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## Leading the Charge: A Multiple Case Study of Presidential Perceptions of Essential Leadership Characteristics for the 21st Century Community College

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LEADING THE CHARGE:  
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF PRESIDENTIAL PERCEPTIONS OF ESSENTIAL  
LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE

by

B. Jeanne Bonner

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Educational Studies  
(Education Leadership and Higher Education)

Under the Supervision of Professor James P. O'Hanlon

Lincoln, Nebraska

July, 2013

LEADING THE CHARGE: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF PRESIDENTIAL  
PERCEPTIONS OF ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup>  
CENTURY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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University of Nebraska, 2013

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Leadership of 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges is more demanding today than at any other time. Community colleges are faced with an array of challenges previously unimagined, generally resulting from the impact of concurrent socio-economic changes, competing demands from various college constituencies, growing complexity of the leadership role of the community college president, and increasing competition for scarce resources in the face of the continuing decline of funding support. Thus, the leadership role of the community college president has never been more difficult, nor more critical.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the leadership skills and characteristics that beginning, mid-career, and senior community college presidents perceived to be important to lead 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges effectively today, to learn how these perceptions compared to the AACC guidelines of 2001, and to discover whether sitting presidents' perceptions of leadership characteristics were similar or different depending upon tenure in the presidency.

Research for this qualitative study was founded upon interviews of nine sitting community college presidents from one Midwestern state, representing presidential tenure categories of early, mid-career or senior. The findings shed light upon perceptions

of today's important presidential leadership characteristics, validated characteristics put forth in 2001 by the AACCC, and identified numerous leadership challenges facing today's presidents. Guidance was offered for prospective presidents, Boards, and educators.

The findings suggest: (a) new presidents may struggle with the solitary nature of the presidency during their first years in office; (b) prospective presidents should develop diverse professional experience and demonstrate characteristics such as passion for the presidency and the ability to adapt to the demands of the job; and (c) presidents should possess the energy, persistence, and grit necessary for the long hours and multiple pressures associated with 21<sup>st</sup> century presidencies. Recommendations were offered for additional research regarding the transition and support for new leaders into the presidency and for further investigation of grit as applied to presidential leadership.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

*Leadership consists not in degrees of technique but in traits of character; it requires moral rather than athletic or intellectual effort, and it imposes on both leader and follower alike the burdens of self-restraint.*

- Lewis H. Lapham (1985, p. 96)

Leadership of 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges is more difficult and challenging today than at any given time in the past (AACC, 2012; March & Weiner, 2002; Petrie, 2011). In fact, the presidents of the nation's community colleges today “work in a volatile and challenging political, financial, and academic milieu” (Baliles, 2006, p. 7). Presently, community colleges are faced with an array of institutional challenges previously unimagined, generally resulting from the impact of concurrent socio-economic changes. Also posing potential threats are the competing demands of various college constituents, the growing complexity of the leadership role of the community college president, and the continuing decline of higher education funding support (Petrie, 2011). “Leading community colleges has become more complex in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and demands a greater range of skills” (Romero, 2004, p. 31). As a result, the leadership role of the community college president has never been more challenging, nor more critical.

### **Nature and Significance of the Problem**

There is little doubt that a significant emphasis on the nature of leadership will continue throughout the succeeding decades, due in no small part to the severe impact of significant social change and personal uncertainty facing the United States during the first decades of the new Millennium. In the words of James Khroe, “Extraordinary times — eras of social confusion, military peril, economic collapse, disasters — often bring out the

best in people, including, occasionally, the people in charge” (Khroe, 2005, para. 17).

Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) noted the nation has been dealing with constant change, as well as ongoing technological revolution and escalating population diversity, requiring community college leaders to deal effectively with these trends as they impact the institution. To do so, the question must be addressed: What presidential leadership characteristics will sustain community colleges through this period of organizational change and educational reform, as well as to guide and advance institutions further than ever thought possible?

In anticipation of these societal challenges, in 2001 the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) – the primary advocacy organization for the nation's two-year degree-granting institutions, including public and private community colleges, junior and technical colleges and their branch campuses – attempted to respond to that question when it issued the results of an important and comprehensive study focused upon the essential leadership characteristics considered critical for the nation's 21<sup>st</sup> century community college presidents. The AACC's *Essential Leadership Characteristics of Effective Community College Presidents* (AACC, 2001) represented an important effort designed to identify the most essential personal, professional, and interpersonal skills and overarching competencies for future community college leaders. Based upon the findings of a number of previous national studies of the community college presidency (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Shults, 2001; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998), the AACC's *Essential Leadership Characteristics* (2001) included:

1. understanding and implementing the community college mission;
2. effective advocacy;

3. administrative skills;
4. community and economic development; and
5. personal, interpersonal, and transformational skills, such as interacting with staff to promote the college's vision, values, and mission; personal ethics; competence; ability to model diversity; effective evaluation of personnel; balancing all aspects of the job; building coalitions and collaborative relationships; flexibility and negotiation; public speaking and writing; and demonstrating self-mastery and personal transformation. (AACC, 2001)

Since the publication of the landmark AACC study in 2001, the fundamental fiscal and societal well-being of the nation has been under siege. The lagging economy and accelerating state budget deficits have brought about declining levels of state funding for postsecondary education, resulting in significant growth of student tuition and fees at the same time that student financial aid support has been weakening. When combined with shifting demographics and an unprecedented growth in student demand for higher education, the challenges facing community college leaders have become immense. Yet, despite these factors, the societal benefits of community colleges have remained constant, since “without universal and lifelong access to the benefits of a college education, the nation will simply fail to meet the social and economic challenges of the years ahead” (Ruppert, 2003, p.7).

As we moved into the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, community college presidents were subject to increasingly more complex, demanding, and contradictory expectations. Nationally, educators claimed, “Our nation is in the midst of a perfect storm . . . that is having a considerable impact on our country” (Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto, & Sum, 2007, p. 3). While the nation undergoes a continual technological and economic evolution, community college professionals believe that leadership skills required for today's community college presidents are evolving (Ashford, 2011;

O'Banion, 2010). Given the impact of current societal changes, MacAllum and Yoder (2004) noted the growing importance of the advancement of the comprehensive community college mission and of the associated demands upon college leaders. George Boggs, AACC Past-President and CEO, indicated recent essential leadership characteristics were significantly different from those of only a few years ago (Boggs, 2003). Turner (2005) suggested the community college presidency today has been transformed into "a calling of high expectations, broad responsibility, and limitless challenges" (p. 2). Kezar, Carducci, and Contreras-McGavin (2006) added, "the picture of leadership today is vastly different from fifteen years ago. In fact one might say that we have had a revolution in our views of leadership" (2006, p. 13). Michael Fullan (2001) claimed that because of the short supply of effective leadership and the impending presidential retirements, the nation likely would experience "leadership development initiatives dominating the scene over the next decade" (p. xii). One decade after the publication of the AACC's study, a 2012 report of the AACC, *Reclaiming the American Dream*, suggested "committed and courageous community college leaders are required to support the transformation of the institution" (AACC, 2012, p. 17). Further, 2012 AACC data reveal as many as 75% of today's presidents indicate they will retire in the next 10 years (AACC, 2013).

In response to this nationwide sense of concern in community college leadership ranks, community college presidents must strive toward the attainment of the necessary balance of academic rigor, institutional integrity, and community accountability, while successfully dealing with a variety of challenges not confronted by their predecessors

(Edwards, 2007; Romero, 2004; Shults, 2001). “Leaders are key to how organizations function, and there is little doubt that the leaders who are needed to guide postsecondary institutions in tomorrow’s complex environments have to think about their work differently than did their predecessors” (Amey, 2006b, p. 58).

Mathis and Roueche (2013) endorsed the concept that leadership matters, especially from the top. “New critical leadership skills are required to deal with the changing environment and daunting issues that challenge our colleges, the plunging U.S. global educational ranking and our nation’s competitive position. . . . We have a new era upon us which requires heightened sensitivities, awareness, and ability to anticipate, communicate, and respond as never before” (Mathis & Roueche, 2013, para. 2).

Based upon the ongoing research and given the challenges facing higher education today, including current and projected turnover of community college presidencies, and especially in view of current societal needs and economic threats, the researcher became most curious to learn how sitting presidents themselves viewed leadership. In essence, the researcher sought to discover what leadership characteristics or behaviors sitting presidents perceived to be most essential to guide community colleges today and in the immediate future.

While the AACC Guidelines (2001) were put forth at the beginning of the century to provide guidance for the selection and development of the next wave of community college presidents, the query then followed as to whether those guidelines were still relevant today. In other words, were the leadership perceptions of today’s sitting

community college presidents reflective of those presented by the AACC (2001) at the beginning of the century, or did they provide an alternative perspective?

Further, did sitting presidents believe that community college leadership in today's world required the same or different presidential leadership skills and characteristics as compared to those presented by the AACC in 2001? Did presidents at different phases of their presidencies – early, mid-career, or senior – possess similar or different perceptions of essential leadership characteristics? More specifically, the researcher was interested to learn which specific personal leadership characteristics community college presidents from one state at different phases of their presidencies perceived as essential to navigate a college through the perilous circumstances existing in the nation today and to discover how these perceptions might compare to those posed by the AACC at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Overview of the community college.** Across the United States, community colleges have assumed a prominent role in the education of citizens. Community colleges long have been recognized as educational institutions that could ensure access, equity, and attainment of higher degrees for all students (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). While the first junior colleges were established in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to provide a bridge between the secondary schools and a 4-year degree or to offer vocational training for those seeking a terminal career path, in recent years the social role of the community college has broadened significantly. Today's comprehensive community college is considered essential to the health and welfare of individual states and ultimately to the nation. The overriding common mission of America's community colleges is to provide quality

education and the necessary support to help all students achieve their educational goals

(Pusser & Levin, 2009). According to the Community College Survey of Student

Engagement (2006), the critical work of community colleges includes efforts to:

1. provide full access to education through open admissions policies;
2. serve a diverse mix of students with varying goals from earning a degree to on-the-job-training;
3. serve students with significant time constraints besides educational pursuits;
4. serve part-time students who spend limited time on campus;
5. serve academically challenged students likely not well-served by previous public school education;
6. serve highly academically qualified students seeking an affordable and accessible beginning to their college careers;
7. serve a disproportionately high number of low-income and first-generation college students; and
8. address all of these challenges while dealing with severe resource constraints. (CCSSE, 2006)

In recent years, postsecondary tuition has risen significantly across the higher educational spectrum. Due to escalating costs of higher education, state and national leaders viewed community colleges as a viable option for the large numbers of new students seeking affordable alternatives. The future viability of communities, states, and the nation depends heavily upon raising the overall educational attainment level of our citizenry. In 2012, President, Barack Obama, proposed \$2 billion for the nation's community colleges to help educate U. S. workers to perform the more complex jobs of the future and "build the highly skilled workforce that is crucial for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (The White House, 2012, para. 5).

**Nature of the community college presidency.** Community college presidents are critical in determining institutional success. The early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have presented college presidents with countless challenges, both societal and economic. At

present, the nation's community colleges are struggling with an array of unprecedented pressing issues such as vacillating enrollment trends, demands for accountability, faculty shortages, and budget cuts. Such new challenges add significantly to the complexity of the presidency. As a result, the nature of presidential leadership has become a critical issue for all community colleges.

The literature has warned of an impending leadership crisis in community colleges due to a surge in presidential retirements, combined with a predicted shortage of prepared community college leaders ready to step-up as extensive retirements take place at all levels of the institutions (Duree, 2007; Riggs, 2009; Shults, 2001; Skinner, 2010; Vaughan, 2000; Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). According to the AACC (2004a), the national transition in presidential leadership due to retirement was well underway, with 79 percent of the presidents planning to retire within the next decade (AACC, 2004a; Shults, 2001). Although this leadership transition has been of major concern, it also “provides a window of opportunity to bring greater diversity, new energy, and new ideas to community college leadership” (Boggs, 2002, p. 15).

The mission and scope of community colleges are fast evolving; therefore, it follows that the role of the president must also be transformed. The complex 21<sup>st</sup> century community college brings together in a single comprehensive organization the former missions of junior colleges, technical colleges, and community education programs. As a result, “leading such institutions requires professionals willing to abandon traditional top-down hierarchies in favor of more collaborative structures” (Romero, 2004, p. 31).



The research of Turner (2005) suggested that the new generation of presidents will need skills beyond those of their predecessors. Since community colleges are essential to the economy of their states and their communities, the institutions must keep pace with new trends in business and industry, as well as with those in education and technology. As the key leader of the institution, the community college president must be well prepared to address such concerns within the state and community (Turner, 2005).

Fisher and Koch (2004) suggested that while college presidents were among the most frequently studied groups of college administrators, still more needed to be learned about this key leadership role. Current literature supported the identification of desirable leadership characteristics and skills of community college presidents nationwide. The research of Baliles (2006) suggested the pace and intensity of ongoing change “calls for leaders who are able to function effectively in many domains . . . and calls for a new style of leadership” (Baliles, 2006, p. 2).

During the past several years, a number of studies devoted to the investigation of presidential perceptions of the AACC’s presidential leadership competencies of 2005 were issued. Chief among these was Anthony Hassan’s (2008) study of the perceptions of New York and Florida community college presidents and trustees regarding the six AACC leadership competencies (2005) which served to validate and endorse the competencies. Hassan’s findings revealed consistency of perceptions among presidents and trustees of both states, regardless of size or type of college, or presidential demographics or tenure in the presidency. Across the board, respondents credited their previous professional experiences and specific opportunities with networking, mentoring,

feedback and action learning as supporting their leadership development. A subsequent article authored by Hassan, Dellow, and Jackson (2009) and based upon Hassan's study (2008) further suggested the existing AACC competencies might be used as a foundation or template for the hiring of future presidents and for the establishment of enhancement of internal leadership development programs. Other studies also have examined the perspectives of college presidents in relation to the core competencies and have added to the research, including those by Duree (2007) and McNair (2010).

During 2010, two additional research studies focused upon the AACC competencies were released. Kools (2010) studied two groups of presidents representing either small, single-campus, rural colleges, or large, multi-campus, urban colleges. His research investigated the presidents' perceptions of the AACC competencies, as well as the previous work of Hassan (2008). His findings revealed consistency between the perceptions of the two groups of presidents from rural and urban colleges and served also to validate further the competencies, as well as the findings of Hassan's 2008 study. As did Hassan (2008), Kools (2010) recommended the utilization of the AACC competencies (2005) as a tool for the selection of future presidents and for the enhancement of leadership development programs. Specifically, his work served to validate the value of networking, mentoring, feedback and previous professional experience as providing a strong foundation for the development of leadership skills. In addition, Kools (2010) urged further work to expand and amplify the AACC competencies into more distinct and better-defined categories to increase their precision

and to provide a foundation upon which future leaders could focus their personal leadership development.

In a like manner, Bechtel (2010) considered the AACC competencies along with transformational leadership when he designed his study of one large multi-campus in-house leadership development program. His research was founded upon the perceptions of those most recently enrolled in the leadership program and revealed that the AACC competencies (2005) were embedded within the program design, although the establishment of the leadership development program preceded the release of the AACC competencies (2005) and therefore, was not specifically designed around them. He discovered that the college supported the development of staff from all levels of the college, but noted the demographics of the subjects did not impact their responses, with the exception of long-term leaders. Finally, he suggested the redesign of the leadership development program to more closely synch with the AACC competencies. Like Hassan (2008) and Kools (2010), Bechtel (2010) also recommended the inclusion of a focus on networking, mentoring, feedback and active learning experiences to enhance the professional development of future leaders.

Finally, in response to the growing national concern regarding presidential leadership as linked to the AACC competencies, a special edition of *New Directions for Community Colleges* (Eddy, 2013) was edited by Pamela Eddy and released as a special Fall 2012 issue. The ten articles were focused on the AACC competencies and their utility in the development of presidential leadership and provide a varied perspective of the competencies in the field today. As Eddy notes, “the changing environment of higher

education places new demands on leaders, and as a result, the AACCC competencies must expand and adjust to reflect this new climate” (2013, p. 4).

Despite a focus on the investigation of leadership competencies and the design of leadership development programs, there was a paucity of existing research available concerning the personal and interpersonal skills needed for community college leaders during such critical and challenging times for higher education as those present today. The combined societal forces of the 21<sup>st</sup> century impacted all postsecondary institutions significantly, although Romero (2004) suggested these forces affected community colleges “more heavily than other sectors of higher education and demand agile leadership” (p. 31). Given these ongoing societal changes, it is likely that the challenges of recent years will continue to impact the role of the president heavily and thus, may well demand leadership skills other than those identified in the AACCC research.

*The quality of leadership, more than any other single factor, determines the success or failure of an organization.*

–Fred Fiedler & Martin Chemers (1984, p.3)

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the mid-1980s, George Vaughan (1986) began to question the nature of community college presidential leadership. Nearly three decades later that same issue remains significant. Today we are experiencing massive changes in the way people live, think, and work due to key developments in science and technology that affect society and alter education. In his work, *A Short History of Progress*, Ronald Wright (2004), claimed we have progressed so rapidly as a society that the skills and customs we learned as children are outdated by the time we are thirty. As a result, we are struggling simply to

keep up with our own culture. Clearly, leadership is a universal phenomenon. However, Lakomski (2005) suggests we may have reached “the end of leadership as we have known it in the past” (p. 1).

Despite the forces impacting our environment, community colleges have continued to provide a gateway to the future for first time students seeking an affordable college education and for mid-career students looking to get ahead in the workplace, while making significant contributions to the economic future of the nation. As community college boards seek to recruit new presidents to replace those currently poised for retirement, it is critical that potential leaders possess the requisite leadership skills and characteristics necessary to address effectively the myriad challenges facing community colleges.

While current research has addressed the external and internal forces impacting the nation’s 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges and their presidents, the literature studying presidential leadership characteristics from the perspectives of presidents at different stages of their presidential careers – early, mid-career, and senior – is lacking. Further, although the members of the AACC Taskforce of 2001 and other researchers have investigated the desirable leadership skills, characteristics and competencies for 21<sup>st</sup> century community college presidents and chief executive officers on a national level, it is unclear how the general leadership skills and characteristics recognized in those studies might compare to those identified by community college presidents from one state at different phases of their presidencies, thus eliminating responses based upon regional differences. Finally, many of the current challenges impacting community college

leaders today clearly are associated with fast-moving societal changes which were not predicted at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The questions then become: What specific leadership skills and characteristics do community college presidents at various stages of their presidencies from one state believe are needed today and for the immediate future; how do these perceptions compare to the findings of the 2001 AACC Taskforce; and finally, how do the established AACC leadership characteristics play out in the field?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and describe the perceptions of community college presidents in one Midwestern state as viewed from one of three presidential career phases – early, mid-career, or senior – of the leadership skills and characteristics necessary to guide 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges and to discover how those perceptions compare to the prevailing national guidelines originally proposed by the AACC in 2001.

### **Research Questions**

The expanse of literature studying leadership during the past century is voluminous. Even after centuries of investigation and prognostication, there still exists no one common definition of leadership. At the same time, the literature regarding community colleges and the role and leadership capabilities of the community college president through the past several decades is likewise massive. Thus, given the plethora of text in the literature, the best way to “manage such excess is with a good research question or set of research questions” (Bryant, 2004, p. 49). The following research questions were designed to supply the focus for this study.

**Central question.** What leadership skills and characteristics do beginning, mid-career, and senior community college presidents perceive to be important to lead 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges effectively today and how do these perceptions compare to the AACC (2001) guidelines?

**Sub-questions.**

1. What do sitting presidents perceive to be the most important presidential leadership skills and characteristics required to guide 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges?
2. How do the presidential leadership skills identified by the AACC in 2001 compare to those perceived as important by new, mid-career, and senior community college presidents?
3. What lessons can be learned from sitting presidents regarding important leadership characteristics for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that will provide guidance to boards, potential presidents, and leaders at other institutions?

**Method**

The method selected for this study was that of the qualitative, multi-case study. Since the researcher was most interested in discovering the perceptions of sitting community colleges presidents of the leadership characteristics they consider essential to lead a community college in today's challenging and fast-changing environment, the qualitative method enabled the researcher to undertake "an inquiry process of understanding [to] explore a social or human problem" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). In a similar manner, the case study approach permitted the researcher to "study the

particularity and complexity of the case(s), coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. xi). Finally, data were gathered through the process of interviewing. Qualitative interviewing, as defined by Kvale (1996), "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Kvale, 1996, n.p.).

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, terminology is defined as follows:

*Leadership*—While there is no one commonly accepted definition of leadership, for the purposes of this study leadership will be considered as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2007, p. 3). Leadership also can be viewed as an observable, learnable set of practices; a continuous process in which an individual attempts to influence his or her followers to establish and accomplish a goal or goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2001).

*Leadership characteristics and skills*—Often considered innate or distinguishing traits, qualities, or essential attributes, the professional, personal, and interpersonal behaviors exhibited by acknowledged leaders help to determine what makes certain leaders effective.

*Leadership style*—The individual or personal approach to leadership demonstrated by a leader, usually described on dimensions independent of the leader’s skills, knowledge and experience.



*Mid-career college president*—For the purposes of this research, a “mid-career” college president is defined as one who has served as a community college president for a period of five through nine years. This range is based upon a national tenure average of slightly over seven years in the presidency (King & Gomez, 2008).

*New college president*—For the purposes of this research, a “new” college president will be defined as one who has served as the president of his or her community college for a period of one through four years.

*President*—The principal administrative official responsible for the direction of all affairs and operations of a postsecondary educational institution and generally reports to a governing system or board of some type. Depending upon the nature of each college, the position also may be termed Chancellor, Provost, or Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

*Senior community college president*—For the purposes of this research, a “senior” college president will be defined as one who has served as the president of his or her community college for a period of ten years or more.

### **Assumptions**

The practice of leadership constitutes a critical element of higher education in general and community colleges in particular. In fact, presidential transitions in higher education may command the attention of about one-quarter of the nation's colleges and universities at any given time (Bornstein, 2010; Focht, 2010; Martin & Samels, 2004). Prevailing theories of leadership have evolved significantly through the ages, thus rendering its study something of a moving target. As Hernez-Broome and Hughes (2004) note, “today, effective leadership is commonly viewed as central to organizational

success” (p. 27). Given the ever-evolving leadership theory, as well as the ambiguity and uncertainty connected with massive societal change resulting in ongoing leadership transition, it can be assumed that the model of effective community college presidential leadership for the future may look somewhat different than at any point in the past.

Based upon this understanding, the following assumptions have guided this study:

1. Twenty-first century presidential community college leadership was both complex and existed in a state of uncertainty (Bumpus, 2012; Romero, 2004; Shults, 2001).
2. The community college presidents’ lived leadership experience provided insights from the field for practice.
3. The prevailing *Essential Leadership Characteristics of Community College Presidents* (AACC, 2001) constituted a national benchmark with which to compare current leadership perceptions of sitting presidents.
4. The presidents agreeing to be interviewed for this study provided complete and truthful answers to the questions asked.
5. Methodologies employed in this study offered an appropriate way to identify and better understand the perceptions of community college presidents and to compare those findings with established benchmarks.

### **Delimitations and Limitations of the Study**

The delimitations and limitations of this study should be noted when interpreting its findings. This study was restricted to leadership perceptions of community college presidents from one Midwestern state, gleaned during the period of societal change in

existence during the early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Further, this study was limited by sample type, size, and institutional location. While the nine community college presidents at three different stages of their presidencies represented community colleges of varying sizes, types, organizational structure, and geographic locations within the state, the nine institutions may not have been representative of any other individual community college or of community college systems in other states, thus possibly restricting the generalizability of the findings. Further, it was possible that the perceptions expressed by the subjects of this study were not representative of those of sitting presidents from other geographical areas of the nation.

*The future of presidential leadership is in a state of uncertainty.*  
 - Christopher Shults, (2001, p. 2)

### **Significance of the Study**

It has been asked, who will lead the nation's community colleges in the future, especially in view of the impending wave of retirements, coupled with the shrinkage of the pool of prospective presidential candidates (AACC, 2012). According to Martha Romero (2004), the demands for effective community college leadership have continued to increase during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the same time, the challenges impacting the presidency – both internal and external to the organization – have multiplied as well. As Romero reported, educational institutions have been “pressed to become more accountable – pressed by government watchdogs, by industry, and by students. . .[demanding] a broad-based leadership structure that requires leadership at many levels of the institution continuously and simultaneously” (Romero, 2004, p. 32).

During times of dramatic change such as currently impacting community colleges, effective leaders become critical to organizational success. Despite the wisdom about different approaches to, and philosophies of, intentional institution-wide change in the literature, extensive organizational change is an extremely difficult undertaking and success remains elusive for many college and university leaders. In a major study on the massive impact of change upon postsecondary institutions undertaken on behalf of the American Council on Education, Eckel, Hill, Green, and Mallon (1999) stressed the critical importance of the role of leaders during trying times and stressed that leaders are essential since they “make a clear and compelling case to key stakeholders about why things must be done differently (p. 2).

An effective community college leader can strategically improve the quality of the institution, protect the long-term health of the organization, promote the success of its students, and sustain the community college mission based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends (AACC, 2004a; Campbell, 2002). As a result, the current and future success of community colleges depends upon the skill of the institution’s leaders (Murry & Hammons, 1995). Members of community college boards are challenged to recruit and hire new presidents possessing requisite leadership characteristics to lead colleges effectively in such perilous times. At the same time, those contemplating the position of community college presidency need to be aware of the personal skills and attributes considered essential by experienced professionals.

It is abundantly clear that community college presidents must address effectively the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with specific competencies and skills if higher

education is to continue to prepare society's lifelong learners, thus enhancing the future vitality of the states and of the nation. Boggs (2003) suggested higher educational leaders of the future will be chosen based in no small part upon their demonstrated knowledge and leadership skills. However, the type of leadership required within the new context of globalization, demographic changes, technological advancement, and questioning of social authority may call for new or different skills than those acceptable in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, requiring a re-education among campus stakeholders if they want to be successful leaders in the future (Kezar et al., 2006).

Although there is a rich description of leadership theories and the behaviors of presidential leaders paralleling the findings from the literature on effective leaders, there are limited data related to the identification of which leadership characteristics best facilitate and promote positive change in educational settings during challenging socio-economic times from the lens of sitting presidents at various stages of their presidencies. Further, it is unclear whether the societal changes that have taken place since the 2001 publication of the AACC Task Force findings might call for the same or different presidential leadership characteristics than those revealed in the literature. While many sources in the literature identified specific leadership traits and skills considered desirable for community college presidents at the beginning of the current century (Boggs, 1995, 2002; Vaughan, 2000; Weisman & Vaughan, 2002), none of these studies focused on the unique leadership needs of community college presidents from the perceptions of current presidents at different phases of their presidencies.

The topic of leadership and the investment in leadership development by various organizations has never been more pronounced than it is today. A recent literature search using the key word “leadership” on a popular Internet search engine revealed an incredible 391,000,000 references. Refining the search by using the term “community college leadership” dropped that total to 355,000,000 references, while further focusing the search by using “community college presidential leadership” garnered 214,000,000 references. Similarly, a search of Dissertation Abstracts using the search terms, “leadership, community colleges, and president” revealed a total of 76 studies concerned with the overall concept of community college presidential leadership. The focus of these studies ranged from investigations of gender differences, to prevailing presidential leadership styles in certain regions, to the leadership styles of institutional officers other than the president; many of these studies were centered on competencies. Yet, none of the studies focused on the perceptions of new, mid-career, and senior community college presidents of essential leadership characteristics required for success since the publication of the results of the 2001 AACC study.

Wallin (2002; 2010) argued that today’s changing environment is demanding a new array of leadership skills than those of the past century. She suggested that old methods of leading and managing will no longer be effective in the future due to our challenging national environment. Likewise, the author asserted community colleges are dealing with similar socio-economic forces and therefore, require a new type of leadership. She noted, “the roles of community college leaders at all levels are in a state of flux” (2002, p. 5). Further, Terry O’Banion, president emeritus of The League for

Innovation in the Community College, agreed with Wallin's perspective and added, "Providing leadership in a community college in the early years of the 21st century is like dancing with porcupines: all the challenges are prickly ones" (2008, para 1).

As the Boards and presidents of community colleges assess specific institutional leadership needs and demands, this study should serve a three-fold purpose. It should help to illuminate and bring clarity to the leadership challenges and demands facing community college presidents today. At the same time, it should also serve to inform boards and potential presidents of the essential leadership characteristics perceived by presidents as best suited to meet these prevailing challenges. Finally, this study should offer a unique perspective on current presidential leadership characteristics juxtaposed with those identified in 2001 by the American Association of Community Colleges, as revealed by sitting presidents from three different stages of their presidencies, currently missing in the literature.

### **Organization of the Study**

This chapter has provided an introduction to the study through an overview of the context of the problem, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the study design and research questions to be investigated, the central research question, and assumptions and limitations of the research. Chapter Two presented a literature review relative to previous studies conducted on general leadership theory and practice, as well as in the field of community college presidential leadership, with emphasis on the prevailing 2001 AACC essential characteristics of effective 21<sup>st</sup> century presidents. Chapter Three described the methodology of the multiple case study approach, as well as

the process of discovering the perceptions of sitting community college presidents.

Chapter Four summarized and presented the data. Chapter Five provided the research findings, conclusions, inherent implications, suggestions for further research, and recommendations.



## Chapter Two

### Review of the Literature

*The literature review provides a framework for relating new findings to previous findings. . . [and] creates a thick, rich description of the essence of primary researchers' experiences*

– Justus Randolph (2009, p. 2)

For the purposes of this research, two separate, but somewhat overlapping bodies of literature were reviewed and evaluated. The first collection included works focused upon the historical and ever-evolving context of leadership theory, leadership styles, and leader effectiveness. The second body of work concerned the foundations of leadership within the institution of the American community college, with a focus on presidential leadership. Literature reviewed in this study included material from selected books, journals, and unpublished works. It was the perspective of this researcher that gaining a degree of insight into the evolution of leadership through a historical perspective would greatly improve the reader's understanding of the complexity of leadership and of the role of the leader through time. Further, a review of literature from a variety of eras should serve to present a solid framework from which to consider the evolution of leadership theory.

The literature and research examined in this chapter provided the theoretical framework upon which this study was based and is arranged as follows: Part One looked at the historical perspectives of leadership and leadership theories from the Classical period through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Part Two examined the leadership dynamic within the institution of the American community college, with a specific focus on prevailing

theories of community college presidential leadership at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Foundations of Leadership Theory**

Scholars from the worlds of management, social sciences, psychology, and education have studied the concept of leadership for centuries. Through the years, the various prevailing understandings of the factors that constituted leadership, including those that defined an effective leader, have evolved significantly. In fact, fundamental theories have differed substantially, depending upon the theorist, often resulting in conflicting viewpoints. Bernard Bass suggested that leadership “is a universal phenomenon in humans and many species of animals” (Bass, 1990, p. 4), while theorist James M. Burns, asserted that leadership is “one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (1978, p.2).

It has been argued repeatedly that effective leadership is critical to the success of any organization or enterprise. Pasmore (2011) noted that capable leadership was required if organizations were to successfully navigate unprecedented changes. Researchers have struggled in attempts to analyze and define leadership in an effort to determine common understandings or theories of leadership. In the words of James Kouzes, “Leadership matters. And it matters more in times of uncertainty than in times of stability” (2003, p. xvi).

For the purposes of this review, the historical context of leadership theory was confined to the most significant movements of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, during which the concept of leadership was dominated by a number of often-conflicting theories. However,

it would be shortsighted to neglect a brief mention of the classical sources of leadership theory which offered the foundations upon which much of the more recent leadership theories were built.

### **Classical and Historic Views of Leadership**

The study of leadership has roots in the beginnings of civilization and can be viewed as a universal phenomenon. Bernard Bass asserted the study of leadership “rivals in age the emergence of civilization, which shaped its leaders much as it was shaped by them” (1990, p. 3). The early leadership focus tended to revolve around the areas of military, moral, or political leadership. At the same time, profiles of human excellence revealed in the literature of Egyptian rulers, Greek heroes, and biblical patriarchs displayed “ideal” leadership characteristics (Colella, 2002).

To a great degree, a large part of the study of history revolved around the study of its leaders. As early as 3,000 BC, concepts of leadership were discerned in human myths and legends. Ancient Egyptians formulated hieroglyphics for leadership, leader and follower. The heroes of Homer’s ‘The Iliad’ embodied these concepts in the military sense. In addition, principles of leadership were discussed by Plato in *The Republic* and Aristotle in *Politics* (Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978; Colella, 2002).

The intellectual scene of the 13<sup>th</sup> century was typified by Christianity as a focal point. Platonic ideals were incorporated into the framework of the Christian religion and could be observed in the work of early Christian authors such as St. Augustine and others. Emerging also from this tradition was Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), whose political philosophies were based on the work of Aristotle. Aquinas’ writing suggested

that the qualities which might be observed in the ideal leader were predicated upon those of the divine mode. Aquinas' king assumed the highest standards of goodness and strove for the continual improvement of his followers. Thus, the king emerged "as a teacher of virtue as well as the caretaker of human needs" (Colella, 2002, p. 234).

In sharp contrast to this Christian view of the leader, Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) presented a realistic and worldly view of leadership in *The Prince*, written during the Renaissance. In this work, Machiavelli developed a theory of leadership which suggested the necessity for the leader to maintain power and authority. Machiavelli's philosophies advocated the use of deceit, threat and violence when popular consent failed (Adair, 1989; Bass, 1990; Colella, 2002). As Adair (1989) noted, Machiavelli cut ties between Christian morality and successful leadership and turned the emphasis away from archetypes of leaders to the leaders themselves. Leadership in this worldview is concerned with control over the followers, and is governed by the prevailing concept of the ends justifying the means.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century was considered a turbulent period in England and most of the western world. During that period, two political theorists addressed the issue of effective political leadership from different perspectives. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704) posited diametrically opposed theories of leadership at approximately the same period (Colella, 2002; Rapaczynski, 1987). Locke suggested war could bring about corrupt or inept authority. Predicated upon the concept of natural rights, he theorized people have the right to fight against a government that fails to represent their best interests, as well as the right to respond to offensive incursions by unjust leadership.

Locke portrayed personal liberty as the key component of a society that worked toward the best interests of both the individual and the commonwealth, and further assumed people were rational enough to recognize their best interest. Ultimately, when compared with Thomas Hobbes, Locke appeared to be almost an incurable optimist regarding human nature and the goodness and rationality innate to that nature (Colella, 2002; Rapaczynski, 1987).

Conversely, Thomas Hobbes believed because people are so base and destructive, government must keep them in line by exerting absolute control. In *The Leviathan*, written in the 1600s, Hobbes described the natural human condition as one of universal war. His solution to this condition, referred to as the “laws of nature,” was to create a sovereign power agreed upon contractually by the members of the society. Yet he also believed the human desire for power might ultimately challenge those laws. Notable among Hobbs’ attributes of an effective leader were “strength and the ability to instill sufficient fear to keep the subjects obeying their agreements” (Colella, 2002, p. 237).

**Twentieth century theoretical approaches to leadership.** Twentieth century scholars examined leadership from a variety of perspectives, presenting a number of leadership theories and models which served to illustrate to some degree the movement or evolution in the thinking about leadership during this period (DeRuyver, 2001). Any comprehensive review of 20<sup>th</sup> century leadership theory could reveal numerous distinct categories of leadership. This study focused on the most influential leadership theories of the century, specifically those which offered a valuable context for the field of higher educational leadership.

According to voluminous research undertaken by Stogdill (1948, 1974), Bass (1990), Rost (1991), Northouse (2001), and others, the major 20<sup>th</sup> century research traditions in leadership can be grouped into at least four major categories. While the categories portrayed leadership and leaders from diverse perspectives, it is important to note that these theories were neither totally time-bound, nor mutually exclusive. The major leadership categories included:

1. trait theories, which attempted to identify specific personal characteristics that appeared to contribute to a person's ability to assume and successfully function in positions of leadership;
2. situational/contingency theories, which emphasized the importance of situational factors, such as the nature of the task performed by a group or the nature of the external environment to aid in understanding effective leadership;
3. behavioral theories, which studied leadership by examining patterns of activity, managerial roles, and behavior categories of leaders, as well as by considering what it is that leaders actually do;
4. transformational, charismatic, transactional theories, which considered leadership in terms of the leader's ability to motivate and empower followers, to influence and inspire them, or to create a simple transaction or exchange. (Bensimon, 1989)

***Trait theory.*** The Trait Theory or Approach represented an inquiry first revealed early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when scholars identified leaders based upon the natural traits that the leader possessed, most specifically those which separated the leaders from the followers. During the early years of the century, leaders were regarded as “great men,” or superior individuals, displaying qualities that differentiated them from the general populace. Many experts of the time assumed there was a definite set of characteristics that made a leader, regardless of the situation. As a result, scholars and researchers dedicated their efforts toward the search for specific innate traits and qualities of social and military leaders for next several decades, while essentially ignoring the followers

(Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2001). Conversely, other studies investigated individual traits such as intelligence, birth order, socioeconomic status, and child-rearing practices (Bass, 1990; Stogdill, 1974).

By the middle of the century, researchers began to challenge this theory. Surveys of early trait research by Stogdill (1948) and Mann (1959) reported many studies identified personality characteristics that appeared to differentiate leaders from followers. According to Gary Yukl, “over a hundred studies on leader traits were conducted in the period from 1904 to 1948” (1981, p. 67). In his 1948 study, Stogdill reviewed 124 trait studies conducted between 1904 and 1948 and concluded that there existed no set list of consistent traits to differentiate leaders and followers across an array of situations. The study revealed only four traits common to five or more studies. The results indicated “an individual with leadership traits who was a leader in one situation might not be a leader in another situation” (Northouse, p. 15). Thus, this landmark study effectively sounded the “death knell of Pure Trait Theory” (Bass, 1990, p. 78).

In his second massive study of the major research on important leadership traits, Stogdill (1974) analyzed an additional 163 studies completed since the publication of his 1948 publication. In this work, Stogdill (1974) argued that both personality characteristics and situational factors could be determinants of leadership, as had Mann (1959) before him. Thus, Stogdill’s work tended to validate the conclusion that the characteristics of the leader were essential components of leadership, recognizing that certain traits will increase the likelihood of leader effectiveness. Leadership traits central to the lists derived from Stogdill (1974), Mann (1959), and others included intelligence,

self-confidence, determination, integrity, decisiveness, dependability, sociability and a willingness to assume responsibility.

***Situational/contingency theories.*** The Situational theory, based in part upon the earlier work of Stogdill, suggested that leadership is entirely situational in origin and thus de-emphasized the personal nature of leadership. The focus of this theory revolved around the concept of leadership in various situations. In essence, theorists suggested that different situations might demand different styles of leadership. Factors affecting situational decisions included motivation and capability of followers. The relationship between followers and the leader could constitute another factor that affected leader behavior as much as it did follower behavior. To become a successful leader, an individual must adapt personal style to the demands of the particular situation (Bass, 1990; Bolden, 2004; Northouse, 2001; Yukl, 2002).

Critical to the understanding of this theory was the supposition that no one leadership style could be correct under all circumstances. Leaders must alter their style, especially the degree to which they are directive or supportive, in response to the changing needs of the subordinates. The essence of situational leadership demanded that “a leader matches his or her style to the competence and commitment of the subordinates” (Northouse, 2001, p. 56). Hershey added, influencing behavior “is not an event, but a process” (1984, p. 122).

The Hershey and Blanchard situational leadership model of 1969 attempted to demonstrate that was possible for the leader to adapt his or her style to the situation. Subsequently revised (Hershey & Blanchard, 1988), this model revealed the linkage



between leadership style and the development level of the subordinates. As the maturity level of the subordinate increased, the leader must adapt his or her task-relationship style in accordance, from directing to coaching, supporting, and delegating. In essence, leaders must diagnose where the followers may be on the developmental scale and then adapt their styles accordingly (Bolden, 2004; Northouse, 2001; Yukl, 2002).

While situational leadership revealed the complexity of leadership, it has proven to be somewhat problematic since the theories could not predict which leadership skills would be more effective in certain situations (Mendez-Morse, 2005). Closely linked to the situational approach are contingency theories of leadership which attempted to bridge the gap between the needs of the situation and the leader's required style. Contingency models characterized situations by assessing task structure, leader-member relations, and position power (Yukl, 2002).

Fiedler's Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC) Contingency Theory, first presented in 1964, represented one of the earliest and most highly researched models to measure leadership styles as either task motivated or relationship motivated. The leader's ability, according to Fielder and Chemers (1964), was contingent upon various situational factors, including the leader's preferred style, the capabilities and behaviors of followers, and other environment/work factors. In this theory, the position power of the leader played a significant role in the leader's ability to administer rewards and punishment, as well as to influence the degree of compliance of the subordinates (Northouse, 2001; Yukl, 2002).

***Behavioral theories.*** As the focus of the theorists shifted from leaders to leadership, different patterns of behavior, or styles, were grouped together and labeled. The behavioral theory of leadership was predicated upon the concept that leaders can be made, rather than are born. In this model, successful leadership was based upon definable, learnable behavior. According to E.A. Fleishman as quoted in Northouse (2001), the emphasis shifted from “thinking about leadership in terms of traits someone ‘has’ to the conceptualization of leadership as a form of activity” (p. 35).

Major theories of leader behavior included that of Douglas McGregor in 1960, the Ohio State University and University of Michigan Studies of the mid-century, and the 1964 Management Grid of Blake and Mouton. McGregor suggested management and leadership style were fundamentally influenced by the assumptions about human nature held by the leader. According to McGregor (1960), Theory X managers held negative views of human nature, believing that coercion and control were required to induce avoidance of work in the average person. Conversely, Theory Y managers preferred a more participative management style believing that the average human being would seek responsibility under certain specific conditions (Bolden, 2004; Doyle & Smith, 2001; Northouse, 2001).

Research at both Ohio State University and the University of Michigan took place during the same period in the mid-1900s when researchers from both institutions attempted to discover how leaders could combine most effectively their task and relationship behaviors to maximize their impact upon follower satisfaction and performance. The Ohio State researchers believed that leaders both provided a structure

for subordinates and nurtured them in a mutually exclusive manner. Simultaneously, the University of Michigan researchers identified two categories of leadership behavior termed employee orientation and production orientation as opposite ends of a spectrum. Ultimately, the results of these voluminous studies were inconclusive with regards to a universal theory of leader effectiveness for all situations (Northouse, 2001).

Perhaps one of the best known of the behavior/style theories was Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid of 1964, revised in 1978. Focusing on the task and employee orientations of the manager, the researchers created a grid to place the manager into one of five management styles relative to a concern for task as contrasted with a concern for people. The five styles included: country club, team, middle-of-the-road, impoverished, and authority compliance. Thus, the basic concepts of each of these behavioral/style categories were quite similar, resulting in four main classifications:

1. Concern for task. Leaders emphasized the achievement of concrete objectives, looking for high levels of productivity and ways to organize people and activities in order to meet those objectives.
2. Concern for people. Leaders looked upon their followers as people rather than as units of production or means to an end and showed concern for their needs, interests, problems, and development.
3. Directive leadership. Leaders made decisions for others and expected followers or subordinates to follow instructions.
4. Participative leadership. Leaders shared decision-making. (Doyle, 2004)

***Transformational, charismatic, and transactional leadership.*** Concepts of transformational and transactional leaderships were introduced by James McGregor Burns in 1978, later developed further by Bass (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Burns suggested that transforming leadership took place when leaders and followers engaged in such a way so as to raise each other to higher levels of motivation and morality (Burns,

1978). Since that time, transformational leadership has been the focus of innumerable research studies and has tended to dominate the research scene (Northouse, 2001).

The process of transformational leadership was concerned with values, ethics, and long-term goals. According to Bass and Seidlmeier (1999),

The literature on transformational leadership is linked to the long-standing literature on virtue and moral character, as exemplified by Socratic and Confucian typologies . . . and is related to the major themes of the modern Western ethical agenda. (Bass & Seidlmeier, 1999, p. 182)

Transformational leadership included the assessment of the motives of the followers, and “treating them as full human beings” (Northouse, 2001, p. 131).

The transformational leader had a motivational effect on followers and “raised one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns, 1978, p. 20). In the end, the transformational leader empowered others to take more initiative in work, inspired them to be more committed, and built their self-confidence. Followers felt loyalty, trust, admiration and respect toward the transformational leader and were motivated to serve and achieve at higher levels than original expectations. Ultimately, the goal of transformational leaders was to transform people and organizations in a literal sense (Bass & Seidlmeier, 1999; Bolden, 2004; Burns, 1978; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Northouse, 2001).

Closely linked to transformational leadership was the concept of charismatic leadership. First presented by R. J. House in 1976, charismatic leadership was most often considered in conjunction with transformational leadership due to the nature and strength of the emotional impact and effect that these leaders had upon their followers. At its core, charisma is attributed to a leader by followers (Hollander, 1997). Researchers suggested

that such charismatic leaders tended to act in certain ways and displayed the following four overall characteristics:

1. dominant personality with self-confidence and the desire to influence others;
2. strong role model, demonstrating specific types of behaviors;
3. ability to articulate ideological goals; and
4. expectations of followers and the confidence that the goals will be met

(Bolden, 2004; Northouse, 2001).

Conversely, transactional leadership provided a strong distinction with the transformational approach (see Table 1). Transactional leadership, in contrast, attempted to motivate followers by appealing to their own self-interest. The general principles underlying this approach were to motivate followers through the exchange process. Transactional leaders were focused on task accomplishment and good worker relationships in exchange for desirable rewards (Nyberg, Bernin, & Theorell, 2005).

Generally, transformational leaders were described in terms of their behavioral traits and actions (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978), but there is little consensus on the specific personality traits leaders embodied. To address this issue, a study of 66 organizational leaders in South Africa was undertaken by Linde (2004) to investigate and identify the relationship between transformational and leadership personality preferences, as well as to determine whether transformational leaders were identifiable from non-transformational leaders by their personality preferences. The study attempted to establish an empirical link between transformational leadership and certain aspects of personality preferences to verify whether these leaders could be distinguished from others

Table 1

*Transactional versus Transformational Leadership*

Transformational Leadership	Transactional Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds on a man's need for meaning</li> <li>• Is preoccupied with purposes and values, morals, and ethics</li> <li>• Transcends daily affairs</li> <li>• Is orientated toward long-term goals without compromising human values and principles</li> <li>• Focuses more on missions and strategies</li> <li>• Releases human potential—identifying and developing new talent</li> <li>• Designs and redesigns jobs to make them meaningful and challenging</li> <li>• Aligns internal structures and systems to reinforce overarching values and goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds on man's need to get a job done and make a living</li> <li>• Is preoccupied with power and position, politic and perks</li> <li>• Is mired in daily affairs</li> <li>• Is short-term and hard data oriented</li> <li>• Focuses on tactical issues</li> <li>• Relies on human relations to lubricate human interactions</li> <li>• Follows and fulfills role expectations by striving to work effectively within current systems</li> <li>• Supports structures and systems to reinforce the bottom line, maximize efficiency, and guarantee short-term profits</li> </ul>

Source: Covey (1999)

by means of their personality preferences by utilizing results of the Multifactor MLQ questionnaire as compared with personality preferences indicated on the scales of the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. Findings revealed the only statistically significant differences or interdependencies in the study were those related to introversion and extroversion preferences. Therefore, the findings of this study indicated personality preferences cannot be utilized to predict transformational leadership (Linde, 2004).

**Twenty-first century leadership theories.** Clearly, the socio-economic climate and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially those related to the impact of the events of

September 11, 2001, have combined to pose significant leadership challenges for all organizations, both private and public. Dramatic changes were constantly impacting social, economic, natural, and political climates across the world. While these impacts were diverse, they presented both similar and unique challenges and opportunities that demanded effective leadership at all levels of society in order to create and sustain social progress. The need for effective leadership in an increasingly global, rapidly changing, and knowledge-based society was more apparent than ever before.

At the beginning of the new Millennium, prevailing definitions of effective leadership remained as varied and conflicting as had been the case in earlier years. Hunt (1999) suggested that a rejuvenation in the scholarship of leadership research occurred during this period primarily due to the contributions of the transformational and charismatic schools of thought. He further noted that this rejuvenation came about “because of what most would consider a paradigm shift that has attracted numerous new scholars and moved the field as a whole out of its doldrums” (Hunt, 1999, p. 129).

According to Gini (1996), “leaders help to set the tone, develop the vision, and shape the behavior of all those involved in organizational life” (n.p.). Nevertheless, at present there still existed no consensually agreed-upon formal definition of leadership among scholars. While the research revealed that effective leadership within an organization was critical, fundamental definitions of leadership tended to vary in terms of emphasis on leader abilities, personality traits, influence relationships, cognitive versus emotional orientation, individual versus group orientation, and appeal to self, versus collective interests (Bass, 1990; Bolden, 2004; Rost, 1991; Yukl, 2002).

A review of the current literature indicated a decline in the focus on the heroic, controlling, and the distant leader of the past in favor of a concentration on teams, collectives, and social change. Therefore, according to Kezar et al. (2006), recent views of leadership represented a dramatic departure from history.

The authors pointed out that a new vision of leadership had emerged that was process-centered, collective, context-bound, non-hierarchical, and focused on mutual power and influence processes, and they suggested that difficult times called for different forms of leadership:

In these times of change and challenge in higher education, pleas for leadership have become frequent. However, the type of leadership required within this new context (of globalization, demographic changes, technological advancement, and questioning of social authority) may call for different skills, requiring a re-education among campus stakeholders if they want to be successful leaders. (Kezar et al., 2006, n.p.)

Today's dynamic socio-economic environment has been driving the current demand for organizational change and for leaders to lead change initiatives effectively in an atmosphere replete with countless concurrent challenges and opportunities. To meet these challenges successfully, effective leaders must come to the forefront to make change happen. Even Nicolo Machiavelli recognized the myriad challenges associated with issues inherent in change leadership centuries ago when he stated:

There is no more delicate matter to take in hand, nor more dangerous to conduct, nor more doubtful of success, than to step up as a leader in the introduction of change. For he who innovates will have for his enemies all those who are well off under the existing order of things, and only lukewarm support in those who might be better off under the new. (Machiavelli, 1950, p. 21)

The research of Gary Yukl (2002) suggested that the following categories of leadership responsibility likely would remain critical to 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership:



1. *Change*. Leading change was one of the most important and challenging responsibilities of leaders. The leader's clear and compelling vision for the organization was key to guiding organizational change processes.
2. *Teamwork/Collaboration*. Group decisions and teamwork represented a growing phenomenon for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, effective leadership was required for building and facilitating team learning and decision-making.
3. *Vision*. A vivid description of the future organizational entity, vision painted a picture of the organizational direction in such a manner so as to align people in a common purpose.
4. *Strategic leadership*. Research showed that chief executives had a significant impact in a crisis. Internal and external factors and the monitoring of the environment by executives were considered essential in the formulation of the organizational strategy.
5. *Leadership development*. Effective leaders were needed across every spectrum of society. Thus, leadership development initiatives, such as formal training, developmental activities, self-help initiatives, and training programs were critical to successful leadership transition processes.
6. *Ethical leadership*. Ethical leadership established internal processes to stop unethical practices. (Yukl, 2002)

Twentieth century examinations of leadership reported the differences between leaders and followers, while subsequent studies differentiated effective from non-effective leaders. There was a clear progression in the research literature from static to dynamic considerations (Mendez-Morse, 2005). Comparisons of effective and non-effective leaders led to the identification of two dimensions—initiating structures and consideration—and revealed that effective leaders were high performers in both. While leadership has been well recognized as a complex enterprise, recent studies asserted that vision and collaboration were important characteristics of effective leadership (Mendez-Morse, 2005; Skinner & Miller, 2011).

A major research study undertaken in 2003 by the Centre for Leadership Studies at the University of Exeter, United Kingdom, explored the perceptions of over 100 senior managers from all sectors of society regarding leadership, society, and the challenges of

the next decade (Bolden, 2004). The findings of this research indicated an underlying shift in thinking about leadership from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century views when leadership was considered the purview of an exclusive group of those who were “born to lead.” A clear awareness existed that a far wider range of factors were involved in leadership than previously believed. The research findings further suggested that the emphasis was shifting toward the moral, social, and ethical responsibilities of leaders. As a result, issues such as “who becomes a leader, how they behave, and what they do” are all determined by a combination of social and cultural factors, as well as by individual characteristics (Bolden, 2004, p. 29).

In a similar vein, Mendez-Morse (2005) asked: what is it about certain leaders that enabled them to lead their organizations to change and what were the characteristics of leaders of change? The answers to questions such as those posed by Mendez-Morse (2005) then became critical to organizational success. She suggested that certain characteristics were indicators of successful leadership in the two dimensions of initiating structure – or the concern for task and consideration – or the concern for people and their interactions with others. The following characteristics represented those considered essential for today’s leaders in a climate of significant change:

- being visionary,
- valuing human resources,
- communicating and listening effectively,
- being proactive, and
- taking risks. (Mendez-Morse, 2005)

Research results of the Exeter University study as presented by Bolden (2004) revealed the following list of similar leadership qualities perceived as required of leaders for the next decade:

Leadership, Society and the Next Ten Years

- Integrity and moral courage
- Self-awareness and humility
- Empathy and emotional engagement
- Transparency and openness
- Clarity of vision
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Energy and resilience
- Decisiveness in the face of uncertainty
- Judgment, consistency, and fairness
- Ability to inspire, motivate, and listen
- Respect and trust
- Knowledge and expertise
- Delivering results (Bolden, 2004, p. 29 )

**Overview of leadership theory.** Given the ever changing definitions of leadership throughout the past century, one might question exactly what “leadership” is, as well as why this information may matter. As the study of leadership evolved from the early “great man” theories to the trait, behavioral, situational, transformational, charismatic, transactional, and others, it became clear that leadership was even more critical in today’s world than ever before. Rost (1991) suggested a clear understanding of the essential nature of leadership was “crucial to leaders and followers making a difference in organizations and societies in the twenty-first century” (p. 8).

Following his major review and assessment of the research of leadership published during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Joseph Rost (1991) concluded,

as of 1990, scholars and practitioners do not know, with certainty, what leadership is . . . neither scholars nor the practitioners have been able to define leadership

with precision, accuracy, and conciseness so that people are able to label it correctly when they see it happening or when they engage in it. (p. 6)

The research of White (2005) suggested that despite the ongoing debate and disagreement concerning leadership definitions, there was an uneasy agreement among writers and researchers that at its core leadership dealt with influencing others. Yet another major study by Winston and Patterson (2006) discovered nearly a hundred variables revealed by the literature which may comprise the whole of leadership. Based upon their findings, the authors then proposed “an integrative definition of leadership, encompassing the 90 plus variables that may help researchers and practitioners to more fully understand the breadth and scope of leadership” (Winston & Patterson, 2006).

As Rost’s (1991) extensive research pointed out, the definition of leadership must be clarified for the future. He suggested that the concept of leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be consistent with contemporary organizational life. In other words, leadership should be viewed as an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intended real changes that reflected their mutual purposes. Included in this contemporary definition were four basic, but essential components:

1. The relationship was based on multidirectional influence, predicated upon persuasion rather than authority.
2. Leaders and followers were both involved in leadership.
3. Leaders and followers intended real substantial changes.
4. The intended changes reflected the mutual purposes of both leaders and followers. (Rost, 1991, p. 104)

Despite the various historical definitions of leadership, it is important to apply the significance of past leadership theories to the complex and dynamic world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, since effective leadership is critical to organizational success. The ever-changing

environment today clearly calls for leaders who are able to lead in various situations and with diverse individuals. “Future leaders must recognize how leadership has changed, including essential capabilities of leaders and the forces that continue to shape leadership” (Holverson, 2004). Kouzes and Posner (1995) were in support of this concept and took a step forward to when they added:

Leadership is not just about leaders. Nor is leadership about some position or place in an organization or community. In today’s world—of unrelenting changes in technology, marketplaces, organizational alliances, mergers, and partnerships; of increasing global competitiveness; of accelerating diversity of ideas along with a rainbow coalition of individual backgrounds, beliefs, abilities, and experiences; of continuing reengineering of processes and right-sizing of organizations and flattening of organizational forms—leadership must be everyone’s business. (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. vii)

### **Leadership and American Higher Education**

At no point in the history of American postsecondary education has effective presidential leadership been more essential. During the first decades of the new Millennium, the entire United States higher educational system, consisting of colleges, universities, community colleges, technical schools, and for-profit institutions, was struggling to address the pressing necessity for systemic change, resulting from the impact of societal and economic challenges. The transformation of the world economy increasingly demanded a more highly educated workforce with postsecondary skills and credentials. As James Duderstadt (2003) noted, change has been one of the great themes of higher education in America. Throughout each evolutionary wave of higher education, an expanding focus on educating a broader segment of society has emerged. But to continue to meet these challenges, the nation “now will need new types of colleges and universities with new characteristics” (Duderstadt, 2003, p. 17).

**Higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.** Results of a 2006 national study undertaken by a Special Commission appointed by the United States Department of Education, entitled *A Test of Leadership*, suggested that higher education had never been more important than in today's knowledge-driven society. Colleges and universities will be a key source of the human and intellectual capital needed to increase workforce productivity and growth, as well as providing help for new generations of Americans to achieve social mobility. Higher educational institutions must adapt to a world altered by technology, changing demographics, and globalization.

The Commission further noted that change was overdue, given these ongoing societal challenges. Ultimately, higher education contributed to economic prosperity and global competitiveness, providing citizens with the workplace skills needed to adapt to a rapidly changing economy. In the future, innovation and flexibility will become key to organizational success. As the Commission reported, "in tomorrow's world a nation's wealth will derive from its capacity to educate, attract, and retain citizens who are able to work smarter and learn faster—making educational achievement ever more important both for individuals and for society" (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2006, p. xii).

Clearly, America's national capacity for excellence, innovation, and leadership in higher education will be essential to sustain economic expansion and social cohesiveness. The future economic growth of the nation will depend in large part upon its ability to sustain excellence, innovation, and leadership in higher education (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2006). Benefits of higher education are significant both for individuals and for the nation as a whole. At one time, the United States led the world in higher

educational attainment, although it is now ranked 12<sup>th</sup> among major industrialized countries according to data from the U. S. Department of Labor as reported by the U. S. Department of Education (2006). The study also revealed that 90% of the fastest-growing jobs in the new knowledge-driven economy will require some postsecondary education. “Recent trends suggest that higher education’s current condition of fiscal stress is not a short-term problem . . . the financial problems that affect us are long-term and structural” (Guskin & Marcy, 2003, p. 12).

While change is inevitable, it need not pose an insurmountable threat - especially in view of the potential for positive outcomes. Leaders must transform their institutions to become market responsive, entrepreneurial organizations, positioned to better meet societal needs. Duderstadt (2003) advocated the importance for educational leaders to approach issues and decisions concerning transformation “not as threats but rather as opportunities . . . once we accept that change is inevitable, we can use it as a strategic opportunity to control our destiny, while preserving the most important of our values and our traditions” (p. 26).

Kezar et al. (2006) studied the trends in the literature of higher educational leadership research in comparison with the general leadership literature. Their study identified a pressing need for leadership in higher education, which “has only become more urgent as the fat days with regular increases from state governments are long over, and the days of accountability and assessment, globalization, and competition are here to stay, providing new pressures for colleges and universities” (p. 1). As the researchers

further noted, “in these times of change and challenge, pleas for leadership have become frequent and repeated” (p. 2).

One notable finding from this study indicated that the impact of recent trends in leadership may, in effect, require a different type of leadership for this new context in higher education. The research suggested that today’s environment is calling for different skills and the re-education of campus stakeholders who may wish to become successful leaders. The changes are both dramatic and far-reaching. Many hypothesized reasons for the change in leadership scholarship revolve around two fundamental drivers, which consist of the changing context in which leadership takes place and the introduction of new perspectives and ideas about leadership from scholars and practitioners. As the researchers further noted, these two forces are interdependent and are hard to separate (Kezar et al., 2006).

**The American community college.** Clearly, the entire system of American higher education, most specifically the community college, continued to face difficult times across the nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Sullivan (2001) noted that a combination of challenges, including those both external to the organization as well as the evolving expectations of individuals within the organizations, are “undergoing radical and unremitting change, resulting in the consequent need - even demand - for a renewal in leadership” (p. 559). Bailey (2002) attributed the threats facing community colleges which are inherent in today’s particularly challenging environment to the combined impact of changes in pedagogic and production technology, state funding policy, the



expectations of students and policy-makers, demographic trends, and the expansion of new types of educational providers.

As Patricia Gumport's research (2003) demonstrated, the historical demand-response nature of community colleges called for strategic responses on the part of leaders (Gumport, 2003). Cohen and Brawer (1996) added support to the concept of the inherent complexity and demands of the community college mission when they noted that the unique characteristics of community colleges "have led to forms of administration in community colleges that are different from other sectors" (p. 6).

Given that the first junior colleges were established to provide a bridge between the secondary schools and a 4-year education or to offer vocational training for those who were seeking a terminal career path, we have seen the social role of the community college broaden. Today's comprehensive community college is considered a key element in the dynamic of American life, and is essential to the health and welfare of their individual communities. The mission of "open access" means just that – open and available to all, regardless of previous academic success or prior preparation. As Eaton (1994) asserted, the collegiate community college "is an extraordinary way for a democratic society to provide the best of higher education to as many people as can reasonably benefit . . . unparalleled in providing, sustaining, and expanding educational opportunity and accomplishment within the society" (p. 5).

Community colleges represent more than just another form of higher education. As inclusive institutions of higher education with diverse student bodies and multiple learning entry points, community colleges are positioned at the forefront of offering

educational opportunity to all people to acquire new skills and knowledge to enhance their personal and professional development. Kasper (2002) suggested community colleges consistently have been able to quickly adapt to demands of the times. The nation's nearly twelve hundred public and independent community colleges constantly are engaged in the process of helping to change lives on a regular basis. Millions of individuals have benefited by community college attendance and this has led to improved individual lives, more effective organizations, and changed communities (AACC, 2012; U. S. Department of Education, 2006).

Community colleges of the past are being forever changed by new demands and shrinking resources. According to Alfred and Carter (2000), the market forces now in existence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are placing such intense pressure on community colleges that leaders in the community colleges of earlier years could not have imagined or dealt with. "Hyper competition, smarter and more active customers, advancing technology, and a quickening pace of change force today's institutions to focus on 'sensing and responding' to rapidly changing market forces" (Alfred & Carter, 2000, n.p.). Furthermore, it is understood that traditional sources of funding will not be able to support the community colleges to the degree required to meet demand, putting these colleges at risk in meeting their mission.

Townsend and Dougherty (2007) questioned whether the societal mission of a community college at the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will remain that of providing postsecondary education to students who might not otherwise obtain it, or conversely, to be responsive to the needs of local communities, including business and

industry. Regardless of the answer to that question, it is evident that the community college leaders of the future must transform their institutions if community colleges are to adapt and thrive (Bornstein, 2005; Hamilton, 2003; Maloney, 2007).

Thus, community college presidents of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are facing a multiplicity of challenges requiring effective leadership to ensure the vitality and survival of the institutions. Today's community college environment can be characterized by the following challenges, all of which demand effective institutional leadership, including:

- continuing scarcity of resources;
- changing student and staff demographics;
- a shift in emphasis from teaching to student learning and learning outcomes assessment;
- technological developments that absorb an increasing proportion of the operating budget, challenge traditional instructional methods, and require significant retraining of staff and faculty members;
- increasing regulation by external agencies and demands for shared governance from internal constituents;
- public skepticism about their ability to meet the learning needs of consumers;
- competition from private-sector providers of high-quality training;
- blurring of service boundaries as a result of distance learning and Internet use;
- reduced emphasis on degree completion and growing interest in other forms of credentialing; and
- a nearly unbearable barrage of information. (Sullivan, 2001, p. 560)

### **Leadership and the Community College President**

Since the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars have been studying the role of the president with a focus upon examining the dynamics of presidential leadership.

Bennis (1997) noted that leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be able to reform organizations, create new organizational enterprises, preside over myriad experiences in order to deliver new services to clients, and form major alliances and partnerships with others to achieve mutual goals. Research has primarily contributed to a common

understanding of the impact of personal characteristics and individual behaviors of effective leaders and their role in organizations. In fact, current leadership research suggests that personal traits are still considered determinants of leadership abilities. While calls for leadership to address challenges and take advantage of opportunities are not new, “the emerging definitions of what it means to be an institutional leader or practice leadership are changing” (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006, p. 5).

**The nature of presidential leadership.** Research regarding the nature and role of college and university presidents is voluminous. Numerous studies explored the careers of postsecondary presidents with a focus on particular aspects of the presidency. In 1981, Carbone studied and analyzed specific features of contemporary presidential life through the lens of the ex-presidents (Carbone, 1981). Three years later, Clark Kerr (1984) spearheaded a research study to discover whether sitting presidents perceived it to be increasingly more difficult to attract highly qualified individuals to serve as college and university presidents. Findings of the Kerr study recognized that societal constraints tended to complicate the process of recruiting effective presidents. Kerr concluded by offering the following caveat:

Strengthening presidential leadership is one of the most urgent concerns on the agenda of higher education in the United States. It makes a great difference who the presidents are and what the conditions are that surround their contributions. (Kerr, 1984, p. 102)

Recognizing that the nature of the college presidency is evolving continuously, other researchers contributed substantially to the literature. Fisher and Tack (1988) studied the perceptions of existing college leaders of the essence of leadership (Fisher & Tack, 1988). McDade (1988) investigated the career paths and professional development

of college and university presidents. In a similar vein, Diamond brought together research findings on academic leadership with recommendations for effective practice (Diamond, 2002). Gardiner's original 1989 comprehensive study of college and university presidents was replicated in 2006 by the author. The study investigated presidential leadership teams and described the changes in presidential leadership team processes and strategies. Gardiner's work revealed the following: increased centrality of team building was a critical presidential ability; new insights emerged regarding the implementation of team/builder/leader within institutions of higher education; and changing perceptions became apparent concerning the role of the president with regard to the institution's board of trustees and society's call for moral leadership (Gardiner, 2006).

With a few exceptions, a specific focus on the role of the American community college president did not appear until the 1980s when George Vaughan (1986) published one of the first significant studies of the nature of the community college presidency, as differentiated from the works which focused upon the nature of the community college as an organization, as well as from those that examined the role of the college or university president. Vaughan's study was based upon results of surveys of over 100 community college presidents and provided an evolutionary portrait of presidential leadership of that time. Placing the role of the community college leader into the context of general leadership research, Vaughan concluded that the views of the transformational leader as espoused by Burns (1978), "especially his concept of moral leadership, are helpful in understanding the community college presidency" (Vaughan, 1986, p. 181). Findings revealed that presidents perceived the personal traits and attributes of integrity, good

judgment, courage, and concern for others to be most critical for shaping and achieving the broader institutional goals. Additionally, they ranked the ability to produce results as the top skill associated with the successful president. Finally, presidents predicted the future would demand a greater emphasis on inter-personal relationships, management of change, and the continuing expansion of the president's external role (Vaughan, 1986).

In response to the fast changing dynamic of community college leadership, in 1989, Vaughan's focus turned to the process of leadership in transition at community colleges, based in large upon results of a national survey of over 1,000 deans. The focus of this work moved beyond personal descriptions of presidential traits to acknowledge the change from the early builder presidents and to highlight leadership in the coming era of changing techniques, incorporating a broader range of duties. Vaughan's study further recognized women and minority presidents for having a role in community college leadership, effectively acknowledging a change in the demographic profile of community college presidents. Finally, Vaughan identified three areas of foci for the college president which included managing the institution, creating the campus climate, and interpreting and communicating (Vaughan, 1989).

During this same period, Roueche, Baker, and Rose (1989) examined and categorized exemplary community college leaders while also recognizing the attributes of transformational behavioral. The researchers concluded that leaders were most effective when they empowered others based upon their analysis of the following five themes related to transformational leaders:

1. belief in teamwork and shared decision making,
2. valuing people both as members of the team and as individuals,

3. understanding human motivation,
4. possession of a strong personal value system, and
5. displaying a vision of what their college can become. (1989, p. 12)

Cathryn Addy (1995) took a different approach to the study of the community college president and issued a comprehensive review of both the personal and professional challenges that were facing the presidents. Responses from 50 community college presidents regarding their perceptions of the most important skills, characteristics, and attributes needed by effective community college presidents for the coming decade included the following:

1. communication skills - listening, writing, and speaking;
2. resource management, including fund-raising and marketing;
3. effectiveness with sorting and interpreting information and trends;
4. technological literacy to help shape the institution's future;
5. effective people skills for team building, conflict resolution, and responding to rapid change;
6. global orientation in thinking;
7. sensitivity to issues of cultural and economic diversity; and
8. thinking both generally and holistically. (Addy, 1995, pp. 135-136)

Finally, McDade (1997) opined that in any consideration of presidential responsibilities, "it is impossible to separate leadership and administrative responsibilities, since most leaders also must manage and most managers must occasionally lead" (McDade, 1997, n.p.).

**Leadership and the 21<sup>st</sup> century community college president.** With the advent of the New Millennium, researchers acknowledged that escalating societal changes posed significant challenges for community colleges and for their leaders. During this period of rapid change, a number of major studies of the community college presidency helped paint a clear picture of the state of the profession. Clearly, agreement

existed that one of the most important aspects of organizational functioning has always been the role of leaders and leadership. According to Marilyn Amey (2006b), leaders were critical to how organizations functioned, and “there is little doubt that the leaders who are needed to guide postsecondary institutions in tomorrow's complex environments have to think about their work differently than did their predecessors” (p. 58).

Of significant concern today is the changing context of community colleges in which the constancy of change serves to highlight the ways in which a traditional response falls short in addressing current challenges. Community colleges, perhaps more so than four-year institutions, are facing a leadership crisis, as nearly 80% of two-year college presidents plan to retire in the next several years (Bornstein, 2010; Evelyn, 2001; Shults, 2001; Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). Amey (2004) noted preparing future leaders effectively to assume this kind of leadership role “is an important challenge that we must face and achieve” (p. 14).

At the beginning of the Millennium, two major works authored by the team of Weisman and Vaughan (1997; Vaughan and Weisman, 1998) served to bring the challenges of the community college presidency into focus. Describing outcomes of their first major study of college presidents and trustees, Weisman and Vaughan (1997) explored the relative similarities and differences between presidents and trustees to gain insight into how these two groups might best work together. Since the authors believed that almost every community college has a crisis in its future, they recommended that presidents and boards maximize their similarities to build the trust necessary for effective collaboration.



In their 1998 study, Vaughan and Weisman undertook a third national study of community college presidents in an attempt to update Vaughan's work of the previous decade. Surveys of sitting presidents revealed that efforts to help political and community leaders better understand the community college mission have become a major concern. Changes in the characteristics of community college presidents during the decade were outlined, along with a concern for the pressing educational and training needs of presidents in the coming years. Based upon results of the survey, respondents identified several prerequisites for a successful presidency for the year 2000 and beyond. These included shared governance, consensus-building, understanding of technology, a high tolerance for ambiguity, an appreciation for multiculturalism, and an active role in building coalitions (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998, pp. 156-157).

McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebbers (1999) surveyed 975 community college presidents regarding their preparation for serving as community college presidents. This study suggested that a positive relationship existed between the following factors and a peer-identified outstanding community college president: possession of an earned doctorate or terminal degree, the specific study of higher education community college leadership, scholarly publication and presentations, preparation as a change agent, status as a community college insider, following nontraditional paths to the presidency, relationship with a mentor as a protégé, development of peer networks - particularly those based on community college work environments and relationships established in a graduate program, previous participation in a leadership preparation activity, and knowledge of current technology.

Findings of this study also revealed a composite outstanding community college president of the time as a married, white 55 year-old male, who has served as a community college president for 14 years, has been at his current institution for over 10 years, and achieved his first community college presidency at 41 years of age. Recommendations included a call for greater diversity in the presidency in terms of both gender and race (McFarlin et al., 1999).

Finally, a review of the nature and scope of the community college presidency since the 1901 founding of community colleges and their unprecedented growth during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century revealed four distinct trends or generations. Each of the generations of the presidency presented unique tasks and responsibilities in accordance with the demands of the time. Sullivan (2001) labeled the generations as: “the founding fathers, the good managers, the collaborators, and the millennium generation” (p. 559). Responsibilities of the first three generations ranged from assisting in the development of the new U. S. postsecondary education system, to managing resources in the rapid growth of the community college system, to building strong teams to support student access to higher education. However, Sullivan believed the millennium presidents would be forced to redefine the role of the community college president and become coalition builders to meet successfully the challenges of the new millennium (Sullivan, 2001).

**AACC leadership initiatives.** While numerous researchers focus on studies of various aspects of the community college presidency, one of the most sweeping leadership initiatives began in 2001 under the guidance of the American Association for Community Colleges (AACC). Committed to the concept that community colleges

represented the largest and most accessible segment of higher education in the US, serving nearly half of all undergraduates, the AACC established the *Leading Forward Initiative*. Incorporating data from research studies, national forums, and task force recommendations, the AACC focused its efforts on addressing the impending shortage of college leaders. Recommendations were based in large part upon the following research findings:

- Christopher Shults (2001) discovered that a period of increased growth and organizational diversification brought challenges due to the unprecedented turnover and impending retirements of community college leaders. The study reported 45% of presidents indicated they will be retiring within six years and another 34% will be retiring within ten years, thus resulting in the replacement of 800 of the nation's 1,150 presidencies. Information from several sources was synthesized to predict the effect of those retirements on community college leaders. Data indicated that these retirements will cause voids in all levels of the leadership pipeline.
- Weisman and Vaughan (2002) utilized results of their 2001 survey of community college presidents to add credence to the threat of impending retirements. Data indicated that a fairly large percentage of those planning to retire have served as a CEO for a period of less than five years. Additional data relative to presidential involvement in community and political endeavors was included.

**AACC essential leadership characteristics for effective community college presidents.** In response to the results of the research by Shults (2001) and others, in 2001 the AACC established a series of summits, entitled *Leadership 2020*. Designed as a concentrated effort to promote the development of effective community college presidents for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the AACC Leadership Task Force, consisting of college presidents, AACC board members, and university leadership program professionals identified the “characteristics and professional skills that all leaders of community colleges should have and that should be addressed in any professional development program” (AACC, 2001).

Through the various *Leadership 2020* activities, the AACC identified five essential characteristics for today’s community college leaders and stressed the necessity for a college president to thoroughly understand the community college mission. With that understanding, the president must act as an effective advocate for the college’s interests and possess skills in administration, and in community and economic development. Finally, the AACC identified key interpersonal characteristics of an effective president (see Appendix A).

Predicated upon the understanding that community colleges, like many other American institutions, were experiencing a leadership gap as many current leaders retired, the AACC followed up on its 2001 initiative by convening four, day-long leadership summits in 2004 with different constituent groups to identify further and build consensus around the key knowledge, values, and skills needed by community college leaders, as well as to determine how best to develop and sustain leaders. The AACC

(2004a) believed the leadership skills required in 2004 have widened as a result of greater student diversity, advances in technology, accountability demands, and globalization.

The *Leading Forward* project consisted of a qualitative analysis of data from the four summits, synthesizing into competencies the opinions of over 150 experts in community college leadership regarding the question of: What are the key knowledge, skills, and values of an effective community college leader?

Findings from the AACC's *Leading Forward* summits served to expand upon and further modify the 2001 *Essential Leadership Characteristics for Community College Presidents*. Fundamental to these findings was a key understanding and core belief of the AACC: "Leadership can be learned. While it can be enhanced immeasurably by natural aptitude and experience, supporting leaders with exposure to theory, concepts, cases, guided experiences, and other practical information and learning methodologies is essential" (AACC, 2004b, p. 3). *Leading Forward* findings include the following:

1. *Organizational Strategy*. (Related to 2001 Characteristics #1 and #3)  
An effective community college leader strategically improves the quality of the institution, protects the long-term health of the organization, promotes the success of all students, and sustains the community college mission, based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends.
2. *Resource management*. (Related to 2001 Characteristic #3)  
An effective community college leader equitably and ethically sustains people, processes, and information as well as physical and financial assets to fulfill the mission, vision, and goals of the community college.
3. *Communication*. (Related to 2001 Characteristics #1 and #5)  
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, to promote the success of all students, and to sustain the community college mission.
4. *Collaboration*. (Related to 2001 Characteristics #2 and #4)  
An effective community college leader develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial, and ethical internal and external

relationships that nurture diversity, promote the success of all students, and sustain the community college mission.

5. *Community college advocacy*. (Related to 2001 Characteristics #1 and #2)  
An effective community college leader understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision, and goals of the community college.
6. *Professionalism*. (Related to 2001 Characteristics #1, #3, and #5)  
An effective community college leader works ethically to set high standards for self and others, continuously improve self and surroundings, demonstrate accountability to and for the institution, and ensure the long-term viability of the college and community. (AACC, 2004a, pp. 4-6)

**Recent developments in presidential leadership.** As can be discerned from the literature, perceptions regarding presidential leadership—specifically those related to community college presidents—continue to evolve. Just as general leadership theory has changed during the past century, so too has that related to the community college presidency. Much of this movement can be linked to the impact of the socio-economic difficulties of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, combined with the changing context of the community college organization. Demands and expectations of the array of community college constituents have risen to new levels. Further, compared to societal problems faced by previous generations, the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are unlike any other others that have confronted humanity, generally due to the evolution of the environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is occurring at an ever increasing pace.

When Hockaday and Puyear (2000) explored the issue of community leadership at the start of the millennium, their research led them to predict a continuing evolution in the demands and expectations impacting the presidency. One simplistic view of leadership is that it consists of “simply holding the goals of the institution in one hand and the people of the institution in the other and somehow bringing these two together in a common good” (p. 3). In contrast to this simplistic view, Hockaday and Puyear (2000)

asserted that effective presidents will require certain traits to meet the challenges facing community colleges. The nine traits are: vision, integrity, confidence, courage, technical competence, collaborators, persistence, good judgment, and the desire to lead (pp. 3-5).

Even at the start of the millennium, it was clear that the combined effects of the changing educational and training needs of the workforce, relevance in a global economy, new competition, a blurring of mission boundaries, and escalating funding challenges would serve to place increasing pressure upon the presidency. The demands of our global economy created a more interdependent system which in turn has reinforced the importance of collaboration and working in teams for enacting leadership (Kezar et al., 2006).

In colleges with a mission that addressed recognized needs and flexed to address evolving needs of people in the community, “presidents know there is a difference between building colleges and inheriting them . . . spend the time and effort to ensure that good leadership will continue” (Hockaday & Puyear, 2000, p. 6). As Amey and VanDerLinden’s (2002) research suggested, in the future it will be critical that boards of trustees and search committees clearly understand that the attributes of community college leadership have changed, thus avoiding burdens of false or outdated assumptions (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002).

Pamela Eddy (2006, 2012) noted external changes and demands of the past decade added complexity to the role of the community college president. At the same time that the colleges were beginning to experience significant change, the early presidents were leaving the profession due to retirement or other forces. Thus,

administrative retirements and the hiring of their replacements have created untold opportunities for organizational change within community colleges. According to Eddy “Organizational change is the watchword at community colleges across the nation, with college presidents leading these initiatives” (Eddy, 2006, p. 6).

A 2006 study undertaken by Eddy and VanDerLinden was based upon the results of over 650 surveys of community college administrators and predicated on understandings gleaned from the higher education literature. This study examined whether these recent conceptualizations of leadership were present in the community college administrative ranks. Research suggested that evolving from the traditionally held leadership definitions were alternative leadership styles which provided new and different ways to understand leadership. In an attempt to determine how current community college leaders perceived their leadership roles, the authors searched for parallels within the current leadership literature in an attempt “to see if community college administrators use the alternative language or emerging definitions of leadership to self-describe their own leadership or if their self-descriptions fit the more traditional hierarchical ideal of the positional or ‘hero’ leader” (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006, p. 6).

Findings of the study revealed that leadership was described more often in terms of relationships. Presidents and provosts were most likely to describe themselves as the person responsible for shaping the direction of the institution, as well as for providing the vision. Further, in addition to the roles of leaders, the roles of followers were also highlighted as essential to organizational success. The researchers stressed the critical importance of providing ways to support expanded definitions of leadership. As they



observed, due to the projected turnover in community colleges, “leadership development and training opportunities are an opportune time to nurture expanded conceptions of what it means to be a leader” (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006, p. 24).

The fast-changing landscape of higher education demands a different type of college leader, a person adept at developing innovative responses to the needs of the college community in the face of declining traditional sources of funding. As the literature revealed, it is typically the entrepreneurial president who is skilled at identifying opportunities and creating organizations to pursue them (Maloney, 2007; Roueche & Jones-Kavalier, 2005). According to research from 11 community colleges across the nation studied by Roueche and Jones-Kavalier (2005), entrepreneurial leaders invested time and energy discovering new opportunities, engaging in innovative activities, and evaluating resources needed to move the college forward. It will fall to the 21<sup>st</sup> century college leaders to create the structure, policies, and practices to help bring the vision to life. “Comfortable with uncertainty and risks, the entrepreneurial community college leader understands the role of culture in organizational change and deftly maintains a balance between the two” (Roueche & Jones-Kavalier, 2005, p. 6).

Community college presidents of the future must transform their institutions if community colleges are to adapt and thrive. It is clear that entrepreneurial community college leaders, engaged in transformational leadership, are well suited to the future challenges facing the community colleges. Maloney’s (2007) research supported that of Roueche and Jones-Kavalier (2005), while placing a strong emphasis on the value of the

transformational leadership approach. Her work revealed a number of community college leadership themes for the near future. These 21<sup>st</sup> century themes included:

- different, more entrepreneurial community college president are needed;
- tomorrow's leaders will transform their colleges through transformational leadership;
- tomorrow's leaders must break down traditional silos on the campus;
- tomorrow's leaders must shape the college's values and build organizational culture; and
- tomorrow's leaders must drive change. (Maloney, 2007, n.p.)

### **Overview of Presidential Leadership**

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the start of the 21<sup>st</sup>, many researchers predicted the scope of the community college presidency would change (Boggs, 2003; Shults, 2001; Sullivan, 2001; Vaughan, 1986, 1989, 1998, 2000; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998; Weisman & Vaughn, 2002). The review of the literature pertaining to leadership as it relates to community college presidents revealed the evolution in theory, somewhat similar to that observed in leadership research in general. However, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, no one could have predicted the far-reaching impact of the events of 9/11, nor the severe national economic downturn, felt most strongly in the Midwestern states. These societal pressures have had a profound effect on the leaders of higher education, as well as upon community colleges presidents.

Regardless of the challenges associated with the position of community college presidency, many individuals continue to seek the challenge. In early 2005, a number of community college presidents were asked to describe the experience of being a college president in one word. While the responses varied, one president replied, “the word that came to mind and that still holds true today is *exhilarating*. Those of us in the community

college business know that we do not do what we do for the money, but rather to have the opportunity to change lives” (Paneitz, 2005).

A trend has emerged in the recent decade wherein researchers have focused their attention upon the various competencies necessary for community college presidents.

The AACC first presented the list of leadership competencies in 2005 (AACC, 2005) and a number of research studies focused upon various aspects of the competencies followed.

Most specifically, during the past five years, a number of doctoral dissertations have concentrated upon community college presidential leadership, although from differing lenses. Hassan (2008) was interested in further validating the published AACC

Competencies of 2005 and understanding the differences and/or similarities in the beliefs of community college presidents and of the Board chairpersons in two different states.

Further, the researcher was seeking to learn the types of experiences presidents’ credit as helpful in developing the six leadership competencies (AACC, 2005). The researcher administered 69 survey instruments to presidents and Board chairpersons and findings revealed overall support for the importance of all 6 of the AACC competencies among both groups. Further, responses of the presidents indicated a variety of developmental opportunities—both personal and professional—aided their development of the competencies. The researcher posits these responses provided a valuable foundation upon which to design effective leadership development programs and activities for future presidents.

Boyd (2010) investigated the viewpoints of six trustees and presidents representing three mid-western community colleges of the skills, abilities and personal

attributes needed for new community college presidents to lead effectively their institutions. He also explored factors that contributed to final candidate selection for the college presidency. The findings suggested consistency between the three presidents' and three Board members in terms of the most desirable presidential traits: integrity, morality and honesty. Although no consistency can be gleaned from participant responses relating to identifiable traits leading to the recognition of presidential leadership potential, there is some agreement in the listing of challenges facing new presidents. The three top identified challenges for future presidents included fund raising, an appreciation of lifelong learning and constantly changing technology (Boyd, 2010).

Also during that same year, Overman (2010) studied the concept of relational leadership within the community college framework, as well as of the impact of relational leaders upon the community college. In support of this study, the researcher studied three self-described relational community college presidents in depth, seeking to learn individual perception of their relational leadership skills and styles, along with their perceived impact on the college. Traits and competencies emerged from the interviews which were in alignment with the AACC competencies for community college presidents (AACC, 2004b). Findings of this study indicated the values of relational leaders were significantly influenced by family, friends, mentors and education; that the attributes of relational leaders fell into alignment with the 21<sup>st</sup> century community college vision; and finally, relational leadership was a fluctuating process..

Jacobs (2012) sought to learn whether the leadership styles of Midwestern community college presidents might differ and therefore be predicted either according to the demographics of the college and/or associated with the president's personal and professional characteristics. He surveyed community college presidents and chancellors in five Midwestern states using a demographic questionnaire and a standardized leadership questionnaire – MLQ – developed by Bass and Avolio in 1993. His findings were based upon responses from 88 presidents and chancellors and revealed no statistically significant reliability for the prediction of president leadership styles based upon institutional or personal demographics with one exception: Data indicate female community college presidents are “more likely to prefer passive avoidant leadership styles than male community college presidents” (Jacobs, 2012, p. 70).

Clearly, and as validated by these studies, the future of community colleges lies in the effectiveness of the presidents, most specifically in the leadership characteristics and skills of their presidents. In the view of George Boggs, past AACC President, (2003), “the values that characterize the American community college movement were developed and implemented by visionary leaders . . . continued success of these unique institutions will depend upon the quality and characteristics of their future leadership” (p. vii). Therefore, presidents must be prepared to address new and unexpected challenges in the future, while displaying the agility, adaptability, and leadership essential characteristics (Goff, 2003). As Phelan (2005) noted “without question, numerous challenges, opportunities, stresses, and rewards await current and future generations of community college leaders” (Phelan, 2005, p. 798). Finally, Walter Bumpus (2012), current AACC

President, noted that while the challenges are significant as colleges seek to replace presidents due to retirements, at the same time, colleges gain the opportunity to redesign themselves.

### **Concluding Observations**

The literature of leadership has evolved significantly during the past centuries, from the early “great man” theories, to the situational and behavioral approaches, and finally to the current emphasis on visionary and ethical leadership as supported by leadership development initiatives. Numerous leadership characteristics, attributes, styles, and behaviors have been cataloged and highlighted over the past decades in continuing attempts to discover and nurture those particular characteristics that are believed to contribute to outstanding leaders. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and based upon the research of that time, the American Association for Community Colleges (2001) determined five essential characteristics for effective community college presidents, along with a number of competencies. Identified personal characteristics include vision, personal ethics and values, and collaborative and relationship-building behaviors. In addition, the AACC highlighted the need for community college presidents to demonstrate communication and organizational skills, support the mission and vision of community colleges, and excel community and economic development.

Recent societal changes and demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century support the necessity for community college presidents and those who seek the presidency to remain strong and vocal contributors to the leadership conversation. Given the changes already experienced in the past decade, it may be assumed rightfully that the evolution will continue at an

ever-increasing pace. It is also likely that a new type of leader will emerge who “will understand the various phases of leadership and be conversant in them . . . able to interpret and interface with any style, [and] serve as a diplomat of leadership” (Herman, 2007). The demands currently placed on colleges will drive the need to recruit presidents who possess the leadership characteristics and skills necessary to guide their institutions through the challenging higher educational environment. To do so, Skinner suggested “we need to be clearer about what qualities those leaders and that leadership need to have” (Skinner & Miller, 2010, p. 14).

The review of the literature revealed an ongoing and pervasive interest in the concept of leadership in higher education, yet the literature also suggested that leadership long has been viewed as a complex concept which remains as difficult to define in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as was the case in an historical context. Although a number of studies investigated leadership competencies, there remains a scarcity of research surrounding the personal characteristics and traits perceived as essential by sitting community college presidents at different stages of their presidencies.

This study is needed since it should help to fill that gap in the literature, while also providing an opportunity to relate the perceptions of today’s community college presidents regarding essential leadership characteristics to those posited by the American Association of Community Colleges in 2001. Findings from this research should help to provide a clearer understanding of the perceptions of sitting community college presidents, while also offering critical insights to those who would seek a presidency in the future and to the members of the Boards who would hire the next presidents. Further,

as national and in-house leadership development programs are designed or expanded, the findings of this study should provide further insights into the needs of sitting presidents.

The literature review informed the researcher in the development of the research questions and reinforced the importance of studying this topic, while Chapter Three describes the methodology and design of the study.



## Chapter Three

### Methodology

*Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding [in which] the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture.*  
- John Creswell (1997, p. 15)

The nature of the community college presidency has long constituted a strong personal interest of this researcher, due in no small part to the profound impact presidential leadership tends to have upon the institution—including its organizational health and vitality, its culture, and the morale of its various constituents. Clearly, the president is key to the success of any organization. As John Levin (1998) notes, “presidents continue to be hired, fired, and retired; their influence on organizational behaviors and actions cannot be dismissed easily” (p. 405).

Given this strong linkage between the president’s leadership and its impact on the college, it becomes critical to understand what individual characteristics and traits are present in effective college presidents. Howard Gardner (2011) suggests “an enhanced cadre of future leaders can materialize only if we engender widespread appreciation of the principal issues that surround effective leadership” (p. 285). Therefore, questions regarding essential characteristics of presidential leadership become increasingly important, most especially during times of social change. It then follows that to discover and clearly understand the leadership perceptions of today’s sitting community college presidents can provide valuable insights for the profession, as well as for boards and presidents of the near future.

This chapter will serve to acquaint the reader with the study's methodological plan. The investigator proposed to interview a purposeful sampling of community college presidents at three different stages of their presidencies—early, mid-career, and senior—to discover their perceptions of the essential leadership characteristics needed to lead today's community colleges. Included in this chapter are discussions of the purpose of the study and associated research questions, a rationale for the qualitative case study approach, and an overview of the researcher's approach to participant selection, data collection, potential researcher bias, the transcription process, data analysis, and verification. Also discussed are the outcomes of a prior pilot study undertaken to aid in the design of this research study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Researchers have suggested that the Problem/Purpose Statement should address a central issue that establishes a strong rationale or need to conduct the study, while simultaneously indicating the reason that the problem is important. Emanating from this foundation, the Purpose Statement then determines the direction for the study. In essence, it provides a specific summary of the study's overall aim (Creswell, 1998; McCaslin & Wilson Scott, 2003).

**Purpose.** The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and describe the perceptions of community college presidents in one Midwestern state as viewed from each of three presidential career phases—early, mid-career, or senior—of the leadership skills and characteristics necessary to guide 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges effectively and to discover how those perceptions might compare to the prevailing national

guidelines for effective community college presidents first presented by the American Association of Community Colleges in 2001 (AACC, 2001).

**Central research question/grand tour question.** That overarching grand tour or central research question “should blend together the primary colors of the problem statement and the purpose of the study in a harmonious composition” (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). As Creswell noted, the grand tour question is typically written in the language of a tradition of inquiry (Creswell, 1998).

**Central research question.** What leadership skills and characteristics do beginning, mid-career, and senior community college presidents perceive to be important to lead 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges effectively today and how do these perceptions compare to AACC guidelines first published in 2001?

***Sub-questions.***

1. What do sitting presidents perceive to be the most important presidential leadership skills and characteristics required to guide 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges?
2. How do the prevailing nationally identified presidential leadership skills postulated by the AACC compare to those perceived as important by new, mid-career, and senior community college presidents?
3. What lessons can be learned from these sitting presidents regarding important leadership characteristics that will provide guidance to boards, potential presidents, and leaders at other institutions?

## **Pilot Study**

Maxwell (2005) suggested pilot studies are valuable in the testing of the researcher's ideas or methods, as well as in exploration of their implications. As Chenail (2009) indicated, pilot studies provide an opportunity to assess the quality of the interview protocol, while also revealing possible researcher biases. Through the use of a pilot study, researchers can administer the planned study questions in the same manner as the main study, but then can follow up by gaining subject feedback, particularly with respect to any ambiguities or confusion connected with the questions. The pilot study enables the researcher to record the time needed for the interview and thus, provide a better informed time estimate for the IRB protocol. Should any questions be discovered to be unnecessary, confusing or ambiguous, they can be reworded or discarded. In essence, pilot studies provide investigators with a priceless opportunity to institute a dress rehearsal, or "test run by piloting their means for collecting and analyzing data on a small sample of participants with the same or similar inclusion criteria as would be the case in the main study idea" (Chenail, 2009, p. 16).

This researcher first contemplated a study investigating presidential leadership characteristics in 2006 while completing formal doctoral coursework. During the spring of that year, in an attempt to test the viability of the proposed dissertation topic, a pilot study was undertaken. The researcher determined to seek out executive-level community college leaders—those most likely to work directly with the college presidents and who also possibly could be in line for future presidencies—to serve as the foundation of the pilot study. The researcher sought to ascertain the perceptions of current state community

college Chief Academic Officers regarding the essential leadership characteristics of community college presidents. Four CAOs, representing a variety of types and sizes of community colleges—large, urban, small, and rural, were interviewed and debriefed.

Outcomes of the pilot study helped to inform the design of this study. The pilot study revealed that the CAOs saw a pressing need for incoming presidents and boards to comprehend clearly the challenges facing the community college system and to become familiar with the associated demands that may be placed upon the leadership skills of the presidents. The CAOs believed it possible that given the escalating pressures associated the office of the president, the essential leadership characteristics of effective presidents might differ in some manner from those presented by the AACC in 2001. Further, the CAOs indicated that the outcomes of such a study of the perceptions of community college presidents could also help to enlighten those leaders seeking to position themselves for a future presidency, add to the literature on community college leadership, and serve as a significant resource for community college Boards as they would undertake presidential search processes in response to anticipated presidential vacancies. In addition, the results of the pilot study were evaluated in conjunction with one key community college president nearing retirement, who functioned as an expert source. This president and reviewed the study for its potential value within the profession and offered insights regarding the interview questions that supported those of the CAOs.

The overall assessment of the results of the pilot study revealed an unintentional flaw in the construction of the interview questions which resulted in a redundancy as determined by a duplication of responses. Further, one question was noted which

solicited responses that appeared to provide little value to the overall topic. As a direct result of this assessment, the interview questions were reformatted. The original 13 questions were condensed into a total of 12 questions as follows: Two overlapping questions which solicited repetitive responses were condensed into one question. The following question was determined to provide little value to this study and was eliminated: “If you had the complete support of your governing board and adequate funding, what would you most want to do to develop your skills to improve your effectiveness as president?” Responses to this question might provide guidance to professionals establishing leadership development programs, but offered little insight into the central research question. Finally, one new question was added to the study to provide subjects with the opportunity to reflect upon any evolution of – or change in – their leadership style during the course of their presidency.

As stated earlier, this researcher was subjected to a number of unforeseen factors that combined to cause a lengthy gap in the pursuit of the doctoral degree. When ultimately, personal circumstances were reversed and enabled a return to the dissertation process in late 2012, the researcher began the process of reflection and research to ascertain the nature of recent developments in the field of community college presidential leadership. While a number of national programs designed to develop leadership competencies in prospective community college leaders were founded in the past five years, it became obvious that the national attention was focused on competencies, rather than leadership characteristics. Further research also determined that the outcomes of the pilot study had not been replicated in the literature. The researcher next consulted with

the now-retired president who provided valuable input to the pilot study; then conferred with a sitting college president from another state who had served as one of the CAOs of the pilot study. Both presidents supported the viability and inherent value of the study design and of original pilot study. Thus, the researcher determined to take advantage of and build upon the lessons learned during the original pilot study, to reformat interview questions in accordance with pilot study outcomes and to move forward with the study design.

### **Design of the Study**

Quantitative and qualitative research approaches have different goals. Depending upon the character of those goals, the researcher must assess the approaches and determine the best “fit” for the nature of the research question under consideration. Some significant differences can be observed between qualitative and quantitative research designs. Qualitative research logic tends to be inductive, as opposed to deductive, often consisting of describing particular situations, meanings and experiences of people and groups. The qualitative research process is non-linear and non-sequential, with data collection and analysis often proceeding simultaneously, in contrast to the more formalized and sequential nature of the quantitative approach. In addition, qualitative research designs can be dynamic, emergent, and flexible, rather than designs which are rarely subject to change (Frankel & Devers, 2000).

As Merriam (1998) notes, when determining the approach, the researcher must examine his or her personal orientation to the basic nature of reality, the purpose for doing the research, and the resulting type of knowledge to be produced. The author

stresses research seeking understanding from the subjects' perspectives has the potential of making the most positive impact on educational practice (Merriam,1998). The choice of the study design requires the researcher to:

1. understand the philosophical foundations underlying the type of research;
2. consider whether a good match exists between the type of research and the researcher's personality, attributes, and skills; and
3. keep informed of the available design choices within the paradigm. (p. 1)

**Qualitative research.** Qualitative research seeks illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations and can aid in the understanding of any phenomenon about which little is yet known. Hoepfl (1997) notes the qualitative research method can also be used to gain new perspectives on issues about which much is already known, or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively. Good qualitative studies answer clearly stated, important research questions (Frankel & Devers, 2000).

According to Creswell (1998), a qualitative study should be consistent with the assumptions of a qualitative paradigm and provide an understanding of a social or human problem, founded on building a complex, holistic picture, reporting detailed views of informants, conducted in a natural setting, and "based on distinctive methodologies within traditions of inquiry" (p. 15). As Stake (1995) further noted, qualitative research seeks to understand, provides a personal role for the researcher, and constructs knowledge, all while searching for patterns and consistencies. Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) reported qualitative methods are the most adequate means for producing knowledge when the object is concrete human experience. In brief, one of the greatest strengths of the qualitative approach is the richness and depth of explorations and



descriptions. As Myers reported (2000), the mission of qualitative research serves to discover meaning and understanding, rather than to verify truth or predict outcomes.

Clearly, the nature of the research question for this study lends itself to the qualitative approach, since the ultimate goal of the quantitative research approach is to find out the facts which exist in the reality (Hara, 1995). Qualitative approaches allow the researcher to add thick, rich descriptions to the findings, since the perspectives or voices of the participants are prominent in any qualitative research (Hatch, 2002). Thus, the qualitative research approach was deemed appropriate for this study since the researcher sought to understand community college presidential leadership from the perspectives of sitting presidents at different stages of their presidential careers. The qualitative approach lends itself well to this task (Yin, 1994).

**Case study.** Qualitative case studies are prevalent throughout the field of education (Merriam, 1998). The case study approach is a valuable method of research which is typified by several distinctive characteristics, rendering it ideal for this study. Prominent among these relevant features are that the case study approach involves a research problem that requires exploration and understanding, the purpose statement is broad and general, it seeks participants' experiences, a small number of individuals or sites are involved, and the data collected lends itself to themes when evaluated (Hatch, 2002; Stake, 1995). Merriam (1998) further categorized the special features of the case qualitative case study as particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. The terms are defined as follows:

1. *Particularistic.* Case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon.

2. *Descriptive*. The end product of the case study is a rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under study. (Thick is defined as the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being studied).
3. *Heuristic*. This descriptor suggests that case studies illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study. (Merriam, 1998, pp. 29-30)

Case studies are bounded by time, as well as by place, by the purpose of the study, and by the questions related to it. Stake (1995) revealed that the function of qualitative case study research in pursuit of complex meaning is to provide the reader with thick description, experiential understanding, and multiple realities (p. 43). Further, the case study approach promotes an in-depth exploration about a particular situation (Creswell, 1998). On occasion, experts in case study research have expressed concern with rigor in non-experimental research (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 1994). Yin (1994) suggested that studies do not require a set minimum number of cases, nor must cases be randomly selected. However, as Yin (1994) further noted, it is critical that the researcher crafts the most effective study possible by working with the situation that presents itself in each case. Therefore, the qualitative research method selected for this study is the multiple case study approach which allows for a multi-perspectival analysis.

Multiple case studies utilize more than one specific site or case and are sometimes termed collective case studies, multi-site studies, or comparative case studies. Such studies allow the researcher to collect and analyze data from a number of cases. Merriam (1998) asserted the inclusion of multiple cases is a “common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of findings” (p. 40). Miles and Huberman (1994), as cited by Merriam (1998), noted the precision, validity, and stability of the findings can be strengthened through this method.

**Population sample/participant selection.** Sampling refers to the process used to select a portion of the population for study. Decisions regarding sampling are made for the explicit purpose of obtaining the richest possible source of information to answer the research questions. Purposeful sampling, one of key characteristics of qualitative case study research, allows researchers to intentionally select interviewees and sites based on their ability to advance the purpose of the study. As Merriam (1998) asserted, in purposeful sampling the researcher is attempting to discover, understand, and gain insight about the research topic and therefore, must select a sample from whom the most can be learned. In other words, purposeful sampling selects information-rich cases for in-depth study. Purposeful sampling decisions influence not only the selection of participants but also settings, incidents, events, and activities for data collection. Size and specific cases depend on the study purpose (Frankel & Devers, 2000).

Since the research design required the researcher to understand and consider the unique characteristics of specific research subjects and the settings in which they were located, it became critical that the researcher determined the appropriate selection criteria for the study. Criteria should reflect the purpose of the study clearly (Frankel & Devers, 2000). To do so effectively, the researcher must make the design more concrete by developing a sampling frame, or the criteria for selecting sites and/or subjects capable of answering the research questions, identifying specific sites and/or subjects, and securing their participation in the study. In addition, in multiple case studies, several cases should be selected based upon the relevant criteria (Merriam, 1998, p. 65). Given

the real-world context in which most qualitative research is carried out, identifying and negotiating access to research sites and subjects constitute critical parts of the process.

For this study, several steps were taken to ensure that the final list of participants reflected the purpose of the study, were information rich, and provided for maximum variation to display multiple perspectives, while providing opportunities for the identification of important common patterns (Creswell, 1998). Subjects were selected who represented the particular subgroup of interest in order to obtain the perceptions of individuals who were not only information rich, but might have possessed the same or different perspectives on the same phenomenon (Hatch, 2002). McNabb (2002) defined this particular strategy as a “group of individual cases studied together because they contribute to the greater understanding of a phenomenon” (p. 287). Selection steps included the following:

1. To mitigate any possible impact of regional variations which might color participant responses, the researcher selected “one Midwestern state” for the study site. Since federal trend analyses reveal significant economic variations between and among states across the nation, by focusing on community college presidents from one state, extraneous variables were reduced.
2. Since the purpose of the study was to discover the perceptions of current community college presidents at one of three phases of the presidential career, the next step was to gather data relative to presidential tenure at each of the state’s community colleges. Community college data revealed the following:

- Number of community college presidents. The state was divided into 28 community college districts, each governed by a president or Chancellor.
  - Presidential tenure. Tenure at each community college ranged from less than one year to in excess of 20 years.
  - Subgroups. The total group of 28 subjects was divided into the following categories to establish a somewhat similar sub-group size, using the average U.S. presidential tenure of 7-8 years (King & Gomez, 2008) as representative of the Mid-career phase:
    - New President (four or less years in presidency) = 7 subjects.
    - Mid-Career President (five to nine years tenure) = 11 subjects.
    - Senior President (ten or more years in presidency) = 10 subjects.
3. Within each tenure subgroup – new, mid-career, and senior – three subjects were purposefully selected to reflect a cross-section of institutional size, type, and geographic location within the state, as well as presidential gender and ethnic background, resulting in the participant sample below (see Figure 1).

Therefore, participants for this study consisted of nine (9) community college presidents at various stages of their presidencies; three (3) new presidents (assuming office in 2009 or later); three (3) at mid-career (assuming the office between 2004 and 2008), and three (3) senior presidents (assuming office in 2003 or earlier) from one Midwestern state. These participants were selected to ensure that the sample included a range of presidential gender and race, as well as to provide for a variety of institutional sizes and types. The colleges represented by these presidents were located in every

New Presidents 3 Subjects	Mid-career Pres. 3 Subjects	Senior Presidents 3 Subjects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>President</u>: 2 male (1 of which is a minority), 1 female.</li> <li>• <u>College type</u>: 2 urban, 1 rural.</li> <li>• <u>College size</u>: 1 large, 2 medium.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>President</u>: 2 male, 1 female.</li> <li>• <u>College type</u>: 3 rural, of which all are multi-campus.</li> <li>• <u>College size</u>: 1 medium, 2 small.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>President</u>: 2 male (1 of which is a minority), 1 female.</li> <li>• <u>College type</u>: 2 suburban, both multi-campus, 1 rural.</li> <li>• <u>College size</u>: 1 large, 1 medium, 1 small.</li> </ul>

*Figure 1.* Participant sample.

geographical area of the state, representing urban, suburban, and rural colleges. Student enrollment at the nine community colleges ranged from 2,000 to over 14,000, with FTEs ranging from 1,450 to 8,500. For the purpose of this study and to ensure confidentiality, the nine president interviewees and their colleges were referred to by pseudonyms. This strategy allowed the researcher to explore first-person perspectives of essential presidential leadership characteristics as revealed by sitting presidents. Thus, their observations, comments, and perceptions of the leadership characteristics essential to lead a 21<sup>st</sup> century community college should shed fresh light on the subject and helped to provide a closer look at the 2001 work of the AACC.

**IRB approval.** The most critical of steps when contemplating a research project with live subjects is that of applying to the University of Nebraska's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for research approval. Based upon documentation and the accompanying

research plan submitted, IRB approval was granted in the spring of 2013. The official IRB approval letter can be seen in Appendix A.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The intent of this study was to present the viewpoints and perspectives of those individuals who have directly observed, lived, and reflected upon the leadership characteristics of community college presidents. Perceptions were revealed through personal interviews from the vantage point of nine individual sitting community college presidents within one Midwestern state. Each of the nine presidents represented one of three stages of his or her presidency—new, mid-career, or senior. Other data collected included the investigator's field notes recorded during and immediately following the interviews and the institutional profiles. These data served to provide context to the subject interviews while still ensuring the anonymity of the subjects.

Qualitative inquiry focuses on meaning in context and “requires a data collection instrument that is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 1). Hatch (2002) noted the basics components of the data collection process are similar across qualitative paradigms and include observation, interviewing, and unobtrusive data collection (p. 71). Merriam (1998) supported this assertion when she reported typical qualitative research methods may include conducting interviews, observing, and analyzing documents (p. 134). Frankel and Devers (2000) suggested several factors influence the degree of structure or type of instrumentation used in a qualitative research study, including the purpose of the study. When the study is more exploratory or attempting to discover and/or review new theories and concepts, a very

open-ended protocol is appropriate to consider. Finally, Stake (1995) added the necessity for developing systems for data collections and suggested the essential components of data collection included case definition, research questions, identification of sources of support, data sources, time allocation, expenses, and intended reporting (p. 51).

**Researcher bias.** Given that qualitative research is interpretive and the researcher often functions as a filter for data processing (Bryant, 2004), it is necessary for the researcher to be aware of the potential for unintended bias to impact the study. This researcher has long held a strong interest in leadership in general, with a particularly keen curiosity about the impact of a president's leadership upon an institution. During the researcher's term of service as a community college dean, opportunities became available to view the significant changes in the internal processes, culture, and staff morale at several colleges in the months following the leadership transition from one president to another. As an outsider observing this type of organizational transformation from afar, the researcher soon developed a strong appreciation for the impact the president's leadership can have upon a college. From this beginning, came an overriding interest in—and appreciation for—the importance of presidential leadership, combined with a curiosity concerning whether various leadership characteristics might impact the college in different ways.

During the interview process the interviewer may subconsciously give subtle clues either through body language, or tone of voice, that could influence the subjects. As a result, responses could be slanted towards the interviewer's own viewpoint or preferences. From the design of the interview questions through the interviews



themselves, the researcher can unconsciously bias the study. However, in this qualitative study, it is the combined voices of the sitting presidents that must resound in the findings, not the preferences of the researcher.

To guard against any such unintended bias, there were a number of steps which “must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). During the interview phase, the researcher was careful to remain as neutral as possible and refrain from demonstrating strong emotional reactions to subject responses so as to avoid influencing responses in any way. Questions were read one at a time and in the same manner in each interview and the researcher avoided the potential pitfall of nodding the head which might serve to influence future answers (Turner, 2010).

Additionally, when the data were interpreted and the themes and codes were determined, the researcher took care to review the data repeatedly to verify that conclusions were grounded in what was said, rather than researcher perceptions. Next, the researcher sought the services of an outside consultant to review the themes and codes and provide feedback. In this way, the potential for bias was mitigated. Two additional procedures were employed to limit potential bias: Triangulation—the use of multiple data sources and member checking—wherein the subjects themselves weighed in on the credibility of the findings and interpretations. These procedures were employed to further establish the credibility of the study (Creswell, 1998).

**Data sources.** This multiple case study utilized a variety of data sources for data gathering purposes. Included were:

1. *Participant Interviews.* Person-to-person interviewing represents a common method of collecting qualitative data in the case study approach. As Merriam (1998) stated, we interview people “when we cannot directly observe behavior, perceptions, or how [the subjects] interpret the world around them” (p. 72).
2. *Documentation.* Existing records, consisting of both public records and personal documents, often provide insights into a setting and/or group of people that cannot be observed or noted in another way.
  - a. Public records collected from outside or within the setting in which the evaluation is taking place can help the evaluator understand the institution’s resources, values, processes, priorities, and concerns, as well as providing a record or history not subject to recall bias. According to Mahoney (1997), such materials can be helpful in better understanding the project participants and making comparisons between groups or cases.
  - b. Personal documents, especially such material as the presidents’ CVs, can help the evaluator understand how the participant sees the world and what she or he wants to communicate to an audience.
3. *Field Notes.* Both descriptive and reflective field notes were prepared during the observation and interview period. The descriptive field notes described the events, activities and people; reflective field notes recorded personal

reflections that related to the insights, hunches or broad themes that emerged.

These notes provided the researcher with another lens through which to view the data, as well as to serve to validate researcher perceptions.

**Interview protocol.** This study employed the person-to-person interview method for the gathering of data. As one of the most common forms of data collection, qualitative interviews tend to be more open-ended and less structured (Merriam, 1998). The essential purpose of interviewing is not to get answers, test hypotheses, or evaluate. It is instead, an attempt to understand the experiences of other people and the meaning that they make of that experience (Seidman, 1991). One-on-one interviewing requires that the interview subjects are not reluctant to speak freely and to share perceptions and ideas (Creswell, 1998). Further, the interview provides the researcher with “descriptions, narratives, texts, which the researcher then interprets and reports” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005, p. 163).

Interviews as a data collection method are predicated on the assumption that the participants’ perspectives are “meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit, and that their perspectives affect the success of the project” (Mahoney, 1997, n.p.). Mahoney furthers stressed an interview, rather than a paper and pencil survey, “is selected when interpersonal contact is important and when opportunities for follow-up of interesting comments are desired” (n. p.).

The work of Kvale (1996) outlined the following qualities that any skilled interviewer must possess and demonstrate:

- *Knowledgeable*: Become thoroughly familiar with the focus of the interview.
- *Structuring*: Explain the purpose for the interview; ask whether interviewee has questions.
- *Clear*: Ask simple, easy, short questions without using jargon.
- *Gentle*: Allow people to finish; give them time to think; tolerate pauses.
- *Sensitive*: Listen attentively to what is said and how it is said; be empathic.
- *Open and Flexible*: Respond to what is important to the interviewee.
- *Steering*: Know what you want to find out.
- *Critical*: Be prepared to politely challenge what is said. For example, questioning inconsistencies in interviewees' replies.
- *Remembering and Integrating*: Relate what is said to what has previously been said.
- *Interpreting*: Clarify and extend meanings of interviewees' statements without changing their meaning, (Kvale, 1996, n.p.)

The utilization of in-depth interviews, generally conducted with individuals or with a small group of individuals, provides the researcher with a very desirable qualitative data collection process since it enables the capture of perceptions of respondents in their own words. In this way, the meaningfulness of the experience from the respondent's perspective is revealed. An in-depth interview is a dialogue between a skilled interviewer and an interviewee, with the goal of eliciting rich, detailed material that can be used in analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, as cited in Mahoney, 1997). In-depth interviews are characterized by extensive probing and open-ended questions and are not intended to be a two-way form of communication and sharing. Further, in-depth interviews are particularly appropriate when the subject matter is complex, when detailed information sought, and when the respondents are busy, high-status individuals.

**Design of the instrument.** According to Merriam (1998), to collect meaningful interview data, the researcher must ask good questions (p. 82). Thus, interview questions for this study were derived from a combination of sources as follow:

1. The 2001 AACC research study constituted a major component of this research. Several interview questions emanated from the original AACC study process.
2. The formal review of the literature, most specifically earlier research studies, also helped to shape the interview questions.
3. Outcomes of the Pilot Study proved invaluable in the construction and design of the interview questions. Questions were tested on community college Chief Academic Officers, who represented a class of administrator similar to the president, to check whether the questions were clear and to determine the length of time it might take to answer them. The input of the subjects of the Pilot Study helped to better focus the design and organization of the interview questions.
4. Finally, all interview questions were checked against the three research questions to ensure that interview questions were relevant, that each interview question had the potential to yield data pertaining to the research questions, and finally, that no data superfluous to the study would be collected

The Crosswalk Table (Table 2) reveals the relationship between the three research questions and the 12 interview questions:

Table 2

*Crosswalk Table – Relationship Between Interview Questions and Research Questions*

Interview Question	Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3
1	Ice-Breaker/Context		
2	X		X
3	X		X
4	X	X	X
5	X	X	
6	X	X	
7	X	X	
8	X	X	
9	X	X	X
10			X
11	X	X	X
12			X

**Conducting interviews.** For the purposes of this study, in-depth interviews of the nine new, mid-career, or senior community college presidents, three presidents representing each tenure category, were utilized as the primary data for this research. While the interview questions were issue-oriented, each of the participants brought a unique set of experiences and opinions to the proceedings. As Stake suggested, “formulating the questions and anticipating probes that evoke good responses is a special art” (1995, p. 65). Questions were designed to avoid yes and no answers. The in-person, face-to-face subject interviews of 45 to 60 minutes in length were conducted at private

on-campus locations in accordance with the interview protocol. A focused interview protocol was utilized for the purposes of this study (see Appendix E).

Open-ended questions are intended to explore the subjects' opinions, attitudes, and beliefs in a way which may define areas of importance not previously considered. Interview questions were developed in relation to the study's research questions, with each question allowing for follow-up or probing questions to ensure the questions were asked in a specific order, were answered fully and at the same time, allowed the subjects to expand upon their responses.

Prior to the start of the interview process, the researcher invited the nine presidents to participate in the research study via an emailed recruitment invitation. The recruitment invitation also informed the participants of the intent of the study and of the confidentiality issues (see Appendix C). Once the participants agreed to take part in the interview, the researcher then sent three documents to each participant for review: the Informed Consent form (see Appendix D), the 12 interview questions, and a copy of the 2001 AACC *Essential leadership characteristics of effective community college presidents* (see Appendix B). Copies of the interview questions were provided prior to the interview to allow the subjects sufficient time to contemplate their responses.

A digital voice recorder, a personal reflective journal to provide context to the interviews, and inscribed notes were used to record the data derived from the interviews. Based upon the outcomes of the in-depth interviews, the researcher believed it was likely that unanticipated information and insights might be elicited. However, follow-up

interviews for clarification purposes were not needed at the conclusion of the interview process.

The audio recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Anonymity was guaranteed through the use of the assignment of pseudonyms for each president and for his or her college. Participants were then provided with an interview transcript to review in order to make certain that no errors had been made in either the intent of the participant's meaning or the actual transcription process. During this process, the researcher kept a reflective journal and notes of observations to track the research experience. Not only did the journal aid in the process of tracking data, but it also supplies a daily record of the study, as well as providing "a means of accounting for personal biases and feelings" (Hatch, 2002, p. 87).

### **Role of the Researcher**

Before conducting a qualitative study, according to Hoepfl (1997) the researcher must adopt the stance suggested by the characteristics of qualitative case study, develop the level of skill appropriate for the vehicle through which data will be collected and interpreted, and prepare a research design that utilizes generally accepted strategies. The researcher must be responsive to environmental cues and able to interact with the situation. Researchers must also display the ability to collect information at multiple levels simultaneously, perceive situations holistically, process data as soon as they become available, provide immediate feedback and request verification of data, and explore atypical or unexpected responses.



Stake (1995) provided a comprehensive overview of the role of the researcher which includes functioning in such roles as teacher, advocate, evaluator, biographer, interpreter, as well as considerations of both constructivism and relativity. Of these, Stake suggested that the role of interpreter is central. He further pointed out the researcher “consciously or unconsciously makes continuous decisions about how much emphasis to give each role” (p. 91).

**Rights of human subjects.** The interests of all parties involved in a research study need to be continually appraised and upheld. Ethically, human subjects must be protected from any possible physical or psychological harm resulting from participation in a research study. Subject participation in research studies must be voluntary, rather than coerced in any way. Subjects must be fully informed of the procedures and any potential risks of the research prior to agreeing to participate by signing an informed consent form. Participants must be assured of confidentiality regarding any identifying information that might reveal their role in the study. Anonymity is often provided as well. Researchers should always attempt to ensure the honest and respectful treatment of research participants. To do so, participants should be informed of the purpose of the study, as well as the issues of consent and confidentiality.

The University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) monitors compliance with federal regulations designed to protect human subjects from harmful or undignified treatment. Researchers must complete special training and receive certification upon completion of that training. Official IRB approval must be secured prior to undertaking any research (see Appendix A).

According to McCaslin and Wilson Scott (2003), the researcher functions as the primary research instrument in qualitative investigation. Therefore, the researcher must identify and describe his or her perspective and recognize and deal with any biases that might be held on the subject. Since the study's purpose defines its direction, "once that direction is established, the focus should reside with the process allowing the data to emerge as they may" (p. 453).

For the purposes of this research study, the following actions were taken:

1. CITI training was completed in January of 2013.
2. Official IRB approval was received in April of 2013.
3. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and of the provisions for confidentiality and anonymity via the recruitment email message and through the Informed Consent Form.
4. The Informed Consent Form (see Appendix D) was submitted to subjects for review and signature, indicating their approval/agreement to participate in the study has been given prior to the interview process. Presidents were asked to sign the Informed Consent on the date of and immediately prior to the interview.
5. Participants were informed of the necessity for audio-recording of the interviews and gave permission to do so during the recruitment and acceptance process; their acceptance of the audio-recording provision was authorized by their signatures on the Informed Consent Form.

6. Research materials were kept in a secured location in the researcher's office and were viewed only by the researcher throughout the transcription and member-checking processes prior to being destroyed, thus ensuring that confidentiality was guaranteed.
7. Finally, the researcher employed all fundamental ethical behaviors during the research process such as triangulation, minimization of researcher bias, and participant checks, while findings were reviewed by an outside auditor.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Evaluation of qualitative studies involves the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of information. According to Stake, "Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions, as well as to final compilations" (1995, p. 71). Merriam (1998) suggested the essence of case study data analysis is closely linked to the data derived from the interviews, field observations, and other documents. The analysis process concerns making sense of the data by "consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read" (p. 178). As she further added, conveying an understanding of the case "is the paramount consideration in analyzing the data" (p. 193). The process involves bringing order to the data, organizing the data into patterns or categories, attaching meaning and significance to the analysis and, finally, explaining descriptive patterns, relationships, themes, and linkages.

Regardless of the degree of structure or type of instrumentation used, the data must be captured and put in a format amenable to analysis. In qualitative research, the raw data and data set primarily consist of words and images in the form of field notes, audiotapes,

and transcripts. Documents, including quantitative data, will also be included once provisions are made to ensure participant confidentiality.

Creswell (1998) provided the following steps for analyzing qualitative data, which were followed in this study:

- preparing and organizing the data,
- exploring and coding the database,
- describing findings and forming themes,
- representing and reporting findings, and
- validating the accuracy of the findings. (Creswell, 1998)

Preparing and organizing the data represents the critical first step in the data analysis process. Participants were clearly and accurately informed of the intention of the research project and then asked to read and sign the informed consent form prior to the interview. The audio recordings of the interviews formed the basis for analyzing the data. The carefully crafted interview guides provided ample space for the Researcher to capture observations and the responses of interviewees along with the audio recording during the interview. Confidentiality of the data was maintained by using pseudonyms. The APA Ethical Code was followed throughout the study.

A transcript of each audio-recorded interview was created by the researcher who transcribed each interview verbatim, including word-for-word quotations of the participants' responses. All personal and college-identifying information was removed and pseudonyms were used to guarantee anonymity. Participants were supplied with a transcript of their interview to review in order to ensure that they were quoted correctly and that the intent of the subject's commentary was not misconstrued in any way. Only

three of the subjects offered any points of clarification on the transcribed interview, all of which related to grammatical issues. No substantive changes were requested.

Further, while on each college campus at the time of the interview, the researcher gathered demographic data of the college and recorded impressions of the college's overall appearance and ambience. During the interview, the researcher recorded notes of participants' characteristics, enthusiasm, body language, and overall mood during the interview. These notes became part of the reflective journal and can be used to identify speakers or to recall comments that are garbled or unclear in the recording. These field notes and the reflective journal served to provide sources of data for review and assessment.

Next, all the data were analyzed, with the overall data set divided into categories or groups (Hatch, 2002). Transcripts were analyzed for the frequency of specific text segments and descriptors and common themes sought using the N-Vivo coding software. Merriam (1998) suggested that the first level of analysis is descriptive when researchers carefully consider what data will be included or excluded from the account. Through the comparative assessment of the raw data, recurring patterns were sought in the data which lend themselves to the formations of categories and subcategories.

During this first step of the analysis process, the researcher identified and tentatively named the categories of concepts observed in all of the case data. Hoepfl (1997) suggested that the goal is to create descriptive categories that provide a framework for preliminary analysis. Subsequent stages of the analysis may result in the modification of these categories. Data must be studied unit by unit, then compared with other units in

an effort to discover commonalities which will reflect the focus of the study. While the ultimate number of categories is dependent upon the data and focus of the research, the resultant categories constitute “abstractions derived from the data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 181). Codes were established which reflected key categories revealed in the interviews (Creswell, 1998; Hatch, 2002). Maxwell (2005) stated:

The analysis of multiple cases involves the collection and analyzing of all cases. In qualitative research . . . the goal of coding is not to produce counts of things, but to fracture the data and rearrange it into categories that facilitate the comparison of data within and between these categories and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts. (pp. 78-79)

Data were entered into a computer for analysis through the use of the N-Vivo software product. After data from each case was analyzed and assessed, a cross-case analysis took place, in which the researcher looked for abstractions across cases. Robust analysis can lead to “categories, themes, or typologies that conceptualize the data from all the cases” (Merriam, 1998, p. 195).

Describing findings and forming themes represented the next step in the process. Preliminary coding categories established on the basis of similar patterns or concepts were reduced to the essential themes. Central themes then were compared against the transcripts to ensure that they were, in fact, representative of the data. Participant quotes provided a sense of “voice” which was used to highlight and illustrate the themes, as well as to offer a sense of context. The initial open coding was followed by another review of the data to check for patterns which might have been missed in the initial review.

Berkowitz (1997) suggested considering the following questions when interpreting, coding, and analyzing qualitative data:

- What patterns and common themes emerge in responses about specific topics? How do these patterns (or lack thereof) help to illuminate the broader study question(s)?
- Are there any deviations from these patterns? If so, are there any factors that might explain these atypical responses?
- What interesting stories emerge from the responses? How to they help illuminate the broader study question(s)?
- Do any of these patterns suggest that additional data may be needed? Do any of the study questions need to be revised?
- Do the patterns that emerge corroborate the findings of any corresponding qualitative analyses that have been conducted? If not, what might explain these discrepancies? (Berkowitz, 1997, para. 7).

Representation and reporting of the findings then followed. At this stage, the researcher once again reviewed the data from the coding and themes process which then led to inductive generalizations. These generalizations were then checked against the interview results to ascertain linkages and support for the generalizations. Findings were also compared with the researcher's filed notes, the reflective journal and current literature.

### **Verification Procedures**

Validity, reliability of findings, and ethical procedures constitute critical components of the qualitative research study. Considerations include the following:

1. *Verification.* Verification or validation of the findings is essential in the analysis of a qualitative case study. As noted by Creswell (1998), authentic qualitative research is strengthened by verification made possible through this approach to studying various phenomenon or experiences. He stated, “A case study requires extensive verification” (p. 213). One method of final verification took place as cases were compared and themes validated by the researcher. Other methods were employed to ensure that findings are accurate and verifiable, including triangulation, minimization of researcher bias, participant checks, and the use of an outside auditor.
2. *Objectivity and Bias.* Bias and subjectivity are critical concerns in qualitative studies in education since the researcher's subjectivity may affect the research. As a result, the researcher's viewpoint and value judgments are deeply connected to the research. This researcher made a concerted effort during the interview process to display no bias by using gender neutral language, to ask all questions or each participant in the order cited in the interview protocol, and to ask probing questions that are appropriate within the boundaries and intent of each question. In addition, a research journal was utilized “for self-assessing researcher bias” (Hatch, 2002, p. 88).
3. *Validity.* As is often the case with any type of in-depth study, the researcher may develop sensitivity to the data which could impact the validity of the findings. To mitigate this possibility, the Researcher employed the following:



- a. *Peer reviewer.* A peer reviewer was employed throughout this research process to act as an external check on the process. The peer reviewer aided in reviewing and assessing the coding, determination of themes, and verification of findings. Peer review sessions were captured through written accounts of the meetings.
- b. *Triangulation.* A search for the convergence of information was accomplished by comparing data from the presidents' background, institutional profiles, coded interviews with the researcher's observations and reflective journal, as well as with the results of the 2001 AACC survey.
- c. *Member checking.* Transcripts of interviews were shared with the subjects to ensure accuracy of reporting; subsequently, the data analysis and conclusions, and the entire written narrative were shared with the participants to enable them to "judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell, 1998, p. 203).
- d. *Rich, thick description.* As Creswell (1998) suggests, rich, thick description aids the researcher to provide such a detailed description of the participants and their settings, that it "enables readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred" (p. 203).
- e. *External auditor.* An external audit provides further validity to the study. The auditor authenticated the actions taken in arriving at the data analysis

and interpretation, assessed accuracy, verified that a systematic process was employed throughout the research process, and authenticated validity.

## **Summary**

Steps in the research process can be summarized as follow:

1. *Subject Identification.* Identification and categorization of state community college presidents took place, including length of tenure in the presidency. The nine presidents for this study were identified by grouping the tenure of each president into early, mid-career, and senior president categories. Then a careful assessment was made of each of the three presidential groups to ensure that the presidents purposefully selected for this study were representative of all categories of institutional size and type in the state, as well as of presidential characteristics, such as gender and ethnicity. Thus, three subjects were purposefully selected from each of the three career tenure categories (new, mid-career, and senior) to reflect a cross-section of institutional size, type, geographic location within the state, as well as presidential gender and ethnic background,
2. *Interview Questions.* The development of the interview questions was based upon a combination of resources, including the original AACC study of 2001, the outcomes of the pilot study, the review of the literature, and feedback from two of the state's community college presidents who reviewed the questions. In addition, interview questions were also evaluated by the Peer Reviewer.

3. *Interview Protocol.* Upon securing IRB approval, interviews were structured in the following manner: Each subject was contacted by the researcher via email to explain the project and request a face-to-face appointment for the interview.
4. *Preview of Interview Questions.* Interview questions, along with the Informed Consent form, were provided to the presidents one week prior to the scheduled interview. During this same period, institutional profiles were gathered.
5. *Informed Consent.* At the time of the interview, the researcher informed the subjects of the audio recording of the interviews, as well as of the confidentiality of the interview process. A signed Informed Consent letter and signed agreement of the audio recording was procured from each subject prior to the interview.
6. *Interviews.* Interviews took place at each president's campus and were audio recorded. Additionally, the researcher created field notes of personal observations during each interview to provide a broader lens for each case. Other data gathered include institutional profiles and background of the president.
7. *Transcription of interviews.* Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher; pseudonyms were used to ensure subject anonymity. Member checks of the transcribed interviews followed.

8. *Analysis of Data.* Data analysis included the search for common terms and categories, the creation of codes using NVivo software in conjunction with researcher analysis, and the determination of single and cross-case themes. Once themes were determined, they were compared with the 2001 AACC guidelines to assess commonalities and differences.
9. *Member Checks.* During the analysis process of finding meaning from the data, additional member checking took place to enable participants to review and provide feedback on interpretation.
10. *Findings.* Findings, conclusions and recommendations for future actions then followed and can be reviewed in the following chapters.
11. *Audit.* The external audit was conducted to assess the study's reliability.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a description of the methodological processes of the study. Included were the purpose of the study, the central question, and the research sub-questions. The prior pilot study, which helped to inform the creation of the current research study, was outlined. The researcher provided details of the overall methodological design of this multi-site case study and highlighted the processes employed in the determination of the population sample and participant selection criteria. Also included was a discussion of data collection procedures, the role of the researcher, and the rights of human subjects. Finally, the description of the data analysis and data verification procedures was outlined. The findings will be presented in the next chapter. It was the intent of this researcher to create “a process of understanding” and to add to the

literature through this multi-site case study. Ultimately, through this process, the critical goal of a “complex, holistic picture” which may serve to inform other community college practitioners, boards, and future presidents can be realized (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). The findings of the data collection were presented in Chapter Four with recommendations outlined in the subsequent chapter.

## Chapter Four

### Findings

*Qualitative modes of data analysis provide ways of discerning, examining, comparing and contrasting, and interpreting meaningful patterns or themes.*

- Berkowitz (1997, n.p.)

This chapter introduces and discusses the findings of the study as revealed through personal interviews with nine sitting community college presidents. In this study, the researcher sought to understand and describe the presidents' leadership perspectives through their spoken words in an effort to discover meaningful patterns, themes, concepts, insights, understandings and new ideas which then could be organized and analyzed. Close attention was afforded to the rich detail and significance of shared experiences. According to Yin (2011), "the events and ideas emerging from qualitative research can represent the meanings given to real-life events by the people who live them, not the values, preconceptions, or meanings held by researchers" (2011, p. 8).

### Purpose of the Study

It is unclear how the general leadership skills and characteristics for community college presidents as recognized by the American Association of Community Colleges in 2001 might compare to those identified one decade later by community college presidents at different phases of their presidencies. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and describe the perceptions of community college presidents in one Midwestern state as viewed from each of three presidential career phases—early, mid-career, or senior—of the leadership skills and characteristics necessary to guide 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges and to discover how those

perceptions might compare to the prevailing national guidelines originally proposed by the AACC in 2001.

### **Participant Overview**

For the purposes of this study, the researcher examined the tenure of the 28 community college presidents in one Midwestern state and discovered 10 presidents who had served 10 or more years in that role (Senior presidents); 11 presidents whose tenure in the office ranged from 5 to 9 years (Mid-career presidents); and finally, 7 presidents who were in the first 4 years in office (Early career). Next, the researcher purposefully selected 3 presidents from each category who characterized a cross-section of gender and race while at the same time representing a range of college size, type, and location. Each president and college is represented by pseudonym to provide anonymity; however, the profiles of each president and his/her college are provided in the following pages to provide context for the president's perceptions.

Nationally, college type and size classifications have been reviewed on a regular basis for the past four decades by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. This organization is dedicated to providing a

framework for recognizing and describing institutional diversity in U.S. higher education . . . [for the] study of higher education, both as a way to represent and control for institutional differences, and also in the design of research studies to ensure adequate representation of sampled institutions, students, or faculty. (Carnegie, 2012)

Table 3 represents the Carnegie size and setting classification for the nine state community colleges represented by the presidents in the survey sample. As was the case with the presidents, each college also is coded by a unique designator to protect the

Table 3

*Community College Size and Type Classifications*

Community College	Setting	Carnegie Size Fall 2012 FTE Average*	Campus Size Classification
College A	Suburban	8,000+	L2: large two-year
College B	Rural	1,800+	S2: small two-year
College C	Suburban	2,800+	M2: medium two-year
College D	Rural	1,400+	S2: small two-year
College E	Rural	3,100+	M2: medium two-year
College F	Rural	2,600+	M2: medium two-year
College G	Rural	3,300+	M2: medium two-year
College H	Urban	3,100+	M2: medium two-year
College I	Urban	8,000+	L2: large two-year

\*Actual FTE presented as averages  
Source: Caranegie (2012)

confidentiality of the president. For this reason, the detailed Fall 2012 FTE for each college has been presented as a rounded total.

King and Gomez (2008) reported females at the nation's associate degree-granting institutions accounted for 29% of the presidencies. Also reported of two-year colleges, the ethnicity of the presidents totaled 85% white and 15% other ethnicities, while internal promotions amounted to 54% who were promoted from within. University data revealed in a survey by Selingo (2013) of 400 presidents and chancellors of four-year colleges across the nation indicated females accounted for only 22% of the



presidencies. Additionally, 87% of the presidents were white, with 13% comprised of other ethnicities. Twenty-five percent of the presidents were promoted internally.

Table 4 presents the national and state characteristics of sitting presidents representing the following categories: National Associate Degree-granting colleges; national four-year universities; this Midwestern state's community colleges, constituting the population for this research; and finally, the nine state community colleges included in the sample.

Table 4

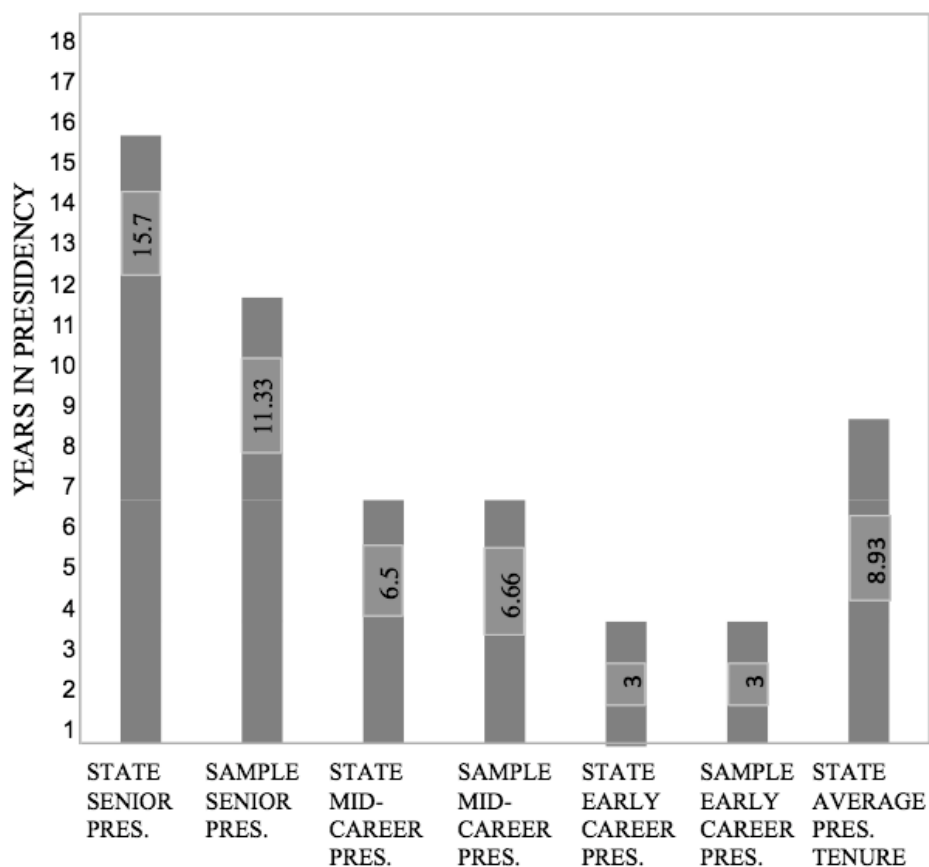
*Characteristics of Sitting Presidents*

	National A.A Presidents	National Univ. Presidents	State Presidents	Sample Presidents
Ethnicity				
White	85%	87%	86%	72%
Other	15%	13%	14%	22%
Gender				
Female	29%	22%	21%	33%
Male	71%	78%	79%	67%
Type of Hire				
Internal	46%	25%	32%	44%
External	54%	75%	68%	56%

Source: King and Gomez (2008); Selingo (2013); State Community College Assn. (2013)

Within this Midwestern state, community college presidential demographics more closely mirrored the national associate's degree institutions. Twenty-one percent of the

presidencies were held by females, while 86% of the presidents were white and 14% were other ethnicities. Those sitting presidents promoted from within totaled 32%, with 68% hired from outside of the college. Recent national data revealed leaders at associate's degree institutions across the United States have served an average of slightly over seven years in the presidency (King & Gomez, 2008), as compared to this state, where the average presidential tenure is nearly nine years as determined by the state's community college association (see Figure 2).



Source: State Community College Association (2013)

*Figure 2.* State presidential tenure comparison.

## **Participant and College Profiles**

This section presents an overview of the participants arranged by length of service in the presidency—early, mid-career, or senior. Professional background and experience of the subjects has been outlined to provide context for the perceptions of the presidents as revealed during the interview process. In a like manner, a profile of the corresponding college of each president is offered to provide further context. To protect subject anonymity, each president and his or her college is designated by pseudonyms.

**Senior President—Tenure range: Ten to 32 years in office.** Of the state's 28 presidencies, 10 of the presidents have served a period of from 1 to 3 decades or more in office. For the purposes of this study, these 10 presidents were designated as “senior presidents.” From this group, a purposeful sample of 3 senior presidents representing a range of college classification was identified. While the name of the president and of the college all have been coded for the purposes of anonymity, the following 3 profiles present an overview of each of the 3 senior presidents and the associated colleges in the sample.

***President A/College A.*** President A was an African-American male who has served in the presidency since 2001. He was promoted from within the college and held his previous vice-presidential position at that institution for a period of 20 years. As a result, he came to the presidency with a long and productive history of working effectively with the Board of Trustees, with his presidential predecessor and with the larger college community as well. He held a PhD and prior to coming to this region he served in a variety of instructional positions at other community colleges. College A is a

large, suburban community college as categorized by the Carnegie Foundation (2012).

Located in the most populous area of the state, the college had a fall 2012 FTE in excess of 8,000, although its designated geographic district was among the smallest in the state (see Table 3). The college was one of three located within its county and was positioned within a short commute to a number of four-year colleges offering bachelor's degrees.

***President B/College B.*** President B was a white female who also assumed the presidency in 2001. She was an internal hire, promoted from within from her previous position in the student services area. Prior to joining this college team, she served as a student services dean in another community college within this state. She held a doctorate in counseling and devoted her early career to working with and serving the needs of students. After assuming the presidency in 2001, that same focus on working with people enabled her to work effectively with college faculty and staff, Board members, and community and legislative representatives as well. College B was categorized as a small rural college, with an FTE of slightly less than 2,000 as of fall 2012 (Carnegie, 2012). Although designated as “rural,” this college was located in an area of the state which was a popular year-round vacation and resort area. Interestingly, the president revealed that external fund raising results for this relatively small college actually exceed reported totals of three of the state's large colleges.

***President C/College C.*** President C was a white male who held the presidency at College C for 10 years. He began his career in the broadcast industry in another state, first as a professional broadcaster, eventually earning a doctorate and teaching broadcasting at the university level. He served nearly a decade as the chief campus

administrator in another state and was recruited externally for his current presidency in 2003. With his Board's support, he had been viewed as the college's voice in the community. The Carnegie Commission (2012) categorized College C as a medium two-year, suburban college. The college's fall 2102 FTE exceeded 4,500. Although categorized as suburban, the college was located in the largest city in its county and served as the key academic postsecondary institution for county residents.

**Mid-career President—Tenure range: Five to nine years in office.** Of the 28 presidents in the state, 11 of the presidents served a period of from 5 to 9 years in office. This range of tenure mirrored the as national community college presidential average tenure of 7.3 years in office as reported by King and Gomez (2008). For the purposes of this study, these 11 presidents were designated as "mid-career presidents." A purposeful sample of 3 presidents representing a range of college classifications was identified from this group and was profiled below. The name of the president and of the college all have been coded for the purposes of anonymity.

***President D/College D.*** President D was hired externally and came to the state in 2003 to assume the presidency. President D was a white male with an earned PhD in an academic discipline. His previous college experience was devoted largely to teaching at a very large multi-campus community college in another state. Ultimately he assumed an academic vice-presidency at the same institution and served in that role for a number of years prior to his current appointment. While his current college is significantly smaller than his previous institution, the president was able to apply lessons learned at his previous college to his current presidential role. College D was categorized as a small,

rural, two-year college and was located in one of the state's northernmost counties. Although the fall 2012 FTE was less than 1,500 (Carnegie, 2012), the college was regarded as a major force in the community, spearheading a number of economic development initiatives that resulted in both educational and employment opportunities in the region.

***President E/College E.*** President E was a white female who was an external hire to the college in 2007. Her previous professional experience was acquired at two other community colleges within the state, one very large multi-campus college and one small rural college. She began her college career in a grant-funded temporary position at a rural college and progressed to a student services vice-presidency before moving to the very large suburban college where she served as dean of students and then in the area of economic and workforce development. The president credited her breadth of experience with rural, urban, and suburban community and economic development issues for her appointment as president. College E was a rural, medium-size two-year college located in the center of the state. Its Carnegie (2012) classification showed the fall 2012 FTE totalled nearly 5,000. Given its location, the college was positioned to provide educational, community and workforce opportunities to citizens in a three-county region.

***President F/College F.*** As the president of the college since 2008, President F was hired internally, although his previous experience took place within the healthcare sector where he served in a number of capacities, including as CEO. At this college, President F also held a number of positions ranging from teaching to campus administrator and ultimately, to interim president, prior to earning the full presidency.

The president was a white male and possessed an earned doctoral degree. He credited his former CEO experience in the business sector with providing him a variety of experience with budgets, finance, human resource issues, and outreach that are needed in his current role. College F was categorized as a medium two-year rural college with a fall 2012 FTE in excess of 2,500 (Carnegie, 2012). The college was located on the far western side of the state, and similar to College B, was situated in an area that was considered a popular vacation destination. As a result, the college was well positioned to provide educational, recreational, and economic opportunities to a larger constituency than its rural designation might suggest.

**Early Career President—Tenure range: Up to four years in the presidency.**

Of the state's 28 presidencies, 7 of the presidents had served a period of 4 years or less in office. Given the ongoing wave of presidential retirements on a national level as reported by the AACCC (2013) and others, the same trend was observed in this state where one of the presidencies had just turned over and another would do so in the next few months. Thus, for the purposes of this study, 7 presidents were designated as "early career presidents" and had served from 1 month to 4 years in office. As in the preceding categories, a purposeful sample of 3 presidents representing a range of college classifications was identified from this group and was profiled below. The name of the president and of the college were coded for the purposes of anonymity.

***President G/College G.*** Unlike the other presidents in this sample, President G had spent his entire professional career at this college. He was a white male who began his employment at the college as a welding instructor and then worked his way up

through various levels of administration from department chair to center director, then to the occupational dean, the chief academic officer, and then to the presidency. As was the case with one of the presidents profiled earlier, President G was appointed interim president for a short period prior to earning the position outright. He completed a doctoral degree during his tenure at the college. College G was categorized as a medium two-year rural college and was located in the southern central area of the state. The Carnegie FTE for fall 2012 was over 3,300. Unlike a number of other rural colleges, College G was located within a city with a population of over 50,000 with a demonstrated commitment to economic development. Furthermore, the college campus was adjacent to that of a private upper level college, providing its graduates with a bachelor's degree option in the same location. Additionally, several other postsecondary bachelor's degree colleges were situated within a 30-mile radius of this college as well.

***President H/College H.*** President H was an African American male with a varied professional background in academe and public administration who was an external hire to the college. A native of the state, his early career took him from public service and roles within the legislative arena to college and university teaching, college administration, then to a university academic vice-presidency and finally to this presidency. He assumed this position in 2009 and had served these past four years in this role. Having been reared in the state, he earned his PhD at a state university and now had found a comfortable fit in his current presidency. College H was an urban, medium, two-year college. Its Carnegie fall 2012 FTE was over 3,100. While the college was categorized as urban, in reality the campus setting was somewhat rural in nature due to its



wooded location. The college enrollment had remained somewhat steady despite the state's recent downturn in student enrollment. However, the municipality in which the college was located had itself seen an increase in the unemployment rates. As a result, the college was involved heavily in workforce development initiative, both locally and within the larger tri-county area.

***President I/College I.*** This president was a white female who assumed the presidency of College I in 2011. She was an external hire for the college and possessed an earned doctorate. President I brought a blend of K-12, teaching, vocational education, community college administration, workforce development and private college experience to the presidency. Further, she served previously as a community college president in the state for several years, as well as a private college campus leader in another state. This breadth of experience provided her with a unique foundation for her current presidency. College I was categorized as a large urban two-year college. The college's Carnegie fall 2012 FTE was over 8,200 (Carnegie, 2012). The college is located in the most populous region of the state where there were two major state universities and a number of private college located within a 10-mile radius of the main campus. Historically, workforce development and community initiatives had served as key foci for the college.

### **Research Questions and Themes**

The purpose of this research was to address the study's grand tour question: Which leadership skills and characteristics do beginning, mid-career, and senior community college presidents perceive to be essential to lead 21<sup>st</sup> century community

colleges effectively today and how do these perceptions compare to the AACC (2001) guidelines?

To provide answers to the central question, the researcher explored and was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What do sitting presidents perceive to be the most important presidential leadership skills and characteristics required to guide 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges?

RQ2: How do the presidential leadership skills identified by the AACC in 2001 compare to those perceived as important by new, mid-career, and senior community college presidents?

RQ3: What lessons can be learned from sitting presidents regarding important leadership characteristics for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that will provide guidance to boards, potential presidents, and leaders at other institutions?

All the data and feedback obtained from the nine interviews conducted for this study were analyzed by the researcher and five significant themes were identified. Two of the themes related to the first research question. One theme addressed the second research question and two themes were associated with the third research question. The five themes and related subthemes are presented below, along with passages in the words of the participants in rich, thick detail.

**Themes related to research question one.** The first research question was: What do sitting presidents perceive to be the most important presidential leadership skills and characteristics required to guide 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges? This research

question was addressed in interview questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 (see Appendix E). Two themes emerged from these questions and are presented below.

***Theme One—The Renaissance president.*** Although the concept of the “Renaissance man” long has connoted an individual who possesses wide interests and is expert in several areas, today its meaning has broadened to include a person who has acquired profound knowledge or proficiency in more than one field. In a like manner, Lobenstine (2006) offered the associated term “Renaissance soul” to describe a person with multiple passions and the adaptability, creativity and emotional awareness required for success in today’s complex world. Both meanings of the term can be detected in the responses of the presidents.

As the presidents in this Midwestern state sample reported those specific leadership characteristics they believed to be crucial for effective presidential leadership today, consistent answers were noted across all three categories of tenure, as well as throughout college types and classifications. Responses indicated today’s presidents should possess and demonstrate passion for community colleges and for the presidency, along with an array of personal characteristics and skills that could be adapted in response to the demands of the presidency. Two subthemes were identified and are as follows.

*Sub-theme: Passion for the role, with ego kept in check.* Each of the presidents identified the key personal characteristics that have defined their presidencies; chief among these was passion for community colleges. Presidents B, C, E, and I spoke of having a passion for the role of the presidency. They indicated without a passion for the

presidency and for community colleges, the position could easily become a burden. In the words of one of the senior presidents, President B stated:

Number one would be being passionate about what I'm involved with. I cannot imagine doing all of the stuff I have to do as the president if you didn't love it . . . the job requires so much of whomever is sitting in the chair, and if you don't love it, there is no way, I just can't imagine. You don't just do this job unless you really, really want it. So passion would be the number one thing.

Another of the senior presidents, President C, spoke of the passion he possesses for student well-being and success. He indicated he is "a champion of the cause of students who have been challenged by life's circumstances. I know the thing that keeps driving me and keeps me enthused is every day I come to work, I'm going to have a chance to help a student." President I, one of the early presidents, concurred when she indicated, "One critical facet to my presidency [is] passion for the students . . . I am definitely a student advocate."

Similarly, one of the mid-career presidents, Presidents E, echoed these perceptions when she stated

I think you have to have embraced the community college mission. You have to have it be your passion because it's too challenging of a role to be doing it as a job. And I've seen a lot of people try because it was 'a job,' but I don't think it can be a job, it has to be something that you believe fervently in and are passionate about because we're very, very different from other educational institutions.

Given the passion for the position noted by the subjects, several of the presidents revealed they made a concentrated effort to keep their egos well under control. They believed self-confidence constituted an important element in their presidency, yet they also understood mistakes could be made on occasion. As a result, humility and the ability to admit errors and take corrective action constituted important leadership

characteristics for many. President D, a mid-career president, noted, “Humility [is important] as well as exuding confidence without having all the answers. Willingness to learn from others and the willingness to acknowledge mistakes, [although] not to the point where you look like you’re close to paralyzed with self-doubt.”

In a similar manner, early career president G stated:

You have to be humble and keep your ego in check. The more effective you are in doing that, the more effective you are going to be. The more you are able to admit when you’ve made a poor decision or admit when you don’t have the information you need to make a good decision or admit when you’ve made any kind of mistake, people actually appreciate the fact that you are willing to say, ‘You know what, I’ve made this decision, I now have more information, and I am willing to do something other than what I had done previously and change that decision.’ And part of that is keeping your ego in its place.

Senior President A concurred when he offered:

It is surprising the credibility that a president has. I say that even as a president. You know, unless you are totally overwhelmed with your own ego, you kind of underestimate what it means for you to be for or against something. You want to pick and choose carefully what you are for and against,

*Sub-theme: A well-stocked tool-kit is required.* Like the Renaissance men and women of history, community college presidents often feel the need to rely upon the lessons they learned throughout their prior professional experiences. Simply put, they must bring all of their skills, abilities, learned experiences – or “tools” – to the community college presidency to address the significant challenges impacting the office during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The participants provided insights into the specific leadership competencies and tools they believed served them well in the role. Chief among these were a varied professional background, combined with the capability to apply past experiences and

learned skills wherever and whenever needed. An assortment of tools such as the talent to build coalitions and teams, expertise in the art of delegation, skills with problem solving, and proficiency with fiscal management provided significant support to the leader. Given that today's presidents may be faced with such diverse tasks as the development of effective working relationships with the Board and various internal groups, the need to maintain a global view of the organization, the responsibility for fundraising initiatives, and the demand to be media savvy and to address effectively the litigious issues that may arise, the presidents' past experiences and the ability to apply learned lessons as indicated have served the presidents as valuable tools for success.

As President B, a senior president, suggested, "The leader has to be able to maintain a bird's eye view over the whole organization." President B continued:

And I think people want a leader who has that, I want to say world vision of the college, but it encompasses everything, and I can't be one dimensional. I don't believe a president can be one dimensional. You know, there are some presidents who can hang their hat on being so technical, savvy, or the instructional piece, or they have come from the legislature, so they are very political. I would think that that would be very challenging, to be an effective president for a whole college, being one dimensional, or having a single agenda. I just don't think it works for the organization. It may work for them in advancing their agenda, but I don't think it's healthy for the organization.

President G noted:

Community college presidents are working in a very competitive environment and if you want to be successful, you better be competitive and be willing to compete against those who would take your students. You've got [to be] willing to go out and fight for the institution and willing to inspire people and push people, and you go to get people to perform, because if we get lax, we will go out of business. I mean there is a business aspect to this work. As much as I love and am very proud of being an educator, we cannot forget there is a business aspect to this.

As the chief spokesperson for the college, the characteristic of effective preparation was described as critical for a leader by many of the presidents. President B offered, “You have to spend a lot of time remaining current on the issues. And that means engaged with reading, having conversations with your peers and colleagues. You just have to know what those current issues are. That’s important.” President A noted, “I think going into things and being prepared is crucial. When you go to any meeting and you even know the topic of the meeting, if you even know that, you are ahead of half of the people in the room.” President H concurred when he noted his presidential leadership was characterized by “a very high level of accountability [that had] everything to do with how well one performs in a professional environment. You come prepared.”

During the past decade, the speed of the transmission of information—or news—increased to the degree that presidents are forced to proceed with caution when taking any position on a significant issue – whether in writing or through the spoken word. Both senior president A and mid-career president D identified skills addressing media issues to be critical since the president functioned as the spokesperson for the college. President D developed a practice of keeping his Board alerted of his communications with the media.

The president stated:

When I interact with the media and a media person asks me for an interview [regarding] anything other than routine or good news, I will send them in the middle of the week, something I call a *Media Contact Alert*. I was contacted by a reporter on this issue and here are the questions that the reporter asked and the answers that I gave. I do that immediately so . . . that evening’s news broadcast or the paper the next day won’t catch them by surprise.

President E, a mid-career president, reflected upon the president’s need to deal with the litigious environment of today and noted:

Presidents must have the ability to be able to think like an attorney most of the time. You know, we're in a litigious society so you have to have the ability, the characteristic of being able to sense situations that could become very litigious and be able to try to avert that path if at all possible. [A president] should be able to prepare for that in advance so it doesn't happen to you either personally or to your institution.

Finally, President A noted presidents need to reflect continually upon the nature of their personal objectives and motives as the point-person for the college. He suggested:

As president, [ask yourself] the question: 'Are you building your own legend or are you acting in the best interest of the university or the college?' I think that unless you can say that I am here acting in the best interest of the college or the university, then you need to get out. You just need to fold your tent and get out.

*Summary of theme one.* The presidents in the sample provided a variety of insights into their leadership characteristics. The presidents, whether early career, mid-career, or senior, highlighted a continuing passion for community colleges and for the role of the president. They noted also the importance of self-confidence balanced with their efforts to keep their egos in check. They pointed out the importance of those personal characteristics and previous professional experiences—their tool kits—they brought to their current roles and considered key to their success in the presidency. They identified tools such as effective communication styles and an open and accessible nature. Additionally, several of the presidents pointed out other specific characteristics that they developed and relied upon in their leadership. Included were traits such as skill in media-related activities and the over-riding prioritization of the good of the organization over the personal benefit for the president.



*Theme Two—Ability to learn on the job.* Theme Two also addresses Research Question One: What do sitting presidents perceive to be the most important presidential leadership skills and characteristics required to guide 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges? Whether they were serving in the first years—or first decades—of a presidency, the subjects in this study disclosed a number of common discoveries pertaining to presidential leadership. Most notable among these was the detection and identification of competing forces and priorities that challenged the presidents' leadership. Subjects noted the presidency is point position in the organization that must be navigated independently. Presidents revealed that to build a personal support network they were forced to look outside their colleges. Also noted were demands stemming from an increasing personal visibility within the community, to a growing accountability to various internal and external stake-holders, to the sheer weight and urgency of the role. Given the competing forces impacting the role, presidents must present the flexibility and mental agility required to adapt to these evolving pressures. Two subthemes emerged from the interviews and are presented below.

*Sub-theme: Presidents lead alone.* Early-career presidents discussed a phenomenon fairly unique to this tenure group: the solitary role of the presidency despite the need for the president to navigate a broad community spectrum. Demands for transparency within public institutions have resulted in the president living within somewhat of a fishbowl—a type of environment that in turn, serves to isolate the president from his or her constituency. Early-career presidents indicated that their leadership was challenged early in their tenure by a variety of internal and external

pressures that served to insulate and isolate presidents from other members of the college team. President G, an early-career president, reported:

As important as it is to develop a relationship with as many people you can, but you can't have a deep personal relationship with anyone. You are more alone in this job than any other job that you have ever had. There is no question about it. I'll try to explain why that is. One, you never know when you are going to have to make some tough decisions and those type of decisions are even tougher if they impact your friends. So you have to stay away from that because it will keep you from making the right decision for the institution because you let a friendship influence what you need to do.

Senior President B became aware of the public perceptions of the president, both the role and the individual serving in that position. She revealed:

When people in the community see me, they see the college, first and foremost. And I am not foolish enough to think all of them like me, because I'm myself. They really are responding to me initially because I'm the president of the college. So the ego stuff? That goes right out the window. I have the benefit of having lots and lots of contact with very successful and engaging people. That is just a tremendous benefit. But it's because I'm in a role. It's not because everyone really, really wants to hear what this person thinks. It's because I'm in a role, and I need to keep that in perspective.

President H, an early-career president, concurred when he stated:

I think you see some presidents get in trouble because they are not necessarily able to function well with the people, as well as legislators, as well as their employees, the rank and file. They have trouble moving back and forth between them all.

Early career President I noted also that the president stands alone. During challenging times at her college, she understood she needed to build an external support network. As a result, she reached out to other college presidents and CEOs of area organizations.

The one skill that has helped me through all of this is really my alignment with the community and the foundation and the leaders and the county and with a nearby university president. . . . You have to have that network. Clearly, I can't go to the bar with the faculty.

President G supported the concept of the president creating an external support network when he continued:

Earlier in my career when I was a faculty member, I had friends. I have friends no more. So it is kind of fun to get together in a weird way with the community college presidents because they all know that. And whether they knew it going in, they know it after they've been in for any length of time. You have camaraderie there because we can kind of share it. We almost have more of a trust in talking with these other presidents than we have in the people of our own institution because we have that kind of understanding.

*Sub-theme: Adaptation of leadership to the situation.* Many of the forces impacting community college leadership today were not anticipated over a decade ago while many of the sitting presidents were preparing for future leadership roles and at the time when the AACC first released its *Essential Leadership Characteristics* in 2001. Further, a number of the sitting presidents gained their professional experience in other geographic regions or at college types dissimilar to those in which they now serve. As a result, the interview subjects suggested they discovered adaptability and the ability to shift personal styles in response to the needs of the specific college served to be critical leadership skills for the presidency. Despite original expectations, a number of presidents discovered that the reality was not in alignment with their expectations. The presidents' preconceived beliefs did not match the leadership requirements of the positions once accepted.

Senior President A reflected on this issue and the fact he needed to adapt to a different role from that he expected:

When I was coming along and somebody would talk about being a college president, I wouldn't think of an office with papers everywhere. I had in mind a little fireplace over in the corner with a chair, and some great books, and students hovering at my feet on the floor where I would pontificate. Not, rehearsing my lines to the press if we had a shooting. Not looking at the impact of medical care, how we pay part timers, not on all those financial and other sorts of things that I have to do.

In the words of President B, a senior career president who reflected upon her natural leadership style:

Yes, I think I've tempered it . . . my natural inclination would be to respond right away. And I've had to temper that, so that I can give some thought to things. I tell people lots of times, "I need to think about this overnight." I have found that when I have made those rash decisions, and my stomach told me I was making a bad decision, by the next morning, I knew I had made a bad decision. And that goes from a hiring decision, to a simple little decision on what our summer hours should be. I have learned to say, "I need to think that through. Give me until tomorrow. I'll get right back with you." So I have tempered my initial reaction where I thought, "Oh, I have to give them the information right now. I have to make the decision." No, I don't have to do that. I need to think that through and let it go throughout the filters, so that when I make the decision, I feel really good about it.

President C, another senior president, also found his style needed to shift and explained:

Yes, I think when I landed here at the college I was looking for more participation just by the nature of the culture of this community college. I know that people wanted to be involved; I know that's what the trustees were looking for. But there was a time when I had to adjust my leadership style to be more authoritarian and that was when we were seeking some solutions to some major issues here at the college.

I think changes evolve is what's happening in the organizational environment that we are in, so a style of leadership that may have been appropriate ten years ago might not be appropriate now . . . unless you are in the military.

President A continued:

I have had to learn to rely [more upon subordinates]. Now, I am on the road to the state capital, probably 2-3 times a week when it's necessary, but at least 2-3 times a month; I am on a dozen different organizations, boards and what have you. So, you are doing a lot of things, so that means you are not back here at the

ranch actually being operational. So you are now relying on people to do the things that you would do once yourself.

In the words of mid-career president F, who discovered the requirements of his community college presidency demanded leadership skills other than those he relied upon in an earlier professional position:

I have had to explain more. I think by its nature community colleges are very democratic institutions and so I have to go out of my way to explain what we are doing and why, more than I did in my prior life as a hospital administrator. That is not necessarily bad, but it is a bit more thoughtful. One of the biggest differences being in a public institution is being cognizant of the Freedom of Information and the Open Meetings Act. This is relatively different. So that has caused me to rethink timing and approach on a couple of things.

As President E stated from her mid-career vantage point:

There have been very many leadership lessons learned. The president I am today I'm sure is very different from who I was when I took this presidency. There is a whole different animal you become, when you know at the end of the day it is your responsibility to make sure that students learn and employees are satisfied. You feel a huge responsibility for that, and that your communities are satisfied with what it is you're doing. That's a major, major role, so I know that I have shifted, very much in who I am.

Each of the three early-career presidents noted there was little connection between their natural leadership styles and the forces impacting the presidencies, resulting in the need for a personal leadership shift. President I stated, "I think the organization does impact your leadership, just like all leadership studies talk about. And I think every individual on my team impacts my style." She continued to explain and stated,

My natural leadership style is participative [but] you can't use that if you don't have the knowledge base to get to that right now I am going to have to be very different. . . . Nothing is going to change about my intentions, but now I am going to have to be more assertive.

President H was in agreement with the necessity to adapt or shift his natural style to meet the requirements of his presidency and explained,

It's a different relationship when you are the single point of reference for the board within the structure of everything that happens on campus. That was something I had to learn and grow into, how to relate to the individual board members and with the board as a whole.

According to early-career president G, when he assumed the presidency he discovered a pressing need to change his existing leadership behaviors. As a result, he became more aggressive on behalf of his college. He indicated:

You've got to bring someone who is willing to go out and fight for the institution and willing to inspire people and push people, and you go to get people to perform, because if we get lax, we will go out of business. I mean there is a business aspect to this work. As much as I love and am very proud of being an educator, we cannot forget there is a business aspect to this. We can feel good about what we do and will be doing it for very few students.

*Summary of theme two:* The information gleaned from the presidents' perceptions shared during the interview process indicated that the presidents discovered the nature of the position of college president greatly impacted their personal leadership in a number of ways. While most of the presidents believed they understood the demands of the position prior to assuming the office, reality served to temper those original beliefs in two notable ways.

First, although the concept of teamwork was much discussed in the literature of leadership, all of the early-career presidents disclosed they came to realize that the presidency tended to represent a somewhat solitary role. This same perception was not reported by the mid-career or senior career presidents.

Second, it was revealed that the presidents believed their natural leadership characteristics needed to adapt when assuming a new presidency in response to a combination of external and internal forces impacting the presidency. Senior presidents reflected on their leadership shifts. President A began to rely more heavily upon his delegation skills; President B adopted a more measured response to issues, enabling her to reflect upon decisions before sharing her thoughts. And President C became more authoritarian. Mid-career President E sensed an evolution in her style; President D saw no real change in his leadership; and President F also became more thoughtful while he took more time to explain to his staff. Finally, the early-career President H shifted his leadership in recognition of his role as the college point of reference for the Board while Presidents G and President I discovered a need to alter their natural style to become more assertive (President I) and aggressive (President G).

**Theme related to research question two.** The second research question was: How do the presidential leadership skills identified by the AACC in 2001 compare to those perceived as important by new, mid-career, and senior community college presidents? This research question was addressed in the interviews by the following questions: 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 (see Appendix E). The following theme emerged from the interviews and is presented below.

***Theme Three—Consistency of views about leadership.*** Based upon the feedback from the subjects, the researcher sought to uncover two threads of responses related to this question. First, how did sitting presidents perceive that the AACC 2001 leadership characteristics played out in their presidencies of today? Secondly, were the presidents’

perceptions of the AACC leadership characteristics similar or different depending upon their length of tenure in the presidency as categorized by early, mid-career or senior?

Responses to the interview questions revealed that the subjects' opinions and perceptions of the fundamental leadership characteristics and skills first endorsed by the AACC in 2001 were quite similar across the board. This despite the fact that the sitting community college presidents from the sample group presented not only a tenure differential, but also a range of gender, institutional size and type, and geographical differences. Further, subjects presented varying professional backgrounds, individual career paths and differing personal leadership styles.

However, the presidents' responses also revealed their perceptions of a number of additional personal or interpersonal presidential leadership characteristics not included in the original AACC list of 2001. It was in these responses that a notable difference in perception between senior presidents and early-career presidents could be observed (See Table 5). The major 2001 AACC categories of leadership characteristics were divided into five categories: Understanding and implementing the community college vision, effective advocacy, administrative skills, community and economic development, and personal skills. The presidents at all levels of presidential tenure universally endorsed these 2001 AACC leadership categories and provided examples of the ways in which these leadership categories play out today.

*Community college mission and vision.* All presidents in the sample were in agreement that the mission of the community college not only provided the foundation upon which the colleges were built, but also played a major role in their presidential



leadership today. There was a very strong general consensus that the president must understand and implement that vision, both internally and externally, to build support across the various college constituencies. President C replied, “Well, you have to wear [the mission] on your sleeve, because everywhere you go, internally and externally, you’re conveying that mission and selling the mission and reminding your external public why it’s a good college.”

In a similar vein, early-career President H stated:

The college vision impacts it directly. I think sometimes the college can lose focus on what the vision of the institution is or more fundamentally, the mission. We serve individual, community and global needs in terms of providing the undergraduate education that we do here at the college, and that’s sort of a very short version of our mission. Keeping the focus on that, we are serving our students and community.

Support for the concept of keeping a continual focus on the vision and mission of the college was provided by President E, who noted that the college’s mission and vision “are at the very basic foundation of the role.” She added:

You have to come at [the mission] from saying this is what I’ve chosen, this is what I believe is a wonderful social good and I’m going to work through all that that means, and the strands of that go so deep into the communities and how you are supported or not supported by the surrounding communities. I don’t think you can do this job effectively unless you really and passionately understand and believe in the community college vision.

Finally, President F appeared to sum up succinctly the opinions of all of the presidents related to the vision and mission of the college when he replied, “It is important. You need to have a belief why the college exists and how it exists to benefit the community. The vision of what we are and what we hope to be is very, very important.”

*Effective advocacy.* To understand the critical importance of college development and fundraising and to function as an effective communicator of those critical issues with communities, legislators and others remain of vital importance to presidents today—perhaps even more so than during previous decades. As enrollment numbers continue to drop at the same time as property values and tax revenue sources decline, presidents are challenged to procure alternate funding sources to ensure the financial viability of the college.

Each of the presidents indicated advocacy constituted a major part of their role, one which they considered to be critical. Early career president H indicated:

I spend a third of my time off campus and that's where community college presidents have changed the presidency more generally. Before they were spending time on campus, managing the institution and ensuring that everything that needed to happen on campus happened when it should have happened, and those operations were effective and efficient. Now, it's more important that we advocate for our institution to various groups, not just the legislature, but with the community foundation, regional groups, ecumenical institutions and so forth, and you can't do that sitting in an office.

I have been told that I am the most active president, at least in the 20 years, and maybe before that, out there just burning shoe leather. That's the only way that I am going to find out what these various groups believe is to get there and ask them directly, what do you think of campus, bringing community members into the fold, serve on boards. I serve on 11 boards right now, actually 12. It keeps me busy, but it is important that I serve with these groups to better understand what their needs are. Then, I'm involved in community activities directly, so that I understand what happens sort of on the ground as opposed to simply by talking to board members from other organizations. That allows me to advocate for the college and allows me to have some outside of the institution.

In a similar vein, Presidents B, D and E representing senior and mid-career categories, endorsed the necessity for presidents to serve as skilled and informed advocates for their institutions, internally and externally, within the college, the local community, the state, and even on a national level. Senior president B indicated,

“Advocacy is one of the areas that has grown tremendously. The relationship with the legislators has become much more demanding and requiring considerably more contact on my part to make sure that they are fully aware of our college’s needs and our understanding of some of the issues.”

In the words of mid-career President E,

It [became clear it] was very, very critical that we build a new campus in a neighboring city. It was the one thing that I could most directly do to ensure the long-term stability of this institution. And so being able to advocate in the state legislature to bring that about, to be able to pull together the communities to support a capital campaign, was extremely important. I think being able to tell a story in minutes, vividly, to be able to support it with bullet points and that you can talk to people quickly and have them grasp, and to really show your passion in it is important. But it is something that is used every day, and I can’t imagine being effective if you couldn’t do that.

As President D, a mid-career president, revealed, the president should demonstrate total comprehension and be able to express the needs of his/her college to various constituencies. He shared the following:

The plus side of [my advocacy] is that it is ever so much more persuasive, convincing and authentic for a legislator to hear from a college president rather than a hired gun who also has other clients. The minus, the proposal that we followed, we are far away and I get down to the state capital once or twice a month at best and the lobbyists are there every day. However, it has turned out to be a kind of role that I enjoy. I have gotten a lot of encouragement.

According to President F, advocacy for the college has been all-encompassing and it demands a concentrated effort. To this mid-career president, advocacy remains at the forefront of his numerous leadership tasks.

I see it as my job, so not only serving in the community as the college’s chief advocate, out talking to community groups or influential individuals, but also talking to our elected state legislators, that being senators, members of the house or even the governor and his staff. I see that as being a very critical role with our congressman and his staff. When there is an issue percolating at the federal level,

I just kind of give him an idea of what is going on. I am making it local so that they understand the ramifications.

*Administrative skills.* While administrative skills may connote the types of routine tasks associated with the operations of any business venture, they have long served a critical purpose in higher education. Included in this set of skills as put forth by the AACC are governance, personnel issues, organizational development, promotion of diversity, and CEO oversight of the core educational functions of the college, such as the promotion of teaching and learning and the management of technology.

When reflecting upon the various administrative skills required of the community college president, all of the presidents in the early, mid-career and senior groups pointed out the importance of day-to-day management skills. President B observed,

I would definitely say shared governance and board relations [are essential] since I have seen presidents experience some very difficult and challenging times. It's where they have not taken the time to develop the board relationships, and that relationship cannot be overstated.

President I also endorsed the need for the president to hone personnel and labor relations matters.

President A, a senior president, volunteered the following observations regarding a unique administrative skill:

One of them, which isn't on the list of the usual sets of skills that people have, I will call "the speed of credibility." In other words, while you don't want to do things precipitously, you don't want to drag your feet on things; especially if there is some implied promise in doing so. The faster you take on something that you said you are going to do or that you believe in, and the sooner people see tangible evidence that it has occurred, the more you will be credible in all circumstances. They will just simply say, well he said that he is going to do that and he did.

This president continued to comment:

I think also people expect from administration a knowledge base that is beyond the particular school or even the category of school that you are running. No one wants to know anybody who just knows community colleges really. You want to know something about four years, privates, proprietaries, and K-12. You want to know something about all of those things. So people are looking for a breadth of knowledge, that I think lots of folks overlook.

*Community and economic development.* Given the role and responsibility of the community college to support the workforce and economic development of its community, all of the presidents strongly endorsed this characteristic. President C stated, “One way or the other, it’s all the time.” President B mentioned that community and economic development is “very important for community colleges. We have to be linked with the community is we are going to know what their workforce needs are.” In very few words President I replied, “This is huge!” And president E added, “Regarding the whole workforce development part of economic development, if we want to do some things in our region, this college has got to be supporting those economic needs.”

Finally, President G, one of the early-career presidents, added:

I think community and economic development impact my leadership greatly. One, the community values that. It also helps when you have that connection to that element of the community, that aspect of the community, and the people at our organization attach more credibility to me. Personally, it works for me and makes me a little more effective in the job I do here. The community college is a major player, has a major economic development impact on the community. We are a part of what draws employers to this community, the services that we provide. No question about that.

*Personal, interpersonal, and transformational characteristics.* The characteristics of accessibility and approachability were highlighted by Presidents A, B, D, F, and I. As president D noted, “I am friendly, accessible, reaching out to people.” When considering advice for future presidents, President I pointed out, “I think you have to be

approachable. But I do think that when you walk into a new presidency, you have to understand there is a culture there already.” Finally, President F added:

I think people perceive me to be very approachable. I don’t try to set myself apart as the president. I see myself as just one of the other managers in the organization. I don’t have a separate parking spot. I don’t have any of the trappings that people oftentimes ascribe to as a president.

Communication across the college constituency, with a focus on listening, was revealed by Presidents A, B, D, G, H and I as key characteristics of their presidencies. As President G stated, “I think that that skill, to be able to communicate, is critically important for your success as a leader and as a college president.” President H offered his reflections that focused on communication when he stated, “I don’t just take the word of a memo or email that I receive. I actually have a conversation with people and invite them here. That makes a major difference more than anything else that I have done.”

As President D recalled, when he first assumed his presidency, he employed one of his key leadership characteristics—listening. He further explained

I hit the ground listening, which was the phrase that I used when I first came. I was very candid about . . . I basically what I said was I am not going to hit the ground running. I am new to this position and new to this part of the country. For me to hit the ground running, would probably mean I would be running in the wrong direction.

*Additional leadership characteristics outside of the AACC 2001 list.* The respondents offered the following list of personal leadership characteristics in addition to those put forth by the AACC that they perceived important to their presidencies today. Included in this category were:

- Approachable, adaptable
- Aggressive, competitive
- Communication/Listening skills

- Grit
- Humility/Humbleness/Ability to admit mistakes and learn from others
- Passion for the presidency/Commitment to the role
- Professional preparation/Wide range of experience
- Stamina/strength/persistence/perseverance/healthy living
- Stress/physical demands of the position

Of these additional characteristics, the presidents all endorsed (100%) the traits of approachability and adaptability; the necessity to present a wide and diverse set of professional skills, honed through a broad array of previous professional experiences; and the combined traits of stamina, strength, healthy living, and grit. Interestingly, all of the early-career presidents commented on the stress inherent in the role, with only some (66%) of the mid-career presidents and none of the senior presidents in agreement.

Table 5

*Perceptions of Sitting Presidents of Additional Personal Leadership Characteristics*

State Presidents: Subgroups by Tenure Category	Approach- able and Adaptable	Stress, Phys. Dem- ands	Humility, Ego-Free, Admit Mistakes	Wide Past Experience, Come Prepared	Passionate About Role, Commitment	Stamina, Strength, Health and Fitness, GRIT
Senior Presidents						
3 Senior	100%	0%	33%	100%	66%	100%
Mid-Career Presidents						
3 MidCareer	100%	66%	100%	100%	66%	100%
Early Presidents						
3 Early Pres.	100%	100%	33%	100%	100%	100%

(Key: Percentage of each presidential tenure category endorsing characteristic when N=3)

*Summary of theme three.* An array of important leadership characteristics for 21<sup>st</sup> century presidents was released by the AACC in 2001. As the sitting presidents at three tenure stages reflected upon their personal leadership, they gave consideration to the skills associated with community college advocacy, college vision and mission, administrative skills, and community and economic development as posed in 2001 by the AACC. Each presidential interview revealed a strong commitment to these characteristics in their presidencies today and further provided perspectives on the additional personal and interpersonal characteristics they believed essential for today's presidents.

**Themes related to research question three.** The third research question was: What lessons can be learned from sitting presidents regarding important leadership characteristics for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that will provide guidance to boards, potential presidents, and leaders at other institutions? This research question was addressed in the interviews by questions 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, and 12 (see Appendix E). Themes Four and Five emerged from the interviews and are presented below.

***Theme Four—All-consuming nature of the role.*** Each of the nine presidents revealed remarkably similar perceptions of the strenuous leadership role and responsibilities associated with the presidency today, a role they believe that continues to change in response to societal challenges. Responses identified factors impacting the presidency that ranged from the depth and breadth of the work, to the time and energy commitments required of the president, and to the demands related to the multiple internal and external pressures of the presidency. Two subthemes emerged from the participant interviews and are discussed.



*Sub-theme: The big leap.* The senior, mid-career and early presidents all indicated they discovered a discrepancy between their original perceptions of presidential leadership and the reality. They noted the presidency and the leadership required by that role was significantly different than their original expectations. They came to find presidential leadership more personally consuming, complex, and demanding than expected prior to assuming the post. As a result, the presidents determined they needed to take a giant step forward to meet the requirements of the position. President G, an early-career president, stated:

Of all the leadership positions that I have had, I certainly would have to separate this from the rest. That last step is a very, very large step. And you really don't anticipate that as much as people might warn you. You think, well you don't get the view from the chair until you are sitting in the chair. And I think one of the lessons you learn very quickly is that you have to give your life to the position.

Other presidents agreed with this assessment. President F, a mid-career president, suggested there is a lack of a general comprehension about the physical demands of the position. He stated, "There is not a lot of recognition about that. These are jobs that can chew you up physically. So individuals aspiring to the presidency need to have a degree of healthy behaviors and ability to burn off stress."

During the recruitment process for the presidency, the presidents indicated they believed it to be critical that the scope of the presidency was clearly articulated to candidates so there were no misperceptions or misunderstandings when the new president determines whether or not to accept the position. President I stated her concern that prospective presidents often are not provided with a clear vision of the nature of the president's role before making the decision whether to accept an offer. She would advise

boards to make certain to inform the candidates of the nature of the position at that particular college. While the institutional culture can vary greatly from one college to another, as President I stated, sometimes prospective presidents “might not have taken that position if they had known its scope.”

Senior president A reflected upon the challenges he faced after assuming the role:

I thought I was very well prepared for this job. I thought that between the schooling and the experience that I knew just about everything there was to know. But, that wasn't true. The whole finessing, political, persuasive, big visionary stuff came as a result of having worked on the job. Certainly, in my early career I would never have envisioned spending \$20-\$30 million dollars in a single summer. It is thinking bigger and longer. It is more a legacy as opposed to projects, tasks, and the need to get it done. So, I guess that's a change.

President D considered his personal experience and lessons learned during the early days of his presidency when he offered the following advice to prospective presidents:

The presidency is a very demanding position and some lose sight of that. And some are exhausted and could make bad decisions as a result. Family and faith are important. Financial issues and disciplinary issues are difficult. On the other hand, there are tremendous rewards. The president is entrusted with heavy responsibilities which can be very fulfilling. Ask yourself if you are ready for that pressure. Take intermediate steps.

*Sub-theme: Motivation to Do the Presidency vs. Be the President.* Those who aspire to a community college presidency today do so for any number of reasons, both personal and professional. Leaders can be driven by a variety of personal goals, objectives and motivations. Research has shown that effective leaders possess the passion to communicate the vision and serve as the point person for the organization, whether in a corporate setting, the public sector or in higher education. The subjects in

this study indicated today's college presidency requires a total commitment of the leader to the college, to the community, and to the role of the president.

President B articulated the distinction between “doing” the presidency and “being” the president when she questioned whether the egos of certain college presidents might impact their performance negatively.

There are some people who want to BE the president and then there are some people who want to DO what you have to do in the role of the president. And I don't know exactly how to verbalize that other than to state some people really get wrapped up in ‘I am the president’ and I really think that is a hindrance. The person in the job needs to like to do the things that the president does. A lot of it is just hard work and if a person did not really like to do this work, I don't know why anyone would stay in this job.

If the president's goals and objectives are not in line with the demands of the presidency, or if the major motivation to seek the presidency was to BE the president, it is likely turnover will occur quickly. In the words of President E who echoed the sentiments expressed by the previous president, “I would say that anyone who goes after a presidency so that they can be called President ‘X’ and takes a presidency without considering fit, is not doing the right thing for either the institution or themselves.”

President G, early-career president, continued to expound upon the necessity for the president to immerse himself or herself in the role when he stated:

I think one of the lessons you learn very quickly is you learn that you have to give your life to the position. You concede your life to the position. You have to stop separating the person you are from the position you are in. That sounds harsh and maybe it even sounds scary to people, but you have to begin living as the president of the institution and you don't try to fight, kind of for this, I want my home life and then my life as president. You've got to say, no this is just who I am, the job is literally 24/7, 365, and that is just who you are. And so when you kind of give into that, you don't worry about when you get home at night. You don't worry about coming in on the weekend. You don't worry about attending events constantly and being in more places than you ever imagined you can be.

Clearly the fit between any specific presidency and the president holding the office is critical. The president who assumes a presidency for the title rather than the role may become frustrated or dissatisfied. President E expanded upon this phenomenon when she stated,

I read about it every day that a lot of presidents are stepping down by choice, or are being asked to step down and at a very short time into their terms. I mean you fall hard on a sword when you fall as a president so you better make sure it's right before you go. . . . Then for professionals who are seeking a community college presidency I think you have to have embraced the community college mission. You have to have it be your passion because it's too challenging a role to be doing it as a job. I mean you have to just recognize, this is your mission, this is your role, this is your life's work to want to do that. Don't do it because you think that being called president of something is what you need. You won't be happy.

The president and the institution must constitute the right fit for many reasons, not the least of which is the turnover that can accompany a bad fit. Once the president either has chosen or is asked to step down there exists a disruption throughout the college. As President A noted:

You see some institutions around the country that have had president, after president, after president. They all didn't quit. I think every time you have that turnover there is a major disruption, not just among the staff and for that president and for that board, but also for the students and to any direction that that president was able to steer for however briefly he or she was at the helm.

*Summary of theme four:* The subjects gave consideration to the demands impacting their presidential leadership today. Further, they described the pressures that were encountered, along with the leadership tools they employed to address those pressures. Some of the presidents believed they were not fully informed of the scope of the particular position during the recruitment process, while others expressed surprise regarding the level of commitment necessary. The critical importance of the motivation

of the leader to function in the role of the presidency was highlighted, with several presidents stressing the need to focus on performing effectively in the office as opposed to prioritizing the perceived glory associated with the presidential position.

***Theme five—Looking ahead.*** The third research question concerned lessons that can be learned from sitting presidents regarding important leadership characteristics for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that will provide guidance to boards, potential presidents, and leaders at other institutions. All of the presidents in the sample, whether serving in the presidency for only 3 years or as many as 13 years, touched upon the ever-increasing demands of the presidency and the leadership skills required to meet those challenges effectively. There was a consensus among the presidents that a college presidency has become an extremely challenging position today which places a multitude of demands upon the president. Two sub-themes surfaced from the dialogue and are presented in the words of the presidents.

*Sub-theme: Advice to prospective presidents and boards.* The subjects endorsed the personal leadership characteristics first espoused by the AACC in 2001. However when considering the societal forces impacting higher education today, they also pinpointed additional characteristics and behaviors they considered critical for today's community college leaders that could provide guidance for the future. In consideration of these factors, the presidents offered the following advice to future presidents and boards.

Advice for prospective presidents, according to Senior President C, included the necessity for a president, especially a new president, to function as though he or she remained an applicant for the presidency at all times. President C iterated:

At the top of all that is lead as though you were term limited. And the reason why I say that is, out in the community, you are much like a politician. And working

the community is crucial when the tax payers know that 60% of your revenue comes from them. So the best face for the community is to keep the community informed about what's going on at the college, how you're enriching the lives of students, and how perhaps they can get engaged in future planning for the college.

President A, another of the senior president subgroup, stressed the importance that an incoming or prospective president should research and reflect upon the numerous leadership challenges faced by 21<sup>st</sup> century community college presidents prior to accepting a presidency. He suggested:

I think there is a need for future presidents to talk about all the things we just mentioned and ask themselves the question, do you want to operate in that environment? When I was coming along and somebody would talk about being a college president, I wouldn't think of an office with papers everywhere. I had in mind a little fireplace over in the corner with a chair, and some great books, and students hovering at my feet on the floor where I would pontificate. Not, rehearsing my lines to the press if we had a shooting. Not looking at the impact of medical care, how we pay part timers, not on all those financial and other sorts of things that I have to do.

In the words of early-career president G:

You know there is a trait that I don't remember seeing in the AACC list here that I think has actually served me well. I think you have to be competitive. Not necessarily aggressive. I am not quite sure how to capture this. I certainly espouse to the whole concept of continuous improvement and it has got to be important to the institution. You have to be a driven person to want to do that. You can't come into the job and manage the institution. To lead it, you have to be, and I'm going back to the word competitive, you want to take the institution forward, so you have to provide leadership.

President G further indicated:

My advice to [prospective presidents] would be to engage in all that you can. The broader your experiences, the more valuable you will be. I mean you really have to . . . you can't just have a lot of experience in one area. You've got to kind of branch out as best you can. You got to kind of broaden . . . do not be afraid to be involved in all that you can. I mean that you just can't put too much. It's not putting stuff on your resume. It's having those experiences that really make your ability to react, adapt, and be flexible, and make decisions. You've got to reach back in the experiences that you had, the rich experiences that you've had.

Mid-career President D added, “Make sure you have the strength, the will and the fortitude to take care of yourself.” Another of the mid-career presidents, President E, offered the following advice to prospective presidents:

[Undertake] a lot of exploration, that whole cultural thing, about where it is you’re going, is really important to figure out before you get there. I’ll read it every day in the Chronicle, a lot of presidents are stepping down, and being asked to step down and very short into their terms, I mean you fall hard on a sword when you fall as a president so you better make sure it’s right before you go.

President F offered another dimension when he provided the following advice to prospective presidents:

They need to go actually talk to presidents, multiple presidents to find out what the job really is because no one wants someone who will fail in the position. It doesn’t do them or the organization any good. There is an inertia that sets in for about a year or two when there is a presidential change. At a time of high change in the industry that can be bad.

When considering advice for Boards, the presidents offered a number of suggestions. According to President H, an early-career president, “If a Board really wants to be helpful, they need to educate themselves in terms of policy, of collaborative governance, and what an institution truly needs. That is one thing that they could do to make a difference in every president’s life.” President I, an early-career president, stated her concern that Boards often do not provide prospective presidents with a clear vision of the nature of the president’s role before the prospect makes the decision whether to accept an offer. She would advise boards to make certain to inform the candidates of the nature and requirements of the position at that particular college.

Mid-career President E seconded this advice when she added her suggestions concerning the Board’s presidential selection process:

I think the boards have to be really, really candid in being able to tell prospective candidates what it is they need. And so that means they need to talk among themselves about their institution and figure out, it's not just someone with a certain credential or because you happen to like the way they talk during interviews or whatever, it's really figuring out what your institution needs and who can best do that for the institution. And so that takes some time pre-planning the presidency before you even put out the posting. So that you are consistent in the message you are sending a candidate. And then take the time to be able to really size up if that candidate has those kinds of traits and competencies and characteristics that you want.

Senior Presidents B and C concurred regarding presidential selection. President B suggested, "For the boards, I would be very, very clear with my advice in that they are hiring a president to do the president's job. Let him or her do that job." And President C built upon that advice when he offered,

For the hiring boards, pick the president who seems to be the best fit for your institution. Because that's usually what it boils down to when you're down to finalists . . . is which one of these candidates is going to be the best fit for our institution

President F, a mid-career president noted:

The boards need to think through what is important to them and pay close attention to how they enter into a contractual relationship with the president and think of it in the context of it doesn't work, and the contractual buyout or the exit plan, and have thought that well through so that if things do go bad, they are not sitting there doing nothing or just screwing things up even worse than they are. Their sole job is policy and the hiring of the CEO.

*Sub-theme: Presidents need grit.* Outside of the leadership characteristics revealed by the AACC in 2001 and endorsed by the sitting presidents in the sample, as well as other traits recommended by the subjects and discussed earlier, the interview responses disclosed the presidents all shared an over-riding perception that a combination of perseverance, will-power, determination and persistence was required to function successfully in the presidency. Interview responses indicated numerous internal and



external forces are competing for the president's time, attention and support. To address these demands and achieve desired outcomes, presidents must draw upon their natural strengths and focus on their goals. Subjects suggest that despite challenges and obstacles, presidents should focus on maintaining their health, while displaying consistent persistence, perseverance, and grit.

In the words of early-career President G:

Sunday is my work day. I come in here. I routinely spend 5-6 hours here on a Sunday and thoroughly enjoy it because I can do all the desk work that I need to do that I can't do during the day, during the week, because I just feel that it is too important to engage the people in this institution during the day during the week. I've got to be moving around, whether in the community or in the college. But that's okay. I'll give up my Sundays for that. That's alright.

Stamina and fitness were identified consistently by the presidents as critical for their success—or possibly even their survival—in the presidencies of today. The following factors were noted by Senior President C in response to the inquiry about his key leadership behaviors.

Stamina. Fitness. That's one of my personal pillars. Stamina, fitness, it always has been, because it clears your mind. And from the broadcast business I read a long time ago that Walter Cronkite wrote that his success was attributed to his stamina as a farm boy. He was recognized at a broadcast of a national political convention in Kansas. CBS noticed this young guy on the radio who had been there in the morning when they started, there at night when they finished, and it went day after day. They said, "My God, the guy doesn't even go to the bathroom." Well, he said it was his farm boy stamina. And he was recognized for that, and I've never forgotten that, because in leadership roles, leaders don't consider when they need a rest. If the job needs to be done, you've got to be out there.

While reflecting upon his early days in the presidency, President G noted the various pressures and stressors impacting his role. He shared the following observation:

I would not want to relive my first year as president again. It was an extremely stressful year. The second year was better and now I have finally started to get my stride in the third year. . . . Then there is another little stressor about our state that you talk about. You are only a 4-3 vote away from not having your job every month.

Similar views were echoed by mid-career President E, who considered the importance of the prospective president possessing the right fit when she stated:

If you're playing a role every day that is so far outside of where your natural strengths are, you have such dissonance going on internally that you're not, you're either not going to be successful or you're not going to be very healthy and satisfied and happy. And you need to be both.

While reflecting upon the nature of "grit," which suggests working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining persistence toward goals despite adversity (Duckworth et al., 2007), senior president B commented, "Definitely, I believe that grit is a critical characteristic for a president to be successful. Grit sums up exactly what I intended." In a similar vein, President E revealed "'Grit' is exactly the right word!" President G concurred and stated, "I love the definition of grit! And I believe that it should be considered a key leadership trait or even qualification." President H shared his perspective of grit when he noted,

Grit . . . definitely is a characteristic I believe would serve prospective new presidents. A president needs to maintain a long term vision for his/her institution. This helps to deflect the many issues that may cause a loss of focus on goals to be accomplished. A flexible and living strategic plan along with grit can be of high value in this regard.

Further, President I then stated:

Grit is a fine label for the energy that I keep trying to describe. The answer is whether grit is a required characteristic is a resounding 'yes.' Without it a leader would crumble at the first challenge or what appears to be a barrier. It is what keeps me going. A colleague of mine called me this morning and said that she admired my strength and perseverance in the face of adversity. She went on to

say that she regrets that she walked away from the challenges and obstacles that came her way. If a president believes in the community and college she is serving then she/he has to persist to do what is the best for the organization even if it is fraught with challenges. If the position of president was easy, there wouldn't be so many job openings that are so very difficult to fill in the present and the predicted shortage in the near future. 'Grit' along with the other skills leaders must possess is what makes a leader effective.

While each of the nine presidents spoke of the high level of energy, stamina, and personal commitment to maintaining a healthy lifestyle required to function adequately in the office, one president indicated he remained skeptical of the designator, "grit," as the best descriptor of this situation. Instead, President D suggested:

Surely there are times when presidents need to exhibit grit, times when it could be reprehensible for them not to be gritty. However, as a consistent core characteristic, this characteristic has potential for doing more harm as good. It's one that comes to the fore when a person is in danger of being overwhelmed by contrary, negative forces. Compared with a consistently gritty president, one who is canny enough to stay out of those situations looks better to me. There's a finesse, grace, urbanity, and infectious spirit of fun in presidents I admire most, and those who manage to get the most done. So I remember the counsel of [a former mentor], who modeled the trait on bringing out the best in those around him. Grit can accomplish that sometimes, but not as often or as well as the other characteristics I'm mentioned.

He continued to comment:

I would not hesitate to list stamina as an important presidential trait – almost to the point where it goes without saying. I like the term stamina also because it connotes staying care of oneself, pacing oneself, being good for the duration. As Blake said, 'Energy is eternal delight.'

Conversely, Senior President A summed up the expressed viewpoints of the other eight presidents when observed:

Oh yes, absolutely grit is an appropriate term to apply to the presidency. True achievement is about the long haul; having persistence; to be able to modify a position without modifying the goal. People need to see connection and belief in what you do in your behavior. Otherwise, they will not adopt or follow your

direction. There is nothing more satisfying to leader or follower than to see a goal or a prediction come to fruition after years of effort.

*Summary of theme five:* All of the presidents made note of the heavy responsibilities associated with the presidential leadership role. They spoke of the competitive environment present in the community college sector today and of the demands placed upon the presidents to lead their colleges through these turbulent times. Many of the sitting presidents indicated that future presidents need to ask themselves whether the position of president would provide a good fit with their personal leadership characteristics and goals; additionally they recommended that Boards endeavor to understand and accurately convey the leadership needs of their colleges to prospective presidents to ensure the best possible fit occurs. And finally, all of the presidents stressed the necessity that presidents make a commitment to personal fitness, stamina, and a healthy lifestyle, given the ongoing requirements for perseverance, persistence and grit inherent in the presidency.

### **Overview of the Findings**

The researcher sought to discover the perceptions of sitting community college presidents from one state regarding their important leadership characteristics, as well as learn how those perceptions might compare and/or contrast with the 2001 presidential leadership characteristics formulated and presented by the American Association of Community Colleges. Participants were selected purposefully from various areas of the state and from differing college sizes and classifications as representative of one of three levels of presidential career tenure—early, mid-career or senior presidents. Each of the participants took part in a personal interview with the researcher and the resulting audio

files were transcribed and analyzed. The findings were presented above in the rich thick detail of the participants' own words.

Table 6 graphically reveals the perceptions of each of the nine presidents as related to the five AACC essential leadership characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> century presidents published in 2001. Participants, grouped by tenure category, clearly endorsed the AACC

Table 6

*Perceptions of Sitting Presidents of AACC 2001 Leadership Characteristics*

State Community College Presidents: Subgroups by Tenure	AACC Mission & Vision	AACC Effective Advocacy	AACC Admin. Skills	Community/ Economic Develop.	AACC Personal Skills
Senior Presidents					
Senior President A	XX	XX	X	XX	#
Senior President B	XX	XX	X	XX	X
Senior President C	XX	XX	X	XX	#
Mid-Career Presidents					
Mid-Career President D	XX	XX	X	XX	X
Mid-Career President E	XX	XX	X	XX	X
Mid-Career President F	XX	XX	X	XX	#
Early-Career Presidents					
Early President G	XX	XX	X	XX	X
Early President H	XX	XX	X	XX	X
Early President I	XX	XX	X	XX	X

(Key: Strongly Endorse=XX; Endorse=X; Somewhat endorse=#; Do not endorse=O)

leadership categories (AACC, 2001) which include: understanding and implementing the community college mission; effective advocacy; administrative skills; community and

economic development; and personal, interpersonal, and transformational skills. Additionally, the presidents disclosed a number of leadership characteristics not presented in the AACC's 2001 list that they consider critical to their leadership today. These characteristics were discussed previously and outlined in Table 5.

The findings were presented in accordance with themes that arose from the participant's words. Each of the themes was reported and associated with one of the three research questions: What do sitting presidents perceive to be the most important presidential leadership skills and characteristics required to guide 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges? How do the presidential leadership skills identified by the AACC in 2001 compare to those perceived as important by new, mid-career, and senior community college presidents? What lessons can be learned from sitting presidents regarding important leadership characteristics for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that will provide guidance to boards, potential presidents, and leaders at other institutions?

Table 7 provides a brief summary of the findings of this study and is arranged by each of the research questions to offer a succinct comparison of perceptions of the sitting presidents representing early-career, mid-career, and senior tenure levels.

Table 7

*Summary of the Findings*

Research Questions	Findings
Question One: Current Leadership Skills	Senior, mid-career and early presidents believed that passion for the presidency and community colleges, self-confidence tempered with humility, and tools such as varied professional background and the ability to learn on the job are critical for leaders today. Additionally, all three subgroups identified effective Board relations, media skills, and the ability to navigate in a litigious environment as important to their presidencies. All subgroups also stressed it was important to develop and maintain positive working relationships with internal and external constituencies and with the Board.
Question Two: AACC Characteristics	Senior, mid-career and early presidents strongly endorsed five 2001 AACC leadership characteristics as important for presidents today: Implementing the community college mission and vision; effective advocacy; administrative skills; community and economic development; and personal skills. Of the subgroups, the three Early-career presidents stressed the discovery that they needed to shift their own leadership styles to meet the demands of the position helped to shape and define their presidencies. All Early Presidents and no Senior Presidents called the position both solitary and stress-filled.
Question Three: Guidance for the Future	Senior, mid-career and early presidents all stressed that prior expectations cannot serve as a valid indicator of the nature and demands of any particular presidency. All participants found the role to be both different and more challenging than expected, causing presidents to adapt. Prospective presidents were advised to research the role thoroughly to determine if the fit were right; Boards were advised to assess and disclose the true scope of the position to candidates to help secure the right fit. Critical advice for new presidents was to recognize the stress associated with this all-consuming role; focus on maintaining healthy lifestyles; and plan to apply their presidential grit to the rigors of the presidency.

*(Source: Subject interview data from nine sitting community college presidents.)*

## Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the research and served to shed light on the leadership perceptions of sitting community college presidents from one Midwestern state, serving in various phases of their presidencies. The participants and their colleges

were described with a broad brush to provide context for the interviews, while still protecting the anonymity of the subjects. Five themes and associated subthemes were identified. Perceptions of the presidents were expressed in their own words to provide rich, thick detail. The next chapter will offer discussions, implications and recommendations that surfaced from the findings.



## Chapter Five

### Summary of Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

*Research studies do not end with the sheer analysis of their data or the literal presentation of their empirical findings; [they] must go two further steps—trying to interpret the findings and drawing some overall conclusion(s) from the study in its entirety.*

—Robert K. Yin (2011, p. 205)

This chapter provides a summary of the findings presented in the previous chapter and explores the implications of those findings. Included also are a discussion of the findings as well as limitations of the research and recommendations for further study. This chapter is organized by the three research questions and is further defined by the themes and subthemes emanating from perceptions of the participants representing each of the presidential tenure subgroups.

As first described in Chapter One, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and describe the perceptions of community college presidents in one Midwestern state as viewed from one of three presidential career phases—early, mid-career, or senior—of the leadership skills and characteristics necessary to guide 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges and to discover how those perceptions might compare to the prevailing national guidelines originally proposed by the AACC in 2001. In this chapter, the central research question was addressed: Which leadership skills and characteristics do beginning, mid-career, and senior community college presidents perceive to be important to lead 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges effectively today and how do these perceptions compare to the AACC (2001) guidelines? During the process of addressing the central question, three research questions are explored:

- What do sitting presidents perceive to be the most important presidential leadership skills and characteristics required to guide 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges?
- How do the presidential leadership skills identified by the AACC in 2001 compare to those perceived as important by new, mid-career, and senior community college presidents?
- What lessons can be learned from sitting presidents regarding important leadership characteristics for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that will provide guidance to boards, potential presidents, and leaders at other institutions?

### **Summary of the Findings**

The intent of this study was to discover and investigate the leadership characteristics sitting community college presidents perceive to be important to lead effectively 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges during the second decade of this century and beyond. The researcher sought to learn how the perceptions of sitting presidents from one state might relate to the essential leadership characteristics first released by the American Association of Community Colleges in 2001. Further, the researcher was interested to understand how the sitting presidents regarded leadership characteristics as viewed through the lens of one of three stages of presidential tenure—early, mid-career, or senior. The research questions were addressed through the structured interview questions asked of each of the nine participants. Themes and sub-themes were presented in Chapter Four and were associated with the research questions.

**Research Question One: What do sitting presidents perceive to be the most important presidential leadership skills and characteristics required to guide 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges?**

Research question one was developed to identify and explore the perceptions of sitting community college presidents of the critical personal leadership characteristics they believed necessary to lead today's community colleges effectively. This question was advanced specifically to ascertain what leadership characteristics sitting presidents relied upon to help them guide their colleges through the virtual minefields linked to the current socio-economic challenges impacting community college leadership.

At the beginning of the century when the AACC leadership study of 2001 was undertaken, research disclosed that a surge of presidential retirements was expected to take place during the first decade of this century. A study by Shults (2001) revealed 45% of sitting presidents planned to retire by 2007. In 2004, the AACC *Leading Forward* study (AACC, 2004a) indicated 700 presidencies would be available by 2007. Today the trend of ongoing and impending presidential retirements continues to accelerate as predicted in the literature. Findings of the latest AACC study of presidential leadership (AACC, 2012) revealed 75% of presidents participating in the survey indicated they planned to retire within the next 10 years. Similarly, other studies released during this same period also discussed this ongoing and pressing community college leadership shortage (Bornstein, 2010; Duree, 2007, 2008; Eddy, 2013, 2004; King & Gomez, 2008).

Whether stemming from the leadership turnover associated with the pending retirements in community college presidential leadership or resulting from conflicting

economic and societal forces, significant challenges are facing those holding the office.

O'Banion (2008) noted:

Being a leader in today's environment and dealing with enormous change are challenges that require special skills and abilities, patience, humor and courage that exceed by far that required of leaders 40 years ago. . . . But for the most part, the challenges today compared with those of earlier decades are more complex and less amenable to solution. We have become more political and more legalistic, and we have become less civil. We are beginning to reflect the malaise of the larger society we had hoped to serve and improve. (para. 4)

Desna Wallin (2010) added to the leadership discussion when she stated,

"Community colleges have been remarkably successful in the past; that is no guarantee they will continue to be. Community colleges and their leaders must be vigilant to ensure that the institutions have both the resources and the leadership to make necessary changes to remain successful" (Wallin, 2010, p. 5).

Given the array of societal challenges impacting community college leadership as reported by the AACC (2001, 2005, 2012); Eddy (2013); O'Banion (2008); Wallin (2010); and others, this research question was designed to identify perceptions of sitting community college presidents of the leadership characteristics they believed essential to guide community colleges through the treacherous higher educational landscape of today. The role of the leader has evolved during the past decade partly in response to societal forces; as a result, the leadership perceptions of sitting presidents can help to illuminate the leadership characteristics that can best serve today's presidents.

Research question one was addressed by six themes and subthemes that included the Renaissance president; the passionate, ego-free leader, a well-stocked tool-kit; ability to learn on the job; presidents lead alone; and the adaptation of leadership to the situation.

The three subgroups—early, mid-career, and senior presidents—each shared notably similar perceptions of the important leadership characteristics for today’s presidents with a few exceptions discussed below.

**The Renaissance president.** The participants described a leader who presented varied skills and strong passion for the role.

*Early Presidents.* Early presidents indicated they needed to function as “men/women for all seasons.” President G believed the position demanded “a total level of commitment that is just total dedication.”

*Mid-career Presidents.* Mid-career presidents communicated their understanding of the far-reaching demands of the presidency. President E reflected,

I held so many different positions in a community college setting over a long period of time . . . at a critical time in the state when the economy was beginning to sour. This was very important to the Board and is what set me apart from the other candidates.

*Senior Presidents.* Senior presidents supported the man/woman for all seasons concept as well. President B stated, “And I think people want a leader who has that—I want to say a world vision of the college, but it encompasses everything. I can’t be one dimensional. I don’t believe any president can be one dimensional.”

**Passion for the role, with ego kept in check.** The perceptions of the presidents disclosed that a passion for the presidency was mandatory, but the president needed to keep his or her ego under control at the same time.

*Early Presidents.* Early presidents strongly endorsed this subtheme, with all three presidents referring to the importance of bringing a passion for both the presidency and

for community colleges to the office, yet keeping a tight grip on their egos. In the words of President H who noted his passion for the role while staying humble,

I feel blessed doing what I am doing what I do now. This is a true blessing from God. It is not something that I take for granted. Not everyone wants to hear that, but we should understand what we have and how we need to discharge that responsibility that we have.

***Mid-career Presidents.*** Mid-career presidents noted the same level of commitment to and passion for the presidency. President E iterated she brought a passion to the office, while President D stated he relied upon, “humility; extending confidence without having all the answers; willingness to learn from others; willingness to acknowledge mistakes.”

***Senior Presidents.*** Senior presidents signified their concurrence with these perceptions as well. As President B described her strengths, she noted, “I am passionate about what I’m involved with . . . so the ego stuff—that goes right out the window!”

**A well-stocked tool-kit is required.** Presidents also were perceived to need to demonstrate the ability to apply a wide assortment of tools—the past professional experiences and lessons learned—to the role.

***Early Presidents.*** Early presidents pointed out their past experiences served them well when addressing the demands of the presidency. President H stated, “Having varied experiences, not just professional experiences, not simply in the academy, has been helpful.”

***Mid-career Presidents.*** Mid-career President E offered these insights regarding her tools: “Probably in terms of preparation, I think everything I have done has helped me prepare for this position.”

**Senior Presidents.** Senior presidents reflected on and endorsed their learned skills as well. President A described his beliefs when he stated,

To some degree all of my previous positions in the academic world have helped prepare me. I have been a faculty member, department chair, assistant dean . . . then vice president of administration and then vice president of instruction.

**Ability to learn on the job.** Participants discovered that prior expectations of the presidency often proved incorrect when compared to the reality. As a result, they discovered they needed to learn while serving as president and then to effectively apply that learning.

**Early Presidents.** Early presidents expressed surprise when they first immersed themselves into the presidency and discovered the demands of the role differed significantly from their personal expectations. As President H discovered:

Working with a board of trustees directly as president I have learned that the sort of feeding of the board is very important. I thought I understood that because I had worked with boards before. I sat on a number of boards. I thought I had a skill set that would be valuable in this position, but it was different working directly with that board.

**Mid-career Presidents.** Mid-career presidents revealed the same discovery—they were required to learn about their Boards on the job quickly. President D revealed,

My first two years were bumpy at times and often enough it happened that [the Board] learned about things that they should have heard from me through other sources or I charged down a road that felt like I had done enough listening and they weren't onboard."

**Senior Presidents.** Senior presidents also revealed some surprises about the difference between their preconceived notions of the role as compared to the reality. President B shared an example:

I think that there needs to be, I need to remove myself more from the situation so that when a person is attacking either me or the college, a lot of times I don't have anything to do with that. It has to do with their inability to advance a project or a program that they wanted.

**Presidents lead alone.** A lesson learned and reported by participants was associated with the nature of the presidency that required the president to function independently, without an internal support team. All three early-career presidents discussed this concept.

***Early Presidents.*** Early presidents came to this realization fairly soon in their presidencies. President G reflected the perceptions of the early-career subgroup when shared the following:

So you have to stay away from [friendships] because it will keep you from making the right decision for the institution if you let a friendship influence what you need to do. So, it's important that you don't have that deep level of friendship. The other thing is, and if there is a drawback to the job, people stopped talking to me, the person, a long time ago.

***Mid-career Presidents.*** Mid-career presidents did not disclose a perception that they considered the presidency a solitary role as identified by the early-career presidents.

***Senior Presidents.*** Senior presidents likewise failed to identify the role of the president as solitary or isolated from the campus team.

**Adaptation of leadership to the situation.** The subjects in all three subgroups identified adaptability and the capability of shifting personal styles in response to the needs of the specific college as essential leadership skills for the presidency. Despite original expectations, presidents discovered their preconceived beliefs did not match the leadership requirements of the positions once accepted.



***Early Presidents.*** Early-career presidents divulged they adapted their leadership to the role. President G became more aggressive; President I shifted from a participative style to one more autocratic; and President H focused on accountability.

***Mid-career Presidents.*** Mid-career presidents disclosed a similar shift in leadership style as circumstances dictated. President D addressed a change in his communication style. He created weekly newsletters for his Board for informational purposes; President E adapted her leadership in response to the degree of presidential responsibility; and President F began to take the time to outline and explain in great detail his plans of action and decisions to the college constituency.

***Senior Presidents.*** Senior presidents provide similar examples of a style shift. President A found he needed to become more externally focused; President B evolved into a more controlled decision-maker; and President C shifted from his natural style to a more authoritarian leadership style.

**Research Question Two: How do the presidential leadership skills identified by the AACC in 2001 compare to those perceived as important by new, mid-career, and senior community college presidents?**

Research Question Two was designed to enable the researcher to learn whether the 2001 AACC leadership characteristics are still considered relevant by sitting presidents a decade after their dissemination. This research provided an opportunity for the researcher to uncover two threads of evidence from the subjects' feedback that related to this question:

- First, how did sitting presidents perceive that the AACC 2001 leadership characteristics played out in their presidencies of today?
- Second, were the presidents' perceptions of the AACC leadership characteristics similar or different depending upon their length of tenure in the presidency as categorized by early, mid-career or senior?

The 2001 AACC categories of leadership characteristics were divided into five major categories:

- understanding and implementing the community college mission;
- effective advocacy;
- administrative skills;
- community and economic development; and
- personal, interpersonal, and transformational skills.

The presidents of all three tenure categories universally endorsed (100%) the five 2001 AACC leadership characteristics and provided examples of the ways in which these leadership categories play out in their presidencies today. Their perceptions, as revealed during the interviews, are outlined below:

**Understanding and implementing the community college mission.** There was a very strong general consensus that the president must understand and implement the college mission and vision, both internally and externally, to build support across the various college constituencies.

***Early Presidents.*** Early-career presidents believed the mission and vision of the college to be at the very core of the institution. President H declared, “The college vision

impacts it directly. I think sometimes the college can lose focus on what the vision of the institution is or more fundamentally, the mission.”

***Mid-career Presidents.*** Mid-career presidents echoed their commitment to the mission. President E captured the perceptions of this subgroup when she stated, “I don’t think you can do this job effectively unless you really and passionately understand and believe in the community college vision. “

***Senior Presidents.*** Senior presidents concurred and President C replied, “Well, you have to wear [the mission] on your sleeve, because everywhere you go, internally and externally, you’re conveying that mission and selling the mission and reminding your external public why it’s a good college.”

**Effective advocacy.** Each of the three subgroups endorsed this presidential role as essential to the institution. Perceptions of the three tenure groups include:

***Early Presidents.*** Early-career presidents suggested presidents should prioritize advocacy. President H stressed, “I spend a third of my time off campus and that’s where community college presidents have [refocused] the presidency more generally.”

***Mid-career Presidents.*** Mid-career presidents also endorsed this characteristic. In the words of President F, “I see [advocacy] as my job” in the community and in the legislature.

***Senior Presidents.*** Senior presidents supported advocacy in the same manner. President A voiced the sentiments of the subgroup when he stated, “I think from a president’s standpoint, to be an advocate . . . is critical to your success as a president.”

**Administrative skills.** This leadership characteristic includes a wide variety of tasks and initiatives that are critical to the college such as governance, promotion of diversity, personnel issues, research and planning, managing technology, and media relations strategies, among others. All three of the tenure subgroups endorsed these characteristics as essential for today's presidents.

***Early Presidents.*** Early-career presidents noted the importance of these skills for the effective operation of the campus. President I endorsed the need for the president to hone personnel and labor relations matters.

***Mid-career Presidents.*** Mid-career presidents also confirmed this characteristic. President F revealed, "I think the most critical is the ability to form a team; the executive leadership that can manage the day-to-day objectives as well as the long-run direction."

***Senior Presidents.*** Senior presidents supported administrative skills in the same manner . . . President B offered, "I would definitely say shared governance and board relations [are essential] since I have seen presidents experience some very difficult and challenging times."

**Community and economic development.** Community colleges were founded to support the communities; today some colleges still emphasize the concept, "community is their middle name." All of the presidents in the sample stressed their commitment to the support of their communities and of the workforce and economic well-being of the region. They pointed out the reciprocal relationship that often exists between the college and the community; they believe the health of one supports the health of the other,

**Early Presidents.** Early-career presidents supported this element as expressed by President G: “The community values that. The community college is a major, major player and has a strong economic development impact on the community.”

**Mid-career Presidents.** Mid-career presidents also supported this characteristic. President E added, “It has been really huge here.” She stressed the impact of the college team she created to support the economic viability of the region.

**Senior Presidents.** Senior presidents concurred as President B stated, “Very important for community colleges. We have to be linked in with the community if we are going to know what their workforce needs are.”

**Personal, interpersonal, and transformational skills.** It is important to note the AACC personal and interpersonal skills/competencies category is robust. Included in these personal leadership skills are working with staff; maintaining a code of personal ethics; ability to project confidence and competencies of a leader; ability to model diversity; interviewing and treating personnel fairly; balancing all aspects of the job; institutional politics; flexibility and negotiation; public speaking and writing; demonstrates self-mastery and personal transformation.

Early, mid-career and senior presidents endorsed these AACC characteristics as constituting important personal competencies for presidents leading today’s colleges. Strongly validated across all three subgroups was developing and maintaining a strong personal code of ethics. Honest and ethical behavior was supported as critical by all three subgroups. In addition, the presidents revealed a number of other leadership characteristics, ranging from adaptability to passion for the presidency to grit.

***Early Presidents.*** Early-career presidents endorsed the need for presidents to display a personal code of ethics. President H noted he brings his openness and honesty to the table.

***Mid-career Presidents.*** Mid-career President D revealed, “To me, trust has an ethical component. If you have integrity and honesty, but also have competency, you earn trust.”

***Senior Presidents.*** Senior President B responded, “I am honest, I am trustworthy, I am dependable.” She noted the importance of a president to conduct his or her life in accordance with a personal code of ethics.

**Personal, interpersonal, and transformational skills outside of the AACCC 2001 list.** Each presidential interview revealed a strong commitment to the 2001 characteristics in their presidencies today and further provided perspectives on the additional personal and interpersonal characteristics they believed critical for today’s presidents. Table 5 presents the specific characteristics posed by the presidents. It is in this category that a significant difference was revealed between the perceptions of the early-career presidents and the mid-career and senior presidents.

**Research Question Three: What lessons can be learned from sitting presidents regarding important leadership characteristics for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that will provide guidance to boards, potential presidents, and leaders at other institutions?**

Research Question Three was developed to identify and explore the perceptions of sitting community college presidents of the personal leadership characteristics they believed important for the presidency that would provide guidance for prospective

presidents and boards. This question was advanced specifically to learn what leadership characteristics sitting presidents relied upon today that could provide value for the presidents of tomorrow and the Boards who hire them.

This research question was addressed by six themes and subthemes that included the all-consuming nature of the role, the big leap, motivation to DO the presidency versus BE the president, looking ahead, advice to prospective presidents and boards, and presidents need grit. The three subgroups—early, mid-career, and senior presidents—shared their perceptions of the essential leadership characteristics for today’s presidents that might provide guidance to prospective presidents and boards. Opinions of the three subgroups were remarkably consistent.

The recent literature of presidential leadership describes the role of the president as both challenging and rewarding. Stripling (2012) reported the expressed opinions of retiring presidents who described the challenges associated with the position. One president reflected that the role of the president is “a job without end” (Stripling, 2012, para. 14). Other presidents revealed the presidency brought endless duties and a growing sense of urgency of the job. “The quality of life of presidents has declined. . . . Something’s got to give” (para. 17).

Conversely, Selingo (2013) communicated the findings of a current survey of 400 four-year college presidents. Unlike the recently retired presidents in Stripling’s report, the Selingo subjects verified their satisfaction with the role in spite of the associated challenges. Approximately 90% of the presidents indicated they were very satisfied to

extremely satisfied with their jobs. Further, older presidents were most likely to report satisfaction (Selingo, 2013, p. 5).

**All-consuming nature of the role.** Each of the nine presidents revealed remarkably similar perceptions of the strenuous leadership role and responsibilities associated with the presidency today, a role they believed that continues to change in response to societal challenges.

*Early Presidents.* Early-career president I conveyed her comprehension that the presidency can be “emotionally draining, because I cared so much about that county.”

*Mid-career Presidents.* Mid-career President F revealed he dedicated his days, evenings and weekend to the college’s work. “The 9-5 idea is hilarious!”

*Senior Presidents.* Senior President C came to understand the college needed to be his focus in life when he noted, “leadership has continued to be at the focal point of all my activities.”

**The big leap.** The participants all indicated their original perceptions of presidential leadership and the leadership required by that role appeared significantly different than their original expectations.

*Early Presidents.* Early-career president G stated, “And you really don’t anticipate that [disparity] as much as people might warn you. You think, well you don’t get the view from the chair until you are sitting in the chair.”

*Mid-career Presidents.* Mid-career President F suggested, some new presidents did not clearly understand the scope of the presidency prior to assuming the office. And



even though colleges may be similar in structure and nature, “each president is a little bit different.”

***Senior Presidents.*** Senior President A indicated,

I thought that between the schooling and the experience that I knew just about everything there was to know. But, that wasn’t true. The whole finessing, political, persuasive, big visionary stuff came as a result of having worked on the job.

**Motivation to DO the presidency versus BE the president.** Participants noted presidents demonstrate differing rationale in seeking a presidency. For those who simply wish to fill an office and enjoy the associated glory, all three subgroups advised those individuals to reassess their priorities.

***Early Presidents.*** Early-career presidents noted the all-consuming nature of the position and the necessity of the president to commit to the position, not to the title.

***Mid-career Presidents.*** Mid-career President E indicated the president must be in the position for the right reasons. The “fit” must be just right.

***Senior Presidents.*** Senior President B added, “There are some people who simply want to be the president and there are some people who want to do what you have to do to be the president . . . and I really think the former scenario represents a hindrance.”

**Looking ahead.** All of the participants, whether serving in the presidency for only 3 years or as many as 13 years, discussed the ever-increasing demands of the presidency and the leadership skills required to meet those challenges effectively. There was a consensus that the presidency places numerous demands upon the president.

**Early Presidents.** Early-career presidents. President H noted the regional drivers he addresses regularly, complicated by the higher education needs of the community, will continue to challenge his presidency for the foreseeable future.

**Mid-career Presidents.** Mid-career presidents. President E reported her multi-county area presents a variety of needs ranging from the economic to workforce development to degrees and certificates. Her fundraising and community development skills will be put to the test in the coming years.

**Senior Presidents.** Senior Presidents. President A noted he is called upon to work with politicians, lawyers, architects, engineers, educators, community members, and others on any given day. As a result, his presidency will continue to evolve in response to the needs of those various groups.

**Advice to prospective presidents and boards.** Participants reflected upon the lessons they learned during their tenure in the presidency and gave consideration to the trends they observe in the field as they offered advice for the prospective presidents and Boards going forward.

- *Guidance to prospective presidents from sitting presidents:*
  - Take advantage of opportunities to gain experience in as many areas as possible, not just to add another item to your resume
  - Broaden your base of experience
  - Remain approachable
  - Be respectful of the college culture already in place when you assume the presidency
  - Make institutional changes gradually
  - Become a higher education generalist, not a specialist
  - Think strategically about your career
  - Determine to be the very best at whatever you do since people see excellence
  - Do not allow anyone to discourage you from seeking a presidency
  - Do some self-examination

- Develop a clear understanding of those things you would not compromise
  - Make sure you have the strength, will, and fortitude to take care of yourself
  - Ask yourself if you are ready for the pressures of the presidency
  - Embrace the community college mission and have it be your passion
  - Do not do this if you think being called “president of something” is what you need
  - Accumulate prior experience since it is important
  - Gain broad experience to prepare for opportunities, given the pending retirements
  - Inform your current boss that you seek more experience and if none is forthcoming, seek another position elsewhere
  - Go talk to sitting presidents to find out what the job really entails
  - Be your authentic self – do not try to be someone you are not
  - Focus on your personal strengths
  - Remember to act like a president
  - Develop your stump speech now so it will become second nature by the time a position opens up
  - Ask yourself whether you truly want to operate in that environment
  - Get real – and look closely at the actual work of the presidency and the real problems presidents face
  - Understand this is hard work; it is not for the faint of heart and not for the dull
- *Guidance to Boards from sitting presidents:*
- Examine your motives before seeking a Board position since some public boards are becoming more political and less value-driven.
  - Select the president who appears to be the best fit for your college
  - Recognize Boards are hiring a president to do a specific job – let him or her do that job
  - Understand clearly what the presidency involves
  - Educate yourselves about Board responsibilities through organizations such as the AACC, ACE, ACCT and others
  - Take advantage of the training programs
  - Understand the difference between community college governance and leadership
  - Develop a clear understanding of the Board’s role versus the president’s role
  - Learn about of policy and collaborative governance
  - Articulate clearly to prospective presidents the culture of the college and of the nature of the organization to allow the person to determine whether or not the fit is correct
  - Warn the prospective president of the reality of what he or she may be walking into

- Consider carefully what is important in a president in terms of experience, skills, and leadership style
- Pay close attention to contractual relationships with the president
- Think through how to structure the contract in the case an exit plan is needed
- Realize the Board's sole job concerns policy and the hiring and evaluation of the CEO
- Quit worrying about what color to paint the classroom walls and think instead where the organization is heading and who best to head it
- Be candid at all times when informing candidates what they need to bring to the table
- Be able to talk about the college and figure out what the college needs and who can best achieve that for your institution
- Engage in the necessary pre-planning of the president position before you put out the posting
- Be consistent in the message you are sending the candidate
- Take the time to be able to carefully size up the candidate to learn whether the person has the traits and competencies and characteristics that you want and need
- Ask what unique characteristics in addition to standard skills are most needed for the institution
- Look to the future – a long way down the road – to make sure the college is selecting the president who is the best person to help the college achieve its future goals
- Hire a skill set – not a resume
- Begin finding ways to select a candidate based on that person's potential to learn
- Note if the Board waits for someone to have everything on a resume that would make him or her a good president, then that person is already too old to be a president at your institution. They will be with you only three years and then retire and you will have to start the search process all over again

**Presidents need grit.** Participant responses disclosed an over-riding perception that a combination of perseverance, will-power, determination and persistence was required to function successfully in the presidency. Presidents mentioned numerous internal and external forces are competing for the president's time, attention and support and noted they must draw upon their inner strengths to achieve their goals. Despite

challenges and obstacles, presidents should focus on maintaining their health, while displaying consistent persistence, perseverance, and grit.

***Early Presidents.*** Early-career President G stated,

I would not want to relive my first year as president again. It was an extremely stressful year. The second year was better and now I have finally started to get my stride in the third year . . . I love the definition of grit! And I believe that it should be considered a key leadership trait or even qualification.

President I concurred: “Grit is a fine label for the energy that I keep trying to describe. The answer is whether grit is a required characteristic is a resounding yes!”

***Mid-career Presidents.*** Mid-career Presidents E and F suggested maintaining a healthy lifestyle can aid presidents to address the stress and long hours required of the office. Persistence and perseverance are mandatory and grit sums it all up.

***Senior Presidents.*** Senior Presidents A, B, and C declared the demands of the office are immense and require a high level of energy. President A indicated, “Absolutely, grit is an appropriate term to apply to the presidency. True achievement is about the long haul; having persistence; to be able to modify a position without modifying the goal.”

## **Discussion of the Findings**

The findings of this study were consistent with the recent literature of community college leadership (Duree, 2008; Eddy, 2013; Hassan, 2008; Kools, 2010). Perceptions of sitting presidents in this study at all levels of tenure in office validated and endorsed the published AACC presidential leadership characteristics of 2001, but also revealed other characteristics they relied upon for their leadership today. Additionally, while the perceptions of mid-career and senior presidents were remarkably similar in substance, the

early-career presidents disclosed challenges impacting their leadership related to the perceived isolation they experienced in the presidency – a factor absent from the responses of those presidents with longer tenure in the role.

**Discussion of findings related to research question one.** The participants disclosed their perceptions of the leadership characteristics they considered important for 21st century community college presidents. At the start of the century, the AACCC (2001) and others noted the pending presidential retirements and the need for future presidents to demonstrate and develop their leadership skills (AACCC, 2004; Shults, 2001). Yet a vast number of societal disturbances that transpired during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including the events of 9/11, domestic violence on college campuses, economic recession and individual financial downturns, and significant college enrollment fluctuations. These factors likely constituted more significant challenges to the presidency than previously imagined.

Glassner and Schapiro (2013) reported the unpredictability of today's higher education environment and noted the associated impact on the college presidents of today. The authors reported, "This is a volatile time for presidents, who are under intense pressure from their boards and the government to modernize rapidly amid a revolution in online learning, information technology, and global education" (Glassner & Schapiro, 2013, n.p.).

Boyd (2012) summarized the key findings that emerged from the ACE study of American college presidents and reported:

Leadership that is not only effective but reflective of the world around it will be key to managing the challenges of today and the unrevealed challenges of

tomorrow. Rapidly ballooning enrollments, escalating fiscal pressures, the change engines of technological advances, a wide array of constituents, and a tumultuous political climate all make it more important than ever for college and university presidents to understand and be responsive to their communities and the contexts in which higher education takes place.

Participants in all three tenure sub-groups revealed their leadership was influenced by current societal forces impacting higher education. They disclosed their personal leadership characteristics and noted those they considered reflective of the challenges facing community colleges in today's volatile environment. Each of the three subgroups—early-career, mid-career and senior presidents—related their fundamental leadership characteristics had shifted or changed somewhat in response to the requirements of the presidency. Subjects mentioned adaptability and approachability as critical components of their leadership.

Participants spoke of the complexity of today's presidencies. Each of the participants indicated they relied heavily upon their tools—the varied leadership skills and experiences developed from past professional positions—to support them in their current presidencies. This finding is supported in the literature by the earlier studies of Bechtel (2010), Hassan (2007), and Kools (2010). All of the subjects also disclosed they were required to learn on the job. Just as today's colleges promote lifelong learning, the presidents found themselves modeling that behavior in the presidency.

There was consistency and commonality of essential leadership perceptions across the three tenure groups with one notable exception. The early-career president subgroup characterized the presidency as a solitary role, one characterized by stress. One of the early-career presidents spoke of the need to distance himself from former friends

who remained on the college staff. In a like manner another of the early-career presidents noted she could not develop friendships at the college. The presidents spoke of a concern that such friendships could impact their decision-making. They all noted they served as the lone point person with the Board, and recognized the tenuousness of their position when at any given time they could be relieved of their duties.

One possible reason for the early-career subgroup's perceptions of a president's relative isolation from the college team could relate to their relative newness in the role, as opposed to the presidents who had served for a longer period. Presidents with greater experience might well have adapted to the reality, accepted this situation as status quo, and turned their attention to more pressing strategic or operational issues. Regardless, the perceptions of the early-career presidents are consistent with recent findings in the literature. A report of the American Council on Education's 94<sup>th</sup> annual conference revealed "the college presidency is an often-lonely place, where the only certainty is a pending ambush" (Stripling, 2012, para. 1). Presidents participating in the ACE 2012 conference cited factors impacting their leadership such as the constant spotlight on the president and a concern about random overheard comments causing misunderstandings and resulting in the need for damage control, thus causing further isolation from campus support relationships. Stripling added, "In a recurring theme, the presidents described the 'high-wire act' of college leadership as one that forces presidents to serve as cheerleaders, lobbyists, and even grief counselors" (Stripling, 2012, para. 5).

**Discussion of findings related to research question two.** The participants stressed their strong commitment to the continuing importance of the leadership



characteristics of the 2001 AACC *Essential Leadership Characteristics*. Based upon the findings of this study, the AACC characteristics first presented at the start of the new century still play out in the field. Overall, respondents consistently agreed that the five core AACC 2001 leadership characteristics were important to the effective performance of their presidential leadership today. Although the participants proffered a number of leadership characteristics in addition to those put forth by the AACC, the findings revealed that the 2001 leadership characteristics were still valid today.

The literature supports these AACC characteristics as well, despite the decade between their publication and today. Cook (2012) reported the results of a recent ACE survey of college presidents that revealed that despite the current challenges facing higher education, presidents today devote much of their time to similar tasks as those noted in 2001. Included in this list were budgets, fundraising or advocacy, and community relations or development.

Ashford (2011) presented the advice that retiring community college presidents offered for presidents who are new to the role. Included in the array of the presidents' recommendations are the following that link to the AACC characteristics: nurture community relations, cultivate community leaders, keep in touch with business and industry, be honest, and be patient in moving the mission and vision forward.

When assessing presidential leadership from another vantage point, Wallin (2010) described the community college president as a change agent and offered theories of change leadership to support her theory. She reported the current environment demands a "different set of leadership skills from those that might have sufficed in less

turbulent times” (p. 5). She stated, “In a time of limited resources and an uncertain economy, community colleges are more important than ever to meet the employment and educational needs of citizens in their communities” (p. 11). The findings of this study clearly demonstrate the utility of the AACC 2001 characteristics for today’s presidents as viewed through the perceptions of sitting presidents.

Research Question Two also sought to learn what differences, if any, could be observed in the perceptions of sitting presidents from three tenure groups. The findings reveal a commonality of response across the three tenure groups relative to the AACC leadership characteristics. Further, a consensus was discovered among the perceptions of the three tenure groups in response to the first research question and the themes associated with that question with one notable exception: Only the early-career presidents perceived the presidency to be a solitary and stressful position. Early-career presidents responded that they lacked internal support groups within the college and found themselves navigating the pressures of the role in relative isolation. The president who had been promoted internally relinquished his existing friendships while those hired externally built personal support coalitions outside the colleges. Senior presidents did not identify “stress” as a pressing issue in their presidencies, while only two of the mid-career presidents did so.

**Discussion of findings related to research question three.** The researcher sought to discover the leadership characteristics sitting presidents rely upon in the field and to understand what leadership characteristics those presidents depend upon today that could provide value for the new presidents of tomorrow and the Boards who hire them.

Participant responses were remarkably consistent and aligned with the literature. Key concepts disclosed by the participants included the heavy demands of the presidential role, the need to maintain a healthy lifestyle to meet those demands and mitigate associated pressures, and the consensus that the personal characteristics—or strengths—of persistence and perseverance represented invaluable tools for today’s presidents. Most notable, perhaps, was the universal belief expressed by eight of the nine presidents in the sample that “grit” represents a critical strength for any president serving in the challenging 21<sup>st</sup> century community college environment.

The concept of grit is closely associated with perseverance and persistence and only recently has been studied by a relatively small group of researchers in the past few years, generally in association with student learning outcomes. While definitions vary, perhaps the best known of the definitions was posited by Duckworth, Peterson, Mathews and Kelly (2007, p. 1087).

Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course.

Cator and Adams (2013) suggest work to date on grit is full of possibilities and opportunities, but there is still much that needs be done for grit, tenacity, and perseverance to become a pervasive priority in our nation (2013, p. 9).

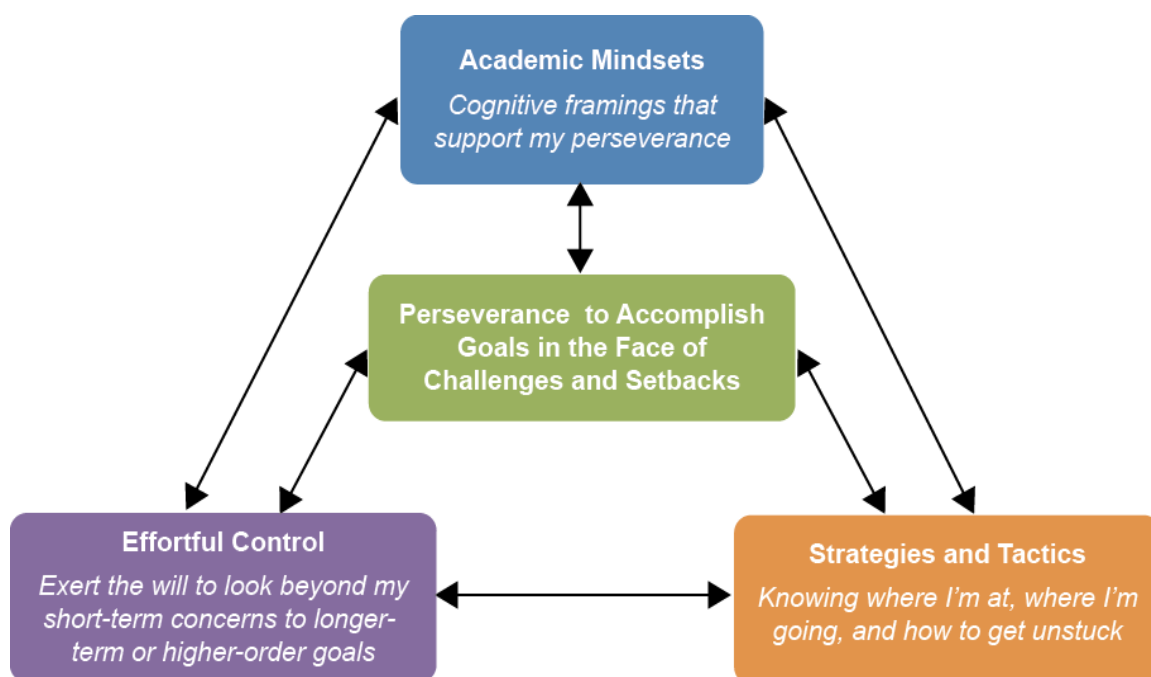


Figure 3. Alternative definition of Grit

Source: Cator & Adams. (2013, p.15)

Also discovered during the interviews was the presidents' strong appreciation for and understandings of the comprehensive role of the presidency. Key to their appreciation is the apparent realization that the role is demanding and stressful at times, but it also presents valuable opportunities for those presidents with a passion for community colleges to employ their leadership skills to make a difference for their students, in their communities and within the lives of their constituents.

The recent literature of community college leadership made note of the challenges inherent in the role of the president. As the waves of presidential retirements continue (AACC, 2005, 2013; Eddy, 2013), the demands associated with the position have resulted in Boards encountering challenges in recruiting new presidents who may be the right fit for the needs of their colleges.

### **Implications and Recommendations from the Findings**

A number of implications and recommendations for practice emerged from the findings of this study. While presidential leadership long has been studied, the societal forces of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have served to heap additional pressures onto the community college presidency. “This is a volatile time for presidents, who are under intense pressure from their boards and the government to modernize rapidly amid a revolution in online learning, information technology, and global education” (Glassner & Schapiro, 2013, para. 5). Thus it is important to consider the lessons discovered from the perceptions of sitting presidents when seeking the position, as well as when recruiting, hiring, guiding, and developing future presidents.

First, the reality of the presidency differed to some degree from prospective presidents’ original expectations. As a result, participants in this study reported they needed to shift their personal leadership away from its natural or preferred style due to the demands of the presidency. Given this disconnect between new presidents’ original expectations of the presidency and the reality they encountered, the curricula of leadership development programs preparing prospective presidents should be reassessed in light of this finding. It is vital that all presidents comprehend and take steps to deal with the myriad pressures inherent in the role today. The researcher urges that presidents build support structures for themselves into the fabric of their daily work lives to help mitigate the solitary nature of the role, as well as to establish a personal network. This concept of networking is supported in the literature by the work of Hassan (2007),

Bechtel (2010) and Kools (2010), recommended the use of mentoring and networking in the professional development of community college leaders.

Such support could emanate from other presidents within the state, from national professional organizations, or from an array of personal support groups. Professional workshops or seminars directed toward community college presidents and focusing upon this aspect of the presidency would provide a valuable resource as well. Presidents would be wise to take strong control of their calendars to ensure time is protected for their personal and family needs.

Secondly, the research revealed early college presidents—those in their first four years in the presidency—experienced a somewhat stressful and isolated first few years in the office, likely impacting their performance and productivity. They noted the presidency required them to withdraw from both long-term and/or potential friendships within the college to avoid a possible conflict of interest should difficult decisions need to be made, rendering them somewhat solitary leaders. While mid-career and senior presidents discussed the challenges and demands upon their time associated with the presidency, none of the presidents who served for five years or longer addressed the stress or loneliness factor so critical to the early presidents. It is possible that this difference in perception between the early presidents and those serving as president five years or longer is linked directly to time in office—a type of adjustment period or “growing pains.”

One of the senior presidents noted his personal transition in the presidency when he stated that in the beginning of his presidency, “I thought I was very well prepared for

the job; that between the schooling and the experience, that I knew just about everything there was to know.” He continued to state, “I think I am a bit more relaxed now than I was earlier on. There is no drive to prove something.”

To help to mitigate the negative impact of these types of stressors on early-career presidents, the researcher recommends that those professionals charged with the design and delivery of professional leadership development programs for new or prospective presidents should seek to prepare new presidents for this dynamic by incorporating information and advice related to this phenomenon into those programs. Formal mentoring relationships between new and other, more experienced presidents should be instituted on a state level to provide further support for those new to the office.

Additionally, during the recruitment and hiring process, the Boards should take great care to outline and describe the position to prospective presidents with great clarity. In this way, both the Board and the prospective president will be positioned to assess the prospective fit. Smith (2013) presented the recommendations of The Community College League of California (2013) for Boards, “Assess the college district and the type of leadership needed. This is one of the most important steps in the process and requires trustees to clarify their assumptions and expectations about where the district should be headed and what leadership characteristics are needed to get it there” (p. 105).

Cook (2012, n.p.) noted:

While a majority of presidents reported having a clear understanding of the job when they accepted it, a sizeable minority expressed confusion or a lack of knowledge over some aspect of the job. For example, at least one out of five presidents stated they were not made fully aware of all institutional challenges, the institution's financial condition, or the expectation of the president during the search process.

Finally, all of the presidents in this study strongly agreed that persistence and perseverance, in combination with stamina and the high energy associated with a healthy lifestyle, constitute important characteristics for today's college presidents. Further, the participants endorsed also the importance of another characteristic—grit—that they deemed vital for today's presidents. While grit currently is a topic of inquiry for a small group of researchers across the nation in the context of learning theory, the research of Duckworth et al. (2007), suggests that grit may be at least as essential as talent to individual high accomplishment. Those who are high in grit tend to work steadily toward their goals, regardless of the obstacles and challenges encountered along the way (Duckworth et al., 2007). Simple testing instruments developed by Duckworth et. al. (2007) have enabled researchers to test for and discover the characteristic of grit within groups of both young learners and adult learners.

Certainly, grit research has strong implications for presidential leadership as well. Given the challenges identified by the presidents, stamina and persistence should be part of every community college president's toolkit. Research suggests that those presidents who can demonstrate grit likely will meet and exceed expected outcomes. Therefore, this researcher urges that those professionals working with grit research broaden the testing parameters and design a simple test to predict grit in prospective and new college presidents. Both the prospective presidents and the Boards who are enmeshed in the hiring process should find this type of test most enlightening and valuable.



### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations to this study. First, the data collection procedures used audio recorded interviews of sitting presidents administered during the spring of 2013. Subjects were identified through a purposeful sampling design to ensure that a range of presidential tenure, gender, racial background, and college type and classifications was represented in the data. However, there is no guarantee that the nine presidents included in the study, or 32% of the state's community college presidencies, accurately reflected the perceptions of the remaining state presidents who did not participate in the study.

Secondly, the study was limited to perceptions of sitting community college presidents from early, mid-career, and senior presidential tenure groups located in one Midwestern state. As a result, it is possible the reflections of those presidents from other Midwestern states not included in the study might garner different outcomes. Further, it is possible a survey of presidents from other regions of the country also could demonstrate different results.

Finally, the study was designed only to discover the perceptions of sitting presidents at one point in time. The community college presidency currently is facing a number of societal challenges. As a result, it is not possible for this researcher to predict how these perceptions might play out over an extended period of time.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Given the limitations of this study, several topics for future research are suggested. Included are future studies of sitting college presidents on a national level to eliminate regional variations or skewed results due to the relatively small sample size.

Further, given the abundance of literature focused on the community college presidency, it is clear there is a wide-spread and continuing interest in this role. As current presidents retire, Boards will be facing the increasingly complex task of recruiting and hiring the “right” president for the role. Eddy (2013) reported the current attention on community college leadership—both in the literature and in practice—is driven by several factors. Eddy stated, “Community colleges represent more than half of all institutions of higher education” and community colleges also educate “nearly half of all students involved in postsecondary education” (2013, p, 21). Skinner and Miller (2011) noted each college must determine its specific leadership needs in consideration of the institution’s mission and goals.

This research served to validate the leadership characteristics of the 2001 AACC initiative as providing value to sitting presidents, but the findings also revealed further investigation is needed relative to the following:

Early college presidents in this study reported they considered the presidency a stressful and isolating position during their first few years in the office. While mid-career and senior presidents recognized the challenges and stress associated with the presidency, none of the more experienced presidents addressed the stress and loneliness factor

important to the early presidents. Selingo (2013) revealed the presidents in his survey “over all are a satisfied bunch, despite the tough times” (p. 5).

Further research should take place to investigate what is happening with early college presidents at the beginning of a presidency with the goal of discovering the nature of their stresses and identify interventions that may serve to alleviate associated concerns and frustrations. Additionally, the researcher believes the design of a long-term study of new presidents following their assimilation into the presidency and during their early years in office may lend insight into ways of managing and overcoming stress.

Grit represents a fairly recent concept in higher education but heretofore research has been directed mainly toward student learning. All of the presidents in the survey agreed that persistence and perseverance, in combination with high energy associated with a healthy lifestyle, constitute important characteristics for today’s college presidents. Eight of the presidents endorsed the concept of “grit” as vital for presidential success during challenging times and the presidents who objected to the term “grit” still endorsed the substance of its definition. Given these findings, value can be noted in broadening the current research efforts on grit as connected to student learning and begin to investigate the concept of grit in connection to presidential leadership. Testing instruments relative to grit as associated with student learning should be utilized as models for the future development of tests to predict grit in future presidents. Results might be used to inform prospective presidents and enlighten Boards during the presidential hiring process.

## Conclusion

*The only true voyage of discovery . . . would be not to  
visit strange lands but to possess other eyes*  
- Marcel Proust (1932, p. 657)

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and describe the perceptions of community college presidents in one Midwestern state as viewed from one of three presidential career phases—early, mid-career, or senior—of the leadership skills and characteristics necessary to guide 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges and to discover how those perceptions compare to the prevailing national guidelines originally proposed by the AACC in 2001. Much has been written about community college leadership in terms of presidential leadership transition, the promotion of leadership development programs to support that transition, and of the current forces impacting the future of community colleges. This qualitative study sought to learn directly from sitting presidents what impact, if any, the societal forces of the 21<sup>st</sup> century had on nature and practice of presidential leadership.

The findings of this study indicated research is needed to provide guidance to new presidents and Boards and to discover interventions to aid the transition into the presidency of the new presidents. In addition, further research on grit as applied to community college presidential leadership is needed to support sitting presidents in the field, as well as to develop instruments that would provide prospective presidents with the means to better identify, understand and develop their own personal grit.

Community college presidential leadership of the 21<sup>st</sup> century faces numerous competing challenges from a variety of external and internal forces. Skinner (2010)

noted that colleges and universities “now confront a complex future” (Concluding section, para. 1). Skinner further recommended (2010, concluding para.):

We need a special sort of leader and a distinctive kind of leadership to steer a course through currents that will tug and pull in many directions. We can begin by being clearer about what qualities those leaders and that leadership need to have. We may find both by asking different sorts of questions than we have in the past.

This belief is further endorsed by the findings of a recent study from Achieving the Dream and the Aspen Institute College Excellence program (2013) which stated, “What we have learned through our work is. . .every high-performing community college has a first-rate president. The best leaders across the country have a special set of qualities and know-how that enable them to lead institutions to high and improving levels of student success” (2013, p. 2). Therefore, it is important that the higher education community continue to assess critically future presidential needs and better define the optimal leadership characteristics desired for community college presidents—those who will lead the charge—to guide the nation’s 21<sup>st</sup> century institutions.

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## **Appendix A**

### **IRB Approval**

## IRB Approval Letter

Your project has been approved by the IRB.

Project Title: Leading the Charge: A Multiple Case Study of Presidential Perceptions of Essential Leadership Characteristics for the 21st Century Community College

Approvers Comments:

Dear Ms. Bonner and Dr. O'Hanlon,

Your project: Leading the Charge: A Multiple Case Study of Presidential Perceptions of Essential Leadership Characteristics for the 21st Century Community College has been certified as Exempt Category 2 according to the Federal Regulations at 45 CFR 46.101(b). You are authorized to begin data collection.

1. The approved informed consent document has been uploaded to NUgrant (file with - Approved.pdf in the file name). Please use this document to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the document, please submit the revised document to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.

Your official approval letter will be uploaded to NUgrant shortly.

Good luck with your research!

Becky Freeman, CIP  
for the IRB  
bfreeman2@unl.edu

## **Appendix B**

### **AACC Essential Leadership Characteristics of Effective Community College Presidents 2001**

## **AACC Essential Leadership Characteristics of Effective Community College Presidents, 2001**

### **Effective Community College Presidents**

To promote the development of effective community college presidents, the Leadership Task Force identified the characteristics and professional skills that all leaders of community colleges should have and that should be addressed in any professional development program. First and foremost, a college president must thoroughly understand the community college mission. Armed with this understanding, he or she must be an effective advocate for the college's interests and must have skills in administration, community and economic development. The Task Force also identified characteristics of an effective program format.

### **Essential Leadership Characteristics**

#### *Understanding and Implementing the Community College Mission*

Understanding the community college mission, with its sense of serving the community through serving the common good, is crucial for successful community college presidents. Some specific areas of focus in professional development programs should be:

1. Understanding and implementing the role of the college within its community.
2. Developing a strong orientation toward community colleges.
3. Creating a student-centered environment.
4. Valuing and promoting diversity.
5. Promoting teaching, learning, and innovation as primary goals for the college.

#### *Effective Advocacy*

Effective advocacy with communities, philanthropists, and legislators is a critical area of competence. Specifically, the community college president must:

1. Know how to work with legislators on matters that concern the college.
2. Be familiar with all aspects of fundraising and development.
3. Know how to make effective use of data and research.

#### *Administrative Skills*

Skills in the following areas are essential:

1. Governance and organization. Presidents must master board relations, shared governance and union contracts, and employee welfare negotiations.



2. Organizational development. Included in this area are the establishment of clear lines of authority, managing institutional change, and implementing quality improvement programs.
3. Promotion of diversity. Presidents must be committed to implementing a campus climate that values diversity and assures a positive campus work environment for all.
4. Assuming the role of a CEO. This area includes understanding trends in student success, understanding the principles of the learning college, promoting service learning programs and global awareness, and assessing student learning.
5. Personnel issues. Important aspects of this skill include hiring, motivating, and evaluating personnel. Also involved is an awareness of professional development needs for faculty and staff, the importance of team building, and acknowledging staff accomplishments.
6. Research and planning. Presidents need to know how to effectively use data and research to plan, make decisions, and respond to accreditation standards and assess institutional effectiveness.
7. Day-to-day management. This area includes facilities management, financial management, budgeting and planning, understanding legal issues, and making effective use of marketing programs.
8. Managing technology. Presidents must understand and use technology to promote innovation and success in teaching and learning, to enhance student success, and to increase organizational efficiency.
9. Managing relations with print and electronic media. Presidents must understand and consistently implement cogent and proactive media relations strategies.

### Community and Economic Development

Given the emphasis by community colleges on workforce issues and economic development, community college presidents must be skilled in:

1. Developing partnerships in the community with business, industry, and government.
2. Developing linkages to high schools and universities to help motivate students to go to college, to ensure curriculum articulation, and to establish alternative routes to attain a college degree, including such programs as Running Start and Tech Prep.
3. Encouraging civic engagement on the part of students, staff, and the institution.
4. Participating in strategies for community development.
5. Implementing workforce development strategies.

### Personal, Interpersonal, and Transformational Skills

The personal skills needed for presidential leadership are extensive. Of foremost importance are skills in the following:

1. Working with staff to promote the college's vision, values, and mission.
2. Maintaining and demonstrating a code of personal ethics.

3. Ability to project the confidence and competences of a leader, backed up by solid accomplishments.
4. Ability to model diversity and succeed in any type of environment.
5. Interviewing and evaluating personnel effectively and fairly.
6. Balancing all aspects of the job.
7. Institutional politics, including the ability to build coalitions and collaborative relationships and to pick battles wisely.
8. Flexibility and negotiation.
9. Public speaking and writing, including the ability to be articulate and circumspect with the media.
10. Functioning in a way that demonstrates self-mastery and operating at the highest level of personal transformation.

Source: American Association of Community Colleges (2001). Retrieved from:  
<http://www.aacc.nche.edu>

## **Appendix C**

### **Recruitment Email to Subjects**

Dear President X:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln pursuing a PhD in Higher Education Leadership. My research involves exploring the perceptions of sitting community college presidents regarding leadership characteristics and behaviors essential to effectively lead 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges today and how these perceptions might compare to the AACC guidelines of 2001. I am writing to ask for your help and participation in this endeavor.

Given the array of institutional challenges facing community colleges today, many of which were previously unimagined in the past, this has become a critical time in the history of the community college. Institutions are facing escalating impacts of concurrent socio-economic changes, complicated by the competing demands of various college constituents and the continuing decline of higher education funding support, all of which have added to the growing complexity of the leadership role of the community college president. And when we add to this mix the current and impending retirements of long-term presidents, effective presidential leadership becomes increasingly more crucial for the future viability of community colleges.

In view of the ongoing national conversations and debate about presidential leadership led by the AACC, your perceptions and ideals will contribute greatly to the general understanding of leadership and the community college presidency. Because I believe you have a unique perspective that will enhance the future of community college leadership, I would like to schedule a face-to-face interview with you on your campus. The interview should take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. In addition, with your permission, I would like to audio tape the interview to guarantee accuracy of reporting.

Attached for your review is a copy of an Informed Consent agreement, which indicates that I will keep information confidential, use pseudonyms to protect your identity, and will not ask any questions that would put you at risk. In addition, the Informed Consent document indicates that your participation in this study is voluntary and that you may withdraw from the study at any time without harm. By signing the Informed Consent document, you would also be indicating your consent for our interview to be audiotaped.

Your agreement to participate in my doctoral study would be greatly appreciated. If you are willing to meet with me for this purpose and would so indicate by replying to this email message, I would be pleased to contact your office to schedule an interview appointment at your convenience. Additionally, prior to the interview, I will forward the interview questions, as well as a copy of the 2001 AACC *Essential Leadership Characteristics of Effective Community College Presidents* for your review.

If you should wish to communicate with me before that time, I would be pleased to hear from you at any time. I can be reached via return email, on my cell phone at 248-470-8232, or via my office direct number at 248-213-1613. Should you wish to contact my Advisor and secondary investigator, Dr. James O'Hanlon at UNL, he may be reached by telephone at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln at 402-472-5310.

Best regards,

Jeanne Bonner  
Doctoral Student  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

## **Appendix D**

### **Informed Consent Letter**



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES  
Department of Educational Administration

**Project: Leading the Charge: A Multiple Case Study of Presidential Perceptions of Essential Leadership Characteristics for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community College**

A research project focused on community college presidential leadership characteristics is being conducted by Jeanne Bonner, a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration at The University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of new, mid-career, and senior community college presidents of presidential leadership characteristics for 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges.

You are being asked to take part in this study by participating in an interview regarding your perceptions of the essential leadership characteristics of community college presidents. Your participation will take approximately 45 minutes to one hour and will be audio taped. Participation in this study involves sitting in a comfortable room, conversing with the researcher, and having the conversation recorded.

You may find the interview valuable in reviewing your perceptions of presidential leadership characteristics. The information you provide for this study will help the investigator to understand more clearly the impact of community college oversight upon presidential leadership.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. However, this interview may prove a difficult task in the event your personal experience was negative. In such a circumstance, this review may bring about those memories.

Any information obtained during this study that could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's office and will only be seen by the investigator during the study. Confidentiality of the data will be maintained by using pseudonyms. Audiotapes will be coded so that no personally identifying information is visible on them, then erased after transcription. Materials will be stored for six months after the conclusion of the study.

Should you have any questions, please contact the principal investigator at the contact numbers provided below. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant that have not been addressed by the investigator or you wish to report any concerns about the study, please contact the Research Compliance Services Office at 402- 472-6926 or [irb@unl.edu](mailto:irb@unl.edu).

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of the consent form to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Please initial if you are willing to have the interview audio recorded.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Research Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

***Name and contact information of the Principle Investigators:***

Principle Investigator: Jeanne Bonner:

Email: [jeanne0804@yahoo.com](mailto:jeanne0804@yahoo.com)      Cell: 248-470-8232      Office: 248-213-1613

Secondary Investigator: Dr. James O'Hanlon, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Email: [johanlon2@unl.edu](mailto:johanlon2@unl.edu)      Office: 402-472-5310



## **Appendix E**

### **Interview Protocol**

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Study Title:** Leading the Charge: A Multiple Case Study of Presidential Perceptions of Essential Leadership Characteristics for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community College

Participant Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Institution Name \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Interview \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

**Scripted Introduction:** Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As I have indicated in our earlier communications, I am presently conducting a qualitative research project for my doctoral dissertation at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am specifically interested to learn the perceptions of sitting community college presidents at one of three career phases - early, mid-career, or senior – of the leadership characteristics and behaviors important for today's community college presidents. I plan to interview nine presidents during this phase of my research.

To ensure that I accurately record your responses, I will audiotape the interviews and transcribe them verbatim, including any extraneous words such as “um” and “uhs.” After my review of the audio tapes and of my notes, I may need to contact you again for clarification purposes. Please be assured that all of your answers will be anonymous and that you will have an opportunity to review the transcript once it is completed to ensure that I have captured your thoughts and views accurately. Audiotapes will be destroyed after you verify that I have captured your responses accurately.

If you agree to be audiotaped, I would ask that you so indicate by signing the Informed Consent letter. This is the same document which I have already shared with you in an electronic format.

You have had an opportunity to review the questions below and to consider your opinions of community college presidential leadership. I will ask you these questions and invite you to share your perceptions freely and fully. It may be necessary for me to ask additional questions not previously listed in this document so that I can clarify your comments.

Do you have any questions of me before we begin? If not, then we are ready to start the interview.

### Interview Questions:

1. To begin, what other positions have you held that have helped prepare you for your current presidency? (Previous presidencies, other positions)
2. Please describe something about your leadership style or behavior that has led to your success.
3. Please give an example of an important lesson you have learned about leadership during your tenure as president.
4. What do you believe have been the three most critical personal leadership behaviors that have enabled you to be effective to this point in your presidency?

*You have been provided with a list the AACC's Essential Leadership Characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Colleges Presidents which were developed in 2001. The following five questions are predicated upon the key components of that research:*

5. Understanding and implementing the community college vision - How does understanding and implementing the college vision impact your presidential role?
6. Effective advocacy – What role does advocacy play in your leadership?
7. Administrative skills - Describe those administrative skills that you believe to be essential for community college presidents today.
8. Community and economic development - To what degree, if any, does your leadership in community and economic development impact your presidential role?
9. Personal, interpersonal and transformational skills - Explain in what ways your key personal/interpersonal skills have helped you shape your presidency.

10. Do you believe you have had to shift or alter your natural leadership style to be successful in your presidency today? If so, please explain.
11. Based upon lessons learned during your presidential tenure, what leadership characteristics outside of those presented by the AACC, if any, do you believe to be of critical importance to the success of current presidents? To future presidents?
12. Given all you have learned about presidential leadership during your career, what advice would you offer to those professionals who plan to seek a community college presidency in the near future? Further, what advice would you offer to the Boards who will be hiring the next presidents?

**Scripted Conclusion:**

Thank you for participating in this interview about the perceptions of community college presidents of the leadership skills and behaviors essential to effectively lead 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges today. As we have discussed, I am going to transcribe this interview verbatim, and then ask you to review it to ensure that I have represented your thoughts and perceptions accurately. If I were to use one of your quotes verbatim, rest assured that it would be presented anonymously, with the extraneous words such as the “ums” and “uhs” removed to improve clarity. Transcripts should be ready for review within the next two weeks.

Thank you very much for your time.

## **Appendix F**

### **Study Process Timeline**

### Study Process Timeline

The following timeline guided this research process:

<b>DISSERTATION STUDY PROCESS TIMELINE</b>	
<b>Dissertation Process Steps</b>	<b>Dates Accomplished</b>
Conduct pilot study	January - April 2006
Review/assess pilot study results	July - October, 2006
Revisit dissertation proposal topic	October - December, 2006
Submit proposal to Advisor and Advisory Committee	January, 2007 -
Literature review process	October, 2006 – February 2013
Literature review update	February – May 2013
Review/revise interview protocol, using lit. search & consultants	January, 2007 – February 2013
Re-determine participant criteria	February, 2013
Submit proposal	April, 2007 – March 2013
CITI Training/IRB approval request	February, 2013
IRB Approval Granted	April, 2013
Following IRB approval, schedule interviews/obtain consent letters	April, 2013
Conduct/record interviews	April-May, 2013
Transcribe interviews/do follow-up interviews as needed/Member checks	May, 2013
Analyze data, search for common terms and categories	May, 2013
Create codes, using NVivo support	May, 2013
Determine single/cross-case themes, triangulation, member-checking	May, 2013
Findings, conclusions, recommendations determined	May-June, 2013
Peer reviewer input	February, 2007 - Completion
Writing, revision, external audit process	May - June, 2013
Submit study to Committee	June, 2013

## **Appendix G**

### **Coding Detail**

### Coding Detail

#### **Theme: The Renaissance President**

##### ***Sub-theme: Passion for the role, with ego kept in check.***

As president, I am passionate about the presidency.  
 I cannot imagine doing the presidency if I did not love it.  
 Passion is the # 1 thing.  
 It is more of a legacy as opposed to projects, tasks and the need to get it done.  
 I am a champion for the cause of students; it drives me.  
 I have a passion for this role, and more specifically a passion for students.  
 Humility and exuding confidence without having all the answers is important.  
 Have a willingness to acknowledge mistakes, but not to the point of self-doubt.  
 The first thing you learn is that you can't have answers to everything, nor should you.  
 You cannot do this job effectively unless you really and passionately understand and believe in the community college vision.  
 You are still just a human being and you're going to make a mistake a day.  
 Practice self-forgiveness.  
 Have the community college mission be your passion.  
 I see myself as just one of the other managers in the organization.  
 You have to have a level of commitment that is just kind of total dedication.  
 You need to be humble.  
 You need to keep your ego in check.  
 People appreciate that you are willing to say you now have more information and are willing to change that decision.  
 No matter how much I know or my team knows, somebody else is going to know more.  
 Being humble is important and people have respect for that.

##### ***Sub-theme: A well-stocked tool-kit is required.***

The president must be multi-faceted.  
 Presidents cannot be one-dimensional.  
 Always act like a president.  
 Bring the best possible preparation to the job.  
 I have held many positions and that was persuasive in my hiring.  
 Having the ability to see all sides of situations is a tribute to my varied background.  
 Experience is important.  
 You need to get some varying background.  
 It would be challenging to be effective with only a single agenda or one dimension.  
 You need to have exposed yourself to a lot of different situations in a lot of different places.  
 I am a career-changer and that helped me to understand the functions of a community college.  
 All of my multiple jobs at the college contributed to my understanding about the college.  
 You can never do enough ground work or leg work.



The broader your experience, the more valuable you will be.  
 You can't just have a lot of experience in one area; you have to branch out.  
 You've got to reach back into the rich experiences that you have had.  
 My varied previous experience helps me in this job.  
 Having varied work experiences has been most helpful.  
 The most important characteristic is having lots of different experiences in my career.  
 In considering how one performs in a professional environment, you come prepared.  
 My vast professional background has made me a good president.  
 Do not be a specialist; you need experience in all areas of the college.  
 Going into things and always being prepared is crucial.

**Theme: Ability to Learn on the Job**

***Sub-theme: Presidents lead alone***

It is surprising the credibility a president has.  
 I had to work hard to build relationships to help during challenging situations.  
 You can get bogged down and the days are long.  
 It's too stressful to not be happy with what you are doing.  
 You have to be able to learn to do some things that are uncomfortable for you.  
 Whether you like it or not, who you are affects the presidency.  
 You learn you have to give your life to the position.  
 You concede your life to the position and stop separating the person you are from the position you are in.  
 The job is literally 24/7, 365, and that is just who you are.  
 You can't have a deep personal relationship with anyone.  
 You are more alone in this job than any other job that you have had.  
 Earlier in my career, I had friends, but I have friends no more.  
 We almost have more of a trust in talking with other presidents than we have in the people of our own institution.  
 People respond to me because I am the president of the college, not because I am me.  
 I have to think things through so when I make a decision I feel good about it.

***Sub-theme: Adaptation of leadership to the situation***

I've learned to be less trusting over time.  
 Presidents need to keep a birds-eye view over the whole organization.  
 Presidents should be able to modify a position without modifying a goal.  
 My style was behavioral, participative, but I felt myself evolving over time.  
 I am adaptable.  
 Leadership appropriate ten years ago might not be appropriate now.  
 First I was looking for more participation, but I had to adjust my leadership to be more authoritarian.  
 I couldn't just take the structure the other president had and make it beneficial for me.  
 I knew where my weaknesses were and I knew where I had to have really strong people.  
 Understanding multiple perspectives has been critical.  
 Adaptability and being able to set my priorities have shaped my presidency.

The president I am today is very different from who I was when I took this office.  
 I have shifted very much in who I am.  
 Adaptability is a trait that is very, very helpful.  
 You can learn from bad examples.  
 In this position, I have to explain more.  
 Allow yourself to be flexible.  
 I think you have to become competitive; you have to be pretty aggressive and assertive.  
 I thought I understood Board relations, but I had to learn and grow into how to relate to individual Board members and to the Board as a whole.  
 The organization does impact your leadership.  
 I have had to become more assertive.

**Theme: Consistency of Views About Leadership**

Mission and vision of community colleges is crucial in dealing with the public.  
 I refer to the college's mission all the time.  
 We clarified our vision and mission so the members of the community understand.  
 Vision and mission – you have to wear it on your sleeve.  
 Everywhere you go, internally and externally, you're conveying and selling that mission.  
 Advocacy is crucial whenever you're trying to energize a new idea.  
 I know how much time I have to spend on the care and nurturing of our legislators.  
 For the college to grow, we have to continue from one campaign to the next.  
 Take the time to develop Board relationships.  
 Advocacy is vital to my presidency.  
 Advocacy is one of the areas that has grown tremendously.  
 Attention to organizational detail is important.  
 Collective bargaining skills are needed in this environment.  
 Legal skills – those skills are kind of under-rated.  
 Community and economic development are kind of integrated.  
 Community and economic development are very important to community colleges.  
 This is important to the vitality of the college organization.  
 You must have integrity and honesty, but also bring consistency over time.  
 Hit the ground listening; communication is the key.  
 Accessibility and full attention to those I am dealing with is my style.  
 Most people perceive me as approachable.  
 I see my job as serving the community as the college's chief advocate.  
 It is critical to have the ability to form a team.  
 Economic development is one of the key roles for a community college.  
 Communication skills are important.  
 I have actual conversations with people.

**Theme: All-consuming Nature of the Role**

***Sub-theme: The big leap***

When people in the community see me, they see the college.

I think I am a bit more relaxed now over the last half-dozen years than I was earlier on.  
 The presidency means thinking bigger and longer.  
 The position is very different.  
 Put in the hours to get it done no matter what it takes.  
 Long hours are just part of this job.  
 The presidency is a very demanding position; some lose sight of that.  
 The president is entrusted with heavy responsibilities which can be very fulfilling.  
 There is a whole different animal you become when you know at the end of the day it is your responsibility.  
 Of all the leadership roles I have had, I have to separate this from the rest.  
 That last step is a very, very large step.  
 You don't get the view from the chair until you are sitting in the chair.  
 It is an important lesson to learn very early on that you need to give yourself over to the job or it will just stress you out.  
 I spend hours here on a Sunday getting desk work accomplished.  
 I would not want to relive my first year as president again.  
 It was extremely stressful.

***Sub-theme: Motivation to do the presidency vs. be the president***

As president, as yourself are you building your own legend or are you acting in the best interests of the college?  
 People can show very different sides of their leadership.  
 Some people get too wrapped up in 'I am the president' which is a hindrance.  
 The person in the job should like to do the things the president does.  
 Be your authentic self.  
 Issues are difficult, but there are tremendous rewards.  
 A lot of people try because it was a job, but it has to be something that you believe in fervently and are passionate about.  
 Anyone who goes after a presidency so that they can be called President X without considering fit is not going to be very healthy.  
 You have to begin living as the president of the institution.  
 For professionals seeking a community college presidency, you have to have embraced the community college mission.  
 Recognize this is your mission and your life's work.

**Theme: Looking Ahead**

***Sub-theme: Advice to Prospective presidents and Boards***

Don't do this job unless you really, really love it.  
 Presidents should ask whether they want to operate in that environment.  
 Look at the kinds of problems that real presidents face, not the idealized version of what presidents do.  
 Before seeking a presidency, actually talk to presidents to find out what the job really is.  
 It's piece of work; it's hard work.  
 It is not for the faint of heart or the dull.

Focus on your skill set.  
 Know your strengths and play to them.  
 Presidents should lead as though they were term-limited.  
 Presidents get in trouble because they are not able to function well with their various constituencies.  
 Go through a period of self-examination.  
 Ask yourself if you are ready for the pressure.  
 Boards have to be really candid in being able to tell prospective candidates what it is they need.  
 Board could kick me out of office.  
 Boards should always find the best fit for their college.  
 Boards need to be consistent in the messages sent to candidates.  
 Do some pre-planning before posting the position.  
 Really size up whether the candidate has the skills, competencies, and characteristics that you want.  
 Boards need to think through what is important to them.  
 Boards should not just wait for the perfect resume.  
 Hire a skill set; don't hire a resume.  
 Boards need to be open and honest with candidates about the college.

***Sub-theme: Presidents need Grit***

True achievement is about the long haul.  
 You must have persistence.  
 Nothing is more satisfying than seeing goals come to fruition after years of effort.  
 Stamina and fitness are my personal pillars.  
 Leaders don't consider when they need to rest.  
 If a job needs to be done, you need to be out there.  
 We need persistence and hard work.  
 Presidents must be demonstrating the energy needed for the job.  
 Have the strength, will and fortitude to take care of yourself.  
 Some presidents are exhausted and could make bad decision as a result.  
 Stamina and being able to keep yourself healthy is important.  
 The physical demands of the job are immense.  
 These are jobs that can chew you up physically.  
 Individuals need to have a degree of healthy behaviors and ability to burn off stress.  
 The idea of the 9-5 is hilarious.  
 Persistence is critical for this role.  
 Persistence, strength, and faith are crucial.  
 Grit is exactly what presidents need to be successful.  
 Grit is a fine label for the energy that I keep trying to describe.  
 'Grit' along with the other skills leaders must possess is what makes a leader effective.  
 I would not hesitate to list stamina as an important presidential trait – almost to the point where it goes without saying.

## **Appendix H**

### **External Auditor**

### External Audit Attestation

**Mark J. Felsheim, Ph.D.**

I have consulted with B. Jeanne Bonner in response to her request for an external audit of her doctoral dissertation entitled: *Leading the Charge: A Multiple Case Study of Presidential Perceptions of Essential Leadership Characteristics for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community College*. We discussed the study's purpose, the methods used for conducting the research, and the study's outcomes. The purpose of this audit, conducted during June of 2013, was to examine the process of the study to determine whether the data support its findings, interpretations, and conclusions.

Several documents were provided for my review, including:

- IRB approval
- Recruitment procedures and interview protocol
- The research proposal
- An overview of actions taken to ensure privacy for the interview subjects
- Informed consent documents
- Interview transcripts
- Codes developed in relation to the interview responses
- The final dissertation, including the findings, their analysis, and conclusions related to the research study

Following my review of the material presented, it is my opinion that this research project has value and could be expanded to include the leadership perceptions of college presidents on a national level. Further, it is likely the results of this study could provide guidance to community college practitioners in the design and expansion of future leadership development initiatives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark J. Felsheim', written in a cursive style.

Mark J. Felsheim, Ph.D.