing gas receipts and tracking mileage. We had a financial aid office and they began to train me in financial aid. So I learned financial aid and worked on the student services end. The opportunity came along to be a financial aid director and travel around to the different campuses. Now, to do that I had to move...about an hour and 45 minutes from home which isn't the end of the world. I had a small child. My son was probably not even a year old yet. But I made the decision to do that. I knew it would help me to move up in leadership because it was a director level position and I was pretty much office assistant type position...So I did that. At the time I was working on my masters...not sure I had my masters yet.*

*That was a good move. It was just me and a guidance counselor there in the summer with all the tech students. I traveled that whole summer and really worked a lot with students. Then the opportunity came to move back with my family's pleading. I came back, but I couldn't come back in the higher education system. That sort of bothered me, but I came back working in healthcare. I worked home health and the clinics and almost immediately began teaching adjunct. I knew I wanted to work in higher ed. That was where my heart was. I kept working adjunct. Pretty quickly a position became available. It was a joint position between workforce and academics. I did a little of both. I taught CIS, in business and then in workforce. Later I moved into the Workforce Dean position and was a Workforce Dean for many years. Then I moved into a position where I was Dean of the Technical Campus...so all the occupational/technical programs and the workforce programs, adult ed. and all the things that fell under workforce at that time. I did that for about 5 years. During that time, I applied for the president's position once and I don't think I received an interview that time. This time I saw a lot of similarities with what I did with workforce and what the President's role was...a tremendous amount of networking, partnerships, working with business and industry...looking at your numbers; looking at your bottom line. Because I saw that similarity, I applied again when the position opened. So this time...I think it was just timing. They had been through a series of different presidents who came and went. I think the fact that I was from the area really helped. They really wanted someone with a strong workforce and technical background and I had that as well. So, I think it was just timing. The second time I did receive and interview and was selected. If anything came along that I could learn and be*

*part of I was all over it. I really did start from entry level and just kept building my way up.*

Theme: Authenticity / Good Fit

*Fairness is key...What you do for one you must do for another as far as students go...as far as faculty and staff go too.*

Theme: Networking / Mentoring

*There have been particular women here that I have seen as mentors. I have tried to model after and aspire to be like...looked at their traits...whether it was that they were good problem solvers or able to communicate well...There have definitely been some women in there.*

*We do have a leadership program that we have started here. We are getting ready to start a mentorship program. It is important for women to support each other... in order for us to grow as leaders....to do job shadowing and allow that to happen....to talk to women leaders, to do interviews. I think all of that is very important. I think we need to support each other.*

Theme: Achieving Balance / Gender Implication

*I think it is hard for women to balance everything they have going on. It is hard to find that work-life balance. I have certainly struggled with that. I think I have always put my family and myself last. I am a self-professed workaholic. It's not a good thing. When your children get older, they remind you of that. I think life gets in the way. I said work-life balance. We all work with our husbands and our children to make sure they get all of their opportunities first and then we will start to work on what we want to do. Speak up! There is a double standard with that...The assertiveness and the aggression.*

Theme: Mobility Factor / Geographical Binding

*Being local can be a hindrance. I also see women who work here at the college who are very competent but when they go through interview processes with committees they are not chosen. And I'm not sure that it's just the mentality that we can't do it or if there is really some male-female thing going on. It's not that I see the men ascend quicker but that sometimes being a local candidate can be a negative thing. I think people may think you might favor one particular person over another. There's just a variety of reasons that sometimes we don't chose local or internal candidates for leadership positions. I think there's a lot of value in growing your own or choosing people internally.*

Theme: Rurality

*You are on 24/7...You are always a good role model. If you go to Walmart, you probably shouldn't go with no makeup on and a holey shirt on.*

## Participant Vignettes

### Participant Nine

Theme: Journey of Ascension

*I was an animal science major, thought I wanted to be a vet...ended up doing a lot of different things. I found myself as a night program manager in a community education course at a college. I turned that, over time, into a Coordinator job and then a Director job...and then I had CTE or continuing ed added to me and then I became an assistant VP for Workforce Development...Then asked the President there for the opportunity to switch that same job level in Academic Affairs...I then became an Associate VP. I realized at that college I would never go any higher. You never say I want to be a community college whatever when you are growing up but found I loved the medium and the mission and so after being Associate VP, obviously it took a few years to make that journey, I decided to apply to be a CAO. That are colleges who will not accept a CAO who didn't come out of faculty and then there are colleges that will. And, so you just obviously find your path. While I was at the college in my state, they brought a cohort program in masters and doctoral programs. I had a bachelor's in animal science but no masters and really needed a masters for the position I had and the one I wanted to get. So I went into the doctoral program and essentially got my masters along the way. So I have a master in higher ed. I went ahead and completed the doctorate...a PhD in education with a higher ed. focus...So I appreciated the University bringing it on my campus as a night cohort with 4 community colleges participating. So, after all that...I applied...during my doctoral program...the head of the program, brought in a guest speaker to speak about a community college system which is very different than the state system I was in...Mine has very strong individual colleges with their own local boards opposed to his system. And while they are accredited local colleges that don't have the same level of control. I liked that model...and I could see it working in a state of 4 million, whereas my current state at that time was a state of 22 million.*

*I felt like that system support to the community colleges made a lot of sense, particularly to a new CAO, because I would have a peer group of CAOs that I might not have at an individual college. So, I applied and the search got cancelled because they had a big tornado in the community. But when it reopened I applied again and was the CAO there for 3 years. And then at the end of that time, I went through a leadership academy which is very similar to the same kinds of things I had done in my state. I was asked if I would be an interim President and I said sure. I never really knew I wanted to be president...I evolved to that or somebody saw it in me...I didn't start out for that but while that college was searching...another college in the system opened and so I applied and...appreciated the opportunity to become their president for a couple of years. I really enjoyed being their president, but in some ways I really missed some of that CAO role, I laugh and say I went through all of the community colleges so I didn't have any other community colleges to go to...But, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to support students statewide.*

*Formally, I went through the educational path. I went through the hurdles to get the doctorate because you had to have that to be a CAO or president. I never had a direction. It just happened to me. I mean I made choices and I took steps...I mean, clearly I had to get my doctorate or whatever. I would hope that somebody would think a little bit earlier on...hey this is an opportunity. How can I plot my course to get there? I'm not sad at how it happened and I have enjoyed a lot of it.*

Theme: Authenticity / Good Fit

*Like most other people...most other women certainly...probably and most other people...I have as much imposter syndrome as anybody else. You meet lots of confident people...But you wonder, at the end of the day, if they are as confident as they project. I get told I'm kind, that I'm open and that communicate...And I do. I try really hard to communicate information. I'm not always the best listener but I try really hard to make sure you know what you need to know. I tend to be pretty open. I tend to be who I am. I don't believe...I was always told you have to go out to the hinterlands to be a President...you have to find that little college who can't get anybody else but you. You just have to find the college that fits you.*

*With any college presidency...I think you have to be yourself and find the right fit at the right college and you have to be ok with the fact that not every college fits every person. If you can't appreciate the community where you are going, it's not the right fit for you. It doesn't mean it's bad or you're bad. It's just not the right fit for you. So when you are ready, really research where you are going. And if you are prepared to tell them how great their community is and what you see as more opportunity for it...It will be the right fit for you and they'll want you.*

Theme: Networking / Mentoring

*I had some really strong women mentors at my first college that I looked up to. Plenty of people invested in me. I can't really invest in them, but I can invest in another person.*

*If somebody asks me to, I try. I don't just go out of my way to say you need a mentor and I'm happy to be that person. If somebody comes up to and says can you do this or can you answer that, or would you be willing, I'm happy to do that.*

Theme: Achieving Balance / Gender Implication

*My husband saw things in me that I did not see, pushed me to do stuff...was willing to change things in his own life so I could go to other colleges. There are a lot of women presidents on Twitter for example. It's interesting to follow their conversations. Another President that is an African-American, gay President. She's talked about where her life is in danger sometimes where she is President. She has one child. I don't know if it's unions, or faculty or the community. But she is still President and has been President there quite a while and she's pretty young. Her story is a real interesting one. She has three things: she's a woman, she's African-American;*

*and she's gay. How many things does she have to deal with? All I have to deal with is being a woman. She's great. She's interesting to follow. I admire her a great deal.*

*People laugh because they will say guys are always spreading stuff out so I tell people that now...that I am making my space at the conference table...to make myself big. Or I'll laugh at the guys and say push that back because I need my space.*

*Then you hear about young women being told you'll get cut off; don't let them interrupt. That's probably true, but I am a bad interrupter myself. I think it all works out.*

*I have tried in terms of people who work for me that may be struggling in a middle role, I try to tell them as gently as I can that a lot of institutions, including most of the colleges, there are no middle positions. There's coordinators, very few directors then there is pretty much a VP. You have to leave the institution to come back. You know the institution is not going to make a role for you. There's no role. Occasionally, you can create one yourself, like finding a grant and becoming a grant director or doing something else. But we have a lot of administrative assistants who get masters degrees, but then they can't go anywhere. Now, I've had some finally go somewhere but it's usually years after they really wanted to go somewhere because they wouldn't leave. And I do think sometimes you have to leave. I think that's for men too. I think that's just a general education problem...I think a lot of time we don't have the space. I don't that men are more likely to leave. I think for one things...when we look...there are just more women. I mean there are just more women you see in those positions, right...More female coordinators and more female directors...You see some males...I'm not saying you don't but here...I think there's probably....in this building.... a better balance just because of the type of work that's done. But, you know, if you think about your Student Affairs office at your college...there are men but there are probably more women...When you think about your faculty...There are probably more women depending on your technical programs and stuff...and your leadership can go one way or the other...When I left the other college, it was all women...at that moment...but not on the Cabinet....but all the chiefs were women...Not because I only hired women, cause I hired both...But because we did some painful cuts like everybody else...It was sort of like one of the last men standing was one of the guys who left out of just looking for another position out of that process.*

*As hard as it is to tell somebody, it's the best advice you can give them...you just need to go. I know you feel safe here; I know you feel secure; I know you like your benefits; I know you like the 2 weeks at Christmas. If you really want to get ahead, you need to go...then come back...You can come back. You've got to learn something else and then come back. Like I told you at my other college, I couldn't be CAO there because people had watched me grow up on that campus. People still thought of me as the young, community ed. person...Even though I had done all these other things and proven my worth in all these other ways...they just had this image of me that would have been hard to get around.*

*I did not walk into a presidency that expected to get 2 for the price of 1. I don't know if they just didn't expect that of women and their husbands the same way they might have expected it of a man and his wife. I really hadn't even thought about that. My husband did not take a big role in the community; he's just not an incredibly social person. I mean he met people and we did stuff but he was not the type person to be at Lions, Rotary and 5 other things. So, I don't know that some people had never even met my husband in our whole 7 years there. So, mainly I did college stuff by myself. I think in some ways it is easier to be an unmarried woman if your husband has his own life and his own stuff. I was lucky in that my husband supported it. Then again I tried not to do more than one thing a week and it's a small community so there weren't a million things like we had 8 sports teams, and 5 student plays going on. There wasn't anything like those. It wasn't that difficult to not be a part...But I can see how it would be difficult...a really hard thing. On the other hand, the role of president...I said before I had a band called Anne...She was a Chief Student Officer. After I left, I nominated her for a presidency in Rochester, NY...and she went for it and got that job. She's an amazing woman...She was an English faculty member that could do 8 jobs to every other person's 1 job. She raised 2 children and make a quilt a day; one of those people you just hate...Every time you turn around, she's like 'here's the book I just wrote, here's the quilt I just made; my 2 kids are getting into Stanford.*

*It's just lovely; she's a lovely person. Not a person to envy. I'm not going to begrudge that at all. So, she is my 'what would Anne do'. But she balances all of that. She's at a pretty big institution; she raised 2 kids. She didn't have any trouble saying, 'I'm going on vacation'. Part of that, it's not all you. Your staff should not be secrets in the community. Your chiefs should be out doing stuff; your division chairs should be out doing stuff. You should not be a one-woman show.*

*You have to move and when you move you uproot more than you. You uproot your parents, if they are near you...You uproot all sorts of things. It is hard. My husband gave up seeing his daughter all the time and I gave it up too. It's still never going to be the relationship he had with his daughter. A lot of people have to give for you to do that.*

Theme: Rurality

*You know I heard from a woman President at a conference several years ago, and she said, you know, I could barely go grocery shopping in my own community. I had to get all gussied up and then I had to drive out of town just to go grocery shopping because no one wanted to see her in her jeans. Well, you know I think that has changed. I never went unkempt but I wore my hiking boots and jeans into town because I was hiking. At some point that kept you real. But I also remember seeing a president I had before that in shorts and an open t-shirt or something like that in a grocery store one time and I thought this is just wrong...you should be in a suit. He wasn't inappropriate or anything, it was just out of context.*

## Participant Vignettes

### Participant Ten

Theme: Journey of Ascension

*I have a doctorate degree in Educational Psychology. I have a masters...I've been in higher education for 40 years. I have a lot of experience. Given my experience, I've been involved in administration; I've taught. I have a background in academic affairs, program planning, evaluations, strategic planning, facilities, budgets, workforce development, student services, grant writing, institutional accreditation, collective bargaining. I've done all of that. I've been around a long time. Given my rich history it prepared me to become a president because you need to have all that background. I have been a president a year and half at this college and I was a Provost and Associate Vice President for 15 years at another college...that was very good preparation...being a Provost.*

*I would say that early on in my career, I never really thought about it and someone said, 'have you ever thought about being a president?' I really had never given it a thought. But, someone put that thought in my mind and got me thinking about it. Because I wasn't really thinking about it because I wasn't really thinking about it.*

Theme: Networking / Mentoring

*I do mentor women a great deal. In fact, when I had to leave my job, because I worked in the northern part of the state and I had to move to the southern part of the state, some of the women I mentored said how are we going to keep this going...conversations with them and so forth? What we can do is meet half way. So I drive an hour and a half and they drive an hour and a half. We meet halfway of the state because I have a strong commitment to that...to mentoring and working with women. I still continue to do that because I think it is very, very important. I meet them over coffee. I drive my hour and a half to get there and they drive their hour and a half to get there and we still meet because I think it is important for them to get to work with somebody. They value my opinion. I also speak at conferences nationally to groups of women. Recently I spoke at the American Association of Women in Community Colleges' conference. So that was sort of a mentoring experience. I still keep it going. I keep my commitment. Although I don't have a lot of time, I try to stay in contact with the women I have committed to. I believe strongly in that.*

*I would suggest...get a mentor who can serve as a guide....to help one out.*

*I also found I am a role model to other women and when they see me they say...gee, maybe I can do that one day.*

Theme: Achieving Balance / Gender Implication

*A lot of women want to go into these roles very, very early. For me, it worked well because I waited until my kids finished college. This job is 24/7...I would have done it the same way. It's all worked out.*

Theme: Mobility Factor / Geographical Binding

*Because I think...one...when you take on a presidency...particularly in a rural area, you have to relocate; you have to move and I did...I had to move. So you have to get your family involved in the decision. And if people are in families or with spouses that don't agree with that move, it could be a barrier...a very serious barrier...particularly when you go to a rural area that may not be the closest to an airport or closest to a train station to get in touch with your family and friends...That's a very, very big consideration. One of my colleague friends...They have a dual career marriage. Her husband had to stay where he was and she is 3 hours from the airport. That's a problem. When you go to a rural area and you get cut off from transportation. That's a problem. Why would anybody want to do that?*

*I would say that early on in my career, I never really thought about it and someone said, 'have you ever thought about being a president?' I really had never given it a thought. But, someone put that thought in my mind and got me thinking about it. Because I wasn't really thinking about it because I wasn't really thinking about it.*

*I think it's because women have more roles to fill...and sometimes it takes women a longer time to figure out...how am I going to do all these roles. You have to have the support of your family and your spouse and that takes time.*

*I say, if you want to move up you have to go get your doctorate degree. She says I can't because my children are this or my mother is this or that...Finally, it took us a couple of years, she is now working on her doctoral degree. I am on her dissertation committee and she is preparing herself to launch to be a president one day. But I told her, you must get your doctorate degree. I think it is very, very important to get that degree.*

Theme: Rurality

*Rural areas don't always have the best travel links and connections, particularly if you have to relocate like I did. It's not just rural, it's presidencies in general.*

## Summary

Through an extensive interview session, each participant was afforded the opportunity to share their journey, including career path and credentials. Each woman



was encouraged to share barriers and facilitators in their journey, to describe the element of female gender in their lived experience and to expound upon mentoring as a support strategy for other women. In addition, each woman was encouraged to express their overall intended leadership legacy through a summation of responses. Overall, the main research question and the sub-questions were addressed.

*Sub-question #1:* What are the barriers to achieving a community college presidency for aspiring women, identified by sitting presidents or past presidents?

Participants consistently identified family obligation and career timing in their responses. Several women indicated delaying their career because of family obligations, their spouse's obligations or the challenge of balancing all the demands of being a woman. They also identified a longer career trajectory during ascension, stating they had served in several roles prior to capturing the presidency.

*Sub-question #2:* What are the facilitators for achieving a community college presidency for women, identified by sitting presidents or past presidents?

Consistently, participants stressed the importance of credentialing one's self appropriately and preparing one's self extensively to serve and to lead. Overwhelmingly, participants stressed the importance of mentoring, building relationships and creating networks as part of their success in capturing the presidency and in maintaining success in the presidential role. Some referenced specific mentors to whom they attributed much of their success or to whom they would still rely for professional support in their leadership roles.

*Sub-question #3:* What is the impact or relevancy of gender for women who have achieved a community college presidency?

Providing different examples, several participants referenced experiencing sexual harassment or innuendos as part of their ascension to a presidency or part of their experience actually serving as a president. Others referenced behavior that would be accepted in male counterparts but would render female counterparts as ‘a bitch’. Consistent with the element of gender, several participants reflected on their experiences with others who did not want to speak to a woman president or who did not want to acknowledge them in high-level meetings.

*Sub-question #4: What is the value of mentoring and networking for women who have achieved a community college presidency?*

Mentoring and networking was a major emphasis of the participants. Although one participant indicated she didn’t seek out women to mentor, she indicated she was definitely ‘open to it’ and valued it. The other participants made multiple, repeated references to mentoring other women as a key to the future of women in leadership. Some shared specific examples of their strategies and venues for mentorship.

*Sub-question #5: What are the prominent leadership styles, traits or prominent leadership behaviors of women who have achieved a community college presidency?*

The majority of participants shared the use of empathy and compassion in her leadership style and approach and emphasized the need to be ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ in leadership. Several discussed their attention to detail and their focus on inclusion, ensuring others felt supported and valued and that an atmosphere of fairness abounded. Admittedly, some participants shared examples of how this commitment grew out of their own negative experiences in past work environments.

*Sub-question #6:* How would sitting female presidents want to define their leadership legacy?

Overwhelmingly, participants wanted to ensure they left the organizations better than they had found them. They took pride in their reputations of being fair, but firm. Repeatedly, they expressed gratitude for others who had invested in them and reiterated their commitment to growing others, to creating opportunities for emerging women. Ultimately, their overall goal was to ensure a sustainable pipeline of well-credentialed, well-qualified women to serve in higher education and to ensure a solid, sustainable future for higher education.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of women who have successfully ascended to the rural community college presidential role. The study also examined the leadership approach and intended leadership legacy of these female presidents. Through this study, potential barriers and facilitators, related to women's ascension, were identified and can be used to guide the advancement of women with presidential leadership capacity, contributing to the resolution of the impending leadership crisis. In order to gain a thorough understanding of the journey of women who had achieved the community college presidency, this research study posed a main study question: What is the lived experience for women who ascended to a rural community college presidency in the 21st century. Additional sub-questions pursued in the study included:

1. What are the barriers to achieving a community college presidency for aspiring women, identified by sitting presidents or past presidents?
2. What are the facilitators for achieving a community college presidency for women, identified by sitting presidents or past presidents?
3. What is the impact or relevancy of gender for women who have achieved a community college presidency?
4. What is the value of mentoring and networking for women who have achieved a community college presidency?

5. What are the prominent leadership styles, traits or prominent leadership behaviors of women who have achieved a community college presidency?

6. How would sitting female presidents want to define their leadership legacy?

This study was relevant considering the potential for insufficient leaders to fill the future presidential pipeline for the approximately 1,462 community colleges across the nation (U.S. Department of Education, 2018) and provide immediate access to educational opportunities that would not be available apart from the local community college. Data supports an impending leadership crisis for higher education with the outmigration and aging of current presidential leadership and the increased role complexity of the presidency with issues such as fundraising, competitor encroachment, declining enrollment, diversity challenges and political interference. Coupled with these challenges is the lack of qualified leaders emerging in the pipeline to replace outgoing leaders (American Association of Community Colleges, 2001; Floyd, Maslin-Ostrowski, & Hrabak, 2010; Hassan, 2008). Without question, today's community college president faces a plethora of challenges, compared to previous generations of presidential leaders. Every viable leader should be embraced, nurtured and developed through defined leadership programs aimed at helping mid-level managers matriculate to senior leadership positions (American Association of Community Colleges, 2001). Although any qualified applicant should be able to ascend to the presidential level, women are not making this ascension equally when compared to male counterparts, especially in colleges and universities that are faith-based, private or offering graduate degrees (American Council on Education, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2017) although they are

credentialing themselves at the graduate level at a higher rate than men (Carnevale, Smith and Gulish, 2018).

Women are hindered by gender stereotyping. Stereotypical biases exist regarding female personality traits and leadership capacity (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Reid, Palomares, Anderson & Bondad-Brown, 2009) and can create barriers in the ascension of women to senior leadership roles (Heilman, 2012). Unfortunately, women who are able to shatter the glass ceiling and achieve a senior leadership role are still not compensated at the same rate as male counterparts (Pew Research Center, 2017) reflecting another layer of inequity and injustice.

Women comprise approximately half of the U.S. population and approximately half of the U.S. workforce. They comprise 52% of the professional jobs in the nation and 49% of the college-educated, entry-level workforce positions (Pew Research Center, 2017; Warner & Corley, 2017). Yet, women are not serving in senior roles in Fortune 500 companies or major political positions (Pew Research Center, 2017). Twenty-five percent of women indicate they have suffered issues with gender parity, earning less than a male colleague for the same job (Carnevale, Smith & Gulish, 2018; U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). Additional challenges for ascending women include role expectation and work-life balance. Women frequently assert challenges in balancing work and family obligations and purport career diversion and delays related to care responsibilities. They also cite a more traditional, lengthy pathway to the presidency, earning advancement through progressive assignments (Johnson, 2017) resembling more of an elaborate “labyrinth” of leadership ascension (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010. p. 239) versus a direct pathway.

Regardless of the pathway, women often cite challenges with stereotypical assumptions and biases related to their role performance and expectation along their journey. The main theory underlying this study revolved around the constructs of role congruence and performance of authentic behavior. In summary, role congruity theory purports leadership effectiveness is proportional to the leader's ability to lead genuinely based on a natural affinity for certain gender attributes and characteristics, masculine versus feminine. Yet, stereotypical biases can impede the selection of women for certain senior leadership roles when the communal feminine traits are not valued as being as important in leading complex organizations (Cauadrado, Garcia-Ael & Molero, 2015; Ealey & Karau, 2002; Garcia-Retamero & Lopez-Zafra, 2006; Reid, Palomares, Anderson & Bondad-Brown, 2009).

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings in this phenomenological, qualitative study, two main areas of future research emerged. Additional research studies need to be conducted regarding the effectiveness of authentic leadership behavior in male versus female leaders. Authentic leadership is often depicted as an attribute exhibited by leaders involving self-awareness, sincerity, and transparency. Rather than frame authenticity by gender as a construct, recent literature depicts authentic ability as an active performance or demonstration versus a passive trait or attribute (Liu, Cutcher & Grant, 2015). Regardless of the empirical evidence depicting the similarities and differences of men versus women in leadership, authentic leadership has not been characterized through gender and personal characteristics, but is defined through demonstrated behavior of the leader. Without question, authentic leaders are identified by the ability to self-appraise

and internally connect so that their actions reflect a genuine leadership direction of moral conscience, inclusion of followers, and empathetic decision-making (Lewis, 2013; Liu, Cutcher & Grant, 2015). Tzinerr & Barsheshet-Picke (2014) posit true authentic leadership can only be verified through the perception of others. This assumption supports the notion that leaders can self-identify as authentic and can aim to shape the identity of followers through the act of authentic response, but can only be truly substantiated by the interpretations of followers on the leader's actual effectiveness. This assumption, however, fails to provide exception for followers whose values are incongruent with those of the authentic leader and whose intentions are to develop a personal self-identity apart from the authentic leader (Anderson & Sun, 2017). Although authenticity was referenced in several participant responses, additional research needs to be conducted to determine the role of gender in authentic leadership style and to explore the relationship of authentic decision-making with the perception of *fit* in the presidential role.

Secondly, more research needs to be conducted to determine the optimal venue for mentoring women in leadership ascension. Overwhelmingly, mentoring was purported as a critical element of female leadership development and was consistent with the emphasis and value placed on mentoring as a recruitment and retention strategy for emerging leaders (Longman and Madsen, 2014). Yet, little research has been conducted regarding the specific types of mentoring programs deemed most beneficial to women ascending in leadership.



## Summary / Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of women who have successfully ascended to the rural community college presidential role. Research sub-questions included:

1. What are the barriers to achieving a community college presidency for aspiring women, identified by sitting presidents or past presidents?
2. What are the facilitators for achieving a community college presidency for women, identified by sitting presidents or past presidents?
3. What is the impact or relevancy of gender for women who have achieved a community college presidency?
4. What is the value of mentoring and networking for women who have achieved a community college presidency?
5. What are the prominent leadership styles, traits or prominent leadership behaviors of women who have achieved a community college presidency?
6. How would sitting female presidents want to define their leadership legacy?

Results of the interviews with study participants are consistent with evidence in the literature. Findings indicate women face multiple challenges in ascension, continue to face gender issues, value mentorship, and endure trials with career progression due to role responsibilities and work-life balance. Although not a prominent theme, issues of rural environments, such as a high-visibility culture of small communities also reflect additional challenges for women serving as presidents in these areas.

This study is significant for the future of community colleges. Sustainability of higher education at the community college level requires an aggressive, proactive pursuit

of quality leaders who can embrace the challenges that are ahead. Considering the inadequate supply of future leaders in the presidential pipeline, coupled with the inadequate supply of emerging leaders to fill the pipeline, a community college leadership crisis is impending across the nation. Barriers and biases have been identified for women willing to step up to the challenge and fill the leadership gap. National efforts need to continue to identify professional development opportunities for women. The future of higher education in America depends on the responsiveness at the national level, regional level and local level. Women, with presidential leadership potential, can be the solution to the impending leadership crisis.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

Institutional Review Approval: Protocol Number #1723

Hello Patsy Jackson,

Congratulations! The Institutional Review Board at Eastern Kentucky University has approved your **IRB Application for Expedited Review** for application entitled, "**Lived Experience of Women Ascending to Rural Community College Presidencies.**" Your approval is effective immediately and will expire on 11/30/18. **You will access your stamped consent form by opening your application files.**

**Principal Investigator Responsibilities:** It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to ensure that all investigators and staff associated with this study meet the training requirements for conducting research involving human subjects, follow the approved protocol, use only the approved forms, keep appropriate research records, and comply with applicable University policies and state and federal regulations.

**Consent Forms:** All subjects must receive a copy of the consent form as approved with the EKU IRB approval stamp. You may access your stamped consent forms by logging into your [InfoReady Review](#) account and selecting your approved application. Copies of the signed consent forms must be kept on file unless a waiver has been granted by the IRB.

**Adverse Events:** Any adverse or unexpected events that occur in conjunction with this study must be reported to the IRB within ten calendar days of the occurrence.

**Research Records:** Accurate and detailed research records must be maintained for a minimum of three years following the completion of the research and are subject to audit.

**Changes to Approved Research Protocol:** If changes to the approved research protocol become necessary, a description of those changes must be submitted for IRB review and approval prior to implementation. Some changes may be approved by expedited review while others may require full IRB review. Changes include, but are not limited to, those involving study personnel, consent forms, subjects, and procedures.

**Annual IRB Continuing Review:** This approval is valid through the expiration date noted above and is subject to continuing IRB review on an annual basis for as long as the study is active. It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to submit the annual continuing review request and receive approval prior to the anniversary date of the approval. Continuing reviews may be used to continue a project for up to three years from the original approval date, after which time a new application must be filed for IRB review and approval.

**Final Report:** Within 30 days from the expiration of the project, a final report must be filed with the IRB. A copy of the research results or an abstract from a resulting publication or presentation must be attached. If copies of significant new findings are provided to the research subjects, a copy must be also be provided to the IRB with the final report. Please log in to your [InfoReady Review](#) account, access your approved application, and click the option to submit a final report.

**Other Provisions of Approval, if applicable:** None

Please contact Sponsored Programs at 859-622-3636 or send email to [lisa.royalty@eku.edu](mailto:lisa.royalty@eku.edu) with questions about this approval or reporting requirements.

For your reference, we have included feedback on your application that was submitted during the review process.

**APPENDIX B:**  
**Stamped Consent**





## **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

### **The Lived Experience of Women Ascending to a Rural Community College Presidency**

#### **Why am I being asked to participate in this research?**

You are being invited to take part in a research study about the lived experience of women ascending to rural community college presidencies. You are being invited to participate in this study because you currently serve, or have served a minimum of one year, as a rural community college president. If you take part in this study, you will be one of about 10 people to do so.

#### **Who is doing the study?**

The person in charge of this study is Patsy Jackson (Principal Investigator) at Eastern Kentucky University. (Affiliation). She is being guided in this research by Dr. Charles Hausman (Faculty Advisory & Dissertation Committee Member), Dr. Bill Phillips (Dissertation Committee Chair), and Dr. Deborah West (Dissertation Committee Member).

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of women who have successfully ascended to the rural community college presidential role. In addition, the study examines the leadership approach and intended leadership legacy of these female presidents.

Through this phenomenological, qualitative study, we hope to identify barriers and facilitators to women's ascension to a rural community college presidency and to identify possible strategies to guide the advancement of women with presidential leadership capacity, contributing to the resolution of the impending leadership crisis.

#### **Where is the study going to take place and how long will it last?**

The research procedures will be conducted through telephone interviews with participants on a date and at a time that is mutually-agreeable to both the Principal Investigator and the study participant. The telephone interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes to complete and will be conducted during the months of August – October 2018 (depends on availability of the sample).

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

Each participant will be provided a concise, inclusive review of the study purpose and design. She will be asked to complete the informed consent by reading, signing, scanning and emailing the informed consent to the Principal Investigator.

#### **Are there reasons why I should not take part in this study?**

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study will be provided to each participant to ensure they are eligible and willing to participate in the study. Each participant will also be informed that she may withdraw from the study at any time at her own discretion.

#### **What are the possible risks and discomforts?**

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

You may, however, experience a previously unknown risk or side effect.

**Will I benefit from taking part in this study?**

You will not get any personal benefit from taking part in this study. However, emerging women leaders can learn from the experiences you have had and may use this information to improve their chances of successfully navigating the pathway to a rural community college presidency.

**Do I have to take part in this study?**

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

**If I don't take part in this study, are there other choices?**

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except to not take part in the study.

**What will it cost me to participate?**

There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

**Will I receive any payment or rewards for taking part in the study?**

You will not receive any payment or reward for taking part in this study.

**Who will see the information I give?**

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write up the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about this combined information. You will not be identified in these written materials.

This study is not completely anonymous. However, only the Principal Investigator conducting the interviews will know that the information you give came from you. We will make every effort to prevent anyone else from knowing that you gave us information. For example, your name will be kept separate from the information you give, and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key. Because this research is being conducted by a student, the student's faculty advisor will be required to save the information provided (both interview transcripts and any audio recordings) for three years in a secure location once the study is completed. After the 3 years, both the written materials and audio materials, pertaining to the study, will be destroyed per EKU policy.

**Can my taking part in the study end early?**

If you decide to take part in the study, you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to participate. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to end your participation in the study. They may do this if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you, or if the agency funding the study decides to stop the study early for a variety of scientific reasons.

**What happens if I get hurt or sick during the study?**

If you believe you are hurt or if you get sick because of something that is done during the study, you should call Patsy Jackson (Principal Investigator) at 606.496.5677 immediately. It is important for you to understand that Eastern Kentucky University will not pay for the cost of any care or treatment that might be necessary because you get hurt or sick while taking part in this study. That cost will be your responsibility. Also, Eastern Kentucky University will not pay for any wages you may lose if you are harmed by this study.

Usually, medical costs that result from research-related harm cannot be included as regular medical costs. Therefore, the costs related to your child's care and treatment because of something that is done during the study will be your responsibility. You should ask your insurer if you have any questions about your insurer's willingness to pay under these circumstances.

**What if I have questions?**

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Patsy Jackson at 606.496.5677. If you have any questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University at 859-622-3636. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

**What else do I need to know?**

You will be told if any new information is learned which may affect your condition or influence your willingness to continue taking part in this study.

*I have thoroughly read this document, understand its contents, have been given an opportunity to have my questions answered, and agree to participate in this research study.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person taking part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person providing information to subject



**Institutional Review Board  
Protocol Number**

**1723**

**Approval Valid  
7/31/18-11/30/18**

APPENDIX C:

Interview Questionnaire



## INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Please tell me a little about your background in higher education, including your achievement of your educational credentials and experiences in leadership.
2. Tell me about how you *formally* prepared for your first leadership position? a. *Informally* prepared?
3. Tell me about how you *formally* prepared for your current leadership position? a. *Informally* prepared?
4. Which method of preparation, *formally or informally*, do you consider the most effective for your leadership development and why?
5. Tell me about an experience or significant circumstance(s) that shaped your leadership development?
6. What characteristics, skills or situations do you think attributed to or facilitated your success in achieving a rural community college presidency?
7. What characteristics, attributes or circumstances may have hindered you or created barriers on your ascension to the rural community college presidency?
8. Tell me about the characteristics of the person(s) that supported your leadership aspirations and development?
9. Please share your beliefs about sponsoring or mentoring other women in leadership. Describe ways you do this and what that is like for you?
10. What aspects of leadership development do you consider the most important for women and why?
11. What aspects of the rural community college presidential role do you consider most important for women?
12. Tell me about a time when your leadership role required you to make changes in how you spent your time?
13. Tell me about a time when your leadership role required you to acquire new job skills? What were they and how did you develop the new job skills?
14. Tell me about a leadership role where your primary areas of focus for the job changed. Which position(s) and what were the changes and why?
15. Why do you think women are not making the transition to rural community college presidencies at the same rate as men?
16. What strategies do you think could help women transition from a middle- management level position to an executive level position such as a rural community college presidency?
17. Would you like to add anything else about job transition and changes in job requirements?
18. Have you experienced any cultural challenges/barriers working in a male dominated field? If so, please describe them and the strategies you used to overcome them? If not, please explain.
19. Would you like to add anything else about the culture of presidential leadership in a rural community college?
20. Please discuss aspects of your leadership experiences that have been the least, and the most satisfying, and explain why?
21. What lessons have you learned from your experience as a woman who achieved a rural community college presidency?
22. What advice would you give to women on how they should prepare for a rural community college presidency position?
23. Would you do things the same way, if yes, why? If not, explain why and discuss what you would change?
24. Is there anything else that you would like to add to this interview that will help me understand your personal lived experience, ascending to a rural community college presidency?