ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES' COMPETENCIES FOR COMMUNTY COLLEGE LEADERS

By

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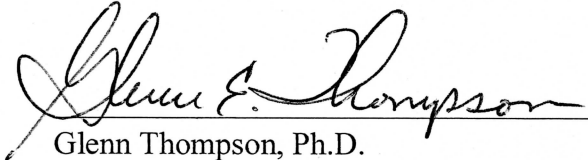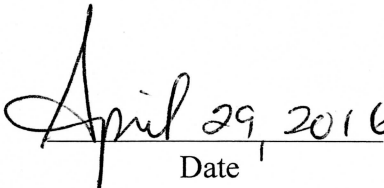Frostburg State University

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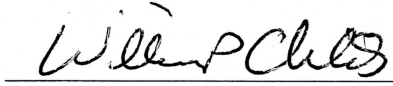
COMMUNTY COLLEGE LEADERS

By

Carol A. Rothstein

The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the College of Education, have examined and approved this dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Abstract

ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE AMERICAN

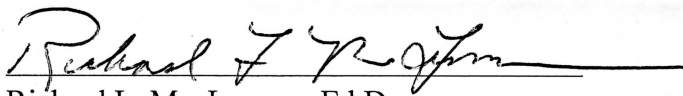ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES' COMPETENCIES FOR

COMMUNTY COLLEGE LEADERS

By

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Community colleges are facing a severe shortage of qualified leaders that may threaten the stability of these institutions. Seventy-five percent of community college presidents and a large number of senior administrators are planning to retire within ten years (AACC, 2013; Boyd, 2010; Shults, 2001). The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) addressed the leadership crisis in 2003, and again in 2012, by creating a framework that identified five key competencies that every community college president should possess. The competency areas are 1) organizational strategy; 2) institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management; 3) communication; 4) collaboration; and 5) advocacy.

The AACC publication, *Competencies for Community College Leadership,* addressed the skills community college presidents need, but it did not address how presidents acquired and developed those skills. This study uses a phenomenological design to discover the ways current community college presidents acquired and developed their skills with the AACC competencies.

Keywords: Community college leadership, community college presidents, AACC competencies

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Community colleges have become such a vital component of the American higher education system that millions of Americans would be bereft if these open access affordable institutions closed. However, community colleges are facing a severe shortage of qualified leaders that may threaten the stability of these institutions. The future success of community colleges is dependent on the ability of the current leaders to anticipate impending vacancies in critical leadership positions and prepare future leaders for those positions (Boyd, 2010; Duree, 2007). The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) addressed the leadership crisis in 2003, and developed a framework that identified five key competencies that every community college president should possess. The AACC reconvened in 2012 and updated the competency framework to be relevant to the constantly changing demands faced by a community college president. The new list was published in 2013.

The AACC's 2013 framework, *Competencies for Community College Leaders,* identified five critical areas in which community college president must have a high level of expertise. The competency areas are 1) organizational strategy; 2) institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management; 3) communication; 4) collaboration; and 5) advocacy. The competencies are broad areas that require a high level of expertise in order to operate a community college efficiently and effectively; developing skill in these areas is essential for presidents. Each competency is comprised of various components that are critical to the overall competency.

Organizational strategy is comprised of the areas like developing a mission and vision, organizational change, taking risks, working with faculty, working with the board of governors, institutional research, and strategic planning. The second competency is

institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management and includes budgeting, institutional finances, fundraising, crisis management, and supporting the faculty and staff. The communication competency consists of public speaking, public relations, communicating during a crisis, using social media, and communicating with staff, students, and the community. Expertise areas in collaboration are developing relationships with staff, students, and the board of governors. Advocacy is the ability to process political information, lobbying, networking, and advocating for community colleges as a system at the local, state, and national levels.

The competencies have proven to be very useful to community college professionals. Presidential search committees have used the AACC's competencies to evaluate potential candidates, colleges use them to design grow-your-own leadership programs, and curriculum designers create higher education leadership degree programs based on them. Some presidents and vice-presidents have used the competencies to structure administrative staff evaluations. Additionally, individuals who aspire to become a community college president can use the competency framework to identify professional weaknesses and areas in which they need to develop.

The shortage of qualified community college leaders and the limited pool of qualified candidates is a crisis; however, this crisis can also be a catalyst for change. The expected vacancies may provide opportunities for leaders that do not fit the traditional characteristics of community college presidents, provided those leaders acquire the necessary competencies (Bradley, 2009). If potential leaders know the most meaningful ways to acquire and develop competencies, they will be able to engage in similar experiences and be better prepared to assume a presidency. A narrative of the experiences current community college presidents encountered while acquiring skill in the

competencies will provide a richer resource for college administrators to use to design

leadership programs for future leaders in their college, curriculum designers to

incorporate experiential learning opportunities in their programs, as well as a pathway for

aspirant presidents to guide their career choices.

Statement of the Problem

Seventy-five percent of community college presidents and a large number of

senior administrators are planning to retire within ten years (AACC, 2013; Boyd, 2010;

Shults, 2001). Additionally, the pipeline for new leaders is shrinking due to candidates

not prepared and trained in the competencies, and fewer people applying for presidential

positions (AACC, 2013; Miksa, 2009). The AACC's publication, *Competencies for*

Community College Leadership, identified five competencies necessary for effective

community college leadership. The framework provides guidance to presidents on which

areas they need to be proficient. However, the publication did not address how aspirant or

current leaders acquire or develop these competencies. Although the new framework

gave a general definition of the level of expertise presidents should possess at different

points in their presidency, the framework did not identify potential learning experiences

in which the aspiring president should engage. Having a list of competencies essential for

community college leadership is useful; however, the framework would be more effective

if the list was accompanied by suggested learning experiences that were useful to current

community college presidents.

Purpose and Rationale of the Study

There is an expected gap between presidential vacancies and qualified candidates;

therefore, it is important to take action to prepare potential leaders for those positions.

The purpose of this study is to identify the most meaningful experiences that helped

current community college leaders to acquire and grow in their expertise of the AACC's five competencies. This study sought to learn the most meaningful influences on a president's development as a leader of a community college; this may include experience, professional development, mentoring, critical incidents, or reliance on other professionals.

Significance of Study

Understanding how current presidents acquired and developed competency will help aspirant presidents as they prepare for the presidency. Creating future leaders will help alleviate the effects of a significant loss of senior leadership. The information gained from the study will also be beneficial to community college leadership development programs. The results hold promise to inform future community college leaders about which activities are the most meaningful in acquiring and developing the AACC competencies. Providing this information may encourage more people, including women and minorities, to prepare for future leadership positions, thereby, reducing the deficit of qualified leaders and increasing diversity in the leadership positions.

Curriculum designers for leadership development programs may use the findings of this study to improve current programs by integrating experiences and activities into the curriculum, which have proven beneficial to current leaders. Although this study will focus on the acquisition of leadership competencies by community college leaders, the findings may be useful in other professions that also rely on pinnacle leaders.

Conceptual Framework

Graham Gibbs's Cycle of Reflection (Gibbs, 1988) is the conceptual framework for this study. Gibbs' model is a cyclical process steeped in experiential learning that is applicable to both learning and leading, both of which are integral to this study. Gibb's

Cycle of Reflection has six steps in the reflective process: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusions, and action plan. Each step is accompanied and defined by a guiding question, which provides structure to the reflective process. A more complete overview of Gibbs' Cycle of Reflection is included in Chapter 2.

Research Design Overview

This qualitative study will utilize a phenomenological design. Phenomenology is focused on exploring experiences shared among individuals and understanding how those experiences affect the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 2009); in the case of this study, the phenomenon being studied is the acquisition of the AACC's five competencies. The lived experiences of current community college presidents was compared and analyzed to determine the underlying essence, or similarities, that exist among the participants. To discover the experiences of the participants, I will conducted a face-to-face interview with each participant. One-on-one personal interviews are necessary when the phenomenon being study transpired in the past and the researcher cannot directly observe the behaviors of the research subjects or their personal interpretations of their experiences (Merriam, 2009). The interview followed a semi-structured interview protocol, which was informed by the current literature and the AACC's *Competencies for Community College Leaders*.

Research Question

The central research question that guided this study is as follows:
What have practicing community college presidents found to be the most meaningful ways to grow their expertise within each of the five AACC competencies?
The following sub questions were used to further guide this study:

1. What are the themes or similarities of community college presidents in terms of

developing competency in the five AACC competencies?

2. What contexts or situations influenced or affected community college presidents' experiences developing the five AACC competencies within themselves?

Assumptions

It was assumed that all participants in this study have acquired the skills and competencies listed in the AACC's *Competencies for Community College Leaders*. It is also assumed that the participants in the study answered the interview questions honestly and candidly and willingly shared their experiences, both positive and negative, with acquiring the AACC's competencies. Finally, it is also assumed that participants were be able to accurately recall events and experiences that contributed the most to their development in the competencies.

Limitations

Due to geographic limitations and time constraints, this research study was limited to include only current presidents at public community colleges in the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. While it is assumed that participants were forthcoming in their experiences with acquiring the AACC's competencies, the study was limited to their willingness to share their experiences. Because this study was limited to presidents of public community colleges, the findings may not be generalizable to private or four-year colleges and universities.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study are as follows:

1. Only presidents at public community colleges were included in the study, which excluded private colleges, tribal colleges, and four-year colleges and universities.

2. Only presidents of community college in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and

West Virginia were included in the study.

3. Only president who have been president at their current institution were included.

4. Only community colleges that are accredited by one of the six regional accrediting agencies were included.

Definitions

American Association of Community Colleges. The national advocacy organization for community colleges to promote five strategic action areas: recognition and advocacy for community colleges; student access, learning, and success; community college leadership development; economic and workforce development; and global and intercultural education.

Board of Governors. The Board of Governors is the governing body comprised of elected or appointed officials who oversee the operations and fiscal management of the college. The Board of Governors may be a local board or a state board. Other names for the Board of Governors include Board of Trustees and Board of Regents.

Competency. A competency is a set of specific knowledge, essential skills, and necessary abilities to be able to lead a community college successful.

Community college. A community college is an accredited, publically funded, 2-year, post-secondary institution that primarily offers an associate degree as the highest degree and typically provides adult continuing education, remedial education, workforce development, and customized training for businesses.

Community college president. A community college president is the chief executive officer of a community college with overall responsibility for the administration and leadership of the college.

Regional accreditation. Regional accreditation is educational approval of

schools, colleges, and universities in the United States by one of the six regional

accrediting bodies recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation

(CHEA). Regional accreditation ensures the academic quality, continuous improvement,

and accountability standards of the accredited institution.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 contains an introduction to the topic, the problem statement, purpose

and rationale, significance of the study, theoretical framework, research design,

questions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and definitions. Chapter 2 contains a

review of relevant literature on community college leadership beginning with the history

of community colleges, continuing with current challenges, effective institutions,

effective presidents, the role of the president, the AACC competencies, pathways to

presidency, and culminating in a review of the theoretical framework for this study.

Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology employed in this study and

includes a description of the population, sample selection, data instrument, data collection

and analysis techniques, validity and reliability procedures, role of the researcher, and

measures of ethical protection of participants. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the data

and findings. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings, which includes conclusions

of results, implications for practice, and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2 – Review of Literature

Introduction

Community colleges are the educational representative of the American ideal of equity. They provide educational opportunities to anyone, regardless of race, socio-economic status, or one's family background or prestige (Gilbert & Heller, 2013). While each community college has its own individual mission, they all adhere to an overarching mission of access and service to all students (AACC, 2012; Phillipe & Patton, 2000).

Two-year colleges have evolved over their 115-year history and several terms have been used to describe two-year colleges like junior college, technical college, and community college. Such terms highlight the missions and goals of the various institutions. The term junior college was primarily used prior to 1960 to describe institutions that were designed as transfer schools (Pederson, 2000). Junior colleges were typically liberal arts colleges that offered the first two years of a baccalaureate degree (Jurgens, 2010; Phillipe & Patton, 2000).

Technical colleges, as their name implies, offered technical programs that required a high degree of skill development and prepared students to enter the labor market immediately after graduation (Noy, Weiss, Jenkins, Barnett, & Wachen, 2012). These programs were occupational in nature and focused on career preparation instead of baccalaureate preparation (Noy et al., 2012). The term community college describes an institution that is focused on community engagement and improvement (Vaughn, 2001). This type of institution provided adult continuing education, remedial education, workforce development, and customized training for businesses (Meier, 2008; Nacco, 2010; Zeidenberg, 2008). Most two-year colleges today incorporate all of these operations into one comprehensive institution (Wyatt, 2009; Zeidenberg, 2008). For the

purpose of this research, all two-year colleges will be referred to as community colleges.

History of Community Colleges

Community colleges originated as a way to provide training and education outside of the typical liberal arts education of a four-year university; however, their mission quickly expanded to fulfill many other occupational and societal needs (Desai, 2012). Federal legislation was both the impetus and catalyst for community colleges. Most notable were The Morrill Act of 1862 and The Servicemen Readjustment Act of 1944; the former set the stage for the creation of community colleges and the latter propelled their growth (Cantor, 2009; Jurgens, 2010; Mellow, 2000). The Morrill Act of 1862, also known as the Land Grant Act, granted each state 30,000 acres of public land for every Congressional member the state had. The states were to sell that land and use the proceeds to establish state universities. The Act also expanded the scope of higher education to include programs and curricula that were previously excluded from higher education, like agriculture and other "mechanical arts" (Library of Congress, n.d., Mellow, 2000).

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, some high schools started to offer post-secondary courses designed to assist students with the transition to college (Pederson, 2000). Subsequently, many states passed legislation like California's Caminetti Act, which authorized credit for post-secondary courses hosted at the high school and created districts for the independent operation of junior colleges (Carey, 2013; Mellow, 2000; Pederson, 2000).

The early 1900s saw a strong increase in the number of applicants to the existing universities at the time, causing some universities to respond by opening junior colleges to accommodate those students (Gilbert & Heller, 2013; Jurgens. 2010). Most notable

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was Joliet Junior College which was founded in 1901 by William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, and J. Stanley Brown, principal of Joliet public high schools (Phillipe & Patton, 2000). Two-year colleges began to appear across the country. In 1921, the American Association of Junior Colleges was created to provide oversight and direction for the junior college movement (AACC, n.d.).

When World War II ended in 1945, thousands of military veterans returned to America eager to take advantage of the newly enacted Serviceman's Readjustment Act. The Act, known also as the G.I. Bill, provided the veterans with tuition, books, and living expenses while enrolled in college (Carey, 2013; Library of Congress, n.d.). Most colleges were unprepared to handle the sudden surge in enrollment, which prompted President Truman's Commission on Higher Education to endorse community colleges as the solution to the capacity dilemma (Gilbert & Heller, 2013; Jurgens, 2010). Two-year colleges were less costly to start and operate, and they provided affordable options for millions of students (Phillipe & Patton, 2000). As a response, the community college network experienced unprecedented growth during this time and added over 450 new colleges by the mid-1960s (Phillipe & Patton, 2000). The number of community colleges continued to increase and enrollment boomed.

Community colleges enjoyed this period of exponential growth; however, when enrollment slowed in the late 1970s, it created an intense competition between four-year and two-year schools (Cosand, 1979). Funding was largely based on enrollment numbers, so many institutions, both two-year and four-year, focused strictly on access and admissions and did not track completion. This created the impression that standards of quality had been relaxed in an effort to keep enrollment numbers high, prompting some critics to claim that higher education institutions became preoccupied with growth and

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began "prostituting themselves by enrolling bodies in order to maintain enrollments" (Cosand, 1979, p. 2). This perceived lack of standards caused many people to question the community college mission of open access and the value they offer to students.

During the 1990s, some community colleges began offering baccalaureate degrees, which further increased the competition with four-year institutions (Skolnik, 2011). The number of community colleges that offer baccalaureate degrees has steadily increased since the 1990s; currently, over 23 states authorize at least one community college to offer baccalaureate degree in certain fields (Community College Baccalaureate Association [CCBA], n.d.). Although it is a controversial issue, several other states are considering granting community colleges the authority to confer bachelor's degrees.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the media often devalued community colleges and generally characterized them as second-rate institutions reserved for mediocre students (Dziech & Vilter, 1992; Narvaez, 2006; Tucciarone, 2007). This led to a negative image of community colleges, which was exacerbated by confusion and misunderstanding of the multifarious mission community colleges were expected to fulfill (Gombash, 2003; Meier, 2008; Tucciarone, 2007). Critics decried the mission of community colleges as too broad and ambiguous, and that their attempts to be all-inclusive and comprehensive resulted in helping too few people achieve too little success (McPhail, 2004; Meier, 2008). In addition, two-year colleges were inappropriately compared to four-year universities, further detracting from the importance of community colleges (Gombash, 2003).

Unlike four-year universities, who have selective admissions standards, community colleges have an open door policy. This means large numbers of students who enroll in a community college are academically and socially unprepared for college

and need a significant amount of developmental work before they are able to complete college level courses (Bradley, 2016). Over 60% of community college students are required to enroll in at least one remedial course (Swanson, 2008). Statistics suggest that college students who enroll in remedial courses are more likely to earn lower grades and drop out after their first year of school (Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009). These students are not prepared academically, socially, and/or emotionally for the demands of college and face many difficulties as they navigate their college experience.

In addition to academic support, community college students frequently need additional services like disability support and counseling services. The additional burdens community college students face often extend the time it takes for students to complete a degree (Bradley, 2016). Unfortunately, critics who compare community colleges to four-year universities fail to consider the students' circumstances and the effect it has on their degree completion.

In recent years, public opinion has shifted marginally and community colleges are beginning to receive more acceptance from the general population (Wenrich & Reid, 2003). Government leaders like United States President Barack Obama and several state governors and legislators support free tuition for community college students (Lu, 2014; Zalaznick, 2015). Free tuition for community colleges has been at the forefront of political debate during the current presidential campaigns, and is a main topic in the platform of at least one presidential candidate. It is likely to continue to be an important point of debate.

Celebrities, like Mike Rowe and Tom Hanks, have also championed the value of community colleges (Hanks, 2015; Rowe, 2013). The main creeds of the community college supporters are affordability and occupational training in the technical career

fields. Rising costs of four-year institutions have made college affordability a concern for many students, and the economic recession of 2008 triggered an amplified need for job training (AACC, 2015c). The positive media attention is a boon to the community college stature, but there are still many challenges with which community college leaders must contend.

Challenges

Institutions across the educational landscape of higher education currently face challenges across multiple dimensions. Some of the challenges include fluctuating enrollments, increasing operational costs, increasing governmental regulations, and integrating technology into the learning process (AACC, 2012; Zeidenberg, 2008). Future community college leaders must have the ability to move the organization forward in ever-changing times.

In addition, community colleges must handle challenges associated with information technology and data security. Just like any organization, community colleges must uphold standards of state and federal legislation as it relates to data integrity and security. Because community colleges may handle several categories of protected information, like personnel records, healthcare records, and personally identifiable information, and financial information, they must have a secure reliable information technology system (Wenzler, 2016). Information technology demands can create a strain on a college's budget, so presidents must plan accordingly and prepare for future upgrades, as technology enhancements are needed.

According to Duree (2007), the top five challenges facing community colleges are fundraising, student enrollment and retention, legislative advocacy, economic and workforce development, and faculty relations. Presidents also face many other challenges

that include keeping pace with technology; developing partnerships with industry; addressing issues of professional growth and training for employees; creating partnerships and articulations with high schools, and identifying leadership potential in faculty and staff (Hood, Miller, & Pope, 1999).

Challenges with personnel are among the most common source of frustration for a president (Duree, 2007; Tekniepe, 2013). These issues range from incompetence, negativity, lack of professionalism, and a resistance to change (Duree, 2007). The mistrust and internal strife caused by faculty and staff members are primary causes of presidential turnover (Tekniepe, 2013). A study conducted by Terry O'Banion, President Emeritus of the League for Innovation, highlighted some of the personnel issues presidents may face during their tenure. O'Banion surveyed 375 community college presidents regarding their experiences with oppositional employees. O'Banion worked with 14 community college presidents and defined this type of employee as a "curmudgeon" and providing the following definition of one:

> Curmudgeons are contrarians who take enormous pleasure and pride in thinking otherwise. They can be cantankerous naysayers acting as self-appointed gadflies to the president or other leaders, including leaders of their own constituencies. Collaboration and civility do not seem to be values they hold in high esteem. They are quite vocal and opinionated and appear to prefer heated debate and prolonged circular discussion to solving problems and reaching consensus. Curmudgeons can be memorable characters with a certain flair or style often using humor and sarcasm to play to their audiences. (O'Banion, 2015, para.3)

A major finding from the O'Banion survey (2015) was that 97% of the community college presidents who responded to the survey had experienced at least one

curmudgeon during their tenure; fifty percent had experienced four or more people who met the definition. The study also indicated that senior leaders have left positions due to the negative effect the curmudgeon had on the college and other employees' attitudes and productivity. Handling these types of employees, 86% of which were identified as faculty members, is not an easy task. They create problems, induce a large amount of stress, and are one of the main reasons community college presidents leave their position.

Finances continue to be a major concern for community college presidents. States are drastically reducing funding provided to colleges, which is creating a major challenge for community colleges. Historically, higher education enjoyed the largesse of state funding. When state legislators considered higher education as imperative for the enduring future of society, they typically made funding higher education a priority (Ballinger, 2012). However, the opinion of higher education shifted during the 1980s, as more people viewed college as a personal gain that should not be government funded (Zumeta, Breneman, Callan, & Finney, 2012). Concurrently, states felt financial pressure from reduced tax revenues and as a result, funding for higher education diminished. Reduced financial support for higher education is an unfortunate trend that continues (Besikof, 2010; Zumeta et al., 2012).

The recession of 2008 forced 36 states to cut higher education funding (Besikof, 2010). Colleges and universities had to find other funding sources to cover their budget deficits. Raising tuition and fees was the most frequent response; however, it only partially covered the financial shortcomings, and it intensified the college affordability problem (Zumeta et al., 2012). Colleges had to make difficult decisions regarding budget cuts while actively seeking alternative funding sources, generally in the form of fundraising and entrepreneurial ventures (Ballinger, 2012; Besikof, 2010; Wenrich &

Reid, 2003).

Although there is a push across the country to provide free community college tuition to many high school graduates, there is disagreement among many government leaders as to whether free tuition programs are beneficial. Some states, like Kentucky, have legislators who support free tuition programs, but also have a governor who wants to cut funding to higher education institutions (Beam, 2016). The free tuition programs will likely increase enrollments, but the funding cuts will reduce the services and support the colleges are able to provide to students.

Egalitarian access is the hallmark of community colleges. Admission offices do not require completion of specific high school subjects, nor do they require standardized test scores to prove academic ability or readiness (Reed, 2013). In some cases, a high school diploma or equivalency is not a prerequisite for attendance (Reed, 2013). Acceptance is virtually guaranteed to all applicants, hence the term open enrollment. Open enrollment and minimal admission standards have helped millions of students pursue a college education, especially student groups who are historically underrepresented in college enrollment. It is also one of the factors in the exponential growth of community colleges.

Open enrollment and unrestricted access have a dark side (Gombash, 2003). Community colleges have been plagued with low retention rates, low graduation and transfer rates, and high student loan default rates (Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin, & Vigdor, 2013). The statistics alarmed consumers and legislators, both of whom provide a large part of college funding. There was a growing concern about the lack of transparency and accountability in higher education. In 2006, The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education produced a report titled *A Test of Leadership: Charting*

the Future of U.S. Higher Education. This report highlighted the absence of data

collection and analysis in higher education. The following is an excerpt of the report:

There is inadequate transparency and accountability for measuring institutional

performance, which is more and more necessary to maintaining public trust in

higher education. Our complex, decentralized postsecondary education system has

no comprehensive strategy, particularly for undergraduate programs, to provide

either adequate internal accountability systems or effective public information.

Too many decisions about higher education—from those made by policymakers

to those made by students and families—rely heavily on reputation and rankings

derived to a large extent from inputs such as financial resources rather than

outcomes. Better data about real performance and lifelong working and learning

ability is absolutely essential if we are to meet national needs and improve

institutional performance. (United States Department of Education [USDE] 2006,

p. 14)

In response to the report, accreditors and government agencies increased their

emphasis on accountability, instead of focusing on access alone (Clotfelter et al., 2013;

McKinney, 2011). In 2012, the United States Department of Education's (USDE) College

Affordability and Transparency Center developed a college scoreboard. The scoreboard

was designed to provide data on critical elements of information students needed to know

like net price, graduation rates, student loan default rate, and estimated loan repayment

amounts (Morgan & Dechter, 2012). As an additional system of accountability, the

USDE is designing a ratings system for colleges. This system will reportedly focus on

three areas of a college's performance: 1) access, generally determined by the percentage

of students receiving Pell grants; 2) affordability, calculated using average tuition,

scholarships, and loan debt; and 3) outcomes, evaluated using graduation and transfer rates, graduate earnings, and advanced degrees of college graduates (United States Department of Education [USDE], n.d.).

According to the USDE, the federal government plans to enact legislation that will make the ratings system the basis for awarding federal dollars via Pell grants and federal financial aid (USDE, n.d.). The premise behind the ratings system is to "enhance consumer choice … and incentivize colleges to provide better value by improving performance, lowering costs, and investing in student access and success" (USDE, n.d., p.1).

Historically, higher education funding structures focused on access and enrollment numbers; therefore, colleges were funded by the number of students enrolled (National Conference of State Legislators [NCSL], 2015). This type of funding incentivized colleges to be accessible, yet it did nothing to encourage institutions to increase performance and ensure student success (NCSL, 2015). In accordance with the increased emphasis on performance, many states have altered their higher education funding formulas to align with performance incentives. Currently, thirty states have enacted performance-based funding and four more states are in the process of enacting it (NCSL, 2015).

Performance-based funding formulas vary from state to state; however, the most common indicators used to determine effectiveness include outcome, progress, and mission metrics. (NCSL, 2015; Reyna, 2010).

- Outcome Metrics include enrollment, underrepresented student enrollment, degrees and certificates awarded, affordability, accreditation reviews, retention rate, transfer rates, and dual enrollment.

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- Progress Metrics include success in remedial education, success beyond remedial education, success in first-year college courses, credit accumulation, retention rates, and course completion.

- Mission Metrics include community engagement, financial stability, and workforce development and training.

Performance funding has been criticized as an inaccurate measure of community college performance (Clotfelter et al., 2013; Cohen, 1989). Graduation rates are typically based on "first-time, full-time students" which represents a small portion of community college students and excludes part-time students and those who previously attended college at another institution. Many community college students work full-time and attend classes part-time; it is common for those students to start and stop their enrollment repeatedly (Bailey, 2012). A student who starts college part-time and graduates with an Associate's degree would not be counted in the graduation rate.

Quality programs and accountability for same have become the watchwords for educational institutions as federal and state agencies demand continuous reports and create regulations that give consumers open access to many forms of data (Hall, 2015). In order to face these new challenges, university administrators need to know their institutions well and be strong advocates for the community college concept of "equity of opportunity."

Effective Institutions

The community college mission is complex and often ambiguous due to its comprehensiveness; therefore, defining success is often a difficult task (Clotfelter et al., 2013; Meier, 2008). However, if the appropriate measures are used it is possible to identify high and low performing community colleges (Clotfelter et al., 2013). A

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successful community college is efficacious in the following areas: student success, finical stability, employee satisfaction, community engagement, and workforce development.

The Aspen Institute has designed an annual College Excellence Program (CEP) that incorporates several performance indicators outside of the standard retention and graduation rates to evaluate success (Aspen Institute, 2013). The CEP gives annual awards to community colleges that have been determined to be excellent in the following four areas: completion, learning, labor market outcomes, and equity. The CEP determines excellence and awards prizes by collecting qualitative and quantitative data that answer the following questions:

- Do students earn degrees and other meaningful credentials?
- Does the college set expectations for what students should learn, measure whether they are doing so, and use that information to improve programming?
- Do graduates get well-paying jobs?
- Do colleges work to ensure equitable outcomes for minority, low-income, and other underserved students? (Aspen Institute, 2013).

Successfully negotiating the perils of financial insecurity while moving a community college forward in terms of success, as defined now and into the future, appears to be no small task. The ever changing landscape caused by advances in technology, governmental scrutiny and regulation, along with intense competition from myriad other arenas will take a strong and sustained effort. The ability to stay nimble, dynamic, and focused in order to be both competitive and successful will demand more than simple management.

Effective Presidents

One of the most important aspects of an effective institution is having an effective leader. Community college presidents are responsible to lead the institution toward its mission, accomplish institutional goals, and meet performance standards. Dean (1986) surveyed faculty, administrators, student services personnel, and presidents in 11 community college districts to determine behaviors most often reported as examples of effective and ineffective leadership. The following were listed as examples of effective leadership behaviors of a community college president: addressing the financial health of the institution, communicating with faculty and staff, planning, promoting positive community relations, and the appropriate transferring, demoting, or releasing of ineffective personnel. In contrast, the following ineffective behaviors were identified: personally alienating faculty and staff, failing to act, insufficiently informing faculty and staff, failing to solicit or use input, inappropriate staffing, showing poor judgment in financial issues, and alienating community members (Dean, 1986).

Drotos (2012) asked 25 community college presidents to define success in the role of president. Three themes emerged from the presidents' answers: serving the community, maintaining financial stability, and achieving goals. Presidents focused on how the community viewed the college, and whether the president had a strategic vision that was grounded in meeting student and community needs. The importance of motivating others to aspire to that vision was also noted (Drotos, 2012). The ability of the president to keep the institution financially healthy was very important; this is especially important in the face of growing financial pressures and budget reductions. Meeting institutional goals is critically important, for no leader would be considered successful if the institution did not accomplish its core goals (Drotos, 2012).

Role of the President

A community college president has a challenging task to accomplish. In order to fulfill the diverse roles of the college effectively, the president must successfully navigate political change and influence public opinion. To be effective, presidents must acquire certain skills and abilities in order to meet the demands of the institution and to bring about change and innovation. A president must be an effectual communicator, innovator, and facilitator (Hood et al., 1999).

As a communicator, the president must assist faculty and staff in understanding the purpose of the institution. This can be accomplished by demarcating the mission and providing a vision for how to accomplish the mission through speeches, writings, storytelling, metaphors, and even by the structure of the college (Bicknell, 2008). Communicating the institutional mission and vision is one of the most important responsibilities of the presidential position (Hood et al., 1999).

Presidents participate in various activities that support and engage the community. More than half of community college presidents serve on a board of directors for community groups outside of the college (Duree, 2007). Presidents must be visible and involved in the community, this includes volunteering, chairing boards, attending social events, and meeting with business and political leaders (Ullman, 2012). One president stated, "Our communities know how much they need us and are hungry for more knowledge about what we do. You have to show up at those breakfasts, lunches, and dinners and serve on the United Way and Economic Development Council Boards" (Ullman, 2012, p. 19).

Presidents are the face of the institution, they bring the vision of the college to the community and business leaders, they bring awareness to students, and advocate to the

legislative body. Presidents must also develop a respectful relationship with the college's

governing board. Presidents who ignore or undermine the governing and policymaking

duties of the board will not be successful in leading the college (Hankin & Steiner, 2010).

In contrast to presidents at four-year universities, few community college

presidents publish books, monographs, or other research articles; however, they must be

lifetime learners (Duree, 2007; Hankin & Steiner, 2010). Community college presidents

must be actively learning about their institution at all times. This type of learning occurs

best when presidents walk around the campus, engage students in conversation, talk with

faculty and staff members, and ask probing questions of visitors (Hankin & Steiner,

2010).

Community college presidents play an integral role in institutional effectiveness;

this is true regardless of the size, location, and number of campuses at the college (Ball,

2008). Presidents report being involved in the planning, outcome identification, and

assessment of institutional effectiveness "often" or "always." It is uncommon for a

president not to be involved in some aspect of institutional effectiveness (Ball, 2008).

This makes sense, as the president is ultimately responsible for all college operations and

their effectiveness.

Community college presidents must be able to make a myriad of decisions and do

so successfully. Berry (2013) divided those decisions into two situations, routine and

non-routine. Routine decisions involve mission and vision, strategic planning, expansion

or closings of campuses, changes to academic offerings, marketing, programmatic

changes, human resource policies, budgeting, and other personnel or operational matters.

When making routine decisions presidents collect data, assess culture, seek

counsel, involve constituents, analyze strengths and weakness, conduct data analysis, and

apply open and creative thinking (Berry, 2013). Presidents typically have time to contemplate the problem and make the decision. Conversely, non-routine decisions include rapid change, unpredictable events; and economic and global competition (Berry, 2013). Some non-routine events, like attacks and natural disasters, require immediate decisions and may have life or death consequences. Other non-routine decisions, like unexpected legislative or economic events, can have significant impact on the future of an institution and necessitate a skilled decision maker at the helm.

Pinnacle leadership in educational institutions, to include the role of president in community colleges, is not an easy task. Today's educational marketplace, coupled with increasing accountability, role complexity, and intense pressure cause fewer administrators to aspire to the presidential position (Ekman, 2010; Mangan, 2015; Miksa, 2009). Public opinion and political support is capricious, and can quickly turn inimical. Many administrators believe the rewards of being a community college president do not outweigh the exacting pressures of the position or the fear of possible litigations or public scrutiny that may arise during the course of duty (Moser, 2008). Public scrutiny is even more exacting now with the instant availability provided by social media and internet media (Floyd, Maslin-Ostrowski, & Hrabak, 2010).

Exacerbating the leadership crisis is the impending retirement of the majority of current presidents. Seventy-five percent of community college presidents plan to retire in the next ten years (AACC, 2013). A significant number of senior administrators and faculty are also projected to leave higher education (AACC, 2013). Turnover, impending retirements of current presidents and senior administrators, and a shrinking applicant pool create a serious deficit of experienced leadership that looms over the future of community colleges (AACC, 2013; Miksa, 2009; Shults, 2001). The vast number of impending open

presidential positions and the limited number of qualified people to fill those positions is cause for concern (Ekman, 2010).

AACC Competencies

In 2003, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) received a grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to address the impending shortage of community college leaders. The AACC used the grant to host a variety of leadership summits designed to "build consensus around key knowledge, values, and skills needed by community college leaders" (AACC, 2005, p. 1). This information would assist colleges with developing new leaders and supporting current ones.

Using the information gleaned from the summits, the AACC mailed a comprehensive survey to 125 community college presidents. The survey asked the participants to evaluate competencies they thought were necessary for presidents to possess in order to be effective, and rate whether those competencies were "minimally" to "extremely" important. The survey respondents unanimously identified six areas of competency as either "very" or "extremely" important. Those areas were organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism (AACC, 2005).

The AACC approved and distributed *Competencies for Community College Leaders* in 2005. Since then, it has proved to be a useful resource and guide to many colleges, presidents, and aspiring leaders. Governing boards often hire new presidents based on the competencies listed, associations and institutions create leadership development programs around it, and individuals aspiring to be president chart their career paths with it (McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011).

Many colleges have used the AACC's competencies to create leadership

development programs and it has been a helpful tool in guiding the next generation of community college leaders (McNair et al., 2011). However, the decade after its inception saw many changes for community colleges and an updated competency list was needed for the future.

The AACC never intended for the original *Competencies for Community College Leadership* to be a static document, and included the following statement on future improvements: "This competency framework is intended as a 'living document', evolving over time to meet changing human and institutional needs" (AACC, 2005, p. 1). The AACC reconvened in 2012 to create a modernized list. The newer list, published in 2013, included the following five competencies: organizational strategy; institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management; communication; collaboration; and community college advocacy.

The 2013 list goes further than the 2005 list by delineating the skill level required at three stages of professional development: the first level is that of the emerging leader, the second stage occurs during the first three years of presidency, and the third stage occurs after more than three years of experience as a president (AACC, 2013). The delineation of stages to community college presidential professional development recognizes that presidents go through a progression of learning while growing in the competencies of the role.

Organizational strategy. "An effective community college leader promotes the success of all students, strategically improves the quality of the institution, and sustains the community college mission based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends" (AACC, 2013, p. 6).

Organizational strategy encompasses many areas of community college

leadership. It involves the president's ability to embrace and support the mission and culture of the institution, maintain high moral and ethical standards, take risks and initiate change, focus on student support and access, as well as develop relationships with employees and the governing board (AACC, 2013). Presidents have tremendous impact on the organizational effectiveness for the institution they preside over (Broome, 2003).

The mission and vision are central to the institution's success. A community college president must embrace and understand the mission and vision of the institution. The community college presidents surveyed by Drotos (2012) defined success as "serving their communities through an understanding of the mission, vision, and values, as well as demonstrating an understanding of what the communities want and expect from the college" (p. iv).

Integrity and good moral character are some of the highest valued characteristics a president should possess; they are so vital to leadership that they are the most recommended characteristics for community college presidents to possess (Boyd, 2010; Vaughn, 2001). A person who upholds high standards for ethical and moral conduct in their personal life will translate those standards into their professional role. If a leader's integrity is questionable, they will not be an effective leader (Hockaday & Puyear, 2000). The AACC (2013) states morals and ethics are more important to the presidency than having a charismatic personality.

Boyd (2010) found that all of the presidents and board members he interviewed regarded integrity and morality as unnegotiable requisites for credible effective leadership. As the official image and spokesperson for their institution, presidents must realize their impact on the public's perception of the college. Fleming (2012) urged colleges to adopt a code of ethics for college presidents; he believes "the development of

a presidential code of conduct supports the growth and success of the institution, encourages relationship congruency, and strengthens the cooperative partnerships between the president and the institutional faculty" (p. 16).

Another challenge in organizational strategy is successfully leading organizational change. According to the AACC (2013), emerging and new presidents must learn the culture of their institution before initiating substantial changes. However, once presidents have thoroughly learned the culture of their institution, they must have the courage to take risks and make necessary changes. Courage is a necessary requisite for being a change leader. Community college presidents must have the courage to admit when they are wrong, to withstand criticism when they are right, and to forge ahead to enact change when it is needed (Hockaday & Puyear, 2000).

Student success should be at the forefront of every community college president's agenda. Every college employee, including the custodial staff, the admissions secretary, the faculty members, and all administrators should understand their role in student success (Gnage & Drumm, 2010). If this is not the case, then presidents must make it their job to change the culture of the college to focus on student success strategies (AACC, 2013). Broome (2003) found student satisfaction and academic development were rated higher when the college president was successful in "inspiring a shared vision" and "modeling the way", which suggests "that leaders who focused their attention on the human needs within the institution were more apt to impact a student's academic development" (p. 80).

Leadership studies, like Broome's, consistently support relationships among leaders and staff as an essential component of a successful institution. This is true in business, education, and many other areas. Several leadership paradigms, like servant

leadership, transformational leadership, and collaborative leadership, are built upon the

foundation of authentic relationships (Boyum, 2012; Greenleaf, 1977). Authentic

relationships are important to the role of president in many ways, building rapport with

the board of governors, developing trust with faculty and staff, and establishing a

connection with external constituents.

Institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management. "An

effective community college leader equitably and ethically sustains people, processes and

information as well as financial assets to fulfill the mission, vision, and goals of the

community college" (AACC, 2013, p. 8).

A key to fulfilling this competency is a thorough understanding of the institution's

budget as well as funding sources. Community colleges increasingly rely on tuition and

fees to support the operating budget and can no longer rely on federal and state funding to

fulfill ambitious goals or to meet the demands of ever-increasing legislative mandates

(Ballinger 2012; Besikof, 2010; Jenkins, 2011; Zumeta et al., 2012). Fundraising has

become increasingly important, especially as state appropriations diminish. The president

plays a vital role in fundraising. The public image of the president creates credibility and

creates opportunities for engagement with potential donors (Besikof, 2010; Wenrich &

Reid, 2003).

Presidents should spend time in the public arena to "tell the college story and

develop external relationships" which will translate into friendships and supporters for

the college (Miller, 2013, p. 81). One president that Miller (2013) interviewed stated,

"I'm highly visible in the community and I serve on a ton of boards that I don't have time

to serve on, but it's important that I'm at those meetings and folks hear my voice" (p. 81).

Due to the expected decreases in funding, fundraising is more important now than ever

before; however, it is frequently listed as the least liked activity in which a president must engage and as the number one reason for not pursuing a presidency (Karns, 2008). Community college presidents also list fundraising as the most important challenge facing current and future presidents (Duree, 2007).

Crisis management is included in this competency. Gone are the days when presidential decisions revolved primarily around budgets, image, and innovation. On-campus violence has increased and an active shooter can assail any college at any time (Drysdale, Modzeleski, & Simmons, 2010; Sulkowski & Lazarus, 2011). If that were to occur, a president would need to make immediate decisions, often without time to seek out advice or options. The president must prepare the college for such a possible event (Lundquist, 2009). In the absence of known best practices for making critical high-stakes decisions, the best protection is for the president to prepare for worst-case scenarios and have an emergency information notification system ("Be Prepared to Act", 2009; Connolly, 2011).

Other non-routine decisions include natural disasters and unexpected economic and legislative events that can adversely affect that college (Berry, 2013; Connolly, 2011). While Berry (2013) considers natural disasters as non-routine emergencies, pre-planned disaster preparation can significantly diminish their impact (Connolly, 2011). Economic and legislative surprises are much harder to prepare for and manage. These events are hard to predict and require quick decisions to mitigate their effects.

When a president needs to make decisions without the benefit of data, it is helpful to possess a high level of intuition (Miksa, 2009). Intuition assists presidents to make the best possible decision in those situations. Intuition relies on relationship sensing and reasoning. Presidents, especially new presidents, are often judged by the decisions they

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make in their first few months of presidency and are under the microscope constantly; if they falter in their decision-making, it can have a negative effect on the rest of their tenure (Miksa, 2009).

Preparation is vital to the effective management of crises; therefore, McCarthy (2014) recommends the following practices to prepare colleges for emergencies:

- Establish a personal relationship with the students and families affected by the tragedies.
- Communicate extensively and well.
- Establish a committed group of professionals to serve as a crisis communication team.
- Work closely with counseling center staff to ensure they have the resources to assist students at a moment's notice.
- Invite psychologists in the community who have volunteered to help the campus during significant crises affecting the larger community.
- Pay close attention to personal well-being and take care of oneself in order to be able to take care of others.
- Develop a campus culture of caring by challenging students to do their best to care for each other and to reach out to resources and staff who will help students succeed and address any obstacles to learning.

Communication. "An effective community college leader uses clear listening, speaking, and writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and its surrounding community; promotes the success of all students; ensures the safety and security of students and the surrounding college community; and sustains the community college mission" (AACC, 2013, p. 9).

Communication is continually at the top of the list of skills that an effective president must possess. (Berry, 2013; Boyd, 2010; Broome, 2003; Dean, 1986). Practically every study on community college presidents involves some aspect of communication. A hallmark of an effective president is open, effective communication. Faculty, staff, and presidents themselves all report communication as a vital trait of an effective president (Dean, 1986; Drotos, 2012). Communication is the basis for the other four competencies outlined by the AACC. It would be nearly impossible to invoke collaboration, advocate for community colleges, manage fiscal resources, or strategically improve the institution in the absence of effective communication.

Communication is a key factor in resolving major issues and when making critical decisions (Fridena, 1998; Kishur, 2004). In a crisis, a college president needs to have significant communication with various internal and external stakeholders and anyone else who could potentially be affected by the crisis (Kishur, 2004). The president must notify and advise constituents about the ongoing crisis, as well as listen, seek advice, and discuss problems and solutions in order to mitigate a crisis (Kishur, 2004).

Communication skills, including one-on-one exchanges, small group interactions, and public speaking, have been linked to longevity of the tenure of a community college president (McDonald, 2012). Therefore, it would be prudent for aspirant presidents to cultivate their ability in this competency.

Collaboration. "An effective community college leader develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial, and ethical internal and external relationships that nurture diversity, promotes the success of all students, and sustains the community college mission" (AACC, 2013, p. 10).

Relationship building is essential to every leader. Presidents who are able to

connect with individuals and are personable, more easily garner support from governing boards, peers, employees, and students; as a result, they often have longer tenures as presidents (McDonald, 2012). New community college presidents describe relationship building and networking with internal and external constituents as one of the most liked responsibilities about their new position (Miksa, 2009). Interview participants in Miksa's (2009) study offered the following advice to new, incoming presidents: develop a strong relationship with the board, listen to constituents and learn the political landscape, and actively seek out a more experienced mentor.

Community college advocacy. "An effective community college leader understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision, and goals of the community college on the local, state, and national level" (AACC, 2013, p. 11).

Community colleges are subject to regulation and legislation by various governing bodies. Federal and state legislators have control over funding, but they also exhibit great power over laws and regulations concerning community college operations. Community college presidents must be advocates for their college as well as community colleges in general (Duncan & Ball, 2011). Presidents who expect to navigate the political realm successfully, must stay abreast of political issues and aggressively lobby for the college's needs (Boyd, 2010).

Presidents have the duty of lobbying for funding and influencing legislative actions to garner more support for the community college system (Duncan & Ball, 2011). Community college presidents can best advocate by networking with legislators and influential people in order to build a relationship (Duncan & Ball, 2011). Legislators need to hear student success stories and understand how community colleges have made positive impacts on the lives of their students and the economic development of their

communities, and presidents should be the ones who tell those stories (Duncan & Ball, 2011).

Pathways to Presidency

There have been many studies conducted that have analyzed the typical pathways college presidents followed to become president. Bradley (2009) surveyed 170 community college presidents to determine their career pathway and found nearly half of the presidents he surveyed held the position of community college instructor prior to becoming president. This is consistent with other studies which indicated the most common route to the position of presidency is via academic affairs positions like Instructor, Vice President of Instruction, and Chief Academic Officer (Bradley, 2009; Cook, 2012; Weisman & Vaughn, 2007). Therefore, those who desire to be a college president should consider charting their career paths to align with opportunities to gain experience in various academic areas of a community college (Weisman & Vaughn, 2007). McDonald (2012) suggests future presidents should also gain experience in several business disciplines like, being a change agent, interpreting legislation, joining local and state level organizations, participating in public speaking engagements, and developing and implementing budgets.

Historically, only 8% of community college presidents are from the student affairs division and 6% are from the business office (Bradley, 2009). Interestingly, more presidents are being recruited from outside of higher education; almost 20% of current presidents are from industry (Cook, 2012). The role of a community college president entails a sundry of skills and abilities. Finding a leader who possesses these skills at an expert level is a difficult task for search committees. Instead of relying on faculty to fill the presidential role as early literature suggests, the board of trustees might be better

served if they look at other areas of the college, like enrollment management, student affairs, workforce development, or institutional advancement to find employees who have a more diverse scope of experience with the institution (Brunen, 2012)

The future success of community colleges is dependent on the ability of the current leaders to anticipate impending vacancies in critical leadership positions and prepare future leaders for those positions (Duree, 2007). Several colleges have instituted "grow-your-own" leadership programs to address future leadership needs. These programs are designed to identify future leaders based on their interest, talent, and diversity and train them through team building, mentoring, coaching, and job-shadowing (Duree, 2007). Most presidents believe they were prepared for their first presidency, however, many are concerned that formal training programs do not sufficiently address the AACC's competencies and suggest contemporary leadership development programs need do a better job of integrating the competencies into the curricula (Duree, 2007).

Summary

Community colleges truly represent an egalitarian ideology, and their importance to the American educational landscape cannot be overstated. Millions of Americans rely on community colleges to obtain foundational skills, prepare for university level coursework, train for a career, and explore personal interests (AACC, 2015a). Forty-six percent of all undergraduates are community college students and over half of undergraduate minority students attend community colleges (AACC, 2015b). For many students, especially those from groups that are historically underrepresented in higher education, community colleges offer the only affordable option. Cohen (1989) stated that for many students, the "choice is not between the community college and a senior residential institution, it is between the community college and nothing" (p. 27).

Leading a community college is not an easy task, and fewer people are willing to take on the responsibility. The position of community college president requires a wide-ranging skillset that is broad, yet highly developed in the critical competencies outlined by the AACC. The position also requires humor, ethics, respect, honesty, patience, and influence (Wheelan, 2012). Finding leaders with those qualities and competencies is difficult; the impending leadership shortage intensifies the need to develop future community college leaders. "There needs to be deliberate preparation in order to produce leaders with the right competencies" (AACC, 2013, p. 2).

Many studies have reported the demographics of community college presidents (gender, race, etc.), their pathway to presidency (prior positions, educational attainment), and the skills necessary to lead a community college (AACC competencies), but few tell the story of how community college presidents acquired and developed those skills. This study is interested in discovering how community college presidents became experts in the AACC competencies. Did a specific person or persons influence them in some way, did a critical event happen, or a series of events, or did the declarative learning received in their graduate program suffice? Why did they choose to become a president and did they feel prepared when they assumed their first presidency?

Geller (2009) proposed that the best and most thorough way to learn how to lead a community college is through experience. This study seeks to understand those experiences and illuminate the personal accounts from community college presidents about how they acquired and developed skill in the AACC competencies.

Conceptual Framework

"A theoretical framework is the underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame of [a] study" (Merriam, 2009, p. 66). The theoretical framework supports the

methodological design, informs the research problem, and provides a foundation for the interpretation of the findings (Merriam, 2009). The focus of this study is the acquisition and development of key competencies necessary for community college leadership, which involves the domains of learning and leading. Therefore, the framework for this study needed to span both domains. A reflective practice theory serves that function, as reflection is vital to both learning and leading.

John Dewey was one of the first educational psychologists to analyze the reflective process (Moon, 2004). In 1933, Dewey published *How We Think. A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process*, it was a treatise about using cyclical thinking to learn as opposed to linear models of learning (Moon, 2004). Reflective thinking to Dewey meant "active, persistent, and careful consideration" about what is known in order to test, prove, or change current knowledge (Moon, 2004, p. 12).

Jürgen Habermas, Donald Shon, and David Kolb expounded on the work of Dewey and analyzed the connection between experience, reflection, and application as a cyclical process that generates new knowledge (Trepulė & Teresevičienė, 2014). Kolb focused on the importance of experience in learning which was foundational to his Experiential Learning Theory. Kolb's theory was represented by a four-stage learning cycle that included concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984).

Gibbs' Cycle of Reflection expounded on Kolb's theory of experiential learning and completed the cycle of learning with "structured debriefing," which includes conclusion and future action analysis (Trepulė & Teresevičienė, 2014).

Gibbs Cycle begins with a description of the experience; the learner describes the

experience without overanalyzing the experience or drawing conclusions. In step two,

learners focus on their feelings during the experience. Evaluation is the process of

making qualitative judgments about the experience and reflecting on the good and bad

aspects of the experience. In the analysis stage, learners analyze the experience by asking

themselves, "What was really going on? What sense does it make?" Analysis may

include information, experience, and knowledge from outside of the situation as well.

Learners then draw conclusions about the experience based on their reflections and other

available information, keeping in mind their own specific and unique situations or actions

that occurred. The final step involves personal action plans and answering questions.

Learners build on what they have learned, apply the reflections and conclusions to

possible future situations, and create an action plan.
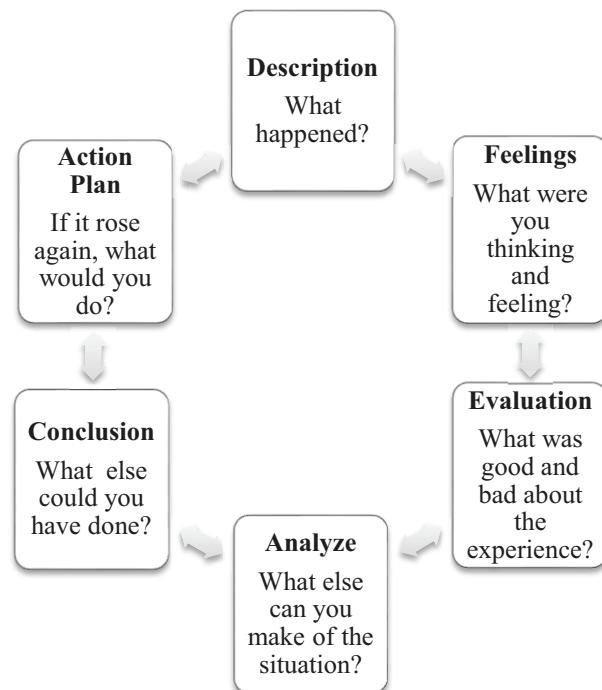
Figure. Adapted from *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods* by Graham Gibbs, 1988, Oxford: Further Education Unit, Oxford Polytechnic. Copyright 1988 by Graham Gibbs.

Chapter 3 – Research Design and Methodology

Community colleges are facing an impending leadership shortage that will either challenge the stability of the community college system or be a catalyst for change. The response to this shortage may determine the outcome. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) has responded to the potential leadership crisis by publishing *Competencies for Community College Leaders* in 2005 and an updated version in 2013. This document contained the essential skills that were identified as necessary for an effective community college president to possess. The 2005 edition listed the following five competencies: organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, and professionalism.

The 2013 edition identified five critical competencies: organizational strategy; institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management; communication; collaboration; and advocacy. The updated list from 2013 will be used for this study. The publication expressed the viewpoint that leadership is learned and progresses through levels of aptitude; however, it did not address how leaders acquire or develop the competencies. Understanding the competencies community colleges presidents need, and how new leaders can acquire those competencies, might help prepare and encourage future community college leaders to step into the role.

While many previous studies used a quantitative approach to define and prioritize necessary competencies for effective community college leadership (Broome, 2003; Dean, 1986; Duree, 2007; Powell, 2004; Reid-Bunch, 2006; Schmitz, 2008), the aim of this phenomenological study will be to identify factors that influenced community college presidents' acquisition and growth in the five competencies identified by the AACC. This chapter includes an overview of the research design, research questions,

instrument, data collection procedures, data management, and analysis procedures.

Research Design

This study used a hermeneutical phenomenological qualitative design. Creswell (2007) states, "a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (p. 58). The phenomenon researched in this study is acquisition and development of the AACC's five competencies for community college leadership.

A hermeneutical perspective allows the researcher to reflect on the "texts," or voices, and "lived experiences" of the participants in order to interpret their meaning within the phenomenon. Individuals interpret the meaning of experiences, even common experiences, differently. The goal of this qualitative research is to understand the participants' perspectives and reconstruct their reality based on their voices (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Individuals create reality based on their mental model or perspective (Senge, 2006). Phenomenology requires researchers to bracket or suspend their own mental model and experiences with the phenomenon in order to make sense of the participants' experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Research Questions

The central research question that guided this study is as follows: What have practicing community college presidents found to be the most meaningful ways to grow their expertise within each of the five AACC competencies? The following sub questions were used to guide this study further:

1. What are the themes or similarities of community college presidents in terms of developing competency in the five AACC competencies?

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2. What contexts or situations influenced or affected community college presidents' experiences developing the five AACC competencies within themselves?

Population

The population for this study includes 62 public community colleges in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia that are regionally accredited and are current members of the American Association of Community Colleges. The presidents of the 62 community colleges were identified along with their tenure at that institution. The inaugural year of a president's tenure is typically available on the college's website. I obtained the president's starting date from the respective college's website. If the website did not list the starting date, I conducted an internet search of news stories and biographical information to determine the date. I was able to find the starting date for all of the presidents in the population. The dates were confirmed with the president or his or her assistant before the interview process.

Sample Selection

"Qualitative researchers are more interested in selecting cases that are information rich [and] on the basis of the researcher's knowledge of the population, a judgment is made about which subjects should be selected to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 138). Phenomenologists must use a purposive sampling to ensure all participants have experienced the phenomenon, are passionate about it, and are willing to discuss their experiences with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

A purposive criterion-based sampling method was used in order to select participants. Merriam (2009) stated that criterion-based sampling requires the researcher to establish a list of essential attributes that reflect the purpose of the study then identify

participants who possess those attributes. For this study, participants must have met the following criteria: 1) are current full-time presidents, not interim or acting president, 2) are president at a community college in the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia, and 3) have been president at their current institution for at least three years.

Selecting participants who have at least three years' experience as a community college president corresponds to the AACC's *Competencies for Community College Leadership*, which identifies a mature president as one who has three or more years of experience at the presidential level (AACC, 2013). All presidents whose tenure at their current institution began after 2012 were removed from the potential participant list.

The findings of this study have multiple uses for higher education. The findings may be very helpful for aspiring community college presidents to use as a reflection guide to examine career choices. Colleges and associations will be able to use the findings to inform higher education leadership programs about the kinds of experiences that might help prospective candidates to be better qualified upon leaving their programs. Therefore, it is sagacious to include only participants who lead colleges that are accredited.

Accreditation status is an important indicator of institutional health. Maryland and Pennsylvania colleges receive accreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). Virginia colleges receive accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). West Virginia colleges receive accreditation from the North Central Association's Higher Learning Commission (NCAHLC).

I created an Excel database on which I entered the criteria for selection of the

sample. The Excel database included a row for each community college in the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. The columns included the college's name, and location. Additional columns included information about the presidents of the colleges listed, as well as the presidents' name and the year they began their presidency at the corresponding college. Once I established the database, I filtered the entries and removed any colleges for which the president had been at the college less than three years.

Data Instrument

Phenomenological studies rely heavily on in-depth personal interviews to obtain the unique reality of the participant's perspective (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). I conducted a single face-to-face, semi-structured interview with each selected participant in order to explore the participants' experiences with acquiring and developing aptitude in each of the five AACC competencies. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions that are informed by the current literature, a content expert, and the AACC *Competencies for Community College Leadership* (See Appendix A).

The interview protocol was piloted with two current full-time community college presidents to be certain the interview protocol had validity. The first pilot study proved to be very helpful. The pilot participant provided insights into what he perceived the questions asked and made suggestions to reduce the number of questions asked and to alter the actual questions. His suggestions were to make the questions more open-ended and general, which would allow the presidents to think about their careers and how they learned the competencies. He worked with me to develop a new set of questions for the interview protocol. The changes were adopted and the interview protocol was adjusted accordingly.

After the completion of the first pilot and the suggested changes were made to the interview protocol, a second pilot study was conducted with a second community college president. In addition to providing feedback on the interview protocol, this pilot study participant provided an informative history of community colleges and the importance of developing future leaders. The pilot participant discussed several areas of community college leadership that were not listed in the AACC framework, yet he felt they were imperative to effective community college leadership. Some of the areas he mentioned were teaching and learning, assessment, curriculum design, and academic standards, and other educational areas. However, since I had chosen the AACC competencies as the basis for my study, he did not recommend any alterations to the interview protocol.

After I had completed the pilot studies and the Institutional Review Board granted approval for my study, I proceeded to select and interview participants. During the interviews, I used probing and follow-up questions as necessary to clarify meaning and attempt to gain deeper understanding of any ambiguous responses. I provided a copy of the interview protocol to the interview participants at least two weeks before the scheduled interview. The reason for providing the protocol before the interview was to prime the participants' memory and allow them time to reflect on their experiences so they could provide rich narrative necessary for qualitative validity. If participants did not have sufficient time for reflection, they may have focused their attention too narrowly on recent experiences. Many of the participants thanked me for providing them the interview protocol ahead of time, and stated it was helpful for them to have time to think about their learning experiences.

Data Collection Procedures

The first step in collecting data was to select and obtain participants for the study.

Using the Excel sheet mentioned previously, which listed community colleges that fit the profile for this study, I randomly selected eight community colleges from the list to contact. For each of the eight selected community colleges, I did an internet search of the college's website to identify the president's executive assistant and contacted him or her by phone. I introduced myself, explained the purpose of my study, and asked if the executive assistant would speak with the president about a potential interview appointment. I then emailed the executive assistant the Invitation to Participate letter (See Appendix B), the Interview Protocol (See Appendix A), and the Notice of Informed Consent (See Appendix C).

Six of the executive assistants returned my email within two weeks and scheduled an appointment for an interview with their president. For the four executive assistants that did not respond to my email, I followed up by phone to check on the status of my request. Two of the follow-up phone calls resulted in scheduling an appointment. I called the final two executive assistants and sent them a second email; however, neither assistant returned my phone call or my email. One of the interviews had to be rescheduled due to a weather related emergency.

I conducted individual, formal, face-to-face interviews with participants at the participant's office. The interviews lasted between one hour and one and a half hours in length. To be sure that I had an accurate recording of the interviews, I used two digital audio-recording devices for all interviews. I wrote a few short reference notes during the interviews, but I did not attempt to take comprehensive notes due to the difficulty of simultaneously taking notes, observing nonverbal communication, and maintaining the flow of the interview.

Although it is acceptable to have a third party transcribe the interviews, I choose

to manually transcribe each interview myself in order to "reawaken the social and emotional aspects of the interviews" (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p.180). Transcribing the interviews myself provided me with the opportunity to hear the interviews multiple times and to start analyzing the interview. I typed each interview transcript onto a Microsoft Word document, which took approximately up to seven hours per interview. Because the transcriptions were for a conversational analysis it was acceptable to exclude superfluous words like "uh's" and uhm's", which made the transcriptions more readable and is an acceptable form of transcription (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p.181). After I finished transcribing each interview, I listened to the interview while simultaneously reading the transcription to check for errors and omissions. The final record of each interview transcription was mailed to the respective participant for review. Participants were granted two weeks to review the transcription and to make corrections, as they deemed necessary.

Data Analysis Procedures

The first step in every phenomenological study is to epoche, or describe, the researcher's personal experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). By exploring their own experiences, prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions researchers become more aware of their bias and are better able to limit the effect of the bias (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). A full eopche of my experience with acquiring the competencies is provided in the *Role of the Researcher* section in Chapter 3.

Once personal experience was bracketed, I used an inductive process to code and analyze the data following Merriam's (2009) preferred method for qualitative data analysis. Immediately after each interview, I transcribed the digital recording of the interview. I then read the transcript several times to obtain a general sense of the data and

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to make notes, comments, and observations. This process was repeated after each interview. Once all interviews were conducted, transcribed, and notated, I developed a list of significant statements using horizontalization of the interview data. Horizontalization is an important and unique strategy in the initial analysis of phenomenological data that applies equal meaning to all statements, perceptions, and experiences that are then compared to create a list of "nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping" text segments (Creswell, 2007, p. 159; Merriam, 2009).

The third step in analyzing phenomenological data is to develop clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2009). The text segments were coded according to patterns and similarities and grouped into broad themes that answer the research questions. (Merriam, 2009). A second round of coding was conducted to remove any redundancy in data. The themes were refined and honed throughout the data analysis process.

Phenomenological studies are concerned with "what" was experienced in relation to the phenomenon, and "how" it was experienced (Creswell, 2007). The themes created in the previous steps were used to write textural and structural descriptions of the participants' experiences. Textural descriptions describe what participants experienced, and structural descriptions describe the context or setting in which the participants experienced the phenomenon. The final step in data analysis was to synthesize both textural and structural descriptions into a culminating "essence" of the phenomenon via tables, figures, or narration (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability have different connotations in qualitative research than in quantitative research (Merriam, 2009). In qualitative studies, validity refers to the credibility of the study, in other words, do the results make sense and are they accurate

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(Creswell, 2007). Reliability is typically confirmed by the replicability of a quantitative study; however, qualitative studies can never be fully replicated due to the mutable nature of human behavior. Therefore, credibility in qualitative research is buttressed by the consistency of the findings with the data collected (Merriam, 2009). Instead of replicating the study to get the same results, another researcher should be able to conclude the same findings using the same data collected.

Qualitative researchers can implement several procedures to ensure validity and reliability. This study will utilize four procedures to include identifying researcher bias, member checking, using rich, thick descriptions, and piloting the interview protocol (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

Member checking is the most important and most accurate method of ensuring validity and eliminating researcher bias in a qualitative study (Merriam, 2009). Member checking is a process that allows the participants the opportunity to read the transcription of their interview to verify the accuracy of the transcription and edit as necessary (Creswell, 2009). For this study, the participants had two weeks to read the transcript of their interview and make any changes necessary and to clarify any information they feel is misrepresented.

Phenomenology interprets the "texts," or voices, of the participants' lived experiences, so it is imperative to provide thick, rich descriptions of the data. Rich, thick descriptions are detailed narratives, which evoke feelings and emotions in the readers to help them understand the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007). The picture provided in the narrative re-telling of the participants' experiences allow readers to "transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred 'because of shared characteristics'" (Creswell, 2007, p. 209). The use of rich,

thick descriptions also allows readers to verify if the findings are consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 2009).

To ensure the reliability of the interview protocol, I conducted two pilot studies of the interview protocol with content experts that were not selected to be a participant in the study. The content experts participating in the pilot were current community college presidents who had been president at their current college for at least three years. After the pilot, I incorporated the recommendations for change and additional questions into the interview protocol.

Polkinghorne (as cited in Creswell, 2007) suggests the following additional ways to support the validity and reliability of a phenomenological study. The interviewer must be careful not to influence the participants' responses or descriptions of their experience, transcriptions of the interviews must be accurate, and the researcher must identify any alternative conclusions that may have surfaced during the analysis of the transcriptions.

Role of Researcher

Qualitative research is frequently referred to as interpretive research because the researcher must interpret the meaning of the participants' shared experiences. The researcher's role in a phenomenological study is to make sense of the participants shared experiences (Creswell, 2007). Before researchers are able to understand and make sense of the lived experiences of the participants, they must first bracket or detail their own experience with the phenomenon.

I am not a community college president; however, I do have experience fulfilling a leadership role in a community college. I have participated in various leadership development programs, such as the Chamber of Commerce yearlong leadership training and I have a Master's of Arts in Management and Leadership. I have been the director of

a community college's off-site campus location, and I am currently the Director of Instructional Support Services at a community college. I have also participated in and chaired many faculty committees at a community college. I am currently acquiring and developing my capacity in the AACC's competencies.

The declarative learning in my Educational Doctorate program and the leadership development programs mentioned previously provided theory and a practical foundation to my leadership repository. The doctorate program has been a main influence on my development of the components of the organizational strategy competency, such as developing a mission and vision, organizational change, and strategic planning. Institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management is an area that I have little experience with as of to date; however, I am gaining knowledge from the requirements my current position, as well learning from other people who are well versed in this competency.

I have definitely learned communication from experience on the job and from formal learning such as leadership classes in my doctoral degree. Collaboration is another competency I have learned from on the job experience. Advocacy is the competency with which I lack the most experience; however, I have learned much about approaches to advocacy from the interviews I conducted for this study.

Qualitative interviewing requires the researcher to become the instrument of data collection (Creswell, 2007). I performed the interview, collected the data, recorded the data on the interview protocol form, and analyzed the data. I also acted as a non-participant observer during the interviews to note the participants' facial expression and body language, which provided depth to the interpretation of the participants' answers.

Measures of Ethical Protection

A notice of informed consent (See Appendix C) was provided to and signed by each participant at the beginning of each interview. Participants were informed of their right not to answer any question and or to stop the interview at any time. Participants also had the opportunity to read the transcription of the interviews and make edits, as they deemed necessary.

The risk of potential harm to participants was minimal; however, to ensure their anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to participants and their respective colleges at the beginning of the study. Pseudonyms were used in the transcription and all additional writings. No master list connecting the real names to the pseudonyms was kept. The transcribed interviews are stored in both electronic and paper form and will be kept behind three locks in the committee chair's office at the university for two years beyond the publishing date of the manuscript.

Chapter 4 – Findings

In Phenomenological research, "we gather other people's experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves" (Van Manen, 2009, p.62). By exploring the lived experiences of others, their experiences become shared experiences from which we may learn. The experiences shared during the course of this study, have the potential to help aspiring community college presidents choose valuable learning opportunities in order to better prepare for a presidency.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to identify the most meaningful experiences that helped current community college leaders to acquire and grow in their expertise of the AACC's five key competencies for community college leadership, which are organizational strategy; institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management; communication; collaboration; and advocacy. The expected gap between community college presidential vacancies and qualified applicants is a cause for concern for the stability and success of these important institutions. Understanding the most meaningful developmental experiences of current community college presidents may help create value added preparatory training for future leaders. In addition, a better-defined experience to obtaining the competencies may prompt more people to enter the presidential pipeline than exists currently.

Sample

There are 982 public community colleges in the United States (AACC, 2016). This study focused on the four states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. There are 62 public community colleges in those four states. The presidents at 35 of the 62 colleges have been employed as president for at least three years. Two

institutions were removed from the list because they were participants in the pilot studies. The remaining 33 institutions are the population for this study. Of those 33 presidents, I interviewed six, which is 18.75% of the population.

Selection

I randomly selected eight institutions, two from each state, from the list of 35 to contact for a potential interview. For each institution selected, I called the president's executive assistant to inquire about a potential interview. After the initial phone call, I emailed the executive assistant a letter of introduction (Appendix C), the interview protocol (Appendix A), and the notice of consent form (Appendix B) to be shared with the president. Of the eight initial contacts, six responded via email and scheduled an interview. Two of the participants were from Maryland, one was from Pennsylvania, two were from Virginia, and one was from West Virginia. Of the six participants, four were first time presidents.

For the purpose of this study, all names of participating presidents have been changed to a pseudonym to protect their identities and preserve the confidentiality of the data.

Analyzation Method

I personally transcribed all six interviews onto a Microsoft Word document. Transcribing the interviews myself, allowed me to hear the interviews multiple times and to become well acquainted with the tone and inflection of the presidents' responses. After each interview was transcribed, I listened to the interview again while simultaneously reading the transcription to check for typos and transcription errors. I read each interview in its entirety before beginning the coding process. I then looked for the major categories of learning avenues the presidents expressed. The categories included formal learning,

experiential, mentorship, relationships, challenging work assignments.

I mailed each transcribed interview to its respective interviewee to provide an opportunity for the presidents to verify the accuracy of the transcript and to make any necessary corrections.

An important step in the analyzation of phenomenological research is horizontilization of the data. Moustaskas (1994) describes this as "listing [and grouping] every expression relevant to the experience" (p. 120). During the first round of coding, I went line by line and underlined any reference to a potential learning opportunity. Examples of learning opportunities included statements like "people helped me, he told me, Bachelors' degree, Ph.D., influenced me, served as a mentor, I realized, it taught me, taught myself, I took a workshop, I attended a president's institution, etc." After I coded each line of each transcript for learning opportunities, I followed step two in Moustakas' modified Van Kaam's method of analyzing phenomenological data, which consists of reduction and elimination of data. To do this I asked the following two questions for each bit of coded data, 1) Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it, 2) is it possible to abstract and label the data? Any coded expression that did not fall under the above two questions was deleted (Moustakas, 1994).

The remaining text segments were grouped into thematic clusters. Clusters ranged from formal learning, challenging job assignments, associations, experiential learning, non-higher education job learning, mentors, relationships, innate ability.

Once the segments were grouped into thematic clusters and identified as invariant constituents, they were validated by comparing them to the "complete record of the research participant" and identified as either explicitly expressed, compatible with the

complete transcription, or neither explicit or compatible with the whole transcription (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120). Only explicit and compatible constituents and themes were retained in the data.

Introductory Question

Each interview began with the following introductory question, "Please share with me your story of how you have arrived at where you are today in your career." This question provided the participant the opportunity to describe an overview of the interviewee's career including academic preparation, positions they have held during their career, and people who may have influenced them. This portion of the interview generally was very important to setting the stage for the rest of the questions.

Academic preparation. Not surprisingly, all of the presidents who were interviewed had an earned doctorate degree. Four had a Ph.D. and two had an Ed.D. Four of the presidents had a doctorate in education, higher education, or community college leadership. One president had a doctorate in Leadership and Organizational Behavior and one had a doctorate in American Civilization. Three of the presidents had either a bachelor's or master's degree in psychology and/or counseling and a fourth had a degree in philosophy. Two presidents had degrees in Literature.

Four of the presidents cited an internship or a practicum they completed during graduate studies as important in their development of at least one competency and/or with their first experience with a community college.

"I knew I would have to do an advanced degree to really work in the field" (President B) When asked which was most helpful in developing skill in the competencies, on the job experience or the doctoral degree, President B replied, "Probably the on the job experience. The education helps with the credential."

President E also emphasized the importance of the doctoral degree as it relates to credibility by stating, "I have a PhD. I have faculty, easily 40-50% of our faculty have PhDs. If I didn't have a PhD and I was just [Mr., Mrs., or Ms.] President, instead of Dr. President…If you want to be taken seriously in an academic community you have to have the chops. And in a place this big with as many credentialed faculty and professionals as we have, I don't think you could just be a banker or Mr. or Mrs. Whatever."

Ascending to the role. Four of the six presidents had been a Vice President directly before becoming president. One was a Vice Chancellor of a community college system and one was a Dean prior to becoming president. Four of the six started their career in community colleges in student services. One president never taught any college courses, the other three taught a few courses over the course of their career. Two started as faculty members and progressed through the traditional academic ranks of faculty, chair, and academic dean before becoming president. Two worked in Workforce and one owned a small business. Only one was an interim president. All but one became president at a different institution than where they had been a Vice President.

Experience matters. The most common theme that arose under this question was work experience. As President E put it, "Experience matters. And these jobs are too complicated; too complex to think you can go from the classroom to this level of administrative position without adding the layers of wisdom that you get from the experience."

President D expressed the importance of taking advantage of opportunities when they arise. President A had the same sentiment, "I took advantage of every opportunity that arose. I was interested in those things, but it was also a way to develop my resume….And I try to teach that to people. There's lots of opportunities." He went on to

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say, "I took advantage of opportunities, I read a lot, my PhD program, and I volunteered wherever I could."

Relationships. Five of the participants frequently mentioned the importance of mentors and role models throughout their life and career. Mentorships came in the form of grandparents, parents, colleagues, and their supervising presidents. Four of the participants were encouraged by their former presidents to pursue a presidency themselves.

"We were having a chat and she [my president] said, 'What do you think?' I said, 'I have been thinking and I think I could do this. I think I would like to be a President', and she [my president] said, 'OK, great'. She put the wheels in motion for me…all of sudden, I was on the Chancellor's re-engineering taskforce, I was asked to serve on Vice-Chancellor search committees…" (President B).

"Well, I was very fortunate that I worked 19 years at [previous institution] and that president was a great mentor. What helped me to be effective is that he exposed me to numerous opportunities. He was the one who said, "You need to pursue becoming a community college president" (President F).

"[He] saw something in me and invited me to his office, mentored me. He was the one who said, 'You really need to be working on a PhD or you're going to hit your own personal glass ceiling'" (President A).

"I was fortunate to work here for 17 years for a mentor, who was just an unbelievable person. Valued the concept of servant leadership and really lived out that expression of servant leadership. So thanks to opportunities he gave me, I was able to work my way up here and become president here…. Then toward the later years of my vice presidency, he started asking about… and he asked me some questions and he

encouraged me to go back and get the doctorate. [He was] the biggest influence of all" (President D).

Research Questions and Competencies

What are the themes or similarities of community college presidents in terms of developing competency in the five AACC competencies?

Organizational strategy. "An effective community college leader promotes the success of all students, strategically improves the quality of the institution, and sustains the community college mission based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends" (AACC, 2013, p. 6). Expertise areas in this competency include developing a mission and vision, organizational change, taking risks, working with faculty, working with the board of governors, institutional research, and strategic planning.

Three major themes emerged during the review and coding process in relation to the organizational strategy competency. These themes are 1) experience, 2) learning from others, and 3) formal learning.

Experience. The most common pattern among the six presidents was the aspect of learning on the job through challenging work assignments, with five of the six presidents referencing their previous job experiences as a major factor in developing skill with organizational strategy. The experiences ranged from committee work, new job responsibilities gained from promotions or expanded job roles, and sometimes they assumed someone else's assignments unexpectedly.

As one president noted, "a new Dean was hired … and a lot was pushed down to me…. I mean I just did everything, every aspect, I did it without complaining or any additional compensation, it just gave me a bird's eye view of every function of campus

operations. That's kind of how it happened. She was let go and she pushed all kinds of things down on me. So that was kind of an important developmental piece" (President B).

While some of the presidents had assignments thrust upon them by someone looking to thwart their own responsibilities, more often the participant sought out the experiences or were excited to be given the opportunity as President D stated, "Well as I look back, I had been given some fortunate experiences that have helped me. One is, early on in my career here, I was given the opportunity to help write a grant…. That was my first, I think, experience with strategic planning. Because it was taking goals that we had and putting them together, writing them down, but then also making them flow together and coherent." "In addition to that experience, we on a regular basis do strategic planning at the college every three to five years… Since then we have done that three or four times and I've been involved each time. So that's how I developed my skill" (President D).

Another president addressed the profound learning experience that occurred early in the participant's career. "When I was still a faculty member I chaired the steering committee for our Accreditation review….And that was really where I connected what I was doing in the classroom with the broader mission and the broader vision…. I tell you that anyone who has that opportunity should seize it. It is the best learning experience and the best professional development that any community college professional can have. You really then get to see the institution as an institution. And that's what really began to do it for me. And I know my decisions once I came here were stronger and better [because of that experience]" (President E).

"I had been through some other re-organizations in my prior life and I just evolved to the point that I felt that this would best serve the institution… but I had no

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idea what I was doing. Now I do, because I've done it, now I know exactly what to do, but I had never done that before" (President B).

"For [working with] faculty, I was one, so I probably would be able to say that I learned it by being one and by being engaged. So I knew what the full-time folks or what the part-time folks liked or didn't like. How to interact with them, what they expected from the administration… and so it was by being one" (President C).

"I think it's just through the experience and when you look at mission and vision statements, they at times are very wordy… and it's over the experience in time, that you realize a short mission statement that is to the point" (President F).

Learning from others. Relationships and learning from others were important in learning organizational strategy. Sometimes this type of learning took place while watching and interacting with other leaders and analyzing the way they handled certain aspects of organizational strategy. Four of the presidents gave specific examples of how they learned certain aspects of organizational strategy from other presidents.

"How to work with [the Board of Trustees] effectively…is easier because I was able to watch some of the presidents I worked for interact with the Board of Trustees. That was probably the biggest way, just to watch them interact with the Board of Trustees" (President C).

"And I said to my predecessor, "How did you ever approve that [operational risk]?" He said, "Well ultimately you have to trust the faculty member"... And that was another lesson to me, it's not about keeping the organization the way it is, it's about moving the organization forward and to do that you have to take some risks" (President D).

"I am a really huge believer in selecting real good organizations and associations.

AACC is a prime example, it's a great network in which I go to the conference and met other presidents and we share ideas" (President F).

"I think watching former presidents go into an organization and go in with their ideas and thrust it upon the organization and that just never worked" (President C).

"It is something I learned from my predecessor, that model of servant leadership." (President D).

"I took other community college strategic plans and gleaned from probably five or six of them what they were doing in their process" (President B).

Formal learning. Although on the job experience was referenced by five of the presidents, organizational strategy was the competency where presidents called upon formal learning more than any other competency, especially as it related to areas of strategic planning.

"I had a workshop at a University, a morning workshop on strategic planning years ago. I actually pull out some of those notes and used them to come up with our goals" (President B).

"Well, part of it came from my education because I studied for an MBA, and so in that process of doing an MBA, we had to do internship program and a start-up company I was involved with needing to do all of that [strategic planning] before they could go out to secure some dollars through a loan or through a federal grant. So, I was intimately involved with that, one, from the classroom perspective, but then the practical perspective. So it really started there" (President C).

"So I studied leadership and organizational behavior. I became much more intentional about being a change agent. My PhD, my burning question was, 'how do you help a complex community college organization to change effectively'" (President A).

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"And then going to a new president's academy once I was named, I did go to a new president's academy and there was a day that we spent just on board of governors" (President C).

Institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management. "An effective community college leader equitably and ethically sustains people, processes, and information as well as financial assets to fulfill the mission, vision, and goals of the community college" (AACC, 2013, p. 8). Expertise areas in this competency include budgeting, institutional finances, fundraising, crisis management, and supporting faculty and staff.

Three themes emerged in relation to the institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management competency, 1) relying on the expertise of others, 2) experience on the job, and 3) formal learning.

Relying on the expertise of others. When addressing the aspects of institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management, the participants frequently cited their reliance on the expertise of other people and through collaboration with the finance and/or institutional advancement staff.

"I don't think it should be micromanaged. The way it kind of works here, our finance people, they work up the recommendation, we discuss it….We all meet in the board room and we go over what should be cut, what should we keep, how much raises, can we give a raise, all those kinds of questions" (President B).

"I consider the relationship with the Executive Dean of Finance as very important" (President F).

President B views the president's role in fundraising more as friend raising and supporting the institutional advancement staff, especially the Vice President of

Advancement. President E also relies on the expertise of the Vice President of Institutional Advancement. It is a collaborative partnership between the president and the Vice President of Institutional Advancement. President E stated, "And you know, I'm a part of it, but I'm not the shaper. I'm the connector. The VP does the hard work, and the president comes in at the end and makes the "ask", or maybe the "ask" has already been made and I'm just there to get the check. But I don't mean to minimize the president's role, because if I were not a well-respected member of this region and so forth, it would be hard to use my name or my college as the motivator for people to write the kind of checks we now see. Because the advancement officer and his people, they kind of build on my contacts, I build on theirs".

President D also highlighted the reliance on special skills and expertise of other people in financial management when he stated, "I would again credit a colleague this time….a very dynamic chief financial officer. He came out of the business world, so he had some hiccups along the way. He dealt with problems differently than higher ed deals with them. He was creative in his approach to problems in a way that state agencies often aren't creative because they go by the rules so much. And ultimately he was like a godsend during my first 6 years as president" (President D).

Experience. Previous experiences, whether in higher education or in another industry, were very important to the participants' development of this competency. As President B noted, "I think just being in senior administration. Having the knowledge of the different pieces that go into it."

President F described a specific position that helped him acquire skill in this competency when he stated, "I think it was really when I became the VP of Workforce and I had oversight of the department, and I had people reporting to me. And it was a

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hard position to be in because I was starting to think like what we could afford and what we couldn't afford… But you go through those experiences, and that's where I learned kind of the budgeting, and I realized what money comes in. In workforce we had to look at what money were we bringing in versus what money was going out for your expenses…. And that's where I learned a little bit more like, hey, you have to think more like a business in this environment" (President F).

"Well, I think experience again has done that. I think two of the colleges I was at, probably the first college I had to learn a little more about that, that didn't come so easily. But the second one was better, and this one as well. I would say that what I saw and/or what I hear from others is important" (President C).

President E described a story of extreme retrenchment while a dean at a previous institution and the lessons learned from that experience. Two lessons President E learned from that experience continue to shape his/her view of institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management. As President E stated, "There are two premises that I put on the table and keep in front of us every time we talk about how do we cut back on spending, where do we do that. And those two premises are first and foremost is we put our money where our mission is, and the second is we work always to support our people". President E expressed the importance of preserving the institution's financial health while maintaining and recognizing the value of the employees. "I care about the people who are here and who are working very hard. The easiest way to conserve your finances is to just say, "OK, no raises." And that's not what we do here. And I'll insist on that because we have people who work very hard… And for us to take that off their backs, it's just not right" (President E).

"I had to go through a process and learn it at first, well throughout my career,

obviously you have a budget and then you learn kind of best practices as you go along. And then with each successful position came more and more responsibility, therefore, I leaned more on finance people to kind of educate me and help me in putting together what at times can be a very complex budget" (President C).

One president had owned a small business before entering higher education and it during that time that he learned many of the smaller aspects of finance and resource management like budgeting and conflict management. President A stated, "And there (owning a small business) I learned merchandising, marketing, sales, personnel management, customer relations, conflict resolution, taxation, bookkeeping, budgeting, all that stuff. Because, I did everything wrong at least twice (President A). The bigger aspects like fundraising and higher education finances, President A learned from work experiences in higher education as noted in the following comment, "It was really when I was Vice President because it was really a part of my job. Because the products that we were selling, were often in my area" and "I learned that along the way" (President A).

Speaking about fundraising, President C stated, "I think that I've always been comfortable. Only because when I worked in private industry before I came into higher ed, I was a corporate trainer and most of my role was to train people how to be sales people. So, it really has not been a problem."

"I learned it through the career. And my first experience was when I was in student services and I was working as a counselor." President F recounted his/her first experience with fundraising and the excitement of raising funds. The participant also described the skepticism that many presidents had previously about fundraising, before community colleges began to focus on the benefits and necessity of fundraising. President F went on to elaborate about continuing to learn on the job, "That's kind of the

part you just learn from experience. It has been just overall in every position; I learn

something new about fundraising" (President F).

Formal learning. One president cited two formal learning experiences as

important to the development of this competency. President F described the experiences

in the following quote, "So, I went [to the Harvard University Management Program] for

two weeks, intense, it was focused on academics, it was focused on fundraising, and I

learned some new skills there. When I became president, I realized that I really needed to

hone in on those skills. And I participated in an executive training through the Council

for Resource Development, and I went to that training in DC, and it was really an

enlightening [experience], you know giving you new contacts, new relationships, so I am

still learning."

Communication. "An effective community college leader uses clear listening,

speaking, and writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college

and its surrounding community; promotes the success of all students; ensures the safety

and security of students and the surrounding college community; and sustains the

community college mission" (AACC, 2013, p. 9). Expertise areas in this competency

include public speaking, public relations, communicating during a crisis, using social

media, and communicating with staff, students, and the community.

The themes that emerged in this competency were 1) experience, 2) relying on

others, 3) learning from other people, and 5) formal learning.

Experience. When it comes to communication, experience was the most common

avenue of learning for the participants. As President B explained, "each situation is

different and you do learn along the way." President B and President E both emphasized

the importance of doing student and employee surveys in order to learn from the

feedback provided in the surveys.

President A cited his/her experience in owning a small business as instrumental in acquiring skill in communication. "So listening to customers, what they really need and helping to find the right product and price to meet what their need is when they may not know what they need, taught me communication" (President A).

"Oh, through experience. I first started out at my first college and I would have one [one open forum with faculty and staff] a semester, and well, then the next one was really intense, because it had built up. So the second college I maybe did two a quarter, now I do three a quarter, because it diffuses an awful lot of issues that can happen if you only meet once a year or once a semester" (President C).

Learning from others. Four of the presidents referenced learning their communication skills by either watching other leaders or having a mentor help them develop their skill.

President B reflected on both positive and negative experiences she had with observing other presidents' communication styles. She stated, "I probably learned that more from when I was interim president, I saw the kinds of things [the former president] he had done, and I thought, that's a pretty good idea." She later stated, "I guess I learned that probably from seeing other people make mistakes" (President B).

President F and President D also looked to others in order to learn from their experiences as reflected in the following quotes: "Then you learn from others that have gone through a crisis, what do we need to do differently, or do we make improvements" (President F). "You can't promise things then end up of having [layoffs or other negative situations] …that's deadly for a president. I have seen that happened" (President D). President D also emphasized the help of a mentor as being beneficial in developing his

skill. "I would say through the mentorship of my predecessor is an important part of it. Again I think I have some innate instincts of when to say things at certain times, I don't know if I'm as skilled as my predecessor was in doing it at the right time in the right way…" (President D).

President A recounted an eloquent story about watching a former president communicate with and inspire the college community after a hurricane caused significant damage to the campus. "He [my mentor] did everything right, except for one thing. He forced us to have a clear timeline and a deadline date for opening up again, he held accountability meetings, and emergency planning and response meetings. He made us confident that we could recover. The one thing he didn't was go around and be visible enough walking around talking to people during the recovery." Years later when President A encountered a similar crisis, and reflected on the lessons learned from watching his mentor navigate the hurricane crisis. "I did everything [he] did, plus walking the halls."

Relying on others. All six of the presidents quickly attributed the help of others to their success in this area. Many of the presidents noted collaboration with the public relations person or team was essential to developing their skill in communication.

"When we go through a particular crisis, we get together with PR and we put together a statement" (President F).

"My public relations person writes it and then I edit it" (President D).

"Whenever I'm going to do an article or public statement on something, I run it through [the Public Relations manager]. I run it through one or two of the VPs, I run it through my executive assistant, and then I send it to my spouse, and they find everything everybody else missed" (President A).

"So in Advancement is where you will find our integrated marketing consultants and so I work closely with them and they are able to help me craft messages that need to be communicated to various groups" (President C).

"I always work with our PR folks to really help me craft the messages, so I'm not just out there as a cowboy" (President B).

President E commented on relying on the Vice President of Advancement to write and/or edit important messages to the college community.

Formal learning. While formal learning was not a major theme, three of the presidents did reference, at least in small part, some types of formal learning, which helped them develop communication skills.

Two presidents mentioned high school activities like speech class, theater, and debate team.

"I think back to high school public speaking courses, and thank god I had that public speaking course" (President D).

President C learned how to use social media via YouTube videos and other means of self-directed learning. President F learned social media techniques from a hands-on workshop specifically designed to help colleges use social media effectively.

One president had attended a workshop on crisis management at a previous institution. The workshop included strategies for communicating during a crisis. That same president also attended a workshop hosted by the chancellor of the state community college system. "When I was at [another community college] we had a crisis management workshop, when I came here, the previous Chancellor had a retreat for the presidents and he included a crisis management communication training, so over those sessions I've learned bits and pieces" (President F).

Collaboration. "An effective community college leader develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial, and ethical internal and external relationships that nurture diversity, promotes the success of all students, and sustains the community college mission" (AACC, 2013, p. 10). Expertise areas in this competency include developing relationships with staff, students, and the board of governors.

Two major themes emerged in the Collaboration competency: experience, and relying on others.

Experience. Experience was a major theme in this competency with four of the participants expressing experience as helping them acquire and develop their skill.

When asked where she learned the model of shared governance she implemented while president, President B stated, "It is a model I had experience with at [previous institution]" (President B).

Previous on the job experience helped President F learn how to relate to the board of governors. "I know when I was VP of Workforce occasionally I would be invited to come to the board of trustees meetings….I think what I've learned over time is keeping them informed" (President F).

President A learned about collaboration during his/her tenure in student government as noted in this reflection, "I learned an awful lot about collaboration, teamwork, involving people, recruiting people, because we had to get other students to get involved. Working with a wide variety of people, professors, some of whom were kind of snooty, and others that were very supportive. Working within the power structure, when you had no power, using influence and so on."

President D had no doubt that experience helped him hone his collaboration skill with faculty, staff, and the board of governors. "I think it's just experience, there's just no

substitute for experience. Sometimes it's little experiences and sometimes it's related but bigger experiences."

Learning from others. Two presidents directly mentioned the influence of a mentor who helped them refine their collaboration skills.

President A spoke fondly of a previous manager, "He was… a very warm caring man. He was good at conflict resolution…. So of course conflict resolution, communication, and relationships are a big part of leadership, so he was a role model and a mentor and a coach" (President A).

President D referred to innate abilities to develop relationships, but highlighted the importance mentors had on refining those skills. "I think it's part of my nature in terms of interacting with people that I do care. And I think I portray that, but I don't think I would have been successful without the mentorship of my predecessor…. Both of them put a shine or a polish on what was a natural inclination. And maybe put a philosophy behind that inclination that I didn't know I had, or I didn't think about" (President D).

Advocacy. "An effective community college leader understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision, and goals of the community college on the local, state, and national level" (AACC, 2013, p. 11). Expertise areas in this competency include the ability to process political information, lobbying, networking, and community colleges as a system at the local, state, and national levels.

Two major themes emerged in this competency: experience on the job and formal learning.

Experience on the job. "My first experience was when I was interim president. Except for locally at different events at [my previous institution], where we would have foundation receptions and you'd interact with [politicians] there. But I made a concerted

effort to visit with the state senator and the delegates and to just continue to advocate for the college" (President B).

"It was really exciting for me and it was also a learning curve when I became the president" (President C).

"I have been a salesman my whole life, and a communicator my whole life. What I had to do, and I've been a good citizen, I vote and I've known some politicians along the way. And my dad was involved in politics some" (President A).

"So I had some vague knowledge, I just had to become more intentional and learn that" (President A).

"Politicians have great connections in Annapolis, but so do people like me. You don't have them immediately the way this guy does, but you get them" (President E).

Formal learning. Two presidents learned how to advocate from specific trainings they attended. One as a new president and the other as a vice president.

"When I first became president, I went through AACC's new president's institute" (President A).

"Many of us were trained by consultants on how to engage [legislators] from a government relations perspective" (President C).

Advocacy is an area where many participants did not have much preparation for before they became a president. During the beginning of their first presidency, the majority of the participants had a vague knowledge of how to achieve success in advocacy. However, during their time as president they acquired skill on the job and further honed that skill through on the job experiences. Over time, they learned which approaches to advocacy were the most successful. Formal learning was helpful for two of the presidents to acquire the necessary knowledge and skill in advocacy.

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Exit Questions

Question 1. What do you believe had the most influence on your ability to be an effective community college president?

Four of the presidents immediately pointed to mentors as having the biggest influence on their ability to be an effective community college president. One stated it was their broad background and the last one referred to their time as a faculty member as having the most influence.

"Probably early mentors, people who took an interest in me and people who supported me and coached me through a lot. So I would think that, yeah individuals" (President C).

"I was very fortunate that I worked 19 years at [previous institution] and that president was a great mentor. What helped me to be effective is that he exposed me to numerous opportunities" (President F).

"Role models, negative role models and positive role models….I've done a lot of studying on my own, I've done a lot of reading on my own, I've done a lot of thinking on my own, but role models have been the most powerful" (President A).

"I'd say mentorship. Yep, in my case" (President D).

"I think the broad experience that I brought in to it was my greatest strength" (President B).

"Having been in the classroom for 22 years. There's no better preparation" (President E).

Question 2. If you could go back and start your career over, would you change anything in order to be better prepared in any of the competencies we discussed?

Four of the president stated they would not change anything if they were able to

go back and start their career over. These four presidents stated their varied background sufficiently prepared them for the role of president. When asked this question, one president hinted at their lack of experience teaching and that more teaching experience may have helped. Only one president suggested areas where he would have liked to have been better prepared for when they first became president.

"I'm not sure, I think that my varied background pretty much prepared me for it, I saw this question, but I never thought about what I would change. I think the way career progressed I'm pretty pleased with the things that took place" (President B).

"No. It was appropriately messy getting here" (President A).

"No. I really don't think, I don't think anything fully prepares you for what you face. If you are raised to be a good person and treat people well I think you'd be a good president" (President D).

"I wouldn't. I told you my story and I actually really, really believe that kind of progressive development is what has really made me what I am. I don't think I could have as good a handle if I had skipped some of those steps" (President E).

"I think because of my pathway, I didn't teach in the classroom. So it was truly baptism by fire in contributing to the schedule and looking at the academic side" (President F).

"There'd be a couple of things, and it's only know now in hindsight, legal issues, finances, and real estate. Those would be the three areas that I would go back and either gain additional information early or be much more serious in those areas" (President C).

Question 3. What advice would you give someone in regards to preparing for the role of a community college president?

Five presidents strongly suggested getting broad experience across the college by

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getting involved in committees, volunteer opportunities, helping others, or taking on new responsibilities. One president noted, "I think it's really important that when [someone who is preparing for a presidency] looks at their resume that they fill in all of the spots. So that they have something to talk about from each area, be it fundraising, student affairs, academics, IT, HR, that they have some knowledge of all of that by serving on a committee, by teaching, by being in on external committee" (President C).

"I think understanding and getting involved and understanding as much about the roles outside of your area as much as possible. It would be something that I would suggest" (President B).

"Take advantage of opportunities, volunteer, pay attention all the time, imagine what you would do if you were that person, find some good coaches and mentors. Don't be shy about that. You'll be surprised that most of us want to help" (President A).

"Don't overly focus on preparing for the task of being a president. Focus on finding ways to help your institution become better. Because I think it's not a mechanistic job. It's not a job, you say, 'oh, I got the skill now, I can be a good president.' Those skills come when you get involved. And you can't be on the sidelines and acquire those skills in a school or even in your work experience if you're not involved. So be creative, get involved" (President D).

"Well, if I were to subsume what I said already, getting the credential, getting the experience, and really valuing each level of development for what it can give you. Because ultimately the community college president cannot just be biased towards administration, biased towards the academics, biased towards…and that's the tendency if that's your background in one of those areas" (President E).

One president specifically referred to the importance of learning how to think like

an entrepreneur. "Preparing I think, is looking at that entrepreneurial mindset. College presidents now, because of the shrinking resources... are being asked to raise more money. To do that, my other piece of advice to someone in the journey, is to surround yourself, certainly your internal team, but also get to know real true entrepreneurs. Because you're not going to learn that entrepreneurial mindset only from that internal team, if they are truly academic" (President F).

Question 4. Is there anything that you would like to add that you believe is beneficial to this study, but I did not ask about?

Two presidents added the importance of relationships in both acquiring skill and with effectively leading a community college. One president stressed the importance of the role in furthering the community college mission, and three presidents did not add any additional comments.

"I do think that it's early examples of individuals, it's working with competent high performing people who you're able to learn from, who are able to correct you, and who are able to mentor you. And then the development is not only your maturation process program, but it is being put into positions that will allow you to grow and to be surrounded by or supported by people who are better than you are, so as to kind of push you to be able to continue to develop some of these skills and others" (President C).

"The only thing I would conclude with is that success is measured on relationships. It goes back to what I said earlier, surround yourself with smarter people…It is truly that network of relationships" (President F).

"I'm always amazed at how important it is that the president be there as a witness, as a participant, as a servant, as a figure head. It's humbling how important it is, even when I was dean and vice president. The role is very powerful, but it's not all about you.

It's about the college. And that's where the power of the role comes from is representing this mission that's bigger than you" (President A).

Overall, experience from a variety of roles and experiences, and the importance of strong mentors were the most significant findings relative to preparation for the role. All of the participants felt their pathway to the presidency had sufficiently prepared them in the AACC competencies. The participants noted the importance of experience, such as completing challenging job assignments, in developing the competency. However, someone who is aspiring to a leadership position in a community college should not discount the significance a mentor plays in the development of the competencies. Nearly all of the participants stressed the invaluable guidance and encouragement they received from a mentor.

Summary

Phenomenological research seeks to understand the lived experiences of the participants; therefore, it is important to provide quotes or "texts" from the participants (Creswell, 2007). The participants' stories provided insight into the types of learning experiences that are the most beneficial to the acquisition and development of the AACC competencies. The presidents followed diverse pathways to the position of president; however, each participant was still able to acquire the skills necessary to lead a community college.

Several of the participants started their community college careers in student services positions, which breaks from the traditional faculty pathway indicated in the current literature. Regardless of their path to the presidency, all of the participants relied on experience gained on the job, the expertise of others, formal learning, and mentors to help them acquire and develop the skills contained in the competencies. In addition, the

participants expressed their satisfaction with their career pathway, with only two suggesting they would make any changes if they could restart their career.

All of the participants happily provided advice for potential future presidents, specifically encouraging anyone who may one day be a president to gain broad experience across all areas and functions of the college. Many of the participants also stressed the importance of having a mentor and highlighted the support and knowledge they gained from mentors during their career.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study is to identify the most meaningful experiences that have helped current community college presidents acquire and grow their expertise of the AACC's five competencies, organizational strategy; institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management; communication; collaboration; and advocacy. Through personal face-to-face interviews, I recorded the experiences participants had with gaining and developing these competencies.

In Chapter 4, I provided a summary of the findings from the interviews. In Chapter 5, I provide an overview of the findings that can be drawn from the research. Chapter 5 will also detail potential implications of the findings, as well as recommendations for further study. Finally, a conclusion is provided at the end, which ties all the pieces of Chapter 5 together.

Findings

Acquiring and developing the AACC competencies is an ongoing process. The participants in this study learned the competencies over a long period using several different learning experiences. All of the learning experiences combine to create a framework of knowledge that prepared them to become a community college president. Even after a person has attained an expert level of knowledge with the competencies, they still need to continually engage in learning opportunities. Several participants discussed how they were still refining their proficiency with the competencies even after years of experience as a president. Because of the changing nature of community colleges, presidents should continually learn and develop the competencies throughout their tenure.

Participants gained experience and knowledge of the competencies through

various methods; however, the two most common methods were on the job experience and through the help of a mentor. Even though none of the participants in this study began their career in higher education with the intent to become a community college president, their varied work experiences coupled with supportive mentorship helped them prepare for the duties and responsibilities necessary of a community college president. As they progressed through their career, they took advantage of learning opportunities and gained experience in various areas of higher education. Mentors provided the participants guidance and support, and often were the people who encouraged the participants to pursue a presidency.

The findings of this study suggest the best way to acquire and develop skill in the AACC competencies is through the completion of challenging job assignments. The participants interviewed for this study developed expertise in the competencies through years of experience in higher education. Most of the participants started their employment in entry-level positions at community colleges and worked their way up to administration. All of the participants expressed gratitude for the time they spent in positions before becoming president, and encouraged future leaders to value that time as well. They expressed how important those positions were to their eventual election into a president's role.

The importance of experience on the participant's acquisition and development of the AACC competencies was evident; however, that experience was frequently supported within the context of having a mentor. The mentor was typically a supervisor who informally coached, encouraged, and supported the participants during their career development. Five of the six participants emphasized the importance of mentors on their development of the competencies. Mentors often created work opportunities for the

participants, from which the participants gained experience and developed leadership abilities. Mentors offered wisdom and assistance throughout the learning process.

Many of the participants had mentors who encouraged them to earn a doctorate and pursue a presidency. However, three participants noted unfortunate encounters with coworkers and supervisors, who tried to suppress the participants' growth instead of supporting it. The participants described these type of people as being insecure and jealous of other people's success. As one president noted, leaders who are not confident in their abilities can resort to disparaging or bullying behavior. None the less, such experiences also contributed to the ability to fulfill the role and meet the competencies successfully.

To paraphrase one of the participants, sometimes people become bullies because they confuse the importance of the position of president with their own personal importance and they start to believe they are morally better than other people and behave in an unpleasant manner. The participants advised upcoming professionals who find themselves in a suppressive environment to leave the department or institution if necessary. They also indicated that even negative experiences provide importance pieces of wisdom that help prepare someone to be a president.

The participants recognized the importance of surrounding oneself with smart, capable team members. Relying on the skill and expertise of other people was an important way participants handled the more technical aspects of certain competencies, especially institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management. The president should work hard to create and sustain a culture of support across the campus. Instead of worrying about people's success overshadowing their own talents, a president should focus on building a talented team of people on whom he or she can rely.

Organizational strategy. Organizational strategy includes developing a mission and vision, organizational change, taking risks, working with the faculty and the board of governors, institutional research, and strategic planning. Most of the participants learned the elements of organizational strategy from their on-the-job experience. Often the participant received or volunteered for a challenging job assignment, which was outside his or her normal job requirements. During the course of completing the duties required of that assignment, the participant acquired more knowledge and skill with the piece of the competency. Additional job assignments continued to add to their repertoire of skills with organizational strategy.

The participants learned technical aspects of organizational strategy, like strategic planning, most often from formal learning opportunities like completing a degree, participating in a president's academy, or taking a workshop. Frequently participants learned relational pieces of organizational strategy, like working with faculty and the board of governors by observing and watching how other leaders handled situations. The participant then analyzed then reflected upon the results of those actions. In some cases, a mentor would coach and guide the participant about working with faculty and the board of governors.

Institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management. Areas in this competency include budgeting, institutional finances, fundraising, crisis management, and supporting faculty and staff. Participants relied on the expertise of others for institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management more than any other competency. The participants were quick to point out the importance of maintaining a healthy and collaborative relationship with the chief executive officer of finance and chief executive officer of institutional advancement.

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Participants also learned aspects of institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resources management from their experience in previous positions. As their careers progressed, they assumed more responsibility in this area and learned what worked and what did not work from experience. Formal learning also played a part in this competency. Training programs for new presidents and vice presidents, like the Harvard University Management Program and executive trainings hosted by Council for Resource Development, were helpful in gaining valuable knowledge in this area.

Communication. Communication includes areas like public speaking, public relations, communicating during a crisis, using social media, and communication with faculty, staff, and students. The participants learned the aspects of communication through a variety of means, including experience, watching others, and formal learning. Participants also rely on the expertise of others to navigate the areas in this competency. It is interesting to note that the participants did not necessarily rely on others for the same areas in this competency. Some participants relied on others to create their public message, while one participant needed another person's experience for communicating with social media. Typically, the participants used the skill and expertise of others to compensate for any perceived weaknesses they may have in this area.

Mentors played an important part in the development of communication skills. Sometimes the participants watched the way their mentors handled situations or interacted with people, and learned from their mentors actions. Other times the mentor took on the role of teacher and provided instructions to the participant. Mentors also provided advice and support to the participants as they established skill in the area of communication. Formal learning played a small part in the participants' acquisition of communication skills; three presidents did mention some type of formal learning which

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helped them develop this competency.

Collaboration. Areas in collaboration include developing relationships with staff, students, and the board of governors. Collaboration is essential to a president's ability to achieve the college's goals. If presidents are not able to build effective relationships, they will most likely not be an effective president. The participants clearly indicated the importance of relationships to every aspect of leading a community college. It is essential for a president to build a rapport with the faculty. Faculty senates can wield a remarkable amount of power and a lack of trust and respect for the president can be disastrous. Personnel issues are a chief concern for presidents; however, an effective collaborator can overcome or avoid many of those issues.

Because of the nuances of personnel relations and the multitude of issues that can occur, it is not surprising that the most common way the presidents gained experiences in this area was from experience. One participant's comments suggested that nothing could fully prepare one for everything a president might face in this area; however, each new experience adds knowledge to help navigate the next situation. To paraphrase one of the participants, all experiences, both big and small, one encounters in their career or personal life are important learning opportunities for collaboration.

Previously held positions provided the participants opportunities to engage with faculty and the board of governors. Participants also mentioned the influence a mentor had on their development of this competency. They associated collaboration with relationship building and highlighted the caring traits they saw in mentors. Mentors helped the participants mature their proficiency with cultivating relationships, resolving conflicts, building trust, and establishing leadership. The mentors passed on the wisdom they had gained from their career and often served in an advisory role to the participants

after they became a president.

Advocacy. Advocacy includes the ability to process political information, lobbying, networking, and community colleges as a system at the local, state, and national levels. Experience and formal learning were the most frequently mentioned ways the participants learned advocacy. Usually the first experience with advocacy was not until the participant reached the presidential level. One president even stated that she would not expect anyone other than the president to be responsible for advocacy.

Advocacy is becoming increasingly important for community colleges, so it is a detriment that many participants' first experience with advocacy was after they become a president. Fortunately, there are formal trainings/academies for new presidents, which help develop this competency. Two of the presidents in this study learned advocacy from a similar formal learning opportunity for new presidents.

Exit questions. Four exit questions were asked of each president. The first was, "what do you believe had the most influence on your ability to be an effective community college leader?" The most common answer was mentors and role models. Without a doubt, other people played a very significant role in the development of the confidence and expertise of persons who fill or whom one day will fill the president role. This finding speaks loudly about the importance of mentors in developing future presidents.

The second question asked, "If you could go back and start your career over, would you change anything?" Most of the presidents said they would not change anything. They believed their experiences were varied enough to allow them to develop in all of the competencies. Two presidents did note a few areas they wished they had been better prepared in before becoming a president, these areas included teaching, legal issues, finances, and real estate.

The third question asked, "What advice would you give someone in regards to preparing for the role of a community college president?" The participants suggested taking advantage of opportunities with the potential to round out the aspiring president's resume. They warned against focusing too narrowly in one area or being overly focused on moving up and becoming president. Timing was a subtle undertone of several conversations with this question. The participants' sage advice was to "value each level of development."

The final exit question simply asked if the participant wanted to add anything additional to the study. The importance of relationships and surrounding oneself with high performing people were both mentioned as an essential component of being a successful president. Half of the participants declined to add anything additional, feeling they were comfortable with the breadth of their answers.

Implications

If community college leaders really care to make a difference in the expected leadership crisis, they have the power to change it. The solution to the leadership crisis can be significantly reduced through the efforts of the current community college presidents. They need to support and encourage the people who work for them and find ways to provide opportunities for those people to complete challenging job assignments has the potential to prepare others for the role. Current community college presidents need to trust subordinates to take on more responsibility while providing them with guidance, support, and mentoring. By creating and sustaining an atmosphere of collaboration throughout their institutions, presidents provide for leadership growth across the institution. As indicated in the experience of some of the participants in this study, the entry-level student services counselor may be a future community college

president.

Higher education leaders might well use the results of this study to redesign aspects of curriculum in graduate level programs for higher education/community college administration. Implementing experiential learning situations into higher education programs may provide the students with experiences that provide deeper learning than written assignments. In addition to experiential learning assignments in course level curriculum, practicums and capstone courses can be evaluated to ensure they are providing the right depth of experiences within the competencies.

Aspiring presidents should heed the wisdom of President A, who emphasized the importance of taking responsibility for one's own career progression. Future community college leaders can learn from the experiences of the presidents in this study to create a pathway or checklist for their own career progression. Using the AACC competencies, they can seek out learning opportunities, like volunteering for an accreditation committee, to develop skill in organizational strategy. Aspiring presidents can also develop a mentoring situation with current leaders and cultivate a relationship with them. This relationship does not need to be a formal mentoring partnership, but can be an informal arrangement based on mutual respect for one another and on the shared mission of the institution. Many of the participants interviewed expressed the eagerness of presidents to help others progress in their development of the competencies.

It is also important to note that most of the presidents in this study started their community college career in student services. This is different from what is represented in the literature, which suggests that someone who aspires to the role of president should follow a career path in academic affairs. As evidenced in one participant's sentiments, anyone who loves and supports the community college mission and is an empathetic

person can acquire the skills to be a good president. It does not matter whether a potential president came from student services or academic affairs, the breadth of their experiences and their ability to build relationships seems to be what is important. The findings of this study support this assertion and suggest that presidents who may have a weakness in a competency often rely on the expertise of others to compensate for that weakness.

Recommendations for Further Study

Continued research is recommended to analyze further the means in which community college presidents prepare for the role of president. This study assumed the participants had acquired skill in each of the five competencies. It may be beneficial for future studies to analyze the effectiveness of the participants in each competency. One possibility would be to either interview or survey the participants' subordinates and/or members of their board of governors to determine if the potential participant is considered effective or not effective.

I could have either interviewed only effective presidents or I could have compared the experiences of effective presidents against the experiences of ineffective presidents to determine if the way the presidents acquired the competencies had any correlation to their effectiveness as a president. I chose the former as a first step in the process but a contrasting study could provide more insights into the life experiences that contribute to success in the role.

This study did not differentiate the participants by gender or race/ethnicity. If the leadership gap presents an opportunity to increase diversity at the presidential level, a study that that does differentiate participants based on gender and/or race and ethnicity may produce findings on the learning experiences of current women and minority leaders which could provide valuable information that may help other women and minorities to

become prepared for a presidency.

I recommend that this study be replicated within a larger geographic area and include more participants. Expanding the study's sample will help validate the findings of this study and potentially provide additional insights into the most effective ways presidents acquire and develop skills with the AACC competencies.

The findings of this study suggest hands on experience and mentorship are the most valuable methods for presidents to acquire the competencies, and formal learning was less valuable in comparison. A study of current presidential preparation programs, like grow-your-own programs and doctoral degrees, could determine if the programs include sufficient opportunities for participants to practice the skills learned. Such a study could identify strengths and weaknesses of programs, and determine if the programs include crucial opportunities to acquire the AACC competencies.

Conclusion

It is a common sentiment that experience is the best teacher; the findings of this study suggest that statement is true relative to acquiring the AACC competencies. Current community college presidents who were interviewed for this study consistently pointed to their on the job experience as a major means of acquiring and developing competencies. Therefore, aspiring presidents should take advantage of each on the job opportunity that presents itself in which they could potentially gain new skill in the competencies. This includes volunteering for committees, requesting challenging job assignments, networking with the board of governors and potential donors, and any other opportunity that may help them acquire new skills or improve their current abilities.

Learning from a mentor was the second most commonly cited method of acquiring the competencies. Most of the presidents were quick to give commendation to a

leader who had mentored them and helped them to become a president. The relationship the participants had with their mentors was very important to their development as a leader. As stated previously, many of the participants were encouraged by their mentors to seek a presidency. Mentors were very important to the participants, but they did warn of trying too hard to become exactly like one's mentor. A president needs to be authentic if they are going to be effective. A common piece of advice in the interviews was for the aspiring presidents to "be themselves." A person should learn as much as possible from their mentor, but they should not necessarily try to emulate everything about that mentor.

The impending leadership crisis can be averted; however, current community college leaders will need to take a proactive role in developing future leaders for that to occur. In addition to being a mentor to individual employees, current presidents would do well to develop a culture at their college that encourages teamwork and mentorship over individualism. This culture will provide opportunities for inexperienced employees to acquire skill with the competencies and eventually share their knowledge with others. By doing so, they will create a pipeline of future presidents. It is clear that community college presidents are made more than they are born, but it takes a wealth of experience and support along the way.

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Appendix A – Interview Protocol

Answer the questions as if you are telling a memoir of your experiences with the competencies. Think about your experiences with each competency and describe what worked, what did not work, and what you have learned as it relates to that competency.

1) Please share with me your story of how you have arrived at where you are today in your career?

Organizational Strategy- "An effective community college leader promotes the success of all students, strategically improves the quality of the institution, and sustains the community college mission based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends" (AACC, 2013, p. 6). *Expertise areas in this competency include developing a mission and vision, organizational change, taking risks, working with faculty, working with the board of governors, institutional research, and strategic planning.*

1) As president, how do you approach the elements of organizational strategy at your college?
2) Why do you believe this is the right approach to organizational strategy?
3) In what ways has your role in organizational strategy changed during your tenure as a community college president?
4) Share with me lessons you have learned about effective and ineffective approaches to organizational strategy.

Institutional Finance, Research, Fundraising, and Resource Management- "An effective community college leader equitably and ethically sustains people, processes, and information as well as financial assets to fulfill the mission, vision, and goals of the community college" (AACC, 2013, p. 8). *Expertise areas in this competency include budgeting, institutional finances, fundraising, crisis management, and supporting faculty and staff.*

1) Describe your role as president in institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management at your college.
2) Why do you believe this is the right level of involvement in institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management?
3) In what ways has your role in institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management changed during your tenure as a community college president?
4) Share with me lessons you have learned about effective and ineffective approaches to institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management.

Communication- "An effective community college leader uses clear listening, speaking, and writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and its surrounding community; promotes the success of all students; ensures the safety and security of students and the surrounding college community; and sustains the community college mission" (AACC, 2013, p. 9). *Expertise areas in this competency include public speaking, public relations, communicating during a crisis, using social media, and communicating with staff, students, and the community.*

1) Tell me about your role as a community college president in the various methods of communication at your college.
2) Why do you believe this is the right approach to communication?
3) In what ways has your role in communication changed during your tenure as a community college president?
4) Share with me lessons you have learned about communication as a community college president, such as effective and ineffective ways to communicate.

Collaboration- "An effective community college leader develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial, and ethical internal and external relationships that nurture diversity, promotes the success of all students, and sustains the community college mission" (AACC, 2013, p. 10). *Expertise areas in this competency include developing relationships with staff, students, and the board of governors.*

1) Describe the types of working relationships a community college president needs to develop.
2) Why do you believe the relationships you described are necessary to cultivate?
3) In what ways has your approach to collaboration changed during your tenure as a community college president?
4) Share with me lessons you have learned about effective and ineffective means of collaborating and developing relationships.

Advocacy- "An effective community college leader understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision, and goals of the community college on the local, state, and national level" (AACC, 2013, p. 11). *Expertise areas in this competency include the ability to process political information, lobbying, networking, and advocating for community colleges as a system at the local, state, and national levels.*

1) In what ways do you advocate for your community college and for community colleges in general?
2) Why do you advocate in the ways you described?
3) In what ways has your role in community college advocacy changed during your tenure as a community college president?
4) Share with me lessons you have learned about effective and ineffective strategies for advocacy, both for your institution and for community college in general.

Exit Questions:

1) What do you believe had the most influence on your ability to be an effective community college president?
2) If you could go back and start your career over, would you change anything in order to be better prepared in any of the competencies we discussed?
3) What advice would you give someone in regards to preparing for the role of a community college president?
4) Is there anything that you would like to add that you believe is beneficial to this study, but I did not ask about?

Appendix B – Invitation to Participate in Interview

Dear Community College President,

I am a doctoral candidate at the dissertation stage in the Frostburg State University Educational Leadership program. The central question of my study is as follows: What have practicing community college presidents found to be the most meaningful ways to grow their expertise within each of the five AACC competencies? I have identified you as a qualifying candidate for my sample and this letter is a request for you to allow me to interview you and use your answers in my data set.

If interested, I will send you prompts that might help jog your memory so that when we meet to interview, you will have had time to reflect on the experiences of your career path that have been very meaningful and influential in developing your expertise to be a successful community college president.

Thank you for considering my request; I anxiously await your response. Enclosed are the documents necessary for IRB approval to conduct this study, which explain how I will guarantee confidentiality for your responses.

Sincerely,

Carol Rothstein

Appendix C – Notice of Informed Consent

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Project Title: Acquisition and Development of the American Association of Community Colleges' Competencies for Community College Leaders

Purpose of the Study: I am Carol Rothstein, a Doctoral Student in Educational Leadership at Frostburg State University, and I am researching how community college presidents acquired and developed the five key competencies necessary for community college leadership as defined by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). You have been selected to participate in this research project because you are an experienced community college president and can speak about the ways community college presidents acquire and develop skill in leading a community college.

Procedures: You have been selected based on your experience and knowledge in community college leadership to participate in an interview that will take approximately 1 to 2 hours. This voluntary interview asks questions about your experience with the AACC's five competencies for community college leadership. You will be asked several open-ended questions.

Participant Benefits: While you may not benefit directly from participating in this study, you can help provide valuable information for upcoming presidents, as well as higher education leadership programs. The information you contribute may help close the gap in community college leadership.

Participant Risks: There is little risk to you in participating in this study. Some questions may ask about previous experiences or people that have influenced you in either positive or negative ways. Some questions may inquire about your level of expertise or lack of experience in a specific area of community college leadership, which may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable answering and you may stop participating in the interview at any time without consequences to yourself. You will be provided two weeks to review the transcribed interview and make any corrections, clarifications, or deletions you feel are necessary.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate in the interview at all. If you decide to participate, you may stop at any time. While I hope you will answer all questions, you are free to skip any questions. You can decline to participate, or stop at any time with no consequences to you.

Confidentiality: All information collected in this study will remain confidential to the

greatest extent permitted by law. Your name will not be used in the study. A pseudonym will be used in place of the names of individual interview participants and their respective community college, so that no reader can identify people or places. No master list connecting the real names to the pseudonyms will be kept. The transcribed interviews will be stored in both electronic and paper form and will be kept behind three locks in the committee chair's office at the university for two years beyond the publishing date of the manuscript.

When Child Abuse May Be Uncovered: In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities information that comes to our attention concerning (past or present) child abuse or neglect or potential harm to you or others.

Contact Information: If you have questions about this research study, please contact:
Carol A. Rothstein
 540-931-1399
carothstein0@frostburg.edu
or
Dr. Glenn Thompson
301-687-4366
gethompson@frostburg.edu
Frostburg State University
207-4 Frampton Hall,
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This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Frostburg State University (H2016-007). For research-related problems or questions regarding participant's rights, contact Dr. Beth Scarloss, IRB Chair at 301-687-4472 or IRB@frostburg.edu.

Consent: I have read and understand the explanation provided to me and have been given a copy of this consent form. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I agree/consent to participate:

_____   _____

Signature   Date

_____

(Please PRINT name here)

_____   _____

Researcher: Carol A. Rothstein   Date