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# FROM THE BORDER TO THE BOARDROOM: THE JOURNEY TO THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENCY FOR MEXICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN

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FROM THE BORDER TO THE BOARDROOM:  
THE JOURNEY TO THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENCY FOR  
MEXICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

IN

COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

BY

YESENIA NOREEKA AVALOS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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## Community College Leadership Doctoral Program

## Dissertation Notification of Completion

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Title of Dissertation: From the Border to the Boardroom: The Journey to the Community College Presidency for Mexican-American Women

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Final Approval Meeting: March 18, 2011

We certify this dissertation, submitted by the above named candidate, is fully adequate in scope and quality to satisfactorily meet the dissertation requirement for attaining the Doctor of Education degree in the Community College Leadership Doctoral Program.

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## DEDICATION

For Angel – My love, my heart, my future

For Adelina and Alejandro - May all your dreams come true. Mommy loves you!

For Mommy and Mama – I miss you everyday

For Maria Elena and Catarina – Your love knows no bounds

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative cross-case analysis study is to examine the professional pathways of female Mexican-American community college presidents. The Hispanic/Latino population has grown immensely in the United States since 2000. The demographic profile for community colleges has evolved to reflect the population changes within the country. Community colleges grew tremendously during the 1960s and 1970s and now thirty to forty years later these institutions are searching for new executive level leaders. Looking to the future, there is an opportunity for the face of community college leadership to change.

Similarly to other women, Latinas are moving into education leadership roles at community colleges. This study searches for insight from two current and one retired Mexican-American female community college presidents. Specifically, the study seeks to learn what these women identify as facilitators and obstacles along their path to the presidency. Additionally, the study seeks to define requisite leadership characteristics for community college presidents.

In summary, these women shared their respective journeys to the presidency and conveyed that while there is not one singular true pathway to the office of community college president, their stories are more similar than different. They all offered responses that spoke to the need for community college presidents to be dynamic, passionate and credentialed to be considered a credible community college president.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as a preliminary introduction to the study and presents the purpose and driving questions of the study. Additionally, the backgrounds of the subjects and participants of this study – community colleges and community college presidents respectively are disclosed. Finally, a synopsis of the organization of the entire dissertation is provided.

#### **Background**

Community colleges have been in existence for over a century. Originally, community colleges were centered on offering the first two years of higher education for those newly graduated from high school. In time, the goals for the community college expanded to include career and technical training, developmental education and continuing education. The community college was to be affordable and accessible and remedy the social and personal issues of students (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Today the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) counts 1,177 community colleges nationwide (American Association of Community Colleges, 2009b).

The Hispanic/Latino population in the United States has grown at a rate of 24.3% between 2000 and 2006 (United States Census Bureau, 2006). In 2006, this segment of the population reached 44.3 million with a projected population of over 47 million for the 2010 census and over 102 million in 2050 (United States Census Bureau, 2006). The demographic profile for community colleges has evolved to reflect the demographic changes within the country, which includes an increase in the Hispanic/Latino student population. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2009b)

Hispanics/Latinos account for 16% of current enrollment in community colleges.

Community colleges, being open and accessible institutions, have served as the primary entry point to post secondary education for women and minorities for generations (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Community colleges grew tremendously during the 1960s and 1970s and now thirty to forty years later these institutions are searching for new executive level leaders. Community college leaders are beginning to retire after serving for many years and the leadership practices are important to consider (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005). Looking to the future, there is an opportunity for the face of community college leadership to change. An overwhelming percentage of presidents are still white males. Currently, only 6% of community college executive officers are Hispanic/Latino (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011). The purpose of this study is to examine the professional pathways and the potential facilitators and obstacles experienced along the journey to executive level leadership for three female Mexican-American community college presidents.

### **Significance of Study to Community Colleges**

While the Latina/o population in the United States is shifting dramatically, educational attainment levels of Latinos are rising slowly. The percent of Latinas considered a college graduate with a baccalaureate degree or more has grown from 4.3% in 1970 to 13.7% in 2007 (United States Census Bureau, 2007). Latinas are beginning to exhibit leadership in various circles of society. According to Sanchez de Valencia (2008) Latinas are becoming leaders in the business field. Latinas are also demonstrating their leadership in the educational academy (Canul, 2003; Lopez-Hansen, 1997). This study

will specifically examine Mexican-American females and their journey along the road to the community college presidency.

Similarly to other women, Latinas are moving into education leadership roles at community colleges. Women in general still face barriers to career advancement in community colleges and these barriers also affect Latinas, especially Mexican-American females. This study searches for insights from three Mexican-American women – two current community college presidents and one retired community college president. Specifically, this research seeks to uncover what the participants identified as facilitators and obstacles along their respective paths to the presidency. This research is intended to provide information to current Latina community college faculty members and administrators who may have an interest in pursuing executive level leadership within the community college system. In addition, it will add to the body of literature that addresses the phenomena of Mexican-American women serving as community college presidents.

### **Purpose Statement and Driving Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine the professional pathways of female Mexican-American community college presidents. The focus of the study will be to examine those facilitators and obstacles experienced by three Mexican-American women who either currently serve or have served as a community college president.

The driving questions arising from the purpose of this study are the following:

1. What factors facilitate successful upward mobility of Mexican-American women to ascend to the community college presidency?
2. What obstacles were identified by Mexican-American women as they ascend to the community college presidency?

3. What are some of the characteristic commonalities and differences shared by Mexican-American community college presidents?

### **Assumptions of the Study**

The first assumption of this study is that Mexican-American women can be and are effective community college presidents. While there is not an abundance of research regarding Latina community college presidents there are Mexican-American women serving as community college leaders. Furthermore, the researcher assumes that they are effective and respected within their roles as community college presidents.

It is also assumed that these three selected Mexican-American female community college presidents have experienced the benefit of various facilitators, as well as, overcame various obstacles. In reviewing the literature and previously published research on Latina community college presidents, many of the studies discuss the obstacles community college leaders experience while serving in the role of president. However, while many dissertations explore the obstacles community college presidents experience, the researcher had to assume that they also experienced various facilitators along their respective professional path to the presidency. These women must have experienced facilitators to have achieved their position as an executive leader. This study explores both facilitators and obstacles that the three presidents experienced throughout their professional pathway.

The researcher, as a higher education professional for over sixteen years has experienced gender bias. The next fair assumption would be that these Mexican-American community college presidents would also have experienced some level of negative gender bias along their journey to the presidency.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study the terms Latina, Mexican-American and Chicana will often be used. The nomenclature used is not necessarily interchangeable. This section provides a listing of terms that will be used for this study.

Latina - refers to any woman of Hispanic or Latin American descent.

Mexican-American - refers specifically to person/s who are either born in Mexico or are of Mexican descent and live in the United States

Chicana - used interchangeably with Mexican-American

Marianismo – the expectation of Latina women to accept patriarchal gender roles (Gil & Vasquez, 1996)

Chicana Feminist Thought (CFT) – appreciation of the roles of Chicanas and opportunity to actualize their potential within society (Garcia, 1997; Vidal, 1997)

Chicana Liberal Feminism (CLF) – specific perspective of CFT that promotes the success of all Chicanas through access to education and political participation (Pesquera and Segura, 1997)

### **Dissertation Organization**

The following chapters include a literature review, description of methodology, presentation of findings and summary of conclusions. The literature review explores topics regarding leadership and the Mexican-American community and culture. This study is a qualitative cross-case analysis and the methodology chapter will present a more detailed account of how the study was conducted. The findings chapter will present the responses to the interview questions and the researcher's interpretation of those responses



through a cross comparative analysis. Finally, in the conclusions chapter the researcher offers recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to examine the professional pathways of Mexican-American female community college presidents. This study will explore the defining moments that led the selected community college presidents to pursue their professional path. It will also explore those facilitators and obstacles encountered during the professional pathway. Finally, the study will look at any similarities and or differences between the three selected president participants. A thorough review of literature was conducted to identify previous relevant studies and to provide information that leads to a greater appreciation of community college presidents, specifically female Mexican-American community college presidents. This chapter is organized to present an examination of female Mexican-American community college presidents within the context of community colleges, leadership, culture and Chicana Feminist Thought. As a result the chapter will include:

- The historical background of community colleges
- Competencies for community college leaders
- Hispanic/Latina/o experience in the United States
- Community college leadership and Latina/os
- Transformational Leadership
- Latinas serving in administrative roles
- Feminist theories

All of the aforementioned subjects when read together add some understanding of the background and expectations of female Mexican-American community college presidents.

Within the literature review, several concepts were considered and researched. The historical purpose of the community college was the first theme reviewed. Specifically, the researcher examined the multiple curricular expectations of the community college that may affect the office of the president and the multi-faceted role the president must execute. Not only was the structure and function of the community college investigated, but the profile of community college leaders was analyzed as well.

The literature review includes a brief synopsis of Mexican-American culture and the influence of culture on Mexican-American women. Throughout the literature, the theme of cultural influence was ever present. Mexican-American women serving in leadership roles are often required to balance ethnic culture and institutional culture while considering the daily needs of their institution as the leader of the college. While this may appear to be a daunting task, the literature demonstrates the need for fluidity to serve as a successful Latina leader.

Feminist theory definitions and Chicana Feminist Theory, specifically, were present in the study of the literature. A variety of feminist thought is presented. Multiple viewpoints regarding feminism and women of color, dependent upon which feminist theory employed, is also discussed within the literature review.

### **Historical Background of the Community College**

This study is centered on Mexican-American female community college presidents, so it is important that a brief review of the community college and its purpose

be presented within the literature review. The community college offers five curricular functions (Cohen and Brawer, 2003): Academic Transfer; Vocational-technical; Continuing Education; Developmental Education and Community Service. Collectively, these five functions are the purpose of the community college, but each function has its own needs and student population. A brief description of each function is summarized within the following paragraphs.

Academic Transfer is often considered the most important function of the college because it was the first and primary reason for the creation of the community college (Cohen and Brawer, 2003). The reputation of the community college is sometimes only as comprehensive as its articulation agreements with local universities. For a variety of reasons, community colleges must maintain active and extensive articulation agreements. For example, in Illinois, all community colleges must maintain articulation agreements with a minimum of three (3) Illinois public universities or three (3) baccalaureate degree-granting institutions where over 51% of the students are transfer students (Illinois Community College Board, 2008). To further expound upon the significance of articulation, in the State of Illinois, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) jointly created the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) in 1993 to facilitate transfer of credit. By 2005 over 100 institutions of higher education in Illinois were participating in IAI (Illinois Community College Board, 2005).

Vocational-technical career education is the second function of the community college. In 1963 the Vocational Education Act was passed, creating an influx of dollars to the community college. The importance of allowing a person to grow within their

desired profession without committing to a senior institution was realized by community college leaders as early as the 1920s (Cohen and Brawer, 2003). However, vocational programs were not always popular with students because many wanted to be able to pursue a baccalaureate degree and vocational education was not a university-based education (Cohen and Brawer, 2003).

Continuing Education is the third community college function. This pillar is broad and expansive. It is the area of the college that caters to various populations and actively pursues the ability to offer alternative courses, both short and long-term. This area of the college allows for the institution to bridge into independent contract training with local corporations as well (Cohen and Brawer, 2003). This function of the college offers the non-credit bearing seminars and classes, such as cake decorating and real estate licensure certification.

The fourth function of the community college is Developmental Education. Literacy and writing skills expectations have declined over the past several decades leaving students unable to attend a university and in need of remediation (Cohen and Brawer, 2003). According to the Illinois Community College Board's 2009 Developmental Education report 19.5% of all Illinois community college students enrolled in at least one remedial course in fiscal year 2009. This is another example of community colleges meeting the needs of the local community members by offering the level of education needed.

Finally, the fifth function of the community college is Community Service. The community college is in a unique position to serve as an exhibitor of curricular events. This role allows for the college to earn a reputation of additional benevolence within the

local community at large (Cohen and Brawer, 2003). According to the Economic Development report by the Illinois Community College Board in 2006 Illinois Community Colleges served over 4,800 unemployed and underemployed citizens through workshops and seminars. Furthermore, the same report states over 14,000 students received job placement or career counseling assistance through the community college system (Illinois Community College Board, 2006).

Cohen and Brawer (2003) addressed the social role of the community college and challenged several myths promoted by critics of the community college, the most important being the fact that critics associate social group mobility with equal access to education. The assumption here is that by providing equal access to higher education, all students would elevate their social and economic status. Cohen and Brawer (2003) argued that the community college should not be held responsible and judged by this assumption, as a portion of enrollees do not intend to complete a degree at the community college and intend to directly enter the workforce after only completing a few credits. Furthermore, another population of students only intends to complete a few credit hours and transfer to a university and do not intend of complete a degree at a community college.

All of the functions have varying expectations and needs. The varying needs affect the prioritization of leadership and the organization. Leadership of the college generally considers all curricular functions of the college. However, the administrative leadership may be held particularly accountable for one area more than another by the governing body of the college. Furthermore, the outcomes of each area will be directly influenced by the expectations of the leadership.

## **Competencies for Community College Leaders**

Between 2003 and 2005 the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) drafted several core competencies that all effective community college leaders should possess and actively execute. A team was developed by the AACC to survey and prioritize these competencies. These competencies are: Organizational Strategy, Resource Management, Communication, Collaboration, Community College Advocacy and Professionalism (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005). According to the AACC these are the competencies that were rated either “very or extremely essential” (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005 p.4).

Upon actual review and reading of these competencies, the depth of knowledge and years of service and experience needed to be a truly effective and respected community college leader is truly recognized. For Organizational Strategy, it could be argued that a community college leader should be able to not only assess the needs of the college, but also inspire the execution of any number of actions and tactical plans to respond to those needs. The needs of the college may or may not be changing, but the long term goal of the leader should be to ensure the success of not only the institution, but of the students, as well. Resource Management is another key competency, but very much related to the first competency of Organizational Strategy. Within this competency the community college leader might be expected to be able to manage the financial and human resources of the college and maintain an ethical, fair and systematic distribution of these resources. Communication, while fairly obvious, also requires the community college leader to have certain finite details. For example, these leaders should exude confidence to all constituents while communicating clearly and effectively. Collaboration

is another necessary competency. Collaboration is more than merely creating relationships; it requires the maintenance of relationships and minimizing conflicts that may arise. Community College Advocacy is of the utmost importance. The leaders of these institutions must take pride in being one of the leaders and represent the entire system positively while truly applying the mission and purpose of the community college to the entire institution and system. Professionalism is the final competency and it is vital to the success of any leader and their institution. Professionalism can have a variety of meaning to an individual. It requires accountability and responsibility to make and accept consequences of difficult decisions. It is the manifestation of all of these competencies that create an effective leader (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005).

These competencies will be considered when reviewing the responses from the selected Mexican-American community college presidents. The competencies are considered essential to community college leaders. It could be reasonable to assume that similar competencies will be discussed during the interviews of this study.

### **Hispanic/Latino Experience in the United States**

The discussion of a Hispanic/Latino experience is very difficult to conceptualize and analyze. There is, in fact, no one true Hispanic/Latino experience. The terms Hispanic or Latino are applied to a variety of ethnic backgrounds and none of them have one true shared history. The histories of the various backgrounds that fall under the Hispanic/Latino umbrella label need to be explored to establish an accurate profile of the collective group. Some of the people under the Hispanic umbrella are in the U.S. through immigration, while others are here because they simply fought to stay in their homes on



the land they owned but the borders changed. Without having a shared history, there is not truly one shared identity.

### **Demographics**

This study specifically examines the professional careers of Mexican-American women serving as community college leaders. Many demographic summaries combine all the ethnic backgrounds of Hispanics. Romero (1997) discusses that the most accurate count of Mexican-Americans was in the 1930 census. At that time “persons born in Mexico, or having parents born in Mexico, who were not definitely White, Black or Indian, Chinese or Japanese” were classified as Mexican (Romero, 1997 p xiii). However, by 1990 the racial options did not include any Mexican or Latin descent definitions (Romero, 1997).

When comparing the Hispanic population to the total population in the United States, there are definitive differences in reference to educational attainment. The total population of women has an educational attainment rate of 26.2% with a baccalaureate degree or higher. Meanwhile, only 13.1% of Hispanic women have completed a baccalaureate degree or higher (United States Census Bureau, 2006). While the educational attainment rate averages half the completion rates of the total population, there are areas of the country experiencing a 200% Hispanic population increase. Kendall County in Illinois, for example, experienced a growth in Hispanic population at a rate of 203.9% between 2000 and 2006 (United States Census Bureau, 2006).

Reviewing census data of the Hispanic population offers a furthered blurriness of collective identity. Dependent upon which ethnic group of the encompassing Hispanic groups there may be varying answers in regards to education and income. There are stark differences in relation to educational attainment alone. According to the U.S. Census

Ethnic Fact Sheets (2000b), only 7% of the Mexican-American population has a baccalaureate degree or higher. In comparison, 21% of Cuban-Americans have a baccalaureate degree or higher (United States Census Bureau, 2000a). However, when looking at median household income Mexican-Americans are only earning \$3,000 less than Cuban-Americans (United States Census Bureau, 2000a; United States Census Bureau, 2000b).

### **Immigration**

The immigration history of all groups under the Latino umbrella is a very important concept. There is a whole discussion of theory and terminology that lead to one of many explanations on how immigration status influences the collective Latino identity in the United States. Many of the Hispanic population are naturalized, or foreign-born, citizens and this is a crucial factor when considering collective identity.

Adding the undocumented immigrants into the discussion further blurs the lines of collective identity (Jimenez, 2007). Hondagneu-Sotelo (1997) studies the history of undocumented Mexican immigrants and determined that there has always been a pattern of labor movement from Mexico to the United States. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1997) cites examples of laws enacted by Congress to allow Mexicans to enter the country and join the workforce. Maciel and Herrera-Sobek (1998) offer similar conclusions, by stating that both the United States and Mexico benefit from the undocumented Mexican immigrant worker in the United States. In fact, Mexico's second source of revenue is the money sent to Mexican citizens from undocumented immigrants residing and working in the United States (Maciel and Herrera-Sobek, 1998). The United States also benefits from this labor arrangement. The undocumented immigrant worker renders more

payment into the United States' economy than they accept (Maciel and Herrera-Sobek, 1998). Maciel and Herrera-Sobek (1998) further contend that this population group fills low-wage positions and these conditions add to the U.S. economy.

However, because Mexicans are not perceived to be a group that assimilates easily, this group is never granted citizenship; they are simply used for the labor (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1997). Currently, in the United States there is much support for anti-immigrant rhetoric (Gonzales, 2009). Gonzales (2009) also discusses the mobilization of Mexican-Americans in response to this anti-immigrant sentiment. Further, Gonzales (2009) contends that this mobilization is derived from the concern of actual United States citizens' potentially losing civil liberties as a direct result from the anti-immigrant expressions throughout the nation.

Jimenez (2007) expands upon this and studies the perceptions the Mexican immigrant and Mexican-American groups have of each other. He offers that the Mexican immigrant offers both benefits and liabilities to the Mexican-American. Based on his 2007 qualitative study Jimenez contends that many of the Mexican-Americans interviewed state that the Mexican immigrants have not assimilated well and can add a negative perception to all people of Mexican descent. Jimenez (2007) offers the example that the Mexican-American will benefit professionally when they can fulfill a role within multiculturalism. Furthermore, Jimenez (2007) delves into the idea that the Mexican immigrant somehow degrades the perception of Mexican-Americans by lumping all together into one group. However, Jimenez (2007) further contends that without the Mexican immigrant, the Mexican-American cannot further themselves because it is the negative perception of the Mexican immigrant that allows for the Mexican-American to

hold a higher self-image. When two groups within the same national and ethnic background cannot seem to agree this serves as only one example that there is not one true Latina/o experience in the United States.

### **Mexican-American History**

Land ownership is another major concern of Mexicans and influences the state of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans on both sides of the border (Griswold del Castillo, 1990). According to Griswold del Castillo (1990) it was the superior attitude of the United States' leaders who believed in fulfilling a Manifest Destiny that allowed not only for the absorption of the land, but created an unequal relationship between the two countries. Within the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexican landowners were expected to keep their land, provided that they agreed to become citizens of the United States (Griswold del Castillo, 1990). However, many settlers or squatters would settle on a piece of land and file a claim with the government of the United States. Once claims were filed, the Mexican landowners would lose their rights to the property, regardless of previous commitment to abiding by the Hidalgo Treaty (Ruiz de Burton, 1997). These actions further perpetuated the status of inequality between the two nations and allowed for the United States to become the nation with advantages over Mexico.

Mexican history shows that the country's land was taken from its citizens. What is now the Southwest region of the United States was once the Mexican northwestern territory. The boundaries may have changed but the flow of migration has not. Immigration into the United States from Mexico ebbs and flows dependent upon the needs of the United States. When there is a high need for inexpensive labor the Mexican is welcome, but once the need disappears so does the tolerance. Deportations rise,

including the deportations of actual U.S. citizens of Mexican descent when the need for the Mexican labor in United States diminishes (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997).

### **Mexican-American Identity**

Identity is complex and involves a multitude of concepts. Hurtado and Gurin (2004) present the following definitions of Identification and Consciousness: Identification is “whether individuals think of themselves as belonging to certain groups” (p. xvii) while Consciousness is “whether individuals are aware that the groups they belong to hold a certain status” (p. xvii). Caso (2011) contends this identity can be difficult to establish. Caso (2011) argues that because Mexican-Americans live in the United States that they do not have a “complete Mexican culture” and instead “have an American culture” (p. 98). The blending of cultures is an important concept to remember throughout this study. Racial and ethnic identification is important to this study as it is centered on Mexican-American female community college presidents.

Oboler (1997) discusses the social implication of racial identity. Most importantly, she reviews how people identify with a racial background based on their socialization. She notes the importance of separating ethnicity from racial profile. While people may identify with the term Hispanic or Latino they may also identify with varying races based on their internal pride of their respective backgrounds. This idea is expounded upon by Tafoya (2005) where she states that 85% of native-born Hispanics racially identify as White. Furthermore, in Texas 63% identify as White compared to 45% for Hispanics outside of Texas (Tafoya, 2005). Tafoya (2005) contends it is because of the particular racial climate in Texas that leads to the higher White affinity.

According to Oboler (1997) there is an issue of racial hierarchy within the Mexican-American experience. Oboler (1997) discusses that Mexican-Americans with lighter skin tones who look more Spaniard and less indigenous often held more clout in the community. This was reinforced by Davalos (2003) when she interviewed Mexican-American women in Chicago. Davalos (2003) expected brown skin to be a “the sign of the authentic Chicano” but was quickly reeducated when the interview participants commented on her being “too dark” (p. 142). Davalos (2003) assumed that by being a darker skinned woman she would have been readily accepted and the research participants would have been more open to her. However, she did not expect the value on lighter-toned skin to be held by the participants of her study. This was one example of how the value of racial identification is not only different from ethnic identification but how the differentiation still holds true over time within the Mexican-American and Mexican immigrant community.

### **Marianismo**

Marianismo is a well-studied Latino cultural phenomenon. It is defined as the woman’s difficulty with breaking away from ascribed patriarchal gender roles within the family (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). Marianismo sets limitations and unrealistic expectations of women, by reinforcing the belief that women are spiritually superior to men (Marano, 2000). Women, in their spiritual superiority, can subject themselves to extreme levels of sacrifice. Women are to serve their fathers, brothers and then husbands (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). These values and behavioral practices at one time allowed for a certain amount of protection and respect for women. Women, who behaved like good women, would be protected and defended by men (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). When a woman did not behave

within the ascribed roles, backlash occurred and women suffered at the hands of the men they were supposed to serve. Deviation from this practice is generally met with resistance, frustration and outright anger.

Gil and Vasquez, (1996) offer the “Ten Commandments of Marianismo” (p.8)

1. Do not forget the woman’s place
2. Do not forsake tradition
3. Do not be single, self-supporting or independent minded
4. Do not put your own needs first
5. Do not wish for more in life than being a housewife
6. Do not forget that sex is for making babies – not for pleasure
7. Do not be unhappy with your man or criticize him for infidelity, gambling, verbal or physical abuse, alcohol or drug abuse
8. Do not ask for help
9. Do not discuss personal problems outside the home
10. Do not change those things which make you unhappy that you can realistically change

There are several behavioral examples of being Marianista. A woman performs tasks for others simply because it is expected behavior. Apologizing for acts of assertiveness is a common practice. Women can choose to be a Nueva Marianista, a woman of culture who does not forget the past while searching for a better life (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). A Marianista is willing to endure any suffering while a Nueva Marianista is willing to endure challenges for change.

## **Summary**

Studying the histories and immigration patterns it is found that while there are similarities and connections, there are vast differences within the different ethnic groups under the Hispanic/Latino designation. While most of the members of each group do identify with the term Hispanic/Latino, there is first allegiance to their respective ethnicity that reigns as the superior identity. This in itself is the uniqueness of the Hispanic/Latino community. The Hispanic/Latino community is often studied, but the influence of the various ethnic groups may not always be considered.

### **Community College Leadership and Latina/os**

Community colleges face an extraordinary change in leadership within the next few years (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005). As current leaders are retiring; the questions arise: from where will the next generation of community college leaders arrive? And, will the face and image of these leaders be different from the current profile? There is a great potential for many men and women of various ethnic backgrounds to pursue the role of community college president. Currently, the overwhelming majority of community college presidents are male, White and just under sixty (60) years of age (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011).

As the current presidents seek retirement are Latinas among the administrative ranks to pursue the presidency? According to Gutierrez et al (2002) there may not necessarily be enough Latina/os poised to ascend to the presidency. Several issues were identified by this article as potential concerns with the pool of Latina/o faculty and administrators. Specifically, Latina/os do not always attend highly selective universities, nor do they have earned doctoral degrees at the same rate as other racial and ethnic



groups, according to Gutierrez et al (2002). Also, Latina/os are not well represented within the faculty ranks. Furthermore, according to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) only 5% of the full-time community college faculty members are Latina/o and only 6% of the administrative staff members are Latina/o (American Association of Community Colleges, 2009). These statistics do not allow for a large pool of candidates to rise to the presidency. Gutierrez et al's (2002) study gives a qualitative report of Latino administrators where one of the significant points is that Latina/os are perceived to use political maneuvers to attain powerful positions. The article further explores the negative perceptions of Latina/os. For example, energy and risk-taking are generally valued as leadership qualities, but when associated with Latina/os these qualities are characterized as aggression and non-conformity (Gutierrez et al, 2002). When considering the low numbers of Latina/os within the faculty and administrative ranks and negative perceptions of Latina/os it may become difficult for Latinas to achieve the presidency at similar rates of other racial/ethnic groups.

### **Transformational Leadership**

While there are a variety of leadership theories, which could have been used as an additional framework, for this study, the emphasis will be on Transformational Leadership. James MacGregor Burns (1978) theorized that leadership requires a relationship between leaders and followers. He further explained that power and purpose are critical for the leader and follower relationship to function. Finally, the power and leadership should be measured by the actual amount of intended outcomes created and completed (Burns, 1978). It is the relationship that allows for all the parties involved to fully engage within the leadership process. Northouse (2010) conveys the ideal that

transformational leadership allows for the elevation of motivation while elevating the morality of both the leaders and followers. This ideal of leadership is considered important to the leadership of Mexican-American community college presidents because of the reciprocal relationship between a community college president and the community which she leads.

James Kouzes and Barry Posner have become synonymous with Transformational Leadership since their creation of the Leadership Practices Inventory in the 1980s. They focused on the practices of leaders and found five general practices of exemplary leadership: Modeling the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act and Encourage the Heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Each general practice encompasses distinctive behaviors and habits that demonstrate the practice. For example, clearly explaining values or serving as a role model to others would be affiliated with Modeling the Way. To Inspire a Shared Vision, leaders generally imagine the future and actively recruit others to envision the same future. Leaders also search for opportunities and create positive situations as a way to Challenge the Process. Trust and confidence are important for a leader to be able to Enable Others to Act. Finally, something as simple as offering recognition for a job well done is an example of someone who can Encourage the Heart.

Dr. Sherry Stout-Stewart uses transformational leadership in her 2005 study of female community college presidents. She surveyed female community college presidents and compared their leadership practices and demographic characteristics in search of patterns of leadership among female presidents. She found that the most prominent practice among female community college presidents was Enabling Others to

Act followed by Modeling the Way. However, when divided by race and ethnicity, women of color were more likely to have Inspire a Shared Vision as the most prominent leadership practice (Stout-Stewart, 2005). When studying Mexican-American female community college presidents, leadership and their definition of leadership, will be an important factor of this piece of research.

### **Latinas Serving in Leadership and Administrative Roles**

In preparation for Latinas to become influential leaders requires, several processes must occur, according to Sanchez de Valencia (2008). Latinas need to be emotionally ready and have enough self-confidence to choose to become a leader. Latinas develop emotional resilience through the process of building self-confidence and this process requires the breaking of negative stereotypes, adopting positive contributions from their Hispanic/Latino heritage and improving personal talents and abilities (Sanchez de Valencia, 2008). Dr. Sanchez de Valencia (2008) further discussed the difficulties and challenges that Latinas face. Latinas must overcome the negative stereotypes of women as well as the stereotypes of being a descendant of ancestors who are not considered being from the United States. Sanchez de Valencia's (2008) findings state that Latinas must be able to reconcile the roles of being a good daughter, mother, wife and leader. Once the different roles and expectations are successfully integrated Latinas are able to solidify their self-confidence.

Similarly, Cipres (1999) offers mirroring characteristics for Latina community college presidents. A Latina must have a "strong sense of self" (p. 69) and be able to project that image. Furthermore, interpersonal skills are critical to the success of the

Latina as a president. Possessing strong communication and negotiation skills and a reputation for being intelligent are also requisite skills for a president (Cipres, 1999).

The leadership development process is also affected by the level of influence and support of loved ones (Sanchez de Valencia, 2008). Family members, parents, children and siblings can be a significant influence. If they are supportive, that support can bolster the self-confidence a Latina needs to continue to grow as a leader. That does not necessarily dictate that a lack of support will lead to a lack of leadership, but having the support is beneficial for the Latina to grow into leadership roles (Sanchez de Valencia, 2008). Cipres (1999) discovers comparable common traits, as compared to Sanchez de Valencia (2008), specifically, Latinas need to identify a specific role model.

Latina/o culture has a strong emphasis on collectivism (Canul, 2003). Community is very important. Being able to depend on someone and being someone to depend upon are crucial components to creating community. According to Canul (2003) creating a team to bring honor and recognition to the team and not each individual is a primary goal. Value is placed on building and maintaining personal relationships and the ability to create harmony. Furthermore, Latinas are people-oriented rather than task-oriented. “Respeto” (p. 171), or respect, is important to Latinas according to Canul (2003). Pride and work-ethic are demonstrated in the dutifulness of all actions and communications, including the value of opposing opinions (Canul, 2003). Collectivism is also reflected in the Cipres (1999) piece as well, by arguing that Latina community college presidents also have a strong sense of commitment to the community.

In Canul’s 2003 piece, the role of the Latina university administrator is discussed at length. The piece was a personal response and more anecdotal, but still very relevant

in context of some of the empirical research on Latina leadership. The incorporation of positive Latina cultural traits is discussed in Canul (2003) but validated by Sanchez de Valencia (2008). The two pieces are similar and different. One is anecdotal and the other a dissertation, but both have strikingly similar topics and range. Leadership roles for Latinas can be challenging and rewarding. In both pieces, family and community are prominent, which demonstrates the connectedness of the Latina/o community, in general. Cipres (1999) also mirrored similar values in her study of Latina California community college administrators.

### **Feminist Theories**

Feminism and feminist theories offer an impact on this piece of research. One of the ideas regarding the subject of Mexican-American women who are serving as community college presidents is considering the potential that these particular women are feminists by the taking on leadership roles at their respective community colleges. The following section offers multiple feminist theories, including Chicana Feminist Thought, which serves as one of the conceptual frameworks of this study.

### **Defining Feminism**

Offering an exact definition of Feminist Theory is an arduous task. The diversity of women is essentially defined by Cacoullos (2001) as any woman who is not White, middle-class and heterosexual. Every category of women has the potential to design their own theory; thus an inconceivable amount of theory is possible. The possible combinations among Latina women alone can vary by nationality, class and sexual orientation.

Anderson (2003) and Chafetz (1997) offer similar criteria to establish a definition of Feminist Theory. Chafetz (1997) offers four criteria to be considered a piece of feminist research: a) gender comprises a central focus of the theory; b) gender relations are viewed as a problem and the research seeks to understand how gender is related to social inequities, strains and contradictions; c) gender relations are not viewed as immutable; and d) the research can be used to challenge a status quo that devalues women. Anderson (2003) offers that the premise to feminism is that the position of women is based on social and not biological factors. Feminism is not only thinking about women but also acting on their behalf. It is this thought and action that have allowed for feminism to be the core of social action and change.

Cacoullos' (2001) article explores the academic versus political battle within the feminist community. One position of the debate is the "academization" (p.74) of feminist theory leads to a loss of power and an inability to inspire political/social action, while the other viewpoint contends that it is the very academization or "professionalizing" (p.78) of feminism that creates its political significance. The academics and activists are very far apart at times, but the battle should be a catalyst to further explore feminism and its position within larger society (Cacoullos, 2001).

Andersen (2003) offers a pro-academization assertion. She states that without scholarly work there would not be an understanding of women nor of their position in society. Most social studies and histories are created from a male standpoint (Andersen, 2003). It is the research from feminist scholars that provide the knowledge needed to create social change. Andersen (2003) further acknowledges that there are four phases of "curriculum changes" (p.12) within the field of women's studies. The first phase was a

curriculum that addresses only white men. Women and other ethnicities have historically been ignored. In order to garner knowledge regarding these groups, the creation of various diversity studies programs was necessary. Andersen (2003) referred to the second phase as the “add-women-and-stir approach” (p.12). While this method of curriculum change does bring attention to forgotten groups, generally it only highlights certain famous individuals from the previously disregarded groups. Identifying women as subordinate within society and attempting to explain the condition is the third phase of curriculum change. This phase does recognize the various barriers women experience, but it also projects an image of victimization (Andersen, 2003). Finally, the fourth phase studies women as a previously discounted group, but not as a problematic group. This phase attests to the rich and diverse experiences of women (Andersen, 2003).

### **Perspectives of Feminist Theory**

The term Feminist Theory is often used to refer to a myriad of research areas. The structure of society and social relationships are often examined by feminist theorists. Chafetz (1997) offers multiple arenas of feminist research as noted in the following list: to offer a critique of classical sociological theories, theorizing from a feminist perspective are additional avenues to use feminist thought and finally, examining of the relationship between gender and various social and political processes in an attempt to offer an explanatory feminist theory for the relationship.

To fully understand the complexities of feminist theory a brief summary of feminist thought will be provided. Several predominant frameworks of feminism (i.e. Liberal, Radical, Socialist and Multicultural) exist and will be briefly investigated and presented. Andersen (2003) offers the most comprehensive, yet brief overview of all of

these frameworks, however, Tong (2009) and selections from Kolmar and Bartowski (2005) will be used to support the summaries, as well.

Liberal Feminism is derived from the Age of Enlightenment (Andersen, 2003) and purports that all people should be treated equally. Tong (2009) agrees but advances the discussion that while liberal feminists do believe in equal treatment, sometimes only when what is right favors what is good. In essence, that the rights of all people, as long as they are doing no harm to others, is best for society. Liberal feminism asserts social change to equalize opportunities for women (Andersen, 2003). This is demonstrated with Tong's (2009) example of "classical" (p.12) liberal feminists versus "welfare" (p.12) liberal feminists. Both liberal feminist groups argue that there should be equal opportunity; however classical liberals would argue that the state should concern itself with ensuring it provides equal opportunity, while welfare liberals argue that it is the state's responsibility to remedy the institutional inequalities, i.e. welfare and Medicaid.

Contrasting liberal feminism is Radical Feminism. Radical feminists regarded themselves as revolutionaries and initiated the practice of consciousness-raising within feminism (Tong, 2009). Radical feminists contend that the "agents of oppression are men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination" (Redstockings, 2005, p.221). Once identifying patriarchy as the source of subordination of women, it became the responsibility of radical feminists to educate women of the profoundly unbalanced relationship between men and women.

Socialist Feminism has its roots in Karl Marx and historical materialism (Andersen, 2003; Tong, 2009). Historical materialism's central assumption is that the material life influences and creates the equality of social and political life (Tong, 2009).



However tied to Marx, socialist feminists do not believe that class is the single origin of women's subordination. Socialization, the structure of the family and the value of the roles of women contribute to the subordination as well (Andersen, 2003; Tong, 2009). Gender, race and class are all factors that contribute to the subordination of women.

Multicultural Feminism is rooted in the debate that feminism was created by and for a specific group of women: white, privileged and educated (Tong, 2009). This particular form of feminism is directly connected with multicultural thought, in that, it promotes the value of diversity and that all cultural groups should be treated equitably. Within Multicultural Feminism race, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation can all be considered as contributing to the oppression of women. This allows for an opening of feminism that was not necessarily practiced during the early stages. Women are more than just a sex, biologically. Gender is socially constructed, as is, race and ethnicity. To argue the defense of Multicultural Feminism, if all identities are socially constructed, as gender, how could these other identities not have an effect on a woman? Within this framework the concepts of *welcoming* and *tolerating* are different and defined. With toleration the openness is not present. Allowing a space to express an opinion is very different from listening to the opinion and being willing to allow change to occur because of it (Tong, 2009).

While several collections of feminist theories exist, Cultural and Social Macrostructural Theories are explored and these theories are generally separated into two categories (Chafetz, 1997). First, the research looks for a relationship between culture and ideology, The macrostructural theories have one goal - to explain the variation in the level of gender stratification over time and/or explain how a given level gender

stratification is maintained or changed. Every society has a “sex-role plan” (Chafetz, 1997 p.107) that has socialized roles for men and women and the degree of gender stratification is in direct correlation with the society’s sex-role plan. The more value placed on activities that are considered activities for men, the more women are marginalized within that society (Chafetz, 1997). These theories cannot fully demonstrate the impact of stratification on social structure, but they do demonstrate that some aspects of social structure impact the role of gender.

Using Tong’s (2009) argument of social construction and the difference between welcome and tolerance leads us back to the academic versus activist discussion from Cacoullos (2001). The rationale that creates theory in the academic world may not be the same in an activist’s world, particularly to activists of color. Cacoullos (2001) discusses how women of color in the 1980s were addressing exclusion by white, middle-class heterosexual women. She furthers the argument that while they are not within the ranks of academia with the white, middle-class women, the women of color were, in fact, still creating theory through experience. Women of color during that time were using their experiences with oppression to theorize on the state of women of color.

### **Chicana Feminist Thought**

Mexican-American women being able to transcend from historically ascribed roles characterizes Chicana Feminist Thought. In many ways, Chicanismo represents hope for a future filled with justice and equality, irrespective of ethnicity, race or gender. Several women who were looking to find their voice, while still not joining the, then-current women’s movement because of racial and ethnic differences created this concept. Chicana feminism describes an appreciation for the new roles of women and demands

that Chicanas actualize their potential and recognize the worth of this potential for all Chicanas (Garcia, 1997; Vidal, 1997). Chicana Feminist Thought was specifically selected as the lens of this study because of the specificity of application to Mexican-American women and their trials and triumphs.

Throughout the 1960s the Chicana Feminist movement was growing and women leaders were a voice for oppressed Chicanas. As the Chicano movement gained momentum, the men expected to be the leaders and have the women in the background. Dozens of women were vocal in protest - sometimes in unison with Chicano men against societal oppressors, but sometimes in competition with the Chicano men who were supposed to be their partners. Furthermore, Chicanas were also battling for justice within the women's movement at the same time. Many Chicanas perceived the women's movement as a white middle-class movement that neglected women of color.

"Feminism: The Chicano and Anglo Versions – A Historical Analysis" by Cotera (1997) is relevant for understanding the complex relationships between different racial and ethnic feminist agendas. She begins by exploring the women's suffrage movement and then moves through history until the 1960's and discusses the racist connotations throughout these time periods.

Cotera (1997) addressed some very important questions. Are there differences between racial/ethnic feminist agendas? What are the differences in racial feminist agendas? How do the early movements effect the more recent movements? Throughout the piece she addresses the questions in various stages throughout women's history. Cotera (1997) offers numerous examples of how the Chicana was neglected throughout several time periods of women's rights movements. During the suffrage movement

Chicanas were not included. Chicanas were subjected to reading tests and poll taxes. Women leaders of the time, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, were quite vocal about ignorant immigrant men having the ability to vote but educated women could not, which marginalized all women and men who did not possess a formal education.

Between the years between 1848 and 1900 examples show how some socialist feminists saw the value of bringing Chicanas into the movement. However, the voice was not able to bring enough pressure to be successful in unifying all women, regardless of ethnicity. Lucy Gonzalez Parsons, a Chicana socialist labor organizer who often worked with Jane Addams in Chicago, is considered one of the leaders and founders of the Industrial Workers of the World (Cotera, 1997). Even with such stature, the narrow platform of voting rights for privileged women was the platform of the day and did not incorporate the needs women of color. While the ideologies of all the movements are similar, the executions were very different. Women of color were forced to not be fully aligned with the movements of white upper and middle-class women. Cotera (1997) asserted that women of privilege were not quite ready to battle as passionately for their sisters of color.

A historical connection to women's rights is important for understanding Chicana feminist thought. Understanding the standpoints of Chicanas in reference to previous movements is imperative to understand the cultural barriers that Chicanas, specifically, have faced to make the advancement of women possible. When reviewing all the pieces of women's history, all perspectives must be considered and woven together to create a foundation of understanding.

Dr. Beatriz Pesquera, and Dr. Denise Segura (1997) identify three specific derivatives from the umbrella term of Chicana Feminist Thought: Chicana Liberal Feminism, Chicana Insurgent Feminism and Chicana Cultural Nationalist Feminism. The general focus of Chicana Feminist Thought and all three perspectives presented by Pesquera and Segura (1997), is the goal of creating upward mobility for the Chicana population. Chicana Feminism combines the social and political realms to facilitate radical social action (Davalos, 2008). This approach has allowed for the movement to effortlessly work both inside and outside the academy. All three perspectives hold the ideals of improving the state of Chicanas. Chicana Liberal Feminists subscribe to the ideas and practice of improving access to education and active political participation (Pesquera and Segura, 1997). Battling against “the cumulative effects of oppression” (Pesquera and Segura, 1997 p. 302) is the key component of Chicana Insurgent Feminism, while Chicana Cultural Nationalist Feminism attempts to create a feminist identity without losing the values learned from the Chicana/o family structure. All three sub-derivatives are committed to the elevation of Chicanos within general U.S. society. Working to increase access to education, fighting the oppression of women and fighting to maintain a cultural heritage are important priorities to all Chicana feminists.

The Chicana Liberal Feminist approach is most applicable when studying Latinas ascending to the role of community college president. This approach encourages increasing access to education and political participation to strengthen the power of the Chicana community. Part of the mission of community colleges is to open access to education for those who historically were denied access, specifically women, minorities, the poor and disadvantaged. Furthermore, Chicana feminism encourages a more

nurturing leadership practice (Ruiz, 2008). Ruiz (2008) further argues that Chicana Feminist influenced leadership is not hierarchal but empowering to others.

In summary, all the feminist theoretical frameworks have an impact on this study. Mexican-American women serving in the role of chief executive officer of a community college must at some point negotiate all the roles and gender expectations. It is how the president responds to the demands of her leadership role that may be influenced by gender and/or feminism. This study will seek an understanding of the role of a community college president, especially for Mexican-American women, using a feminist perspective.

### **Summary**

To summarize, Latinas maintain a strong cultural heritage that has both positive and negative traits. Navigating between the competing traits and being able to renounce some of the characteristics is challenging after years of practice, voluntary or not. Choosing to nurture the positive traits of Latina/o culture, such as collectivism and *respeto* initiate a sense of pride that further empower Latinas to grow in their respective fields and serve as role models for the future generations of Latina leaders.

Choosing to release the negative cultural traits is what allows a Latina to grow as a leader. The influence of Chicana Feminist Thought and confronting racism and sexism that help build the confidence a Latina needs to move forward on the path to stronger leadership and identity. As their confidence grows and Latinas learn to reject Marianismo, the pool of strong Latinas reaching the point to be able to choose to become a strong leader expands.

The path to the presidency is a challenging one and is filled with obstacles. A Latina may need to endure sexism and racism during her journey. For this reason, the profile of the president requires confidence, intelligence, and strong interpersonal skills. Latinas use role modeling and a connection to cultural heritage to influence their decision-making process and can create an image of themselves that will gain trust of all constituents and allow them to serve as exceptional community college presidents.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the procedures and methods that guided this study. Included here are a restatement of the problem and a description of the study design, including a pilot study of experts for review. The guiding and interview questions, selection of participants, and procedures will all be explained, as well as an explanation regarding the data analysis approach. Finally, assumptions and limitations will be discussed.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to identify and examine factors affecting the career advancement of Mexican-American women to the community college presidency. This study compared both institutional and personal obstacles and facilitators along the professional pathways of three Mexican-American female community college presidents. For example, perhaps strife was rampant during the tenure of a particular role, but it was within that capacity that the president learned the most about her leadership. Each president's perception, relative to each facilitator and obstacle, during their ascension to the presidency will be analyzed for similarities, differences and distinctive experiences. The comparison and contrast between the presidents will offer a glimpse into the life of each community college president who participated in the study.

#### **Qualitative Research Design**

The selected approach for this study was a qualitative approach. The researcher sought an understanding of the ascension of Mexican-American women to the community college presidency. Qualitative inquiry gathers an enormous amount of data



regarding one topic, while allowing the researcher to serve as a tool and interpret the data (Creswell, 2007). This study was a qualitative inquiry set in the interpretive paradigm utilizing similarities and differences between the participants to offer a picture of their individual and collective pathways.

This research study has the necessary components to be qualitative. The original purpose of this study was framed in the qualitative approach to allow for a deeper understanding of the common and opposing experiences of Mexican-American community college presidents. The focus of this study was not looking for a correlation between specific variables, but a more panoramic view of the participants' experiences. Focusing on the varying observations and experience of the participants rather than attempting to create a correlation between them is essential to a qualitative study.

Qualitative research is defined by several characteristics. Creswell (2007) states that qualitative research operates with the following components: natural setting, researcher as a key instrument, multiple sources of data, inductive data analysis, participants' meaning, theoretical lens, interpretive inquiry and holistic account. These elements were observed within the study and detailed within the following paragraphs.

The first characteristic is natural setting. Natural setting allows for the researcher to administer the study in the native environment of the subject. As the intent of the study is to explore and understand Mexican-American women while they ascended to community college presidency, this research will rely on interviews with Mexican-American female community college presidents. To establish rapport and facilitate conversation, the researcher traveled to the participants' site of choice to complete the interviews.

The researcher as a key instrument is an underlying assumption of the qualitative approach. The researcher created the guiding interview questions and administered all interviews, as well as interpreted the information gathered. The researcher offers a background in feminist theory, sociological race relations and many years of student development and leadership experience. This variety of experiences guided the interpretation from a sociological and feminist perspective. Using sociology and feminism as lenses offered perspective by using the intersection of ethnicity and gender to fully appreciate each president's life story.

Inductive data analysis was included in this study. Searching for common patterns from the data collected regarding the commonalities among the selected participating community college presidents was important to the analysis. Finding any common patterns among the three selected presidents was important for the discovery of any trends within the professional pathways of community college presidents. Records included were transcripts of the interviews and public record interviews given to various academic periodicals. Sorting of these records allowed the researcher to gather significant amounts of information and then find larger implications. This sorting and comparing allowed for an additional level of validity, or triangulation, to the in-person interviews.

The researcher's interpretation of the participants' professional experiences was at the core of this study. The essence of this study was to accurately assess which facilitators and obstacles were identified as significant to each president. For example, the chronology of the key events throughout the professional careers of the participants were reviewed in this study and examined to determine if those events were considered

facilitators or obstacles while the participants were advancing to the presidency. Further, there was use of operational definitions in order to provide consistent communication between researcher and participant and thus allow an accurate interpretation of their experiences. The researcher wanted to limit miscommunication which could lead to flawed analysis, and using operational definitions between researcher and participant assisted in the limiting incorrect interpretation. Keen attention to detail during the interviews in conjunction with the use of unified language fostered consistent and clear communication and offered depth to the study.

In this study, feminist theory served as the theoretical lens and prominent viewpoint. For example, Latinas pursuing the role of community college president may encounter sexist resistance. Furthermore, Latinas often meet with cultural resistance when pursuing academic success (Watford et al., 2006). It is this academic success, or any success for that matter, that is contradictory to the ascribed roles of Latina women and the women suffer a backlash for not adhering to the expected role (Gil & Vasquez, 1997). Often the sexist cultural resistance can become paralyzing. Moving beyond the classroom and into leadership roles speaks to the ability to overcome resistance. The research presented here will explore the defining moments that led these presidents to continue along their professional path.

The researcher was prepared for the potential of multiple viewpoints of an issue, which could be common with the qualitative approach to research. Every individual community college president participant offered a new insight and different perspective, which presented the possibility of discovering opposing opinions from the preconceived assumptions of the researcher. The researcher was prepared to have any initial

assumption challenged. It was also theoretically possible that any one of the presidents interviewed have professional experiences that differ from the feminist frame-of-reference of the researcher. The acceptance of these multiple viewpoints only offered a broader level of understanding of the issue.

Finally, a holistic account of the issue and structure of the study is essential. The researcher should and did demonstrate the complexity of the issue. Mexican-American women generally observe a unique culture that may have impacted the perception of their journey. For example, the general acceptance of *marianismo* (Gil & Vasquez, 1997) among many Mexican-American women could indicate a tendency for these women to not discern microaggressions against them. Conversely, given circumstances that empower these women to pursue academic and professional success, these presidents may have been able to fully appreciate any challenges they have experienced.

Awareness of the complexities in data interpretation is crucial to the significance of this study. This study was not looking for cause and effect, but for an understanding of the question: What may have contributed to Latinas, specifically Mexican-American women, ascending to the level of community college presidents?

### **Feminist Methodology**

Using DeVault (1996) as a guiding tool, where three practices are identified to qualify as feminist research, this study used a feminist approach to research. First, feminist research attempts “excavation” (p.32) in trying to discover perspectives of all women. Preliminary searches uncovered that there is limited research available regarding Mexican-American female community college presidents. While there have been dissertations written with Latina community college presidents as the subject, this study

specifically examined the professional pathway of Mexican-American female community college presidents. Looking specifically at the events and circumstances that surround the steps towards the presidency was part of the excavation process in seeking understanding of the professional pathway for each of the study participants.

Second, feminist research seeks to use scientific research to rectify past exploitations of women and limit the potential harm to female subjects. This study sought to do no harm to the women interviewed. Precautions were taken to protect the identity of the presidents in this research process. At no time were the colleges nor the state where these colleges are located revealed or mentioned. Every president interviewed was given a pseudonym to further protect their identity. At no time did this researcher want to professionally or politically endanger the women gracious enough to participate.

Finally, feminist methodology promotes research that leads to social change to the benefit of women. This study provided additional insight regarding Latinas, specifically Mexican-American women, serving as community college presidents. As leadership changes occur throughout the field of education, Mexican-American women may be considering moving into executive level leadership. This study sought to provide women of color who aspire to seek leadership roles some preparatory knowledge and insight as to what they may encounter along their journey into community college leadership roles.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Similar to the other feminist frameworks discussed in the Literature Review, Chicana Feminists generally fall into one of three categories (Pesquera and Segura 1997). Chicana Liberal Feminism, Chicana Insurgent Feminism and Chicana Cultural

Nationalist Feminism are the three categories identified by Pesquera and Segura (1997). Chicana Liberal feminists focus on “desires to enhance the well-being of the Chicano community, with a special emphasis on improving the status of women” (Pesquera and Segura, 1997 p. 301). The Chicana Insurgent calls for a “radical praxis advocating revolutionary change” (Pesquera and Segura, 1997 p. 302) and believe that only a restructuring of society will be able to benefit Chicanas. Chicana Insurgent feminists believe that multiple forms of oppression are the reason for the state of Chicanas in society, including race, class and gender. Chicana Cultural Nationalist feminists subscribe to the Chicano movement’s ideology of “la gran familia de la raza”(p. 302) meaning that all Chicanos are one great family. By following this philosophy Chicana Cultural Nationalists search for change in gender relations without losing traditional family values. All three models of Chicana Feminist Thought offered by Pesquera and Segura (1997) agree that the state of womanhood needs to be changed. The betterment of all women is needed, but by varying methods.

Using Chicana Feminist Thought as the conceptual framework for all three selected presidential participants will guide the analysis of this study. Specifically, this study was guided more from a Chicana Liberal perspective. The Chicana Liberal perspective was believed to be the most applicable to the selected participants. According to Pesquera and Segura (1997), the Chicana Liberal perspective seeks to improve the quality of life for all Chicanos “through education, employment, health care services and political involvement” (p.301). Since, the participants for this study are or were working within the field of education; it was assumed this perspective of Chicana Feminist Thought would be the most applicable to the study. It was further assumed that

it would be unlikely that neither the Chicana Insurgent perspective nor the Chicana Cultural Nationalist perspective would be applicable to the study given that all the participants work within higher education.

### **Study Design**

The rationale of using qualitative research design was for the researcher to explore and gain understanding of the professional progression of these study participants. An initial search of previously published dissertations and journal articles revealed that there were only a limited amount of studies that focused on Latina community college presidents. For example, one study was situated in a quantitative format (Montoya, 2007), another study was an ethnographic study centered on only one president (Knowlton, 1992), and most pieces of literature found by the researcher, studied presidents within the California community college system (Cipres, 1999; Knowlton, 1992; Lopez Hansen, 1997; Montoya, 2007). This study employed qualitative, interpretive paradigm, cross-case analysis methodologies and allowed for a deeper understanding of the journey to the community college presidency for Mexican-American women.

### **Expert Review**

The researcher conducted an expert review 'pilot-study' with high-ranking administrators, including a college president, for expert input regarding the interview questions and practice before conducting an actual interview for the study. The expert review process included interviewing the high-ranking administrator and feedback received on the questionnaire from the administrator. Additionally, the administrator offered an evaluation of the researcher for professionalism, time management and poise

during the interview. The expert review pilot-study participants were professional colleagues of the researcher and had agreed to assist with the pilot study early in the dissertation process. These colleagues having experienced tremendous professional growth within their careers were committed to assisting younger doctoral candidates by donating their time, observations and input to the researcher. One community college president and one community college associate vice chancellor were generous enough to provide time and insight for this dissertation.

The expert review pilot study served several purposes for this research. This pilot study allowed for an opportunity to garner insight from executive level administrators for tone and wording of the questions. Knowing that timing is important when conducting interviews, the pilot study afforded the researcher the opportunity to practice limiting time on answers and experiencing where more time was needed for some questions. Additionally, the administrators evaluated the researcher for her demeanor and poise throughout the interview.

The interviews of the pilot study participants were recorded and field notes were taken in exactly the same way that the interviews of the actual study participants were recorded and noted, the expert review pilot-study respondents were assured that their answers were not used in the study. Additionally, transcriptions of the interviews were created with the assurance that their answers were not included in the final study.

### **Participant Selection**

Originally a national search of Latina presidents was considered for this study, but after further consideration and the gaps in the literature pertaining to Mexican-American female community college presidents, the stage of career and specific ethnicity became



the dominant focus of the study. All of the women selected for this study have served at community colleges in the Midwest. This dissertation studied three community college presidents in varying stages of their careers; one who has been president at least one year but less than five years, one with more than five years experience serving as president and finally one who has successfully and recently retired from serving as a president. Finally, all three selected participants are Mexican-American women. This design allowed for a single case study of each of the presidential participants at varying stages of their careers while limiting the study to Mexican-American women.

This study used a purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007). The three presidents selected to interview are Mexican-American women and in various stages in their careers. One president has less than five years experience and offered current information regarding her presidency and her relatively recent appointment to the role and her plans for the future of her presidency. One president has successfully served for longer than five years and still currently serving at her institution. The president shared some hindsight but also spoke to current successes and challenges within her role. Finally, one president is retired and offered a lifetime of knowledge regarding her professional career and the variety of experiences along her pathway with the benefit of hindsight and reflection. These three Mexican-American female community college presidents were selected not only for their ethnicity and years of experience, but also due to their reputation for being strong female leaders. The researcher used networking opportunities to be introduced to the presidents.

The first president is a president who has been in office for less than five years. She has an extensive background in higher education and has earned her doctorate degree

in educational leadership. Her various positions in higher education made her the selected candidate for the presidency at her community college. The college this president leads is small in comparison to the other two institutions within this study with Fall 2009 enrollment at just over 5,000 students. She leads 14 full-time administrators and 52 full-time faculty members. The average student at her college is a Hispanic female and attending part-time.

The second presidential participant has served as president for slightly less than ten years. She also possesses a doctoral degree in educational leadership and served in a multitude of administrative roles before being asked to serve as the college president. She was named as an interim president until her board of trustees issued a vote to install her permanently into the role. Her college has the largest enrollment among the three in this study with a Fall 2009 enrollment of just over 15,700 students. Her administrative staff consists of 36 administrative full-time employees while employing 115 full-time faculty members. The average student attending this college would be a part-time female Caucasian.

Finally, the third president is a successfully twice-retired community college president. This president has had the opportunity to serve two colleges in the role of president. Her doctorate is also in educational leadership. She is currently enjoying her retirement and spending time with family. This college is situated right in the middle between the other colleges led by study participants for enrollment with Fall 2009 numbers at just over 9,000 students. However, this college had the lowest full-time administrative staffing numbers. She led a 10 full-time administrative team and

employed 58 full-time faculty members. The average student attending her college was a part-time Hispanic female.

### **Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were selected to perform data collection. While providing a schedule of questions to ask that are directly related to the driving questions, this format still allows the flexibility to present any follow-up questions as needed (Willis, 2007). The plan for each interview session was to focus on gathering information on each professional pathway, yet be only one hour in length to garner the most information possible in a short amount of time (Yin, 2009). Through the use of open ended interview questions and several approaches to analysis, each story offered usable knowledge for future Mexican-American female college administrators.

The interviews were conducted at the preferred site of the president participant to allow for the most comfortable environment for the participant. Furthermore, this provided the researcher an opportunity to observe each president in their preferred environment. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and copies of the transcriptions were sent to each participant for member-check and approval (Stake, 1995). Field notes, which included observations in relation to each interview environment, were also completed from each interview for an account of the total experience (Johnson and Christensen, 2004).

Each president has traveled their own personal journey to the presidency, and each relates a unique story that involves various factors, including education, cultural experiences, expectations and professional positions. The hope was that similar, or at least, comparable cases could provide insight into the phenomena of the ascension of Mexican-American women to the community college presidency. The diversity within

this study was the experiences and insights of presidents at different stages of their careers. They each possess a doctoral degree, but their academic experiences are varied. They have all held positions within various areas of higher education. It was assumed that within their professional and personal lives they may have experiences that may have served as either a facilitator or an obstacle. Respect of each story was maintained and honored. The interview was an opportunity to gain insight that can be used in a manner that offers the appropriate level of reverence.

### **Research Questions**

The driving questions used for the purpose of this study are the following:

1. What factors facilitate successful upward mobility of Mexican-American women to ascend to the community college presidency?
2. What obstacles were identified by Mexican-American women as they ascend to the community college presidency?
3. What are some of the commonalities and differences shared by Mexican-American community college presidents?

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher served as the interpreter for this study. The interpreter's role was to find connections and guide the reader into an understanding of the study (Stake, 1995). In listening to each woman's journey to the presidency, the goal was to find patterns of similarities or differences that may lead to a general understanding of the phenomena. It is through the study that the researcher found commonalities and differences among the professional pathways of Mexican-American women who serve as community college presidents.

The researcher is a Mexican-American woman currently serving as a community college administrator in the Midwest. This researcher experienced a middle-class upbringing in suburban Chicago, IL and attended a residential mid-sized public university in Illinois. Though the experience may appear traditional and idyllic, it was often interrupted with experiences of racial, ethnic and gender discrimination within both the Latino community and the dominant Caucasian community. These experiences contribute to the frame of reference that the researcher used. While listening to the presidents the researcher was searching for incidents of these experiences within any of the stated obstacles to the presidency. The researcher's role of serving as the interpreter of the data received from interviews may influence the interpretations of the data.

The researcher recognizes potential for bias and attempted to limit any bias from this study. The researcher has served in leadership roles for many years and does possess a few preconceived ideas regarding the professional pathway to the presidency. The researcher has prepared to limit bias by immersing herself within the available literature surrounding the subject of Latina community college presidents. Furthermore, the analysis of the interviews was compared to detailed codices and not compared to personal experiences of the researcher.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

A case study design was chosen for this study due to the need to deliberately investigate this particular sub-set of community college presidents. Mexican-American women who are serving or have served as community college presidents could have been studied in aggregate but this researcher was searching for individual experiences to compare and contrast. The separate journey each woman traveled and how she

experienced significant events are important. Each participant offered insight into her definition of a significant event. How and in what ways these events influenced her journey require the detailed attention provided by a case study.

Each president was treated as an individual case for the study. This study was searching for facilitators and obstacles during the ascension to the presidency. The total experience for each president at each professional position transition was noted in the study. Each case study was analyzed in reference to pre-determined themes such as, culture, leadership, personal life and feminism, to state a few, while maintaining the voice of each president interviewed. Each president presented their own individual experience and circumstance or case. Each president was selected because of their years of experience: one relatively new; one more experienced; and one recently retired president. Their specific cases were analyzed individually and then compared and contrasted to the others. The benefit to cross-case analysis is to gain insight into the entire phenomena through the individual cases and to highlight any significant commonalities and differences (Stake, 2006).

### **Data Analysis**

Transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed for content and recurring themes. A priori themes regarding obstacles and facilitators were used for the first reading of the interviews. For the first reading the a priori themes were: leadership; family; feminism; culture; discrimination and professional positions. For subsequent readings, emergent themes were reviewed and further coding was required.

Using pattern matching and time series analysis (Yin, 2009) allows for a thorough analysis of the data collected. Pattern matching among the responses of the participants

allowed for additional internal validity of the study. Initially, the interview responses were reviewed for patterns that occurred along each professional pathway. Each interview transcription was read for the a priori themes, but then compared to each of the other interview transcriptions searching for patterns. A more in-depth search of the interviews highlighted the chronology of professional positions. A comparison and contrast of positions held by each participant immediately preceding the presidency and timelines within each president's pathway was examined.

### **Triangulation**

Stake (1995) stresses the need to ensure accuracy in the reporting of the study. That accuracy requires confirmation of the interpretations and statements being made by the researcher. Several triangulation protocols were used for this study. For example, data source triangulation was executed. The primary source of data was obtained through the interviews conducted for this piece. However, document reviews that captured public interviews made by each participant for various articles were used. Comparisons between the content of answers were completed to strengthen the validity of the interviews for this study.

Additional triangulation is embedded within the research, due to the diverse career stages of each participant as highlighted with the presidential profile of each of the selected participants. The three participants were selected specifically due to the stage of their careers. One goal of this study was to compare and contrast each of the presidents to the others and find similarities and differences that may have been impacted by their years of service to the field of education.

### **Limitations**

Mexican-American women – Only Mexican-American women who were serving or recently retired from serving as a community college president at the time of the interview were invited to participate. No men, nor women of a different ethnic background, were invited to participate.

Midwest Region - After recognizing a shortage of published research centered on the Midwest, this geographical region was the selected area. Mexican-American female community college presidents from other regions within the United States were not invited to participate.

Community Colleges – The participants were affiliated with community colleges, at no time were university presidents considered for this study.

Sample Size – Only three Mexican-American female community college presidents participated this small sample may not be readily applicable to all Mexican-American female community college presidents.

### **Summary**

The research presented here was a qualitative study centered on the professional pathways of Mexican-American community college presidents. The study is limited to Mexican-American community college presidents who have served at one time in a Midwest community college. Careful consideration of previously published research facilitated in the decision-making process for this study. The study used interviews to serve as one window into the world of Mexican-American female community college presidents. Furthermore, efforts to maintain validity through triangulation of interviews, documents reviewed and published research pieces were used. It was the intent of the



researcher to find common facilitators and obstacles experienced by these selected Mexican-American female community college presidents.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

To introduce this chapter a brief review of a) the purpose of the study, b) driving questions and c) interview protocol of the study is provided.

The purpose of this study is to examine the professional pathways of three Mexican-American female community college presidents and learn what facilitators and obstacles they experienced along their journey. During the interviews, the presidents were forthcoming with their responses and shared many stories of triumph and challenges. According to the presidents, there is no single pathway to the presidency, but all their experiences were characterized by the presence of determination, confidence and an excellent support system.

The community college presidents who were invited to participate were selected due to their ethnicity, gender and career stage. Specifically, the three participants are all Mexican-American females in different stages of their career. The participants were given pseudonyms and for this study are referred to as President A, President B and President C. President A has been in her position as community college president for just over two years. President B is entering her tenth year as a community college president. Finally, President C is a retired community college president. The reason for selecting participants at varying stages of their careers was to learn if there were any specific differences among the women based upon their professional experience.

This study is a qualitative cross-case analysis. Three female Mexican-American community college presidents were interviewed. Each interview was treated as an

individual case and analyzed using a priori themes of leadership, feminism, family, culture, discrimination and professional positions.

The driving questions that created the interview questions were:

- What factors facilitate the successful upward mobility of Mexican-American women to ascend to the community college presidency?
- What obstacles were identified by Mexican-American women as they ascend to the community college presidency?
- What are some of the characteristic commonalities and differences shared by Mexican-American community college presidents?

The three driving questions served as the starting point to form the interview questions for the three Mexican-American community college presidents who participated in this study.

1. Please describe your professional pathway to the presidency.
2. Was there a particular factor that prompted you to make the decision to serve as a community college president?
3. What do you think are the personal and leadership characteristics a Latina needs to possess in order to be prepared to serve as a community college president?
4. What factors facilitated your successful journey to the community college presidency?
5. Did you realize these instances as facilitators at the time or now in retrospect?
6. What obstacles did you encounter along your journey?

7. How did you deal with these obstacles?
8. Would you handle the obstacles differently now?
9. What advice would you offer Latinas as they serve in leadership roles?

This chapter will a) offer a profile of each president, b) present a summary of the responses from each participant organized by interview question, and c) report a cross-comparative analysis between all participants. Each participant's profile includes a brief overview of her professional experience and is followed by the demographics of the college she leads or once led. The interview summaries presented are intended to offer insight into the journey of each of the three community college presidents who elected to participate in this study.

### **Presidential Profiles**

The Mexican-American female community college presidents who were interviewed for this study either currently lead or recently led a community college in the Midwest. Included in this brief profile is a summary of her background and statistics of the college she leads or once led. Headcount and full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment data, as well as, the racial and ethnic breakdown of the students and faculty are incorporated into the profile (Table 1).

#### **President A**

President A is a president who has been in office for just over two years. She has an extensive background in higher education and earned her doctorate degree in Educational Leadership. Her various positions in higher education, including having served as the Interim President, were driving factors in her being selected for the presidency at her college. Her decision to apply for the presidency was based on her

commitment to excellent service and civility. She described her commitment to being available to all her constituents. The researcher observed this quality personally when this president actually delayed the interview to meet with a concerned student.

The college she leads is located in an urban environment in the Midwest. According to state collected data, its headcount enrollment of approximately 5,400 in Fall 2010 had increased 8.1% since Fall 2006 when the college enrolled just over 5,000 students. When reviewing the full-time equivalent (FTE) data the college has experienced a 21% increase in FTE since 2006. In Fall 2006 the college had an FTE of approximately 2,400 but grew to 2,900 by Fall 2010. In terms of student demographics, the college reported to the state in 2010 that 78% of the student population is Hispanic or Latino. The next largest student ethnic or racial population on campus at 13% is White or Caucasian. The remaining 9% of the student population is composed of 5% African-American, 2% Non-Resident Alien, 1% Asian or Pacific Islander and less than 1% is Native American. Conversely, according to Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the college reported that of the 45 tenured faculty members, 41 were White faculty members but only one tenured faculty member is Hispanic. One tenured faculty member is Black, Non-Hispanic, one is American Indian/Alaska Native and one is Asian/Pacific Islander completing the breakdown of the full-time tenured faculty at President A's college.

Academically, the institution offers 42 programs of study, according to the college website and catalog. The degrees offered at President A's college are: Associate in Arts (A.A.); Associate in Sciences (A.S.); Associate in Fine Arts (A.F.A.); Associate in Liberal Studies (A.L.S.); Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) and Associate in Arts

Teaching (A.A.T.). Additionally, the college listed many cooperative agreements with other local community colleges, state universities and local private universities.

### **President B**

President B has served as president for slightly less than ten years. She possesses a doctoral degree in educational leadership and served in several administrative roles before being asked to serve as the college president. She was named as the interim president until the board of trustees issued a vote to install her permanently into the role without a formal search process. She repeatedly stated that passion and commitment are required for anyone looking to embark upon a presidency. President B indicated that she demonstrates those qualities by maintaining constant and open communication with all areas of the college, making a special commitment to meet with students.

President B's college is also located in an urban environment within the Midwest. Her college has experienced a 3.1% decrease in total enrollment since 2006 according to state collected data. However, the FTE data notes a 2.4% increase. Among the student population, the largest ethnic group on campus is White at 50% and the second largest ethnic group at 29% is the Hispanic or Latino population. African-American students represent 16% of the overall student population. The remaining 5% of the student population is composed of 4% Asian or Pacific Islander and 1% Native American. While the student population is a little more evenly distributed by ethnicity the full-time faculty members are not. According to IPEDS data, among the 76 full-time tenured faculty members of the college 64 faculty members are White and four full-time faculty members are Hispanic. The remaining eight tenured faculty members are evenly split between Black, Non-Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander.

The college offers 130 programs of study according to the college catalog. Six degrees are offered at the college: Associate in Arts (A.A.); Associate in Sciences (A.S.); Associate in Fine Arts (A.F.A.); Associate in General Studies (A.G.S.); Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) and Associate in Arts Teaching (A.A.T.). The college specifies 29 academic programs of study that an in-district student can take at surrounding area community colleges through college partnerships.

### **President C**

President C is a twice-retired community college president. She possesses a doctorate in educational leadership. Her accomplishments during her first presidency created a reputation so favorable that another community college district in another state recruited her to apply for a presidency. Upon reflecting on her career she discussed the need for consistency and maintaining a positive professional image as the keys to a successful presidency.

While she served as president at two colleges the demographics captured in this profile are those of the most recent college. The second college is one located in an urban environment within the Midwest. President C's college has experienced steady decreases in enrollment since 2006. According to state collected and reported data, headcount has decreased by 11.3% and FTE by 10.3%. Fall 2006 headcount enrollment was reported as just over 10,100 but decreased to approximately 8,900 by Fall 2010 and Fall 2006 FTE was listed at approximately 6,200 but decreased to just over 5,600 by Fall 2010. The student population at President C's college was overwhelmingly Hispanic and is listed at 71% of the overall student population. The second largest ethnic student group is the African-American population, listed at 18%. The remaining 11% of the

student population is composed of 9% Caucasian, 1% Asian or Pacific Islander and less than 1% for Native American and Non-Resident Alien. Among the 42 full-time tenured faculty members, the majority of the population was predominately White or Caucasian, with 24 full-time faculty members of this ethnic category, according to IPEDS data. The college that President C most recently led had nine Black, Non-Hispanic and seven Asian/Pacific Islander tenured faculty members. Similar to the other colleges, this college only had two full-time Hispanic faculty members.

Degrees offered at President C's college are Associate in Arts (A.A.), Associate in Sciences (A.S.), Associate in General Studies (A.G.S.), Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) and Associate in Engineering Science (A.E.S.). According to the college website, the college offers 50 programs of study within these degrees. While the catalog does not specifically list any agreements with local colleges, the college is a part of a large multi-college district that allows students to attend any college within the district at any time.



**Table 1: President and Institutional Profiles**

President	A	B	C
Years as President	2	9	18 *
Fall 2010 Headcount Enrollment	5,450	15,250	8,960 **
Fall 2010 FTE	2,930	8,430	5,610
Student Racial/Ethnic Profile (%)			
Hispanic	78	29	71
Caucasian	13	50	9
African American	5	16	18
Asian	1	4	1
Native American	1	1	-
Non-Resident	2	-	1
Tenured Faculty Racial/Ethnic Profile			
Hispanic	1	4	2
Caucasian	41	64	24
African American	1	4	9
Asian	1	4	7
Native American	1	-	-
Degrees Offered			
AA	✓	✓	✓
AAS	✓	✓	✓
AAT	✓	✓	
AES			✓
AFA	✓	✓	
AGS		✓	✓
ALS	✓		
AS	✓	✓	✓
Number of Programs	12	130	50

\* Two presidencies total

\*\* Most recent college data used for college profile

### Driving Question #1 - Facilitators

The president participants were all asked to look at their career path and remember specific occasions that guided their path or eased their transition into the role of president (Table 2). The presidents were to discuss both personal and institutional facilitators and whether or not they recognized these facilitators at the time or only now

in reflections of their respective journeys. All the presidents recognized the facilitators now in retrospect. While they understood what they were experiencing at the time, the moments were not as significant until later. Some of the instances were refreshing and funny but all were genuine and described how they opened the door to the presidency. The presidents shared the moments in which they knew that they had champions either in the professional or personal arenas of their lives.

### **President A**

This president stated that she had the support of the entire faculty and the professional unions during her ascension to the presidency. She was welcomed and experienced a smooth transition from her previous role of vice president into her role as the president of the college. Although she felt welcomed into her new position, she did experience some trepidation about accepting the perks that accompanied the office of the president. For example, when she was named as the interim president she was hesitant to park in the designated parking space, or even sit in the president's office. The union leadership was encouraging. The administrative assistants redecorated the private bathroom to be more feminine. The entire college was supportive and committed to ensuring that she not only excels as the interim president, but as the permanent college president. She believes that their support was instrumental in her being offered the position.

In regards to personal facilitators, President A noted her husband and family as the reasons she is serving as a college president. Her parents have always supported her and all of her educational achievements. Coincidentally, her sister predicted at an early age that she would eventually serve as a college president. This president described a time

when she and her sister were visiting Washington D.C. and encountered a protest rally. She was curious about the rally and simply wanted to go to see what the large groups of people were protesting. Her sister stopped her with the rationale that she would be a president in the future and she could not afford any chance of a photo or a video of her attending this rally and possibly creating the wrong perception of her image. Describing her sister's reaction when she was selected as the college president, she said, "Then my sister was right there [saying] 'Right on, Mija! I'm so proud of you!' Those things keep you going when it's very difficult." President A shared this story as an example of how she has a family that is completely supportive of her, concerned about her image and wants to assist with her being a well-respected college president.

### **President B**

President B attributes her success to the constant encouragement from college leaders and mentors. This participant's first professional mentor was the director at the off-campus adult learning center. In time, President B would eventually be invited to serve as site's director and be her mentor's successor. As she grew professionally, the college president became her mentor and guided her along her professional journey. Even when she didn't necessarily believe that she had the confidence to pursue new roles in the college, her mentors had confidence in her. They always gave her guidance and opportunities to excel and learn more in every role.

Within each of her roles she was able to gain new knowledge to be able to grow her skill set. She gave an example of how she had extensive administrative experience regarding curriculum rules; however, one of the vice presidents she was serving only had faculty experience. That vice president depended on her academic management

experience to ensure state-level compliance, which provided valuable experience and knowledge for her role.

This president's particular pathway also allowed her to grow from the adult education arena and expand her knowledge into the college credit arena, allowing her to, as she stated, "[go] through the ranks." She explains that her expertise allows her to be able to advise and serve as a role model for the current managers at her college. Her relationships at the college are important to her, not only with faculty and staff, but with students as well. She believes that her connection to all constituents and her ability to nurture those relationships are one of many keys to her success.

### **President C**

This president decided at a young age that she wanted to be a leader and explained, "Well, I've always, I knew ever since fourth grade that I wanted to lead. I knew that my career path would be to lead." She has managed her life and her image in a manner that facilitated her pathway. She wanted to ensure she had the credentials, the image and the political savvy to progress professionally. This president contends that her role is a political one and anyone serving in the role must always remember the political responsibility of the position.

She was very concerned with her image, so much that her family was image conscious as well. It was very important to her that she be prepared for any criticism, real or perceived. Great care was taken to ensure there were no missteps or misperceptions of the family. Every decision was deliberate to manage the image and to be aware of both the supporters and critics.

Her family members are very supportive as well. They are just as much concerned about the management of her image as she is. She was widowed and remarried and her stepson is also very committed to her success and fully understands her perspective. She was already a leader and political figure when she remarried and her new family understood who she is and chose to love and accept her role.

**Table 2: Facilitators**

President	A	B	C
Facilitators	Mentors Family Support Faculty Support	Mentors Personal Commitment	Credentials Family Personal Skill-set Maintain Positive and Professional Image Mentors

### **Driving Question #2 - Obstacles**

Similar to the facilitator question, the three president participants were asked to offer obstacles they encountered during their professional career (Table 3). All three presidents discussed both personal and institutional obstacles and challenges they experienced along their journey to the presidency. Further, they discussed whether or not they would handle these obstacles differently, now. The researcher was truly inspired by all the personal information that the presidents shared within the interviews.

#### **President A**

This president discussed the current national economic crisis and low educational funding levels as obstacles. She follows local, national and international economic trends. She remembered watching the economic difficulty in Greece and wondered to herself which country would be next for economic challenges. Her concerns with college

funding stem from the constant competition for dollars. All areas of education are competing for limited funding from the same tax pools. Several of her counterparts nationwide have mentioned to her that this is a difficult time to serve as a college president. While she acknowledges the current adversity she is also hopeful and looking forward to working through the economic challenges ahead. She described herself as someone who “[wants] to change things or do things for good” but recognizes that those goals may need to be placed on hold temporarily until current economic stresses diminish.

She was very candid and openly discussed personal obstacles that she experienced along her pathway. She discussed her choice to not have children at this time. However, she does want children and stated that women who complete their degree are faced with unfair choices. She shared several situations throughout her lifetime that essentially made her choose not to have children. For example, during her K-12 experience she wanted to enroll in honors level courses and was discouraged by her counselors. During a time that she was pursuing a scholarship, the department head stated that there was no point in giving her the scholarship because women just become pregnant and don't continue their career. With regard to this issue she stated “Women who go for their degree...they do everything right, and when I say right I mean according to the social norm, the sociological norm.” She went on to express that women then face questions regarding pregnancy, age and childbirth. Specifically, she discussed the timing and potential health concerns for women who begin a career and delay having a family. She even discussed that when she engaged her predecessor in this very conversation he stated that he felt like he had failed at home life. The role of a community college president is

demanding and leaves the person accountable to multiple constituencies and often forced to choose between biological family and college family. She wondered aloud if she should have chosen to have children earlier and practice the balancing act that she sees other college presidents practicing nationwide.

When asked how she confronted all the obstacles throughout her career she answered that she relies on her spirituality and her family. She, again, credits her parents, sister and husband. Her faith in God and her family are a daily presence in her life and she credits them for her ability to remain strong and ready to face any obstacle, personal or institutional.

### **President B**

Institutional obstacles were dominant during the conversation. She experienced a great level of resistance during the beginning of her tenure as president. For instance, she attributed the resistance to her lack of credentials and being female as the main forces working against her. She did not complete her doctorate until she was already serving as president. She believes that her faculty and staff had a concern with her credibility because she did not have the doctorate degree at the time of her appointment. Additionally, she stated that her gender was an issue. While she does not believe that everyone had a concern with women serving as college leaders, she did perceive that many males had a resistance to her serving as the college president. Finally, another obstacle was her relative youth. She was named to president at forty, which in comparison to other college presidents in her state is relatively young. She stated “I remember sitting around the table...[the other college presidents] were white-haired males.”

She responded to the challenges in multiple ways. She modified her leadership style depending upon the situation. Her personality is nurturing by nature and, at times, takes an authoritative tone when she senses that she needs to speak with that demeanor to forward the business of the college. President B always recommends confronting any challenge. At one point during her tenure the faculty filed a no-confidence vote with the board of trustees. To address this situation, instead of offering a speech at the fall convocation, she opened the floor to questions so she may demonstrate her commitment to the college and to being transparent. She quickly realized that it was not the entire faculty doubting her. In fact, there were only a few faculty members who served as leaders in the fight to declare a no-confidence vote. President B began a series of monthly mini-luncheons where a few college community members could have lunch with her and address any questions or concerns. This is a practice she continues now to be able to maintain high quality relationships with all the members of her college community.

### **President C**

This president explained the politics behind the scenes and all the political obstacles she experienced. She often had to battle the “good ole boys and good ole girls” because they realized very quickly she was there to compete and accomplish whatever goal she had in mind. She had the favor of many influential mentors. She gained favor with local and state politicians who were always ready to battle for her. She gave an example of how much support she received from her mentors:

They were a phone call away if I didn't like the way I was being treated by a certain group I would pick-up the phone and call one



of my mentors to say ‘Here’s the situation, here’s what I want you to do.’

While sometimes they did not like the conversation they needed to have her mentors never faltered in supporting her and her agenda.

President C stated many times that presidents must be attentive to the politics that are a continuous undercurrent. From general politics she segued into ethnic politics. She warned that sometimes “minority communities are very tough on minority leaders” and when the president and the ethnic group leaders are not promoting the exact agenda it can be a grueling experience for everyone involved. She argued that there is often a lack of trust between the ethnic group community leaders and the community college president. However challenging, she also understood how the community leaders held a view reflective of not being involved at the decision-making level. President C contends that it is the responsibility of the community college president to be open and transparent with the community leaders. Once they begin to understand the business processes of the college they will become more open to the president’s agenda and learn to support it.

President C also noted gender politics as an obstacle. She stated “I think that boards of trustees are not adequately trained to be able to look at the strengths that women bring.” That definitive statement was persistent throughout the interview. The obstacle of being a woman, a Latina, was a challenge for her to face, especially considering that she first became a president in 1991. Though she served with female board members who were supportive during her first presidency, she learned that sometimes gender and ethnicity are the only labels seen by various constituents.

She shared some institutional obstacles. First, she regretted that she was not as connected to the accreditation process as she could have been. Both times while serving as president she allowed for her teams to lead the accreditation process. While her colleges were always successful in attaining re-accreditation, in retrospect, she wishes she would have been more hands-on in the process. Another potential institutional obstacle she wanted to discuss was institutional finances. She emphasized that not every president arrives equipped with financial training. Yet, she stressed that understanding the financial and business side of the college is very important. Regarding the gender politics and finances she stated:

The good ole boys they just figure it out and they do it and it's always so much easier for them because everybody looks at them as leaders. But for girls, you have to figure this stuff out and go after it

Finally, looking back on her lengthy career she thought about her direct personality and her limited ability to offer apologies. She often wondered if she should reach out to some, but not all, and apologize for some of her "give me the bottom line" behavior and personality. President C chuckled when she stated quite frankly that there was one man to whom she would never apologize. She stated with a sense of rebellious pride:

He was a difficult personality...I don't think it would have helped for me to apologize to him for anything because...he would have put a different spin on it. I'm not about to apologize to a Mexican man about anything!

She was very open to the lessons she learned throughout her two presidential roles. There were moments that you could actually see on her face that the reflection was as real during the interview as it was when she lived through the moment. The smiles, and acknowledgement of mistakes, were readable on her face while she spoke. Her demeanor during the interview indicated that she had moments of sincere reflection about her successes and mistakes during her presidencies.

**Table 3: *Obstacles***

President	A	B	C
Obstacles	National and International Economic Crisis  Gender Roles and Expectations	Gender Roles and Expectations  Challenges from Faculty	Gender Roles and Expectations  Racial Politics  Accreditation  Financial Training

### **Driving Question #3 - Commonalities and Differences**

The following sections present the findings for the study's third driving question; What are some of the characteristic commonalities and differences shared by Mexican-American female community college presidents? Multiple interview questions were posed to the presidential participants to glean information regarding any comparisons that could be made between the Mexican-American female community college presidents interviewed for this study.

### **Summary of Professional Pathway**

Each president has a lengthy history in the field of education. All the president participants had some form of exposure and experience in the classroom, as well as, managing curricula and policy. The three participants are all committed to assisting in the furthering of research in higher education and readily participate in studies for

doctoral candidates. A summary of each professional pathway follows. At the end of this section Table 4 is provided for a visual presentation of the narrative.

**President A.**

This president is entering her third year serving as her college's leader after serving many years as a vice president. Prior to her selection as vice president she served for many years in a variety of positions at other community colleges in another state. She began her career in the K-12 arena as an administrator and eventually transitioned to the community college field. President A has served in multiple leadership positions and was very accomplished in gaining new programs and facilities for her previous institutions. She spearheaded the creation of a dentistry program and was instrumental in assisting with the creation of a special tax district that permitted the funding of a new campus.

Her academic background includes a degree in Library and Information Science and she served as Head Librarian at a community college for seven years. This experience coupled with a PhD in community college leadership with an emphasis in sociology created the pathway for her to obtain employment at her current college as vice president of administration. From this role she continued to transition professionally into an executive vice president role and finally to president. She offered "I think it just fell upon me every time there was an opportunity... So that was my pathway. My pathway was a) constantly learning and b) I think things were just plopped in my lap as time grew along." She explained that it was not her goal to be a community college president. However, she received multiple opportunities that enabled her to grow professionally and be confident enough to apply for and be selected for the presidency.

**President B.**

Education was not the intended path for President B. She originally studied business and Spanish hoping to find employment in the field of international relations. She fully intended on exploring a corporate career. In fact, her first job was doing accounting for a small construction firm. She described how she originally envisioned her life: “I really enjoy different cultures and travelling and I thought this was the perfect career for me and as a young person you always envision all that, of course, will bring in some money.”

However, she began working part-time in the adult education arena of her college and grew professionally from a part-time employee to an adult education instructor. These experiences led her to several administrative positions, including assistant dean for adult education and vice president for academic affairs, before she began to pursue a doctoral degree in educational leadership.

The first experience of working at a community college was volunteering at an off-campus site adult education center. She stated that she loved volunteering in her own community, “I would volunteer because I was in that Spanish area, I had grown up in the area, too. I was familiar with the center and I thought this would be really good.” Her job was to assist in the registration process for all English as a Second Language (ESL) students. This experience led to being hired as a part-time assistant in the center. She began teaching ESL courses until she eventually applied for and was hired as the center’s director. Her director role led to other opportunities at the college, whereby she was asked to serve as the assistant dean of adult education. All of her accomplishments resulted in to her being asked to serve as an associate vice president. During her tenure in

this role she successfully led the re-accreditation process for the college. Her accomplishments opened the door for her to serve in the role of vice president of academic and student affairs. She shared that while her career pathway appears logical and to be a smooth transition it was not without challenges.

**President C.**

This president began her career as an elementary school teacher but eventually moved on to the community college arena as an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor. However, she found an opportunity to join a grant program and then worked for a different federal grant program. She pursued a master of education degree and eventually a doctoral degree in educational leadership. Her experiences led to several administrative positions both at the local college level and within her community college district. These experiences coupled with her graduate degree in education led to an opportunity to apply for and attain a campus administrator position. She eventually had an opportunity to serve as college president. In time, she was lured to apply for and obtain the role as a college president in another community college district several states away.

The campus administrator role was critical in her journey. It was within this role that she had the opportunity to learn how to essentially operate a college housed within a high school satellite site. She states:

It was full-blown college in the evening. I operated out of a storefront office. Almost functioning like quasi-presidents. Our job was to do the marketing, the outreach, negotiate with the instructional leaders and all the disciplines, the workforce, the

academic. We had to oversee the policy and on Fridays, we were down at district meeting with, face-to-face, meetings with the district folks to talk about plans for each semester.

She had full reign to decide which courses were needed and offered. It was also serving within this role that enabled her to sharpen her management skills. She admitted that it was the campus administrator role that made her feel like a college president and truly prepared her to serve as a community college president. Serving as the campus administrator gave her the responsibility for every aspect of the campus. She was able to garner resources and offer the programs of study that expanded the number of students studying at her campus dramatically.

All the success she experienced as a campus administrator gained a substantial amount of attention from the district-level. She applied for and obtained a position as a system-wide dean of students. This role was very much student services oriented, however she created opportunities to work with the academic side, as well. For example, to further enhance opportunities to work with faculty she assisted in the creation of the faculty handbook. This and her other experiences within higher education enabled her to hone her academic management skills and eventually prepared her to serve in the capacity of president.

Eventually, the district hired a new chancellor and this chancellor created a new vision and changed the entire dynamic of the district. Instead of continuing to operate in high school buildings, he wanted to build multiple college campuses in the city. He created new positions at the district level and advertised for college presidents to oversee the building of the colleges and end the high school arrangement that was in place for

many years. President C applied for several positions and made the short list for three - executive vice chancellor, vice chancellor of student affairs, and president. She accepted the offer for a presidency.

She served as a college president for twelve years. At the end of her first presidency she considered retiring; however, she was recruited to her second presidency. The second district essentially offered an opportunity that she felt unwise to decline, and therefore accepted the offer to serve as a president. She served in this presidency for six years before making the decision to retire, for a second time.

**Table 4: Summary of Professional Pathway**

President	A	B	C
Professional Pathway	K-12 Administrative experience	Accounting	K-12 Teacher
	Faculty	ESL Instructor	ESL Instructor
	Vice President	Dean, Adult Ed	Grant Administrator
	President	Vice President	Campus Administrator
		President	Student Affairs
			President

### **Defining Factors that Lead to Serving as a President**

The presidents were asked to describe some defining moments that prompted them to serve as president (Table 5). These three women revealed a variety of situations that gave them the confidence to enter into this role. Two revealed that they were not necessarily pursuing a presidency but were presented with opportunities to grow professionally. The third president stated that she sought out mentors and opportunities with the intended goal of achieving leadership positions in higher education.



**President A.**

She began her journey to the presidency as Interim President after the president resigned his position to take on another role at another college. She hadn't considered applying because she was very happy serving as the vice president of academic affairs. She fully intended to be able to return to her position once the search for a new president was complete. She loved the college, her faculty team and was very content in knowing that she could return to her vice president role once a new college president was selected. However, she realized while she was serving as interim president that she was fully capable of making the commitment. She reevaluated her decision and eventually decided to apply for the position.

She explained that her commitment and ability to serve as president came from a defining moment of discomfort. While she was serving as the interim president, with no intention of applying for the presidency, she lived through a very difficult experience that motivated her to apply for the position of president. While in the office, the administrative assistant had asked for her assistance in taking a call from a very irate presidential applicant. This applicant began shouting and demanding that the staff search for his application in the human resources' office immediately. President A stated "I remember it distinctly. It was a person applying for the presidency who yelled at me, too!" She further indicated that this applicant was so busy yelling that he did not notice he was speaking with the interim president and continued to yell at her. She could not believe his demeanor and tone. It was this experience that confirmed her desire to ensure that every person at the college was treated with an exceptional level of care and respect. She knew at that moment she would never want to be spoken to in that manner on a daily

basis and as a result she submitted her application for the position of president. She knew she was confident and well versed in academic policy and could serve her college well, if selected to continue serving as the president.

Her commitment to excellent service was witnessed by the researcher the day of the interview. The researcher arrived a few minutes early and observed a student who wanted to meet with the president to share a concern. Although the meeting was not scheduled, the president was very gracious and took a few moments to meet with the student. This president feels she made a choice to serve her constituents and has resolved to practice that commitment every day.

#### **President B.**

This president had actually been prepared, by her predecessor, to serve as president for about a year prior to her appointment. While President B served as vice president, her president frequently assigned her roles to be the representative for the college. He wanted her to be exposed to the scope of responsibilities within a presidential role “He would talk to the board and say ‘this is going to be your next president!’” She was grateful for these experiences, although not necessarily convinced that she would serve as the next college president.

During this participant’s service as the vice president of academic affairs the sitting president was constantly encouraging her to pursue the presidency upon his retirement. He finally informed her that he intended to retire in a year and that she should be the next college president. She stated that she was not completely convinced that the presidency was something she wanted to pursue. While she was contemplating the possibility, the president had a heart attack and she was the logical choice to serve as the

interim president. While she was serving as interim president she was offered and accepted the appointment to serve as the permanent president and is now beginning her tenth year in that position.

President B expressed concerns regarding her credentials, as she had not yet completed her doctorate when she was selected to serve as interim president. She also questioned her desire to serve. While she was very pleased with her successes throughout her career, she never sought out to be a community college president. She stated that she “fell in love with education”. The opportunity to serve people is what originally connected her to the field of education. Furthermore, since she had not yet completed her doctoral degree when the board named her interim president she faced some challenges from the college faculty. It was not until the beginning of her fourth year as president that she attained her doctoral degree.

### **President C.**

President C had her sights set on leadership roles since a young age. This president acknowledged that she had built her skill-set over the years to serve as a college president. She discussed in depth the lack of Latinas serving in leadership roles within higher education. Throughout the time she was growing professionally she didn't see the support or encouragement for Latinas to take leadership roles in community colleges. However, this president states that her mentors were the defining factor that led her to pursue her first presidency. Her mentors guided her to continue her education and to perform well professionally. She stated “I figured it out...through some of my mentors” how important it was to be credentialed and to be assertive.

While President C was envisioning a presidency, she had mentors that guided her. She was confident that her credentials were what she needed to move on professionally. Her mentors reinforced that a good leader needed both experience and the credentials in education. She eventually learned that if she wanted to achieve her goal she would need to assert herself into the candidate pools. She learned from mentors that she needed to position herself and demonstrate her commitment and energy to be able to lead an entire community college. She always made herself available for special projects in the hopes of being considered for different positions and this proved to be a successful strategy. Her first presidency created a pathway for her to be recruited to a second presidency.

**Table 5: Defining Factors that Lead to Serving as President**

President	A	B	C
Defining Factors	Civility  Service Excellence	Predecessor Resigned	Mentors  Deliberate Career Planning

### **Personal and Leadership Characteristics Latinas Should Possess**

This question was posed to gain information regarding the credentials, image and skill-set a community college leader should possess to be effective and successful. All three presidents discussed the level of commitment needed to serve in the capacity of a community college president. The responses presented by the participants offer insight into gaining a president position and how to cope within the role (Table 6).

#### **President A.**

President A was very clear in that she didn't want to over generalize and speak as if she was speaking for every president or infer that only Latinas need these characteristics. She discussed the need to be dynamic and to really let actions speak for

the reputation that is created. She stated she looks young, often being confused for a student, and sometimes is not taken seriously as a president.

Given that she is just beginning her third year she explained the extreme scrutiny that new presidents undergo. She explained that statistics, being fact-based reporting mechanisms, can create the positive reputation that is important for a community college president. She stated that someone who has many years of experience could be very difficult to work for because they can be very set in their ways, while a president who may only have a few years experience may be more willing to listen and be more open to ideas from others.

She mentioned briefly within this section of the interview that there is also a possibility for misperception from the public. For example she states, “Folks automatically tend to think that you think about one group” implying that as a Latina, her presidency only focuses on the Latino population of the college. She was clear that this is probably not applicable only to Latinos, and as a result she cautions every president to remember to serve every population within the college community. This type of misperception of a president’s reputation could be very detrimental to the success of a community college president.

### **President B.**

Passion and credentials for the position is necessary to serve as a community college president, according to President B. She expressed, “First and foremost than anything you have to have a passion for what it is that you do because it is a very difficult position, very demanding”. She reasons that the long days and the need to be responsive to so many different constituents require a president to carry a deep passion for their

institution. Furthermore, she stated that credentials are very important to possess prior to achieving leadership roles. She had not quite completed her doctorate when she was propelled to the presidency. She doesn't doubt her abilities and fully believes she would have done an excellent job without the degree but also believed that because she had to devote time to her degree completion, at times, she felt she was slightly distracted from her presidential responsibilities.

President B stressed that "Being an effective communicator" and being open to future leaders while serving as a role model is also very important. While serving as a role model and as a leader of an institution it is necessary to ensure that the leader does not have the image of only caring for one population more than the other populations within the institution. Finally, a president should have a long background of serving in administrative roles within the community college. All of these leadership qualities are what President B recommends for any community college president to possess

**President C.**

One of the personal characteristics needed, according to President C, is consistency. A president will limit challenges from differing constituencies and detractors if she is consistent in her decision-making. Furthermore, she argues, a president needs to be energetic. A community college president must be prepared to prove she is able to serve and "exhibit high levels of energy while serving" all her constituents. Additionally, she elaborated, maintaining her personal image and "controlling her own story" was also important. This president referred to it as keeping a "report card" for herself. She briefly discussed the need to be able to handle both critics and supporters, emphasizing the ability to control personal image and reputation.

President C also mentioned multiple times that playing an integral role within the accreditation process is imperative. As a professional in the field of education, a president needs to be connected to the accreditation process. An accreditation report can be treated much like a personal report card. All the data collected throughout the college for an accreditation report can determine how a president's credibility is perceived, as well as, provides the president with the information to defend her credibility and limit the influence of the challengers.

She further states that a Latina president should not believe that they were selected to serve as a president because they are Latina, because it is not a racial or ethnic decision. She makes the point by firmly stating, "Latinas, you can never think for a second that you have the position because you are Latina. That's not it! You get the position because you are the most qualified." She made this comment in a firm tone, almost one of proclamation and announcement. Additionally, she continued, when one is selected to serve as a president that is the time to demonstrate equality and to never show favoritism, especially along ethnic lines. Serving as president is not the time to only care for the Latino population on campus, she argues:

You are hired to implement the instructional program and you have to keep all those passions and emotions in check. Because if you show too much favoritism, let's say, to any one group, that's going to send all kinds of signals to your supporters and your critics. It is the time to demonstrate that business is the first priority

It was clear that President C's message was that a president is installed to serve as a chief officer and leader, regardless of any affinity they may have with any particular racial or ethnic group on campus.

**Table 6: Personal and Leadership Characteristics**

President	A	B	C
Characteristics	Dynamic	Passion	Consistency
	Positive reputation	Credentials	Positive Reputation
	Responsive to all Constituents	Effective Communication	Commitment
	Commitment to Excellence	Administrative Background	Accreditation Experience
		Responsive to all Constituents	Responsive to all Constituents
		Being a Role Model	

### **Advice for Future Latina Leaders**

Finally, the presidents were asked for any advice they would offer to Latinas with aspirations to serve as leaders within a community college. This question was posed to glean information regarding their ideas for the future of the state of Latina community college leaders. The presidents all offered recommendations and guidance that varied from maintaining a strong sense of self to attainment of proper credentials. At the end of this section Table 7 is provided as a visual presentation of the narrative responses.

### **President A**

This president was firm and authoritative during this portion of the interview. Throughout the interview she was very cordial and spoke in a matter-of-fact tone; however, here her demeanor become very impassioned in response to this question. She sat up straight and proclaimed "You're going to have so many people knock you down.



You know what? Don't ever listen to them! Don't listen to them!" After that point, she allowed her passion to flow into the interview. She advised others to accept the fact that change is the only constant in higher education. No leader, regardless of title, should allow themselves to become comfortable in their position or role on campus. She maintains that "once you start getting comfortable that's when things will change."

### **President B**

Several pieces of advice were offered by President B. The recurring theme throughout the interview was passion. She recommended that anyone with aspirations to go into college administration should examine their passions and professional goals. If they are passionate about serving the college, then that internal passion will lead to opportunities. She explained that sometimes opportunities are found in other areas of the college. A professional looking to move beyond their current role should never limit themselves to within any one area of the college. Networking within the college is important but so is making connections outside the college.

Credentials and professional development are important to a leader's portfolio. Having the credentials, in hand, when offered a position facilitates transition into their leadership position. While having the credential is important, constant improvement of skill sets is imperative. "Never think that you know it all, even if you've been president for ten years" were her exact words when discussing her advocacy for professional development. In her experience, no one is ever exempt from needing professional development.

## President C

The first piece of advice President C offers is that she believes that leaders must hold their credentials at the time of appointment for maximum credibility. Furthermore, college leaders are role models to the college community so being credentialed and having as many experiences as possible are key pieces to serving successfully.

However, while serving as a college leader, boundaries must be set. She reiterated that it is essential that the leader controls the image and consistency within that image.

The control of image requires structure. A major piece of advice was for leaders to set structure early within their career. President C conveyed the opinion that a community college president is always on-stage and should be a good actress to promote a positive reputation. College leaders are the consummate recruiter for the college “You want things that are true, but you are a model, you are an epitome of, you’re always recruiting to your college.”

**Table 7: Advice for Future Leaders**

President	A	B	C
Advice	Determination  Don't Become Discouraged  Serve all Constituents	Be Passionate and Committed  Volunteer for Committee Opportunities  Perform to Best of Ability  Credentials  Professional Development	Consistency  Be Credentialed  Respect Constituents and Politics  Positive Reputation

### **Cross-case Analysis**

The essence of this study was to examine the obstacles and facilitators experienced along the professional pathway of female Mexican-American community college presidents. This section of the chapter offers the comparisons and contrasts between the three presidents interviewed. Based upon these interviews, each president conveyed the message that they understood they are members of a very unique sorority. They actually were all very encouraging to the researcher.

All the presidents interviewed offered insight into the demands of serving as a community college president. While they are in different stages of their career, the participants noted that there are some salient concepts that everyone should recognize regarding the role of community college president. For example, they all discussed the need for being able to demonstrate energy, commitment and passion for the job. Additionally, the need to be responsive to all constituents, regardless of racial or gender background, was stressed by each president. All three presidents also discussed the need and benefit to being properly credentialed with a doctoral degree.

In addition to comparing and contrasting each of the three presidents based upon their responses, the researcher analyzed each case summary using a feminist - specifically, Chicana Feminist - lens. The responses the presidents shared have been reviewed for any relationship to Chicana Feminist Thought and the results are presented in the following sections.

At the end of each comparative section lies a table to offer a visual representation of the responses received from the three community college presidents. The tables are intended to display the similarities and differences between the presidents interviewed.

**President A compared to President B**

President A was installed as president in September 2008 and is beginning her third year as the college president. President A moved quickly through the administrative ranks and has been employed at multiple community colleges throughout the United States. She attained a PhD in educational leadership and frequently volunteers to be interviewed for doctoral students because she enjoys assisting future community college leaders.

Entering into her tenth year as a college president, President B has proudly served her institution as a full-time employee since 1985. She actually began working as a part-time student assistant during her undergraduate years. She moved through the administrative ranks after serving the institution as a part-time ESL instructor and has completed a doctorate in educational leadership. Similar to President A she also assists doctoral students by frequently participating in research studies.

**Driving Question #1 - Facilitators.**

These two presidents shared similar stories regarding the mentoring they received and how it served as a facilitator along their professional pathway. President A and President B both had tremendous support networks providing the encouragement they needed while travelling along their journeys. Each had the benefit of having people in their lives to serve as their champions with encouraging words, even when they doubted themselves. Both presidents had people in their lives who were always reinforcing the thought of these women serving as community college presidents. President A's family members were always encouraging her, while President B had the college president always telling her that he expected her to take over as president upon his retirement. President B's predecessor always had words of encouragement. He often placed her in

situations to serve as the representative of the college. Furthermore, President B believes that her own personal commitment to a strong work ethic was another facilitator along her path. The positions they held at their respective colleges have given them vast administrative experience that truly prepared them to speak to the needs of all the stakeholders.

### **Driving Question #2 - Obstacles.**

During the interviews, the presidents were asked about professional and personal obstacles they experienced during their career. President A discussed at length the emotional impact of wanting children and not yet having them. She was very forthcoming and committed to sharing this intimate detail about her life to benefit the study. Her concerns were very connected to the expectations of women and the difficult choices women must make for their careers. President B was very candid that she chose her career over personal relationships. She described the institutional obstacles she experienced. She discussed the challenges she endured with the faculty and the gender politics she encountered. For example, she shared that she experienced some negativity on the part of faculty when she first became president. She had to face the reality that many were not ready to accept a relatively young woman without a doctoral degree to lead a college.

During the interview the presidents were asked about how they responded to obstacles. President A and President B offered different answers regarding their response to the challenges they faced. President A responded that she is a very spiritual person, has great religious faith and depends on her family to keep her grounded in faith. While President A relies on her faith, President B relies on herself when responding to negative

situations. She believes in facing all conflict head-on and moving forward. When she was faced with challenges during the beginning of her presidency her response was to speak frankly and ask and answer questions to engage everyone involved in much needed conversation to foster greater understanding. President B also discussed how she faced her detractors and actually began to engage them in conversation. Eventually she earned their trust and respect.

### **Driving Question # 3 - Commonalities and Differences.**

The cross-comparative analysis for the interview questions regarding these participants' professional pathway, leadership characteristics and advice for future Latina leaders is presented within this section of the findings presentation.

#### *Professional Pathway.*

Presidents A and B have passion for higher education and are both very committed to their institutions and the students they serve. Both presidents have had the opportunity to provide academic leadership to the faculty members of their respective colleges. Each served as a vice president prior to serving as President (Table 8). Additionally, each president has served in administrative roles for many years. One minor difference between these two presidents was that President A has always worked in education, but began her journey in elementary education while President B first began her journey in corporate accounting. President B transitioned from a corporate career to working with Adult Education and ESL students and eventually moved into academic leadership with an associate vice president position.

*Leadership Characteristics.*

These two presidents shared that leadership characteristics are not ethnic or racially specific. They both believe that the qualities of strong leader transcend racial and gender boundaries, both specifying that their answers to this question were not to be considered solely for Mexican-American females, but for all potential community college leaders. Both women emphasize that Mexican-American female community college leaders are not different from any other community college leader. Presidents A and B have similar responsibilities and reiterated these responsibilities do not change simply because they are leaders who happen to be Hispanic women.

In regards to leadership style and characteristics President A explained that being dynamic and creating a positive reputation is very important for all community college leaders. Communication, passion and having the proper credentials are very important to President B. She spoke of the need to be properly credentialed as one of the most important points to consider in preparing to serve as a community college leader. Furthermore, she shared that serving as president is an opportunity to serve as a role model to the rest of the college. She believed these attributes are needed by presidents within their role.

However, both presidents consider being able to exhibit passion for the position and to communicate effectively as very important for a community college president. They both also discussed the reality that presidents must be responsive to all college stakeholders. Each president shared the similar opinion that community college presidents must serve many constituents and ensuring that everyone is heard should be a priority.

*Advice for future Latina leaders.*

Both presidents were asked what advice they would offer future Latina leaders. In response to this question, both women were very encouraging. President A was honest in explaining that all leaders will have detractors and at no time can anyone allow themselves to be deterred from their goals. She passionately advises “Never give up!” She also shared that presidents need to consider the needs of all constituents, knowing that they all can’t be pleased at once. President B specifically offers the advice of always being open to new opportunities and to participate in professional development. She felt the breadth of experiences garnered from these opportunities coupled with networking can lead to leadership positions. The recurring theme throughout the interview with President B was her commitment to passion and the need for presidents to have and demonstrate that passion for the role.



**Table 8: Comparing Presidents A and B**

Presidents	Professional Pathway	Leadership Characteristics	Facilitators	Obstacles	Advice for Future Leaders
A	K-12 Administrative experience Faculty Vice President President	Dynamic Positive reputation Responsive to all Constituents Commitment to Excellence	Mentors Family Support Faculty Support	National and International Economic Crisis Gender Roles and Expectations	Determination Don't Become Discouraged Serve all Constituents
B	Corporate Accounting ESL Instructor Dean Vice President President	Passion Credentials Effective Communication Administrative Background Responsive to all Constituents Being a Role Model	Mentors Personal Commitment	Gender Roles and Expectations Challenges from Faculty	Be Passionate and Committed Volunteer for Committee Opportunities Perform to Best of Ability Credentials Professional Development

**President A compared to President C**

President C served as a president at two different community colleges. Her first presidency lasted twelve years and her second presidency lasted over five years. She is thoroughly enjoying her retirement. She spends time with her family and is very pleased to be able to continue consulting within the field of education and remain connected to higher education.

Conversely, President A has only been serving as a community college president since 2008. She is entering her third year as a community college president. These two

presidents are strikingly similar, even though their stage of career couldn't be further apart.

**Driving Question # 1 - Facilitators.**

Regarding the facilitators along their journeys both women shared that the support of their families was crucial to them. President A displayed love and affection when she described the support of her mother, sister and husband. President C beamed with pride when she discussed having her children being a part of her life and how they were just as important to her as her presidencies. Furthermore, President C shared that her family also facilitated her journey by assisting her in management of her reputation. Her family also realized the importance of the politics of the presidency and they were very supportive of her career. Presidents A and C expressed the benefit of having mentors that encouraged them and guided them along their respective journeys.

**Driving Question # 2 - Obstacles.**

The obstacles these two presidents discussed differed at the macro and micro level. President A really focused on the national and international economic trends and how they can impact a presidency. President C discussed at length the personal impact of racial and gender politics. Both President A and President C discussed the expectations of Latina women and how they worked to succeed beyond those expectations. Both shared truly personal stories and how they were affected by the obstacles. For example, President A admitted to seeking an opportunity to achieve a balanced life with an opportunity to have children. She discussed her desire to have children and the concerns she had with being able to be a parent and a community college president. Regarding obstacles, President C discussed, at length, the challenges she experienced with men of

color. Specifically, the perceptions and attitudes these men of color held against her. President C also shared her challenges with other Latino men and how she refused to apologize to them for her actions and success. President C elaborated on the institutional and professional politics involved with a presidency and how these politics were challenging to handle, especially for a goal-oriented woman.

### **Driving Questions # 3 – Commonalities and Differences.**

The cross-comparative analysis for the interview questions regarding the professional pathway, leadership characteristics and advice for future Latina leaders between President A and President C is presented within this section of the findings presentation.

#### *Professional Pathway.*

These two presidents share some similarities but also some differences within their professional pathways. Both began their journeys in the K-12 arena. President A served as a K-12 administrator and President C as an elementary teacher before transitioning into community colleges. President A moved through the community college faculty ranks and into academic leadership. President C did have some classroom experience, but she moved through the community college administrative ranks within student affairs. Both discussed, at length, that they were able to progress professionally because they were able to take advantage of opportunities presented to them.

#### *Leadership Characteristics.*

Both Presidents A and C shared their views on leadership characteristics. One of the leadership characteristics President A and President C believe is most important is performing to the best of your ability. It is this commitment to excellence that is

important to a successful presidency, according to these two presidents. Presidents A and C were similar in their feelings towards the importance of creating a strong and positive reputation. President A emphasized the importance of being dynamic in order to establish a strong reputation. Interestingly, with one president at the beginning of her presidency and the other retired from two presidencies, both stated the need for building a positive professional reputation. For example, President C stated that it is the reputation built upon consistent and clear communication that make a strong leader. President C was very definitive in explaining that the role of a community college president is a role that must focus on running the college like a business, as well as dispelling the thought someone is the selected candidate because race or gender. Presidents A and C both stressed the point that a community college president is selected because of their professional profile and distinctive reputation.

*Advice for future Latina leaders.*

The advice they offered for future leaders was also similar. President A offered determination as a key to attaining leadership roles. President A was forceful in her tone for every woman who is considering leadership roles to pursue them and to never listen to the detractors along the way. Similarly, President C stated that along the way there will be conflict and a woman should not apologize for being determined and taking leadership roles within a community college. President C shared that consistency and establishing boundaries are some of the best pieces of advice she could offer. She contends that a president should always be consistent in decisions and behave in a manner that commands the respect of the role. These women almost sounded like

kindred spirits during the interviews. Both women conveyed a message of determination and encouragement to all future leaders.

**Table 9: Comparing Presidents A and C**

Presidents	Professional Pathway	Leadership Characteristics	Facilitators	Obstacles	Advice for Future Leaders
A	K-12 Administrative Experience Faculty Vice President President	Dynamic Positive reputation Responsive to all Constituents Commitment to Excellence	Mentors Family Support Faculty Support	National and International Economic Crisis Gender Roles and Expectations	Determination Don't Become Discouraged Serve all Constituents
C	K-12 Teacher ESL Instructor Grant Administrator Student Affairs Campus Administrator	Consistency Positive Reputation Commitment Accreditation Experience Responsive to all Constituents	Credentials Family Personal Skill-set Maintain Positive and Professional Image Mentors	Gender Roles and Expectations Racial Politics Accreditation Financial Training	Consistency Be Credentialed Respect Constituents and Politics Positive Reputation

### **President B compared to President C**

Similar to the previous comparisons, President B and President C also shared many similarities within their respective professional pathways. These two presidents seem to have the most differences between each other, but are still more similar than different.

#### **Driving Question # 1 - Facilitators.**

Having mentors to guide the professional pathway were cited as a facilitator to the presidency by both President C and President B. President C disclosed several instances

that her mentors would not only guide her but maneuver to support her agenda and facilitate her success as a president. In addition to mentors, President B stated that her own work ethic and persistence allowed for her to advance her career. She demonstrated her passion for the education field and how it allowed her to establish a reputation of being committed to the success of her students. She shared that the combination of good mentors and her work ethic and passion paved the way for her to attain the presidency. However, President C also stated the understanding the politics of the role was important. The appreciation for the responsibility of the presidency, coupled with her mentors' guidance, attributed to her serving at two different community colleges in two different states.

#### **Driving Question # 2 - Obstacles.**

The obstacles these two presidents faced were similar regarding the perceptions of others. Both had detractors when they were named the college leader. President B specifically faced challenges with the perception that she may not be an effective community college leader. She had not yet earned her doctorate when she transitioned into the presidency and that was a concern by some of the faculty members at her college. Furthermore, she faced a vote of no-confidence from the faculty when she supported the termination of a dean. She chose to face the entire college at convocation and open herself to questions from the floor. She set an example of open communication and continues that practice, even to this day, entering her tenth year as president. To foster that commitment, President B hosts a small monthly luncheon with faculty and staff to maintain open communication. The obstacles President C endured included surviving the good ole boys and girls networks and racial politics. President C shared a story of how

she had to rebuff the challenges of the network that wanted someone else to serve as the community college president. She discussed that it was the gender and racial politics that were “raw” and embittering to many. Both President B and President C had to survive politics to be effective within the position. While each president had to face political challenges in differing ways, they both learned to survive and grow professionally from these challenges.

**Driving Question # 3 – Commonalities and Differences.**

*Professional pathways.*

The pathways of President B and President C to the presidency are similar in that they both began their community college careers in ESL instruction, but their individual trajectories differ once they moved beyond the ESL classroom. President B grew professionally into academic leadership. She became the dean of adult education, then the associate vice president and eventually the vice president of academic affairs. While President B grew into academic leadership roles, President C grew within the Student Affairs ranks. She served a director of a grant program and eventually into a campus administrator role that allowed the opportunity to serve as a district-wide dean of student services. Although she possessed limited academic experience, in time, she established a reputation that opened the doors for her to be selected as a community college president.

*Leadership characteristics.*

One of the interview questions addressed what leadership characteristics that Latina community college leaders should possess. Both President B and President C were very clear in that the answers they offered could be applied to all community college leaders and not just Latina community college leaders. President B focused the

conversation on expressing passion for the role. She shared the reality of long days and nights while serving as a president. One way a president can exhibit that passion and commitment is by demonstrating a strong work ethic. Similarly, President C stated that there is a need to demonstrate high energy for the huge time commitment expected of a president. Furthermore, President C stated that consistent decision making and attention to politics also contribute to the success of a community college president. Both these presidents focused on the need to be responsive to various constituents and to ensure honest and consistent communication. Another important characteristic these two presidents shared was their belief that community college leaders should be properly credentialed. In regards to this, they also stated it is important to obtain a doctorate degree, particularly when leading faculty who possess doctoral degrees. President C discussed the importance of not allowing anyone to find fault with your work. She shared a very specific example of one president who resigned from her presidency over critics attacking her dissertation. She continued her argument that critics will search for fault in anything possible and that it is vital to ensure that everything a future leader does is accurate and verifiable.

*Advice for future Latina leaders.*

Finally, these presidents were hopeful that other Latina community college faculty and staff would pursue leadership opportunities. Presidents C and B are both very encouraging and shared advice for Latinas who may be considering seeking leadership roles at a community college. Both participants advised others to be open to opportunities and committee work throughout the college or district in order to gain a greater knowledge base. These presidents shared that the professional growth from



working with varying areas of the college allow for the creation of a positive reputation and image. It is the creation of a positive image and reputation that President C states as one of the most important pieces of advice she could impart upon a future leader.

President C touts structure and tight control on personal image and planning for the next position as key elements to growing professionally. To the contrary, President B believes one should not plan and maneuver with so much intent. She expresses concern that any future leader who plans too much may lose sight of the responsibility of their current role.

President B furthers her argument that future leaders need to be really intent on performing to the best of their ability, regardless of their current role. While their demeanors may differ, they both wish for more Latinas to pursue leadership roles at community colleges.

**Table 10: Comparing Presidents B and C**

Presidents	Professional Pathway	Leadership Characteristics	Facilitators	Obstacles	Advice for Future Leaders
B	Accounting ESL Instructor Dean, Adult Ed Vice President President	Passion Credentials Effective Communication Administrative Background Responsive to all Constituents Being a Role Model	Mentors Personal Commitment	Gender Roles and Expectations Challenges from Faculty	Be Passionate and Committed Volunteer for Committee Opportunities Perform to Best of Ability Credentials Professional Development
C	K-12 Teacher ESL Instructor Grant Administrator Student Affairs Campus Administrator	Consistency Positive Reputation Commitment Accreditation Experience Responsive to all Constituents	Credentials Family Personal Skill-set Maintain Positive and Professional Image Mentors	Gender Roles and Expectations Racial Politics Accreditation Financial Training	Consistency Be Credentialed Respect Constituents and Politics Positive Reputation

**Summary**

All three presidents shared that mentors were a huge influence on their lives. Their mentors all gave them advice and encouragement and left an indelible mark on their lives in a positive manner. When they needed inspiration or guidance, they knew who was in their support system and where to turn.

The journey to the presidency was a story each one was proud to share. Given that each president interviewed was in a different stage of career, the researcher expected

a few more differences. These three women definitely have more in common than differences. During the interviews the presidents' stories began to sound similar to one another but at the same time remain unique. Some examples of the differences occurred in the positions they held prior to their presidencies and when they completed their education in reference to their professional position. However, the commonalities among the three Mexican-American female community college presidents interviewed were clear and allowed for an image of these three women who are dynamic, passionate and consistent, as well as, credible community college presidents.

**Table 11: Comparisons of All Presidents**

Presidents	Professional Pathway	Leadership Characteristics	Facilitators	Obstacles	Advice for Future Leaders
A	K-12 Administrative Experience  Faculty  Vice President  President	Dynamic  Positive reputation  Responsive to all Constituents  Commitment to Excellence	Mentors  Family Support  Faculty Support	National and International Economic Crisis  Gender Roles and Expectations	Determination  Don't Become Discouraged  Serve all Constituents
B	Accounting  ESL Instructor  Dean, Adult Ed  Vice President  President	Passion  Credentials  Effective Communication  Administrative Background  Responsive to all Constituents  Being a Role Model	Mentors  Personal Commitment	Gender Roles and Expectations  Challenges from Faculty	Be Passionate and Committed  Volunteer for Committee Opportunities  Perform to Best of Ability  Credentials  Professional Development
C	K-12 Teacher  ESL Instructor  Grant Administrator  Student Affairs  Campus Administrator	Consistency  Positive Reputation  Commitment  Accreditation Experience  Responsive to all Constituents	Credentials  Family  Personal Skill-set  Maintain Positive and Professional Image  Mentors	Gender Roles and Expectations  Racial Politics  Accreditation  Financial Training	Consistency  Be Credentialed  Respect Constituents and Politics  Positive Reputation

### **Aggregate Comparisons to Chicana Feminist Thought**

Three female Mexican-American community college presidents provided insight into the professional pathway they followed. They were open and honest in revealing their joys and challenges and each one had hope that they would be able to witness more Latinas pursuing community college leadership roles. Their common desire to see more Latinas succeed in education, led to the conclusion that all three presidents are in some way aligned with the Chicana Liberal Feminist model. Chicana Liberal Feminists subscribe to the ideas and practice of improving access and active political participation for Latinas. The battle against “the cumulative effects of oppression” (Pesquera and Segura, 1997 p. 302) is the key component of Chicana Liberal Feminists. This model of Chicana Feminist Thought actively seeks to improve the general condition of Latinas through access to education and other social institutions.

In comparison to Chicana Feminist Thought, President A’s answers embraces a philosophy that supports Chicana Liberal Feminism. Throughout her interview she made several references regarding the access to education and scholarships for women. One of her concerns was the access to scholarships for women, specifically, the attitudes towards women held by those serving on scholarship selection committees. She shared one of her personal experiences in which a faculty member was discouraging towards women receiving scholarships because of the possibility of women becoming pregnant. However, she was brutally honest during her interview that she would love to have children. She then transitioned the conversation to the use of Spanish among Latino students. She mentioned that it was important to be culturally sensitive to all and if that means speaking in Spanish, then so be it. She also disclosed that she does not believe

students should be limited to English in the classroom. President A did not explicitly state she considers herself a feminist or embraces Chicana Liberal Feminism. However, throughout the interview she questioned the expectations of women and whether women should be forced to choose between a career and a family. She revealed the gender bias against women she experienced during her search for scholarships. Furthermore, she mentioned that her mother is a “closet feminist”. The tone of pride within this statement suggests to the researcher that she identifies with feminist ideals.

President B also does not specifically claim to be feminist. However, when listening to her interview responses, a distinct affinity to the success of women can be heard. She took time to discuss how she experienced challenges throughout her career and some of those challenges were because she is a female community college leader. She originally was planning on pursuing a corporate pathway but discovered her passion for education and followed that passion to a rewarding career. She shared her thoughts that women leaders could be perceived differently and admitted that her leadership style is more nurturing than her predecessor. Her statement of being a nurturing leader could almost serve as a quote from Ruiz (2008). As Ruiz (2008) states that Chicana feminists tend to practice a more nurturing leadership style. It is this nurturing for others aspect of her leadership style that lead the researcher to conclude that similar to President A, President B seems to embrace the some of the ideals espoused by Chicana Liberal Feminism.

Finally, President C revealed many challenges she faced that she directly attributed to her womanhood and ethnic background. She also discussed her ability to face the challenges and be proud of her professional accomplishments. This president

was very forthcoming in her responses on how she managed to balance a family and a career. She considers herself very fortunate to have served two colleges and raised her sons during her first presidency. She also expressed her frustration with several men she encountered along her journey. It was the behavior that these men displayed that she believed to be less than professional and it was that behavior that accentuated the gender differences. Furthermore, the acceptance of the behavior as normal only reinforced her determination to be successful. These answers also seem to align President C to the Chicana Liberal Feminist school of thought.

All three presidents interviewed for this study offered responses that seemed to embrace the values of Chicana Liberal Feminism. President A shared her viewpoint that scholarship applications should be reviewed on merit without gender as a consideration. Meanwhile, President B revealed that she practices a more nurturing style of leadership. Finally, President C discussed her hope for more Latinas to move into leadership roles within higher education. While any one of the presidents had moments that could be interpreted as other models of Chicana Feminist Thought, in general it was the theme of their desire to see women serve as successful educational leaders that truly aligned them with Chicana Liberal Feminism.

### **Aggregate Comparison to Transformational Leadership**

The presidents were all asked about leadership characteristics and what advice they would like to offer to future community college leaders. All the women shared various points that are all aligned with varying components of Transformational Leadership. Kouzes and Posner (2007) created the Leadership Practices Inventory in the 1980's. Since that time they have established a reputation for being synonymous with

transformational leadership. Their focus on the practices of leaders and found five general practices of exemplary leadership: Modeling the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act and Encourage the Heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Each general practice encompasses distinctive behaviors and habits that demonstrate the practice. The responses from the interviews most resemble two general practices; Challenge the Process and Enable Others to Act. Summary of the comparison of these general practices to the responses from the presidents is presented in this section.

In listening to the presidents, they all shared the belief that leaders should take advantage of all the professional opportunities available. Volunteering to work outside of the immediate professional role was a prominent theme within the interviews.

Furthermore, for the women to leave the comfort of their position to learn about another arena is a risk. These acts of initiative and using opportunities to learn about another area of the college could easily be interpreted as an example of Challenge the Process.

The concept of Enabling Others to Act centers on communication and building relationships. The three community college presidents shared examples of building relationships and fostering clear communication. They also discussed the need to be confident and to not allow detractors distract them from their role as a leader. Their unified voice in the need for clear communication could be viewed as an example of Enabling Others to Act.

### **Summary**

Three female Mexican-American community college presidents were interviewed for this study to examine their professional pathway to the presidency. They all shared stories of challenges and triumph. Their responses to questions regarding leadership are



consistent with Chicana Liberal Feminism, as well as Transformational Leadership.

They all revealed examples of gender bias and how they responded to establish a credible professional image.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION; CONCLUSIONS; IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

This study was inspired by the desire to learn more about Mexican-American community college presidents and their respective journeys to the presidency. Within her entire sixteen year higher education career the researcher had limited experience with Latinas, much less Mexican-American women, serving as leaders. Those that she was aware of were not easily accessible to her. In fact, the researcher only had experience with Caucasian and African-American professors, mentors and supervisors. The researcher wanted to examine the professional pathways of selected Mexican-American female community college presidents and use a feminist lens to compare and contrast the pathways.

This chapter presents a discussion of the study, conclusions from the research, implications from the responses and recommendations for future research. A summary of the study and the findings are presented as an introduction to the chapter and discussion section. The conclusions from the study will be presented by each driving question. Finally, based on the summary, discussion, and implications presented, the researcher shares several recommendations for higher education and further research.

#### **Discussion**

Nationwide statistics do not reflect a large pool of candidates to rise to the presidency. According to the American Association of Community College data shows Latina/os are not well represented within the faculty and administrative ranks. Only 5% of the full-time community college faculty members are Latina/o, furthermore, only 6%

of the administrative staff members are Latina/o (American Association of Community Colleges, 2009). These statistics impact the world of research. Given that only 6% of community college administrators are Latina/o, the potential participant pool is limited. Researchers will continue to reach out to the same group of Latina/o community college leaders. While the purposes of the studies may vary, the participants are from the same limited pool. Within this study alone, all three presidents interviewed had made some reference to participating in other studies. Many of the studies within the published research focus on California or are nationwide in scope. This study was purposefully limited to Mexican-American community college presidents who either, currently lead or at one time led a community college in the Midwest region of the United States.

The researcher used Chicana Feminist Thought as a lens to review and analyze the responses to the interview questions. Chicana Feminist Thought is the conscious feminist theorizing of Chicanas and the opportunities for them to actualize their potential (Garcia, 1997; Vidal, 1997). The nurturing leadership expressed by these three Mexican-American community college presidents could easily be interpreted as being aligned with Chicana Liberal Feminism. For example, throughout the interviews they discussed a range of leadership characteristics from being more nurturing to being unapologetic for their decisions to be strong women. The women offered hope, encouragement and inspiration to all future community college leaders.

### **Study Summary**

The literature review provided insight into several background concepts, including the history of the community college, Latinas in leadership roles and feminist theory in general. The community college has a history of being an open access

institution for all (Cohen and Brawer, 2003). This type of open access institution creates a unique situation for community college presidents, as they are responsible for multiple curricular pillars. Community colleges offer educational opportunities to many students who may have been denied access to other more traditional institutions of higher education. Furthermore, many community colleges nationwide are facing the retirements of college leaders and this time in history may open the door to leaders that are not older Caucasian males.

The various ethnicities under the label of Latino do not allow for a unified cultural experience for all Latinos in the United States. This study was exclusive to Mexican-American community college presidents. Special attention was paid to the specific demographics, history and identity of Mexican-Americans. The literature review also included the differences even within the Mexican-American community regarding immigration status and the perception of Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans within the United States (Jimenez, 2007).

One of the common researched concepts is Marianismo. The concept of Marianismo is essentially the acceptance of the ideal that women are to behave in a subordinate manner to men (Gil and Vazquez, 1996). In an effort to contrast Marianismo, several feminist theories were reviewed for perspective on the societal and cultural expectations of women as well.

A qualitative cross-case analysis approach set within the interpretative paradigm was selected as the most appropriate methodology. The researcher was looking to gain an abundance of descriptive data to be able to tell a story for each participant. To gain that data the researcher conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with each of

the three presidents at very distinct stages of their professional careers. Prior to the presidential interviews the researcher conducted interviews with two prominent community college administrators and they offered an expert review of the interview protocol. Each participant was honest, direct and, at times, emotional when sharing their journey to the presidency. To be able to give a profile on each president the researcher reviewed state and national reported college data, the college websites and catalogs and previously published public interviews that highlighted each of the selected community college presidents.

The data collected was coded using a priori themes of leadership, feminism, family, culture, discrimination and professional positions. The emergent themes that came from the data were mentoring, credentials and credibility. The responses were then analyzed to find any connection to Chicana Feminism Thought.

The differences among the three presidents were minor. They each shared some differences, but none were glaringly distinct. Two current and one retired Mexican-American community college presidents were interviewed and they all offered insight into the demands of serving as a community college president. They were each in a different stage of career. All three presidents were very encouraging and hopeful that more Latinas pursue leadership roles within the community college. One of the presidents specifically shared her concern for the lack of Latinas serving in leadership roles.

There were some salient concepts that everyone should recognize regarding the role of community college president. All three presidents shared that the role of the college president is a challenging one. They all discussed the need to be able to

demonstrate energy, commitment and passion for the job. Furthermore, all three stressed the need to be responsive to all constituents, regardless of racial or gender background. Finally, all three presidents discussed the need and benefit to being properly credentialed with a doctoral degree because it spoke to the image of credibility needed by a community college president.

All three community college presidents who participated in this study shared many vignettes of the gender bias they experienced along their respective journeys. Each of the presidents shared what characteristics they valued in themselves and other community college leaders. The women revealed that they each had negative experiences regarding gender. One shared a story that she had an encounter with the professor who preferred not to give scholarships to women because this professor believed that women are likely to leave school to have a family.

### **Participant Summary**

President A is a president who has been in office for less than five years. President A began her career in the K-12 administrative arena and then transitioned into the community college. She has served as a faculty member, a vice president of administration and then executive vice president immediately prior to being selected as the college president. She has earned her doctorate degree in educational leadership. The college she leads is small in comparison to the other two presidents' institutions within this study with a Fall 2009 enrollment of just over 5,000 students. She leads 17 full-time administrators and 42 full-time faculty members. The average student profile at President A's college is a Hispanic female and attending part-time.

Meanwhile, President B, began a career in corporate accounting but soon turned to her passion – education - and she is now beginning her tenth year as the college president. Through out her entire career within higher education she has only worked at her current community college. She began as a part-time employee while in college and grew into a director role after leaving her accounting position. From the director position she was selected to serve as an assistant dean of adult education. In time, she held the positions of associate vice president and then vice president of academic affairs before being propelled into the presidency. She was named interim president when her sitting president suffered a heart attack and chose to retire immediately. The board of trustees opted to name her president without a search process. She, like Presidents A and C, also possesses a doctoral degree in educational leadership. President B's college has the largest enrollment among the three used in this study with a Fall 2009 enrollment of just over 15,700 students. The college reports 76 full-time tenured faculty members with 36 administrative staff members and the average student profile would be a part-time female Caucasian.

Finally, President C has a lengthy career in education. She began in K-12 teaching but found her true calling to be at a community college. She served in various roles including campus administrator and a district-level dean of students before being selected to serve as a president. President C is a successfully twice-retired community college president. This president has had the opportunity to serve two colleges in the role of president. Her doctorate is also in educational leadership. She is currently enjoying her retirement and spending time with family. The college she led experienced steady declines in enrollment and listed Fall 2009 enrollment at just over 9,000 students. The

college President C leads had the lowest full-time administrative staffing numbers. She led a 10 full-time administrative team and her college employed 42 full-time faculty members. The average student profile at her college was a part-time Hispanic female, similar to President A's college.

The journeys of these three community college presidents have been filled with support and challenges. Each president has a lengthy history of experience and practice in the field of education. All the presidents have had some form of exposure and experience in the classroom, as well as managing curricula and college faculty. The three participants are all committed to assisting in the furthering of research in higher education. They readily participate in studies for doctoral candidates and enjoy meeting future community college leaders.

## **Findings**

A brief synopsis of the findings is presented within this short section of the chapter. The synopsis presented is organized by driving question.

### **Facilitators.**

The presidents were all asked to look at their career path and remember specific occasions, or people, that guided them along their path and eased their transition into the role of president. The presidents were asked to share both personal and institutional facilitators and whether or not they recognized these facilitators at the time or only now in retrospect while serving as president. All the presidents stated that they only recognized the facilitators now in retrospect. While they understood what they were experiencing at the time, these moments were not as significant until later. Some of the stories these women revealed were refreshing and funny but all were genuine and described how they arrived at the presidency.



The participants shared moments in which they knew that they had true champions either in their professional or personal lives. Family and the support of the unionized faculty are the facilitators that President A acknowledged during the interview. President B shared that the encouragement of mentors truly gave her the confidence she needed to serve as president. Similar to President A, President C stated that the support of her family was instrumental in her pursuing leadership roles within the community college.

### **Obstacles.**

Similar to the facilitator question, the three presidents were asked to share obstacles they encountered along their respective journeys. All three presidents discussed personal and institutional obstacles and challenges they experienced along their professional pathway to the office of the president. The researcher was truly inspired by all the personal information that the presidents shared within the interviews.

President A believes that the current economic crisis can impact a presidency and possibly limit accomplishing the agenda they have set forth. Institutional obstacles were prominent within the conversation with President B. She endured many challenges from the college faculty and even faced a vote of no confidence. Meanwhile, President C was subjected to the negative effects of racial and gender expectations. Several males made it clear to President C that she was going to face difficulties at every opportunity they had to challenge her.

### **Commonalities and Differences.**

The presidents were asked to describe defining moments that prompted them to serve as president. These three women revealed a variety of situations that gave them the confidence to enter into the role of community college president. Two shared that they

were not actively pursuing a presidency but were very pleased to be presented with opportunities to grow professionally and eventually achieve the presidency. The third president stated that from a very young age she felt confident to serve as a leader. She sought out mentors and opportunities with the intended goal of achieving leadership positions in higher education. Whether the opportunities were at the campus or district level was not a major concern for President C she just wanted to ensure that she would achieve senior or executive level leadership roles.

President A chose to pursue the presidency as a commitment to excellent service and civility. She had a very negative experience with a presidential candidate and quickly realized that she could be considered as a final candidate and applied for the presidency. She was very pleased she was the selected candidate. While President A was applying for her presidency, President B was propelled into her role. She was named as the interim president out of an emergency need when her sitting president suffered a heart attack. She was then installed as the president per the board of trustees. Conversely, President C actually applied for multiple positions, including vice chancellor for student affairs, executive vice chancellor and college president. She was interviewed for all the positions and was finally selected to serve as a college president and served twelve years before retiring from her first presidency. She attributes her first successful presidency as the reason she was recruited to apply for her second presidency.

The presidents were asked to consider what characteristics, credentials and skill-sets they believe a community college leader should possess to be an effective and successful community college president. All three presidents discussed the level of commitment a community college president must demonstrate to be able to be responsive

to all their constituents. The responses presented by the participants offer insight into gaining a president position and how to cope with the challenges once serving in the role. All three presidents were compelled to state that they did not want to over-generalize or speak for all community college leaders.

In regards to those characteristics, credentials and skill sets the three presidents offered various pieces of advice and insight. President A stated that creating a positive image and being dynamic are very important to serving as a community college president. She added that presidents need to remain connected to all constituents and that a president never wants to create a perception of favoritism toward any constituent group on campus. Meanwhile, President B believes that passion and effective communication are the most important characteristics needed to being able to serve as an effective community college leader. She shared that she maintains regular contact with her faculty and staff by hosting monthly luncheons and to stay informed and be able to respond to the needs and concerns of her faculty and staff. President C agreed with President A that a positive reputation is important but she added that consistency in decision-making is the key to creating the positive image.

The last question the presidents were asked was to state what advice they would like offer to Latinas with aspirations to serve as leaders within a community college. This question was posed in an effort to glean information regarding their ideas for the future of the state of Latina community college leaders. The presidents offered recommendations and guidance that varied from maintaining a strong sense of self to ensuring the attainment of proper credentials.

Remaining confident was very important to President A. She was adamant that one should never listen to the detractors. Her last piece of advice was to be committed to serving all constituents. President B stated that passion and being able to demonstrate that passion is important to a community college president. Connected to that passion it is vital that a community college leader creates opportunities to learn all areas of the college. Finally, President C advised future leaders to have the proper credentials. The credentials and a positive reputation are what a future leader needs to be prepared to serve as a community college president.

### **Conclusions**

The interviews conducted revealed an array of obstacles and facilitators. The descriptions of their respective journeys and the emotion they shared allowed for the researcher to listen and learn from the three Mexican-American community college presidents. The conclusions presented in the following paragraphs are organized by the three driving questions of the study. The driving questions of the study were:

- What factors facilitate successful upward mobility of Mexican-American women to ascend to the community college presidency?
- What obstacles were identified by Mexican-American women to ascend to the community college presidency?
- What are some of the characteristic commonalities and differences shared by Mexican-American community college presidents?

### **Facilitators Experienced During the Professional Career**

In aggregate, the concept of mentoring was an emergent theme from the interviews. While the researcher did expect some level of a support network, it was

assumed that it would be family or personal. All the presidents disclosed the impact of mentoring. They all attributed much of their success to having mentors who had faith in them and supported them through challenging times. The message from the interviews was that all community college leaders need mentors to assist and guide them through their professional journeys.

In addition to having professional mentors, personal support networks were also cited. The support network was especially important for two of the three presidents. It was clear that having confidants and strong personal relationships provided the strength and encouragement to serve as a community college president.

In reviewing the multiple facilitators listed by all the presidents, many seem to culminate in a theme of credibility. Topics discussed included being credentialed, having a positive professional and personal image and having an administrative background. Separately, these topics seem appropriate enough, and when studied in aggregate there is a significant message. A community college president must be credible to the public and to all those that they serve.

### **Obstacles Experienced During the Professional Career**

Multiple obstacles were divulged within the interviews. One president referred to her concerns with the current economic state. Another shared her difficulties with several faculty members of the college. However, all of them shared some level of gender bias against women.

The role of the president is not without challenges. Throughout the interviews, the participants shared that every president must face the reality that not every constituent or stakeholder can be pleased with every decision, but it is the responsibility of the

president to make decisions in the best interest of the college. The challenges these presidents faced ranged from moving beyond the traditional gender roles to feeling unaccepted at the college. Nonetheless, the challenges made these women stronger and more valiant in their fight to serve and be as effective as possible while serving as the college president.

### **Commonalities and Differences**

The research shows there is not one true pathway to the presidency. President A began working as a K-12 administrator and then moved to the community college and finally moved out of state to work at another community college. President B took her first position in accounting and then moved over to work at the local community college and she has only worked at this one community college her entire tenure in education. Finally, the retired president started as an elementary school teacher and then moved into grant administrator roles then into student affairs positions.

What is similar about these pathways is that each president was always willing to volunteer on committees that were outside their immediate areas. These community college leaders were always active throughout the colleges where they worked so that they may learn as much as possible within varying areas of the colleges. This commitment to consistently broadening their perspectives subsequently made their professional profiles more attractive and they were able to move into roles with additional responsibilities. When listening to all three presidents the message is clear; commitment of time and energy are important to all community college presidents. It appears that while there is no one preferred pathway to the presidency, professionalism

and commitment are the stepping stones. However different the journey, each woman had confidence and commitment to serve as president.

The image and reputation a community college president projects is crucial. All three presidents discussed the challenges a college leader can face if there is an opportunity for detractors to attack the image and or reputation of the community college president. President A discussed the importance of ensuring that a community college president is serving all the stakeholders, regardless of ethnicity. She argued that the perception of favoritism could be detrimental to the community college president. President C communicated that the professional reputation of a community college president is very important and sometimes it is the innuendo of impropriety that can be damaging and lead to challenges to the president and her agenda.

Each of the three Mexican-American female community college presidents who participated in this study has earned a doctoral degree. Presidents B and C have a Doctorate in Education or EdD. Meanwhile, President A earned a Doctorate in Philosophy or PhD. Each of the women studied with an emphasis on educational leadership. Throughout the conversations, the significance of having appropriate credentials was discussed. It appears that a doctoral degree with the focus of educational leadership may have in some way contributed to the successful attainment of a presidential role.

They each offered words of encouragement and for future Latina leaders to remain confident. The presidents all shared stories of being able to overcome the naysayers and detractors. They each stressed it was very important for future leaders to

have self-confidence and not allow the negativity that they may experience to discourage them and to keep moving forward.

### **Implications**

The research findings identified implications regarding community college practice, specifically pertaining to the facilitators and obstacles experienced by Mexican-American community college presidents. Furthermore, the research revealed additional implications regarding the difficulty Mexican-American female community college presidents face in attempts to lead a balanced life.

#### **Community College Practice**

Implications to community college practices are categorized as both facilitators and obstacles to mirror driving questions one and two of the study: 1) What factors facilitate successful upward mobility of Mexican-American women to ascend to the community college presidency? and 2) What obstacles were identified by Mexican-American women to ascend to the community college presidency?

#### **Facilitators Along the Professional Pathway.**

Mentoring was an emergent theme from the interviews. Community colleges have an opportunity to create leaders within their institutions and prepare them to become effective and credible leaders. All three presidents interviewed for this study shared the significance of having committed mentors during their ascension to the presidency. However, they did not explicitly state that these were formalized mentoring programs. The implication to community colleges is the importance of mentoring, especially as it relates to preparing historically underrepresented populations, specifically Mexican-American female presidents. Community colleges need to recognize the significance of



mentoring, whether it is formal or informal and how it can truly facilitate the ascension to the presidency for future community college leaders.

Credibility was another emergent theme extracted from the interviews. The ability and need to establish a reputation of being a credible leader was stressed by the community college presidents interviewed. *Dynamic, Passionate* and *Credentialed* were words that resonated throughout the interviews. The implication for community colleges is to support and nurture the credibility of its leaders, especially historically underrepresented populations, such as Mexican-American females. Future leaders should be prepared to establish and maintain their credibility and work diligently to proactively prevent questions of their credibility.

#### **Obstacles Along the Professional Pathway.**

Gender bias was cited as one obstacle for all the participants of this study. Community college presidents have traditionally been Caucasian males. Currently, according to the American Association of Community Colleges (2011), 72% of presidents are male and 81% are White, non-Hispanic. While several community colleges nationwide have presidents that are not Caucasian males, these three female Mexican-American community college presidents were consistently made aware of their minority status when meeting with their counterparts. Furthermore, since 1991 to the present, the entire length of time that these particular women have served as presidents, it appears as though gender bias continues to negatively impact aspiring female community college leaders. As community college leaders retire, boards of trustees have an opportunity to change the face of a community college president.

The personal life choices revealed within the interviews create another implication for community colleges. The need to be more sensitive to the needs of Mexican-American female community college presidents as they seek a balanced life should be considered by community colleges. All three presidents had varying degrees of family life. One chose to not have a family. Another worked diligently to ensure both she and her family, were protective of her reputation. Finally, one president discussed at length the desire to have a family, but expressed concern with how to be effective in both worlds, family and professional. It is important for boards of trustees to value the family and personal life of their respective community college presidents, particularly Mexican-American females.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Community College Practice**

1. Reduce Gender Bias - Community colleges have historically been the institution open to all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or class. With the growing Hispanic/Latino population within the United States, the need for professional development in relation to diversity should be expanded to consider the Hispanic/Latino community, specifically. As previously noted, all of the Mexican-American female community college presidents interviewed for this study experienced gender bias. Consequently, the need to expand and enhance sensitivity training is recommended. Professional development to embed sensitivity training, specific to the needs of Latina/os for all levels of faculty and staff is suggested.

2.      **Formalize Mentoring** - Formalized mentoring programs could be one mechanism to assist and support Mexican-American female aspiring leaders. Although the presidents did not discuss having formalized mentor relationships, they each shared the importance of having these relationships. The participants shared that knowing who were their champions and specific support network truly facilitated their ascension to the presidency. This presents an opportunity for community colleges to establish formal mentoring networks to cultivate leadership skills for historically underrepresented populations, specifically Mexican-American females.

3.      **Presidential Orientation** - Creating and adopting an orientation for new presidents could assist with the transition and acceptance of a new president. Throughout the interviews the presidents discussed the expectations of a president. Furthermore, they discussed the facilitators and obstacles they experienced along their respective journeys. An orientation to the role of president that prepares new community college presidents and what to expect from various constituents would be beneficial to both the community college and the new community college president. This would be particularly beneficial to Mexican-American female community college leaders.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

1.      This study was limited to Mexican-American females. One potential future study could examine the professional pathways of Puerto Rican or Cuban female community college leaders. This would create an opportunity to examine

any cultural differences that may exist within the leadership of these populations as it pertains to community colleges.

2. Female Mexican-American community college presidents in the Midwest were the focus of this study. Future researchers may consider examining the professional pathways of Mexican-American female community college presidents throughout the nation and to find any applicable generalizations.

3. This study only investigated the professional pathways of female presidents. Future research studies may consider the comparisons and contrasts between the professional pathways of Hispanic males and Hispanic females. The women in this study cited gender bias. When considering male populations it might be interesting to explore what biases men experience.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine the professional pathways of female Mexican-American community college presidents. Specifically it examined the facilitators and obstacles these women encountered along their journey to the presidency. Ultimately, what was discovered was that each president did not experience one true pathway to the community college presidency. However, there were multiple commonalities experienced among these Mexican-American female community college presidents along their respective journeys.

The three women interviewed for this study are dynamic, passionate, credentialed and credible community college leaders. As presidents, they serve in a multi-faceted role that requires ensuring that all college stakeholders are considered and connected to the college, while also ensuring that all areas of the college are executing their

responsibilities. The Mexican-American female community college presidents interviewed for this study cultivated a spirit of inclusivity. Finally, they expressed their commitment to education, in spite of the obstacles they experienced, while in appreciation of the facilitators along their respective professional pathways.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

YESENIA N. AVALOS

Yesi Avalos is a Student Affairs professional with over 16 years of experience. She has experience in Athletic Compliance, Recruitment, Multicultural Populations, Fraternity and Sorority Affairs, Academic Advising, TRiO programs, Disability Access, Student Leadership Programming and Student Judicial Affairs. In addition to her student affairs experience she has served as an adjunct instructor in the social sciences.

The professional experiences of Ms. Avalos span between the Illinois Community College system and the public university system within Illinois. She is currently serving as an Associate Dean of Student Services and aspires to leadership positions with more responsibilities within the community college system.

## APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study that will take place from May 2010 through January 2011. This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

I consent to participate in an interview for a research project conducted by Yesenia N. Avalos, a doctoral student at National-Louis University, located in Chicago, Illinois.

I understand the study is entitled *From the Border to the Board Room: The Journey to the Community College Presidency for Mexican-American Women*. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors affecting the career advancement of Latina women to the community college presidency. The intent of the study is to explore the pathways, obstacles and facilitating factors selected Latina community college presidents encountered along their journey.

I understand that my participation will consist of audio recorded interviews lasting 60 to 90 minutes with a possible second, follow-up interview lasting 60 to 90 minutes. I understand that I will receive a copy of my transcribed interview at which time I may clarify information.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time until the completion of the dissertation.

I understand that my anonymity will be maintained and the information I provide confidential. I understand that only the researcher, Yesenia N. Avalos, will have access to a secured file cabinet in which will be kept all transcripts, audio recordings, and field notes from the interview(s) in which I participated.

I understand there are no anticipated risks or benefits to me, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be used to assist community colleges in becoming more effective in their presidential search processes.

I understand that in the event I have questions or require additional information I may contact the researcher: Yesenia N. Avalos, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] E-mail: yesenia.avalos@gmail.com

If I have any concerns or questions before or during participation that I feel have not been addressed by the researcher, I may contact the Primary Advisor and Dissertation Chair: Dr. Dennis K. Haynes, National-Louis University (Chicago Campus), 122 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603. Phone: 312-261-3728 or E-mail: dennis.haynes@nl.edu

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please describe your professional pathway to the presidency.
2. Was there a particular factor that prompted you to make the decision to serve as president?
3. What do you think are the personal and leadership characteristics a Latina needs to possess in order to be prepared to serve as a community college president?
4. What factors facilitated your successful journey to the community college presidency?
  - a. Were there institutional facilitators, if so please explain?
  - b. Were there personal facilitators, if so please explain?
5. Did you realize these instances as facilitators at the time or now in retrospect?
6. What obstacles did you encounter along your journey?
  - a. Were there institutional obstacles, if so please explain?
  - b. Were there personal obstacles, if so please explain?
7. How did you deal with these obstacles?
8. Would you handle the obstacles differently now?
9. What advice would you offer Latinas as they serve in leadership roles?