

## **ABSTRACT**

Katrina Ramsey Arnold, **PORTRAITS OF LEADERSHIP: THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE ADMINISTRATORS** (Under the direction of Dr. Crystal Chambers). Department of Educational Leadership, November 2017.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences of African American women administrators working in executive leadership positions that exist within the presidential pipeline at predominately White community colleges. Data was collected through semi-structured one-on-one interviews with five participants. Work-Life balance and barriers related to race and gender emerged as challenges during the career journeys of the women interviewed. Although they were presented with challenges, the ability to maintain a strong support system, having a faith system, creating a career path that focuses on leadership, and having a passion for community colleges contributed to their success as community college leaders. This research can provide a better understanding of the experiences of African American women community college administrators and how their roles as leaders contribute to the diversity within community colleges, both in the administration and as role models for minority students.



PORTRAITS OF LEADERSHIP: THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE ADMINISTRATORS

A Dissertation

Presented to

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by

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE ADMINISTRATORS

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## **DEDICATION**

To my daughter, Maci, this is for you! May my research empower you and remind you that you can accomplish your goals despite the challenges you may face along the way.

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First, I would like to give honor and all praise to God for providing me with the patience, the strength and the courage to complete this dissertation. I experienced so many life changes during this process. My faith in God and his unwavering love allowed me to successfully complete this research.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Community colleges are centers of educational opportunity, and as compared to other educational sectors, they are more responsive to the various needs of the local communities they serve (Plinske & Packard, 2010). Their commitment to accessibility and affordability has contributed to the diverse population of students, serving individuals that are diverse in age, ethnic and cultural background, socioeconomic background, and academic preparation levels. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), 57% of women and 45% of minorities are enrolled in community colleges. Forty three percent of Black and 52% of Latino/Latina undergraduates are community college students (AACC, 2017). In addition, among students, men are outnumbered by women across all races and ethnicities at community colleges and three out of every ten women enrolled as students at community colleges are either Latina or African American (St. Rose & Hill, 2013). While the gender gap within community colleges favors women overall, the gap is largest for African American community college students, 63% are women. On the staff side, 58% of those employed at community colleges are women and 11% of all employed staff are Black. Further, 53% of women working at community colleges hold executive/managerial positions, while only 10% of Blacks are employed in those positions (AACC, 2016, 2017).

Challenges within the economy drive the relevance of higher education to the productivity and innovation of the American workforce. The American Graduation Initiative was launched in 2009 by President Barack Obama as a plan to dramatically increase the number of college graduates in the United States by focusing on community colleges, which are often an overlooked part of the national higher education system. The President has challenged community colleges to graduate an additional 5 million students by 2020, which would require

these institutions to double their graduation rates (St. Rose & Hill, 2013). Additionally, White students continue to surpass African American students in academic performance. Further, African American college students tend to exhibit a greater academic risk than White students due the fact that many are first generation college students, they are likely to begin college academically underprepared, many are often juggling a variety of responsibilities, and they are more likely to experience cultural and institutional barriers (Greene, Marti, & McClenney, 2008). In order for community colleges to increase their graduation rates, they must focus on ways to assist African American students in persisting and achieving academically. One way to assist African American students as they move through their courses of study at community colleges is to offer them support from African American faculty and staff. This is essential to the success of the African American student due to challenges these students encounter when trying to pursue higher education opportunities.

While it is evident that the community college has a diverse student body, the composition of the professional workforce is not congruent to that diversity. As community colleges are identified by political leaders as being critical to assisting the United States in becoming the world leader in higher education again, it is imperative that we understand and support the students that attend these institutions (St. Rose & Hill, 2013; The White House, 2016). Further, community college administrators must be able to relate to and understand the challenges that community college students face, especially given the diverse nature of the students that are enrolled. Jackson (2001) explains that the existence or absence of African American administrators at colleges and universities provides a sense of whether or not African American students will or will not feel welcomed at the institution. When considering the disproportionate and increasing number of African Americans, particularly women, attending

community colleges it would be good practice for community colleges to attend to their staff being just as diverse as their student body.

Educational and career opportunities for women in higher education and society writ large have not always been comparable to men. According to Alonso-Almeida (2014), the number of women in the workforce is increasing although the rate is not comparable to the population that they represent. According to St. Rose and Hill (2013), women have responded to the shifts in the economy and the workforce by enrolling in higher education institutions and community colleges have played a significant role in this increase. Further, many women are continuing their education by receiving graduate and advanced degrees. As a result, women are obtaining degrees and credentials that are necessary to obtain top-level positions. Women occupy approximately 28% of all presidencies at community colleges and represent 21% of positions that include dean, vice president of academic affairs, and chief academic officer. Due to the fact that the prime pathway to the community college presidency is through positions such as provost and senior academic affairs administrator, the future of women leading community colleges is promising because many women are successfully serving as senior-level administrators (Eddy & VanderLinden, 2006).

Grant and Simmons (2008) note that a number of researchers acknowledge the barriers that make it difficult for African American women to experience success in higher education. So while the future of African American women in senior level administrative positions is promising, the journey to those positions can be quite tumultuous.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The number of African American women serving in senior-level administrative roles at community colleges is not comparable to that of White men and White women serving in similar

positions. While some research related to the experiences of African American women in higher education administrative roles exists, there is very little research that focuses on African American women serving in these roles at community colleges. In addition, not much is known about the challenges faced by African American women as they obtain senior-level administrative positions that exist within the community college presidential pipeline. With the increase in the number of African Americans and women entering community colleges, it is important to gain insight on the experiences of African American community college administrators.

According to Yakaboski and Donahoo (2011), race and ethnicity receive a significant amount of attention in existing literature; however, the majority of the focus is on the experiences of minority faculty members. Research on race and ethnicity as it relates to minority administrators, especially at the community college level, is not as common. Further, many scholars look at the experiences of women of color in higher education, examining the issues that affect these women as they work in higher education. Many of these works provide a general overview of women of color working in higher education administration, but do not focus specifically on administrators at community college (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011).

While the term women of color includes minority women from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, this research specifically focuses on African American women and their experiences as community college administrators. Yakaboski and Donahoo (2011) note that a great deal of existing literature discusses African American women administrators. In spite of this, research is minimal when looking at the intersection of race and gender among women community college administrators.

It is important to examine the experiences of African American women working in administrative positions at community colleges. This is especially true for women working in positions that are within the community college presidential pipeline. These positions play a significant role in the decision making process that affect the student body and the institution as a whole. Individuals that hold the positions must understand diversity and be able to make decisions that will benefit all students. Slater (2007) affirms that African American leaders enhance the educational experience of all students due to the fact that they can offer students a different viewpoint on racial and social concerns. This is especially applicable to the community college due to the makeup of the student body. It also supports research suggesting that community colleges fill vacant positions with women and individuals of color. Examining the experiences of African American women in administrative positions at community colleges can offer insight that will be beneficial in creating an environment of support for those women that will allow them to remain in these positions and advance through the pipeline. In addition, highlighting the experiences of these women can provide insight to women that are looking to obtain administrative positions at community colleges. Awareness of these experiences can be beneficial as other African American secure administrative positions at community colleges and as they navigate the presidential pipeline.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of African American women administrators working in executive leadership positions that exist within the presidential pipeline at predominately White community colleges. This study focuses on those executive leadership positions that report directly to Presidents of predominately White community colleges and the African American women working in those positions.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Creswell (1994) notes that a theory offers a rationale for the research design and guides the interpretation of results. Critical Race Feminism (CRF) provides a foundation to explain the experiences of Black women. CRF is an extension of Critical Race Theory (CRT), but its focus is centered on the experiences of women of color (Pratt-Clarke, 2010). This is essential to this study due to its emphasis on the experiences of African American women administrators that are in positions within the pipeline to the community college presidency. According to Childers-McKee and Hytten (2015), CRF broadens the scope of CRT by exploring the “social phenomena of people doubly marginalized by both race and gender” (p. 395). Unlike other theories, the utilization of CRF allows one to view the experiences of African American women as being distinct in relation to the experiences of White women and Black men (Berry, 2010). African American women experience oppression and marginalization that is two-fold and it is important to be able to analyze their unique experiences.

For the purpose of this study, CRF adds a more intersectional and gendered perspective than CRT. CRF underscores the significance of intersectionality and multiple identities when analyzing the various challenges that African American women community college administrators experience as they navigate the community college presidency pipeline (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). In this study, CRF provides a basis for evaluating the narratives of African American women community college administrators.

## **Research Questions**

### **Primary Research Question**

This study addressed the following research questions: What are the Experiences of African American women during their journeys to executive leadership positions that exist within the pipeline to the community college presidency?

### **Secondary Research Questions**

The following secondary research questions support the primary research question in this study:

1. What challenges do African American women face while working to obtain executive leadership positions at predominately White community colleges?
2. What strategies are used by African American women to advance to executive leadership positions at predominately White community colleges?
3. How do African American women balance their multiple roles and identities while pursuing executive leadership positions at community colleges?

## **Overview of Methodology**

This study is qualitative in nature and utilizes a phenomenological approach. In a qualitative study, the researcher makes claims based on the perspectives and multiple meanings of the experiences of individuals, meanings that are socially and historically formed, all with an intent on creating a theory or pattern (Creswell, 2003). According to Smith (2013), phenomenology is the study of “phenomena” and the way things are experienced by individuals. Further, these experiences are from a first person point of view. Creswell (2003) notes that in qualitative research, the investigator collects open-ended, evolving data with the key intent on developing themes from the data.

To explore the experiences of African American women in positions within the community college presidential pipeline, utilizing a phenomenological approach to collect data is necessary. This approach allows for the use of open-ended interview questions to discover the lived experiences of the research participants.

Semi-structured interview questions guided the one-on-one interviews with five women who are senior leaders at community colleges that are located within the regions established by the National Council on Black American Affairs (NCBAA). In addition to the one-on-one interviews, resumes and curricula vitae were collected from study participants in order to gather additional information on education and career background. Further, twenty resumes and curricula vitae were collected from willing members of the NCBAA and National Council of Instructional Administrators (NCIA) that either did not qualify for one-on-one interviews because they do not meet the criteria or those that did not wish to participate in the interview process. This allowed for a resume mapping process that helped to understand the paths taken by individuals working in executive leadership positions at community colleges. In addition, this resume mapping process contributed to the analysis of the interview data by allowing for a comparison and contrast of education/career paths of interview participants and those individuals that only submitted resumes and curricula vitae. Data collected from the one-on-one interviews and supporting materials were analyzed to identify emergent themes. These themes provide more insight into the lives of African American female community college administrators and their experiences while working in positions within the pathway to the community college presidency.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is designed to reveal the experiences of African American women that are employed in executive leadership positions at community colleges. Due to the fact that the study

focuses on African American women with positions that exist within the pipeline to the community college presidency, the dynamics of their everyday lives as administrators that are both female and African American are addressed. Since research related to Black women administrators at the community college level is minimal, this study will contribute to the body of knowledge by providing insight into the lives of women that are in positions that are within the pathway to the community college presidency. This insight will provide other African American women with goals of pursuing similar positions with advice and strategies as to how they can best navigate the pipeline to the community college presidency. In addition, this study can assist community college employers and board of trustee members to further diversify their staff by recruiting and hiring African American women in executive leadership positions. Further, the experiences of the women in this study can assist community colleges in supporting African American women with leadership development opportunities so that more will seek positions and advance within the pathway to the community college presidency.

### **Definition of Terms**

Throughout this study, a number of terms that are significant to this research are used. These terms are defined below:

*African American/Black* - An American of African descent. The term African American is often used interchangeably with the term Black (Ghee, 1990). This study will also use the terms interchangeably.

*Administrator* - An individual that is responsible for managing an organization.

*Executive Leadership position* - A community college administrative position that reports directly to the President. Such positions include vice-president, provost, dean, and executive director and depend on the structure of the particular community college.

*Senior-level administrative position* - Individuals serving in positions ranging from executive director to president. This includes executive director, dean, assistant vice-president, vice-president, provost, and president.

*Community Colleges* - Two-year public higher education institutions that are regionally accredited. Community colleges have an open door admissions policy and offer a wide range of educational opportunities (Vaughn, 2006).

*Predominately White Institution (PWI)* - Higher education institutions where Whites constitute 50% or more of the student body (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

*Community College Presidential Pipeline/Pathway* - The career route that must be taken in order to qualify for the community college presidency. This career route includes a number of senior-level administrative positions.

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

Due to the fact that this study focuses on the lived experiences of a specific group of women, limitations do exist. Through interviews, this study provided limited analysis on how the participants perceive life as an African American woman community college administrator, especially at the executive leadership level. The sample for this study is small, so generalizations that all African American women have the same experiences should not be made. Five participants were interviewed and recruited through the National Council on Black American Affairs (NCBAA) and the National Council of Instructional Administrators (NCIA), both which are affiliate councils of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). The NCBAA's membership consists of Black community college faculty, staff, and administrators. There are also four regions within the NCBAA that cover community colleges across the United States (North Central, Northeast, Southern, and Western) (NCBAA, 2016). The NCIA serves the

needs of individuals that work in the area of instructional administration at the community college. The NCIA is comprised of eight regions (NCIA, 2016).

Participants are women who identify or are identified as African American and are employed in executive leadership positions. Men and women of other ethnic backgrounds were not be included in this study. In addition, community colleges are the only type of higher education institution that this study focuses on. This study does not address four year or for-profit institutions, neither public nor private.

While limitations are present in this study, this research regarding the experiences of African American women community college administrators provides an inside look into the lives of these women. This helps to familiarize those who are not African American women with the challenges that these women face as leaders at community colleges.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized in five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a foundation for the study. It provides an introduction the literature related to community colleges and African American women administrators at community colleges. In addition to this, the research problem and guiding research questions are presented.

Chapter 2 offers justification for this study by reviewing relevant literature that is associated with African American women community college administrators. Topics covered in this chapter include: preparing for the next generation of community college leaders, women leadership in community colleges, and the challenges African American women face as leaders within community colleges. Chapter 2 will also provide an overview of the conceptual framework that underlies this study.

An overview of the methodology for this study is the focus of Chapter 3. The researcher used a purposeful sample of African American women in executive leadership positions at community colleges. In-depth interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data concerning the experiences of the participants. Chapter 3 discusses how data were collected and analyzed in this study.

Chapter 4 will provide an analysis of the data collected and a presentation of findings. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the results of the study, implications, and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This study examines the barriers that are faced by African American women administrators as they navigate the pathway to the presidency within community colleges. The study analyzes the relationship between experiences related to race and gender and career progression. With the increase in the enrollment of women and minority community college students, it is important to take a look at the issues surrounding the minimal number of African American women in senior level administrative positions at community colleges. In addition, although the African American women that do hold such positions are situated within the pathway to the community college presidency, many do not advance to the top position. As a result, this chapter explores literature related to leadership with a specific focus on community college leadership. This chapter will discuss the importance of succession planning and considering diversity when filling key positions within community colleges. Further, a review of the literature related to barriers African American women face as they attempt to advance in senior-level administrative positions within predominately White higher education institutions is presented in this chapter. All of the research presented in this review of literature provides a foundation for the purpose of this study of African American women administrators and their experiences within the pathway to the community college presidency.

### **Community College Leadership: Preparing for Generation Next**

#### **The “Graying” of Leadership**

Community colleges are beginning to experience the consequences of a considerable leadership turnover in administrative and instructional capacities (De Los Santos, 2013). According to Shults (2001), research associated with senior-level administrators working in the community college reveals that there is a “graying” of individuals currently holding these positions. The average age of senior-level administrators in 1984 was under 50 and in 2000 the

average age was 52 (Shults, 2001). According to Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk, and Taylor (2017), the majority of community college presidents are 61 years of age or older. Moreover, the American Association of Community Colleges revealed in 2001 that 79% of community college presidents intended to retire within the next decade (Leubsdorf, 2006). By 2006, this number increased to 84% (Weisman & Vaughn, 2007). Senior-level administrators that report to these presidents were also aging at a significant rate. As a result, leaders that began their tenure in the community college during the 1960s are now departing in droves (Leubsdorf, 2006). Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) explained that nearly 50% of community college presidents planned to retire by 2012. Over the past few years, this exodus of leaders has opened the doors to approximately 700 new community college presidents and 1,800 new senior-level administrators (Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005).

In 2003, Cohen and Brawer suggested that the time in which baby boomers began employment at community colleges was one of the largest periods in community college history that experienced growth (Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005). In contrast, the American community college system is facing a deficiency in the number of leaders due to the fact that senior-level administrators are retiring at a rate that surpasses the pace in which they are being replaced (Shults, 2001). The fact that new leaders are not emerging as rapidly as necessary to fill vacancies is of great concern and college boards and leaders continue to struggle with the most effective methods to acquire the next generation of leaders (Strom, Sanchez, & Downey-Schilling, 2011). Coupled with this issue is that since the majority of community colleges emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, many of the individuals that played a major role in the institutions' early development are now community college leaders that are near retirement. The history and experience possessed by these leaders along with their understanding of the culture

and mission of the community college all contribute to the gap that will be present as they retire (Shults, 2001). These concerns are extremely valid because institutions are looking to fill vacant positions with the next generation of community college leaders that will be able to offer innovative ideas while also learning from the past (Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005). Thus, as De Los Santos (2013) explains, it is mission critical to also prepare the next generation of community college leaders in order to meet the needs of the diverse student body and community.

### **Value of Succession Planning**

Riggs (2009) notes that over the past several years, there have been a number of reports that have addressed the increasing shortage of leaders in the community college. More than 75% of community college presidents that participated in a study conducted by Chris Duree (2008) planned to retire by 2012. These positions have traditionally been filled by other presidents or individuals employed as Chief Academic Officers; however, Duree (2008) found that the average age of Chief Academic Officers mirrored that of presidents. Hence, these individuals are retiring at a similar rate as their superiors (Riggs, 2009). As college presidents and senior-level administrators begin to exit their positions simultaneously, community college officials will find it more difficult to fill these vacancies (Riggs, 2009; Strom et al., 2011). Warning signs of this substantial turnover of community college leaders have been visible for some time; however, many colleges are underprepared when it comes to replacing those administrators that will be retiring (Leubsdorf, 2006).

As community college leaders and boards ponder over the most effective methods to fill vacant leadership positions, they can consider employing the notion of succession planning as a preparation strategy. According to Luna (2010), the concept of succession planning and its

principles have been present in the fields of business and industry for decades. A common theme that exists when defining succession planning is the execution of systematic methods for long-term leadership as it relates to succession, recruitment, and retention to meet the goals and adhere to the mission of an institution. Moreover, succession planning is utilized to address the planning of institutional employment with tactics that emphasize both internal and external candidates (Luna, 2010). It can ultimately ensure that organizations have the appropriate leadership for the future through a talent channel that is capable of nourishing the long-term goals of the institution (Wallin, Cameron, & Sharples, 2005). After all, it is essential to “have the right people in the right place at the right time” (Wallin et al., 2005, p. 26).

While it can be a key instrument for colleges as they prepare for retirements and turnover in order to create a seamless transition for new leaders, according to Jones-Kavalier and Flannigan (2008), less than 12% of community colleges had created a succession plan (Riggs, 2009). Leubsdorf (2006) supports this statistic by noting that higher education leaders do not do a good job of planning for changes in leadership. The culture of academic administration does not require leaders to cultivate their own replacements; therefore, there is a lack of preparation when it comes to filling vacant leadership positions (Leubsdorf, 2006). Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) explain that the concept of succession planning is valued within the community college, but it is not always implemented. According to Klein and Salk (2013), Henri Fayol explained that it is an organization’s responsibility to create stability. If organizations do not adhere to this responsibility, individuals that do not possess the necessary skills and characteristics will be placed in critical positions (Klein & Salk, 2013). Therefore, if community colleges want to be prepared for the impending need to make leadership replacements, it is

imperative that effective succession planning procedures are applied (Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005).

Klein and Salk (2013) provide four key components that will contribute to the success of filling vital leadership positions within the community college. Cognizance of the issue, a clear understanding of the needs of an institution, the consideration of talent outside of the “normal” profile, and constant professional development opportunities for employees are all key components that can guarantee success when filling senior leadership positions within community colleges (Klein & Salk, 2013). While all of these components are necessary, it is imperative that the concept of talent outside of the “normal” profile be highlighted. Wallin et al. (2005) explains that succession planning is not an extension of the “good ole’ boy” system. It is a mechanism to pursue diverse candidates and provide opportunities for a larger category of talented individuals (Wallin et al., 2005).

Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) stress the importance of the hiring of minority leadership. Succession planning can provide an opportunity not only to plan for the replacement of individuals when they retire, transfer, or find new opportunities, but it can also assist community colleges with adding to the diversity of their institutions (Klein & Salk, 2013). According to Gilliland (1991), stability is a product of diversity, which is the ability of a system to tolerate stress and to recognize and respond to opportunities. So, the utilization of succession planning to assist in leadership turnover and to enhance diversity can be extremely beneficial to community colleges.

### **The Community College and Reflective Leadership**

As community colleges work to replace retiring leaders, it is necessary to discuss the origin and purpose of the community college, along with recent statistics related to the

demographic makeup of the student body and staff. This provides significant support to the concept of reflective leadership and its relationship to makeup of the community college administration. Further, it is critical to recognize the history of diversity within the administration of community colleges and how it compares to the present.

Efforts to increase diversity in higher education have resulted in an increase in the diversity of the community college student body. Community colleges are vital pathways for African Americans that go on to pursue associate and bachelor's degrees. Since 2000, enrollment rates of black women at community colleges have increased significantly (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). This background information serves as a foundation and supports the notion of increasing diversity in the administrative makeup. Additionally, this evidence supports the concept of reflective leadership and its applicability to the community college.

The community college's open door policy provides higher education access to those who may not otherwise qualify for admittance into four-year institutions (Jurgens, 2010). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2016), millions of individuals would not have the opportunity to pursue higher education if the community college did not exist. This is because it provides citizens with access to higher education and training in their communities that will ultimately prepare them for their next educational and/or career endeavor.

According to Brint and Karabel (1989), the community college was established in the early 1900s. Some decades earlier, the preparation of proposals to create junior colleges began to evolve. At that time, it was believed that junior colleges could minimize the burden experienced by universities by offering general education courses to high school graduates. In turn, universities would then be able to focus on research and higher levels of education (Jurgens, 2010). The community college soon evolved out of the junior college as the demand for access to

higher education increased at a rapid pace. Unlike the original concept of the junior college, the community college would provide a more comprehensive education and have the ability to award associate of art and associate of science degrees. In addition, vocational and training programs would be offered to provide occupational training to students (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

The creation of the community college and its purpose of providing education and training have allowed the community college to become the entryway to higher education for working class individuals and minorities (Dougherty, 1991). An example of this is illustrated in the fact that the majority of Black and Hispanic undergraduates have attended community colleges. Community College Enrollment includes almost 2.7 million full-time students and 4.5 million part-time students across the United States. Of those students, 56% are female and 52% are minorities (AACC, 2017). The students served at community colleges across the United States are quite diverse in their academic levels as well as in issues related to their personal lives. Student populations can vary from those that are academically and personally prepared for the university experience, to those that are not strong academically and require some support to move forward in their educational quest (Husain, 2012). The beauty of this contrast is that community colleges have the ability to meet students where they are and assist them in succeeding in post-secondary education.

While it is evident that the community college has a diverse student body, the composition of the professional workforce is not congruent to that diversity. Gagliardi et al. (2017) revealed that 80% of community college presidents are White. In regards to women, 54% work as senior-level administrators and only 16% of those administrators are members of minority groups (June, 2008). As a result, there is a mismatch between the number of minorities

and women serving in administrative roles and the increasing number of minority and female students that are attending community colleges.

### **The Growth of Women's Leadership in Community Colleges**

According to Stephenson (2001), the 1960s were faced with unparalleled growth of community colleges nationally. At the same time, many community colleges became open to women in positions of leadership. While this was not necessarily the case for all institutions that identified themselves as community colleges, those that did not accept women in leadership positions would ultimately be forced to do so because of the demographics of the institutions (Stephenson, 2001). Furthermore, as a matter of symbol, the quest for Title IX revealed issues related to gender in higher education in 1972. This ultimately allowed the underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership to become a significant focus of study. During the thirty years after the passing of Title IX, the number of male higher education administrators increased by 10% and the number of female administrators increased by 147% (Opp & Gosetti, 2002). The fact that women in leadership positions at community colleges are largely accepted and more and more women succeed in securing these positions each year is extremely positive. However, it will be several decades before the number of female leaders at community colleges match the number of women students and employees on college campuses (Giannini, 2001). Thus, in spite of the fact that community colleges are comprised of a diverse student body that includes a large number of women and minorities, the makeup of the administration at these institutions does not necessary mirror this diversity, although the community college sector fares better than others (Ebbers, Gallisath, Rockel, & Coyan, 2000).

When compared to four-year higher education institutions, community colleges enroll and employ a higher quantity of women. However, there is an apparent underrepresentation of

women in senior level administrative roles within community colleges (Vanderlinden, 2004). This is especially interesting since community colleges are frequently regarded as having the ability to be more supportive to the career pathways of women. While this support is quite apparent as women continue to attain greater representation within community colleges when compared to other institutions, their advancement is at a much slower pace than their male counterparts (Eddy, 2008).

The slow advancement of women administrators in community colleges is especially true for women of color. Even as the presence of Black women in higher education increases, they continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions (Agosto & Karanxha, 2011, 2012). Opp and Gosetti (2002) contend that the proportional representation of Black, American Indian, Asian American, and Hispanic women administrators has only increased by 2%. This evidence illustrates the fact that women of color have progressed at a slow rate in their attempts to obtain positions as higher education administrators. Moreover, African American females in community college administrative roles tend to be employed at the lower levels and often find it difficult to progress from those lower level positions to positions that are considered to be senior level. This reveals a lack of upward mobility for African American women seeking higher level positions within the community college (Bower, 1996).

African American women less frequently obtain positions of leadership when compared to their White counterparts. Cook (2012) explains that minority women and men are raised to believe that hard work and education will ultimately lead them to successful careers and lives. This belief is coupled with the idea that race and gender are not factors in this pursuit for success. Although there is truth in the idea that hard work and education will lead to success, many minorities eventually learn that their race and even their gender can significantly impact

their ability to climb the career ladder or break the infamous glass ceiling (Cook, 2012).

Additionally, while higher education is viewed as being essential for economic progression and success, higher education is not immune from the inequalities that pollute the rest of society (Harris & Gonzalez, 2012).

### **The Pathway to the Community College Presidency**

Vaughn (1989) notes that if minorities aren't serving in community college presidency roles, the college's mission to serve all sectors of the community cannot be accomplished. This is why it is important to analyze the pathway to the community college presidency and what actually occurs as individuals serve in positions that are traditional stepping stones to that top position.

Those embarking on the community college presidential journey understand the importance that education, professional experience, and mentor relationships will have on career mobility; however, a number of barriers often exist for African American senior-level administrators as they navigate the presidential pathway. In regards to education, African Americans continue to be successful in earning advanced degrees. A study by Phelps, Tabor and Smith (1994) revealed that the percentage of African American community college presidents with doctorate degrees was higher than other presidents. For the purpose of that particular study, 54 African American community college presidents were surveyed. Forty-one of those surveyed held either a PhD or EdD. In 2014, 211,000 African Americans earned doctoral degrees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). This was a significant increase from the 2,066 doctoral degrees that were awarded to Blacks between 2000 and 2001 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). The substantial growth in the number of African Americans receiving doctoral degrees shows that they are educationally more prepared than ever to lead community colleges. The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education

(2006) offers specific statistics related to doctoral degrees earned by Black women. 38.7% of doctorates awarded to African Americans in 1977 were earned by Black women. That number increased to 65.7% by 2000, but has since decreased to 46.9% in 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Although 2014 showed a decrease in the number of Black women who earned doctoral degrees among African Americans, it is apparent that many of these women continue to pursue terminal degrees.

While education is an important component when navigating the pathway to the community college presidency, job experience is also essential. The study conducted by Phelps et al. (1994) revealed that the majority of African American community college presidents that were surveyed were previously employed in senior-level administrative positions such as chief academic officer, chief student services officer, chief of continuing education, and chief of administrative services. Forty-eight percent of those surveyed obtained the presidential position directly from the position of chief academic officer. Vaughn (1989) notes that while his study, “The Community College Presidency,” indicated that community college presidents came from a variety of professional positions within the college and outside of the college, the best way to obtain the community college presidency is through the academic pipeline.

### **Race, Feminism, and Critical Theory**

Social indicators have revealed that women of color are stuck at the bottom of American society and have found it difficult to fit in with those of higher class status in economic, political, social, or educational sectors (Wing, 2003). Chambers (forthcoming) explains that social inequity is displayed through group disproportions when it comes to access to income, wealth, quality education, employment, and more. In particular, in regards to weekly earnings, Black

women earn at rates that are lower than Whites, Asians, and Black men. This fact supports the notion that social disproportion is connected to identity intersections (Chambers, forthcoming).

Coupled with this are the stereotypes and constant prejudices that are cited when referring to these women that further degrade their competence, intelligence, and their ability to perform at a level comparable to their White male counterparts (Harris & Gonzalez, 2012). As these women continue to face challenges when they attempt to integrate into a world that is primarily concerned with the status of the White male, they continue to constitute a substantial portion of the workforce where the majority of new hires are already people of color and White women (Wing, 2003).

According to Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010), “Black women deserve a theoretical framework that combats racial and gender oppression from multiple standpoints” (p. 19). Critical Race Feminism (CRF), a product of Critical Legal Studies and Critical Race Theory (CRT), accepts the experiences of an African American woman as being different from the experiences of an African American male (Berry, 2010). CRT developed out of Critical Legal Studies, which was controlled by the opinions of legal academicians that were White male (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). With origins in Critical Legal Theory, Feminist Legal Theory, and Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Feminism provides a foundation to explain the relationship between gender, race, and class in regards to minority women and more specifically, African American women. In order to comprehend the concept of Critical Race Feminism as a theoretical framework, it is important to discuss its development as an outgrowth of critical criminal legal studies, Critical Race Theory, Critical Legal Theory, and Feminist Legal Theory.

## **Critical Legal Studies**

Founded in 1977 at the Conference on Critical Legal Studies (CLS) at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, CLS was a response to the disbelief in regards to the ability of Legal Positivism and “liberal legalism” to provide adequate analyses of law in a society that is constantly changing (Stuart, 1986). The Critical Legal studies movement challenged the fundamental ideas of contemporary legal thought and replaced it with a new notion of law. This idea involved a view of society and a practice of politics (Unger, 1983).

According to Cornell University School of Law’s Legal Information Institute, proponents of CLS believe that logic and organization attributed to the law grow out of the power of relationships within society. The purpose of the law is to support the interests of the class or party that creates it. Further, it is simply an assortment of theories and preconceptions that validate the prejudices that exist in society. In addition to this, those that are affluent and powerful utilize CLS as an instrument for oppression in order to retain their place in the chain of command (Cornell Law, 2015). West (1988) explains that the Critical Legal Studies movement emphasizes how the irrefutable actualities of class exploitation, racial suppression, patriarchal control, and homophobic marginalization affect the creation and enforcement of legal sanctions, thus supporting the notion that society is designed to benefit those associated with wealth and privilege.

The requirements and components of “rule of law” are significant standards that form the complete foundation of democratic justice. To those engaged in the critical legal studies movement, the requirements and sanctions of the rule of law further marginalize oppressed groups, thus fortifying the privileged status of the elite of society. The rule of law is seen as another conceptual and oratorical ploy that allows those with power and prestige to convey “false

consciousness” to those that are underprivileged. Hence, those associated with the CLS movement view the rule of law as a mechanism of subjugation rather than a requirement of justice (Bellotti, 1986).

### **Critical Race Theory**

According to Hughes, Noblit, and Cleveland (2013), Bell, Delgado, Lawrence, Matsuda, and Williams are often referred to as the founders of Critical Race Theory (CRT). A majority of these founding members were individuals of color and were also devoted to the struggle against racism, specifically as established in and by law (Hughes et al., 2013). CRT materialized as an insecure entity in 1989 and while several individuals are noted as founders, the scholarly foundation of CRT can be found in the work of Derrick Bell, Harvard University Law professor (Wing, 2003). It is the result of an undertaking of scholars, mostly of color and affiliated with law schools, whose works challenged the manners in which race and the power of race are created and characterized in American society and American legal culture (Crenshaw, 1995). Mutua (2006) explains that CRT materialized as a response to the emergence of colorblind ideology in the law. It builds on the perceptions of critical legal studies and radical feminism, two preceding movements that it owes a significant debt. Critical Legal Studies provided the idea that not every legal case has one result that is correct, while feminism offered insights into the connection between power and the composition of social roles. Moreover, the hidden and largely undetectable collection of patterns and behaviors that are associated with patriarchy and other types of power is present (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT attempts to understand how a system of White supremacy and its subservience of people of color have been shaped and preserved in America (Chambers & Dixson, 2012). CRT also strives to examine the connection

between the social structure and ideas such as rule of law and equal protection (Khalifa, Dunbar, & Douglas, 2013).

The Critical Race Theory movement, as described by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), involves a group of advocates and scholars with interests in studying and changing the connection between race, racism, and authority. Many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies dialogues address are considered in the CRT movement; however, CRT places them in a more wide-ranging viewpoint that encompasses economics, history, perspective, group and self-interest, as well as feelings and the unconscious. While traditional civil rights endorses incrementalism and gradational progress, CRT questions the actual foundations of liberal order (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Khalifa, Dunbar, and Douglas (2013) explain that CRT has developed into a centered conceptual framework that provides an understanding of American education and reform. This supports the notion that CRT can contribute significantly to the field of education leadership because it directly challenges the abundant claims of the colorblind impartiality expected in data-driven decision-making (Khalifa et al., 2013). Additionally, many individuals in the field of education consider themselves to be critical race theorists who utilize the ideas of CRT to make sense of issues involving school discipline and hierarchy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Khalifa et al. (2013) describe five principles that have emerged from the work of scholars in the areas of CRT and Critical Legal Studies (CLS) that support this notion:

- Recognizing that racism is an invisible standard and White privilege is the standard by which other races are compared.
- Committing to the understanding that racism is socially created and extended and a comprehensive worldview is essential for true social fairness.

- Accepting the distinctive viewpoint and voice of people of color as victims of racial persecution and understanding their storytelling as an authentic method to convey information.
- Engaging interdisciplinary conversations to evaluate race relationships.
- Maintaining an understanding that racism is universal, and that several rules and regulations are positioned to provide opportunities to Whites.

In all, CRT provides an understanding of the relationship between race, racial discrimination, and authority. While CRT has its origins in the law, it has quickly spread to other disciplines and where it is used to explain a variety of situations involving race and the law. In addition, the activist component of CRT is unique in that it goes beyond just attempting to understand the issues of racism, but also how to make changes for the better (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Harris (2001) explains that “as race relations continue to shape our lives in the new century-setting the stage for new tragedies and new hopes-Critical Race Theory has become an indispensable tool for making sense of it all” (p. xxi).

### **Feminist Theory**

The relationship between Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and feminism can be quite complex due to the fact that there are a broad range of views on whether or not the two can coexist. An apparent reason for this is that gender is the primary category of examination that feminism centers around. In contrast, feminism does not exist within the core texts of CLS. As a result, in the more conventional bodies of legal theory, feminists have been asked to clarify the differences in their perspectives when compared to others that are associated with CLS (Rhode, 1990).

The rise of legal feminism was coupled with a principle that has been present in both civil and political rights movements: all individuals should be treated equally, with respect, and impartiality. So when women argued that they should be admitted into civil and political society, their reasoning was that they were equal to the White men that were considered founders (Menkel-Meadow, 1992). According to Harris (2011), during the 1970s and 1980s, most women of privilege moved from being outsiders to insiders, playing a more significant role in the labor force. This evolution gave rise to several changes including the introduction of feminist legal theory (Harris, 2011).

Feminist legal theory, on a political level, strives to promote equality between women and men. Fundamentally, frameworks focusing on feminist critical theories make gender a focus of examination and their goal is to reconstruct legal practices that have omitted, undervalued, and demoralized the concerns of women. Methodically, these frameworks seek to describe the world in manners that relate to the experiences of women and that recognize the critical social transformations that are essential for complete equality between women and men (Rhode, 1990). When compared to other frameworks, feminist critical theories are unique in that they focus on both gender equality and the belief that impartiality cannot be acquired under existing conceptual and institutional structures. This theoretical approach somewhat intersects, and regularly draws upon approaches such as CLS due to the fact that they both have a mutual goal of challenging the current distributions of power (Rhode, 1990).

Harris (2011) explains that feminist legal theory no longer consists of one entity; however, it is separated into two complementary but diverse components. The first strand deals with the fact that the second wave of the women's movement accomplished enough so that today's privileged women have immensely more opportunities than what their grandmothers had.

While this is factual, some of the most dominant demands of Women's Liberation seem as inaccessible as ever before (Harris, 2011). Harris (2011) provides further explanation of the second strand of feminist legal theory by focusing on the term "women" as an unstable classification for American political movements. As a result, "feminism" and "gender" emerge to replace the concept of "women." In addition, included in feminist legal theory is the movement for "reproductive justice." This movement is predominantly led by women of color and it seeks to alter the familiar political-legal outlook that is identified as reproductive rights (Harris, 2011).

While the emergence of feminist legal theory offered a framework that intended to promote gender equality, the main culture of focus did not include minorities. Harris (2003) supports this notion by describing the dominant culture in feminist legal theory as typically being White, heterosexual, and "socioeconomically privileged people who claim to speak for all of us" (p. 34). As a result, Critical Race Feminism materialized to fill the void of the specific support for minority women within the family of critical theories.

### **Critical Race Feminism**

An influx of scholarly attention emerged at the end of the twentieth century regarding the legal status of women of color. During this period, scholars in both the areas of civil rights and Critical Race Theory attempted to incorporate the experiences of women of color into law and legal scholarship. Intersectionality, with roots in both Black feminism and Critical Race Theory, was introduced by Kimberle' Crenshaw to address the marginalization of African American women within antidiscrimination law, as well as feminist and antiracist theory and politics (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). Crenshaw's perceptions about the way a commitment to all women can obscure the particular struggles of certain women provided a unique view of the issues that exist within feminism (Harris, 2011). Intersectionality deals with

the incapability of organizational structures to improve discrimination due to the connection between social dynamics (Crenshaw, 1989). It speaks to the interaction of race, gender, and other aspects while indicating the means in which racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression function concurrently (Junior, 2015). Crenshaw (1989) discusses the fact that African American women are often “caught at the intersections of race and gender discrimination law and left without an effective remedy” due to the fact that the law may not understand the differences in issues between Black women versus Black men and Black women versus White women (p. ix).

While the concept of intersectionality was an outcome of this effort, CRF extended its notion of the experiences of black women by concentrating on how race, gender, and class interrelate for women of color that are burrowed in an organization characterized by White patriarchy and racial oppression (Wiggins, 2001). Further, CRF emerged as an attempt within the legal area of higher education to highlight the legal issues of a specific group of individuals that consist of minority women of a low socioeconomic status (Wing, 2003).

As African American women continue to experience issues and barriers related to the intersection of race, class, and gender, it is necessary to be able to identify a framework to study the multifaceted effects of these characteristics on women of color. CRF offers a legal framework to examine the intricate effects of race, class, and gender on women of color. The focus of traditional legal scholarship is challenged by CRF. This traditional scholarship involves analyzing a legal case based on the outcomes of previous related cases, determining and investigating the differences of each analysis based on the distinctive facts of the cases, and applying both the constitutional and legal interpretations that are reflected in previous decisions to the new facts (Pratt-Clarke, 2010). Because this method infrequently discusses the operation of authority, structures of domination or social justice engagement, it is unlikely for

transformative change to occur because an unaccompanied legal approach to a complex social problem will hardly ever result in complete understanding of the issue. As a result of this limitation and the fact that the law has been designed to only permit minimal and marginal change and progress, CRF materialized as an obligatory lens to examine the experiences of women of color (Pratt-Clarke, 2010).

The decision to use the term Critical Race Feminism to provide an emphasis on women of color was a sensible one as it specifies the connection to Critical Legal Studies, CRT, and feminist law (Wing, 2003). It offers an unremorseful analysis of the intersection of race, class, and gender within the legal domain and the wide-ranging experiences of women of color. As a result, the principles of CRF are separate from Critical Race Theory, but the two occasionally intersect (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). This is due to the fact that CRF builds on the concepts of CRT. The roles, experiences, and stories of women of color in the legal arena become the focal point of analysis in CRF. This focus includes the numerous identities of women and how their experiences are a product of those individualities. In all, CRF can be described as a field of study that encompasses a number of related fields of study that include Critical Legal Studies, Critical Race Theory, gender studies, race and ethnic studies, and communications studies (Pratt-Clarke, 2010).

For some time now, scholars in the field of education have explored Critical Race Theory and the method in which theories related to race explain the social structure and existence of racism in educational institutions (Parker, 1998). As a branch of Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Feminism has also found its place in education. For example, Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) explain that CRF is valuable to the examination and the construction of theories that are linked educational issues effecting Black females in a variety of ways. First, as a theoretical lens,

CRF indicates that the experiences and viewpoints of women of color are not the same as what is experienced by men of color and White women. In addition, the focus of CRF is on the lives of women of color and the numerous forms of discrimination they face as a result of the intersection of race, class, and gender within a structure that is characterized by White male patriarchy and racial persecution. Furthermore, CRF affirms the various individualities and cognizance of women of color; CRF is multifaceted in scope; and CRF appeals to theories and practices the study gender and racial oppression concurrently (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

### **Barriers to African American Woman Leadership in Community Colleges**

According to Bower (1996), the African American female administrator in the community college can be compared to an endangered species. Women administrators in higher education face significant barriers as they attempt to advance professionally. Racism, sexism, isolation, loneliness, climate, salary issues, coping strategies, institutional beliefs, and lack of trust have been identified as a few of the barriers that can interfere with the full participation of Black women in higher education (Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). These barriers often discourage African American women administrators from becoming effective, fulfilled, and successful members of the academy. According to Opp and Gosetti (2002), earlier literature proposes that the underrepresentation of women administrators in higher education was a result of personal aspects such as minimal self-confidence, a lack of required credentials, and the inability to relocate. Beginning around the 1980s, literature began to challenge this notion by providing an overview of cultural and organizational issues that affect women in higher education (Opp & Gosetti, 2002). For instance, Patitu and Hinton (2003) explain the use of “filters” during administrative searches. Such filters tend to eliminate African Americans and people of color from the hiring pool. Sagaria (2002) identifies these filters as normative,

valuative, personal, and debasement. The normative filter includes qualifications such as education, experience and expertise, while the valiative filter is associated with decision-making skills, professional behavior and leadership traits. Character traits, attitudes, personality, family composition, and sexual orientation are included in the personality filter and the debasement filter is where several forms of racism occur. For example, the seriousness and sincerity of black men and women's interest in positions are doubted by search committee chairs. An additional form of debasement consists of the perception of professional anonymity by chairs. In addition to this, there is also a undervaluing of experiences and the expectation of Blacks to respond to Black issues (Sagaria, 2002). As a result of these issues, it is important to analyze the particular barriers that women face within the academy. More specifically, it is vital to express that the issues faced by African-American women at predominately White institutions are unique when compared to Black men and their White female counterparts.

## **Race**

According to Harvey (1999), for most administrative positions in higher education institutions, the review of candidates consists of an assessment of qualifications, accomplishments, educational background, and professional training. In addition, personal style and mannerisms are assessed to determine whether or not an individual will be able to perform specific job responsibilities in an effective manner. While these qualities assist some individuals in climbing the career ladder, others are often overlooked and disqualified for certain positions even when they possess the required qualities to perform the duties of the position. The one disqualifying factor for many of these individuals is race. The history of racial discrimination in the United States has resulted in African Americans not receiving comparable consideration for

positions, particularly positions of power and authority in colleges and universities that are predominantly White (Harvey, 1999).

Jackson and Daniels (2007) note that there were practically no African Americans working in administrative positions at predominately White institutions prior to the civil rights movement. The only administrative opportunities for African Americans during that time were at historically Black colleges and universities. Subsequently, the demands of African American students, civil rights legislation, and affirmative action encouraged predominately White institutions to increase African American representation in administrative areas of their institutions. While this was promising, many African American administrators were only given responsibility, not authority. Therefore, many of their decisions were questioned and they were limited to what they actually could do in their positions (Jackson & Daniels, 2007).

Like their White counterparts, African Americans desire administrative positions at the highest level; however, the largest representation of African Americans tend to be in areas that are not favorably seen as pathways to the top (Harvey, 1999). The reason for this is that White males have filled these positions for many years, making it difficult for African Americans and other minorities to become essential parts of college and university administrative staffs (Jackson & Daniels, 2007). For instance, a larger proportion of African Americans seem to be located in the areas of student affairs, minority affairs, and affirmative action. While top administrative positions such as Dean and Vice-President exist in these areas, they do not traditionally lead to presidencies like the top positions in academic and financial affairs do. Nevertheless, there are cases in which African American administrators have beaten the odds and advanced into top administrative positions that have been traditionally held by their White counterparts only to find

that they must encounter personal slights, aggravation, and insults all because of the color of their skin (Harvey, 1999).

A study conducted by Rolle, Davies, and Banning (2000) revealed that African American administrators working in a predominately White environment must familiarize themselves with the culture of the environment in order to be successful. The burden of comprehending and dealing with institutional and personal racism is a common experience of Black administrators in higher education. These administrators must develop skills that allow them to manage working in a hostile environment and survive in an atmosphere that is filled with institutional racism. It is important to note that race is a key concept that structures the African American administrator in higher education institutions that are predominately White. Issues of race often appear during the hiring process and the overall structuring of the positions that Black administrators hold. The issue of institutional racism provides a need for Black administrators to understand their roles in both Black and White environments. Further, this necessity is coupled with the understanding of how to become an effective leader in a predominately White atmosphere (Rolle et al., 2000).

## **Gender**

Shifts in gender roles have been present in American culture during recent years as well as in higher education. There have been an increasing number of women attending and obtaining degrees from higher education institutions, which has resulted in those women being educationally prepared for career advancement. While this is true, women are still considerably underrepresented in senior administrative position at higher education institutions. There has been a misconception of women leaders in higher education because of several appointments of women as leaders of prestigious institutions over the past few years (Longman & Lafreniere, 2012).

External barriers also exist in the form of devaluation, responsibilities of home and family, role models and networks, and systemic partiality. Many women encounter these obstacles that ultimately limit their career mobility. For instance, in many cases, women are offered lower salaries and are not provided with much room to negotiate. In contrast, men experience more flexibility and have the ability to obtain their desired positions and salaries. Women are also faced with the challenge of balancing the roles of mother and wife with their professional roles. Although men do have familial responsibilities, women are more likely to take on the bulk of these responsibilities. This, in turn, makes it difficult for women to succeed and stay on an ideal career track within the academy because they often have to step away to handle familial duties (Cook, 2010).

The barrier of role models and networks in the lives of women seeking higher-level positions in higher education is also significant since individuals have a tendency to gravitate to those they are most like. Because there are not a large number of women that have successfully navigated and achieved career success within the academy, women desiring to obtain that status find it difficult to meet other women that have these experiences and can provide them with the support they need. In addition, many women often prefer to work with men, making it tougher for women to obtain much needed information and establish career networks. Certain systemic biases such as the idea that White males supervise adults while women oversee students and children discourage females from attempting to obtain positions of power because they have a difficult time visualizing themselves in those positions (Cook, 2010).

### **The Glass Ceiling**

The term “glass ceiling” was initially introduced to explain the experiences of women working in corporate America. Dolan (2006) suggests that if there is a glass ceiling that prevents

women from achieving upper-level positions, an even thicker one is present as minority women attempt to climb the career ladder. The glass ceiling concept can be described as a set of obstacles that impede the career advancement of women and minorities. These particular barriers involve a number of issues that evolve into practices that are discriminatory, whether intentionally or subconsciously (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009).

The glass ceiling that exists for women in higher education is very well documented. Women tend to be less likely to obtain certain positions when compared to men. The reasoning behind this can be attributed to gender bias (Williams, 2005). According to Williams (2005), there are two types of gender bias associated with the glass ceiling. First, there are prejudices that prevent successful females from reaching the peak of their careers (Williams, 2005). The notion is that they make it to a certain point in their professions and they are blocked from moving any further by barriers that are symbolically described as the glass ceiling. There is also something called the “maternal wall” that serves as a glass ceiling for women that attempt to climb the professional ladder in higher education. Williams (2005) explains that once women became mothers, their progression through the ranks is often obstructed. The glass ceiling in higher education is similar to glass ceilings that exist in other types of organizations. Several studies have focused on understanding the glass ceiling in higher education. For example, the proportional representation of women and minorities in conjunction with demographic information has allowed researchers to offer data that reveal bleak representation of these groups in positions that are of senior-level rank. Additionally, studies have analyzed the employment trends of women and minorities in higher education. This has ultimately provided proof that women and individuals of color are not equivalent professionally when compared to White males. Moreover, studies have indicated a “double whammy” for Black women in leadership

positions in the academy due to the fact that they are members of two groups that face discrimination; women and minorities (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009).

Since the 1980s, the federal government has recognized this term as something that affected the advancement of women, individuals of colors, and other disenfranchised groups in the workplace (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) reveal that prior research has recognized the relationship between gender, race, ethnicity, and the glass ceiling, with the research revealing a connection between these concepts and the challenges and successes experienced by women and individuals of color in senior-level positions. Cook (2010) explains that the current generation may be under the assumption that the glass ceiling has been shattered and no longer exists. Realistically, although women of previous generations experienced barriers to career advancement and offer stories of success, the glass ceiling or at least some remnants of it remain (Cook, 2010).

While the glass ceiling is evident as women seek higher level positions in academia, the "glass cliff" goes beyond this notion by capturing the aspect of women seeking top management positions only to find themselves blocked from these positions by obscure, yet real barriers that exist to keep the top level of leadership a predominately White territory (Ryan, Alexander Haslam, & Postmes, 2007). According to Ryan et al. (2007), when compared to men, women are more prone to find themselves on a glass cliff that can be characterized by leadership positions that are coupled with a greater risk and a larger possibility of failure.

### **Being Black and Female on a Predominately White Campus**

African American female administrators in higher education display a desire to obtain more responsibility that coincides with their abilities and experience. Unfortunately, race, gender, and social status often hamper their success as they attempt to progress professionally in

the academy (Lloyd-Jones, 2009). Numerous studies have been conducted that address gender and the effects it has on professional advancement. While this is promising, there are few studies that speak to the influence that race has on opportunities for professional advancement. Further, a smaller quantity place emphasis on the combined effects of gender and race on career advancement (Hite, 1996). As a result, it is imperative to focus on how gender and race impacts professional advancement. More specifically, the concept of being Black and female while attempting to obtain higher-level administrative positions on predominately White campuses is especially vital to the study of race and gender in higher education.

Black women in higher education face many challenges and barriers that are the result of the social interpretation of race over time as well as the extensiveness and immovability of the concepts of sexism and racism. The fact that Black women in academia experience discrimination that is two-fold in regards to race and gender leads to them being less appreciated and experiencing significant burdens while working at predominately white institutions (Agosto & Karanxha, 2011/2012).

There is an extensive history of Black women holding leadership positions as founders, presidents, vice-presidents, deans, and department chairs at HBCUs; however, this is not the case for many of those Black women that are employed at predominately White institutions (PWIs). The number of African American women in administrative roles at PWIs is significantly low, especially when compared to the student body of these institutions. (Cook, 2012). This underrepresentation creates a campus culture for Black women that make it difficult to successfully navigate through the various levels within academia.

Historically, the number of African American women that have held positions on the campuses of predominately White colleges and universities has been minimal. White colleges

and universities were very selective of the number of African American women that they welcomed to their campuses (Holmes, 2008). In addition, the participation rate of African American women in higher education when compared to other groups has been lower. A number of theories contribute to the reasoning behind these disproportions, but the turbulent legacy of gender and race in America has contributed greatly. As a result of this stormy past, African American women suffer double discrimination because they are both black and female. This especially hinders their entrance and advancement in academic environments that place minute value on either characteristic (Holmes, 2008).

During the late 1960s, predominately White higher education institutions began to adhere to the requirement to correct inequitable patterns of faculty and administrator employment (Anderson, Frierson, & Lewis, 1979). Although this seemed promising, numerous recent studies address the injustices that African American women continue to face while attempting to obtain positions at higher education institutions. These studies explore the question of why many of these women continue to face barriers when attempting to secure positions at predominantly White institutions. According to Adams (1983), legal reforms did not warrant a transformation in discriminatory attitudes and conduct. Consequently, this has resulted in the continuous lack of representation of Black women in higher education positions at White institutions.

Anderson et al. (1979) explain the belief that predominately White institutions offer many benefits to Blacks. However, once Blacks enter into the White Academe, they often experience difficulty in maintaining positions and obtaining promotions. There are also cultural differences between Black and White co-workers that may result in conflict (Anderson et al., 1979). Ultimately, issues of conflict, prejudice, and discrimination often have a significant effect on the career progression of African American women working in predominately White

institutions. Moreover, African American women pursuing higher-level administrative positions at these institutions must come to the realization that gender and race do matter even when you are educationally and professionally qualified (Cook, 2012).

### **Intersections of Race, Gender, and Multiple Identities**

Although their work experience, levels of education, and job performance is similar to that of their male counterparts, women often face barriers as they attempt to acquire senior level positions (Ryan, King, Adis, Gulick, Peddie, & Hargraves, 2012). These challenges are even greater as Black women try to advance professionally, as they often encounter obstacles such as marginalization and tokenism. These barriers, along with several others, make it difficult for African American women to navigate and succeed as senior level administrators. Further, as minority women attempt to assimilate and fit into an atmosphere that has long been dominated by White males, they often must encounter additional issues such as gendered racism, cultural taxation, and insider-outsider status. The negative effects of institutional discrimination, as well as an academic culture that offers little to no support, often causes women of color to part ways with higher education (Cobb-Roberts, 2011).

Gender and race equity are key issues faced by higher education institutions in the United States. Although efforts by higher education institutions have focused on eliminating these issues, Black women continue to experience these forms of discrimination (Singh, Robinson, & Williams-Green, 1996). Black women have been described as Outsiders Within because of their noticeable yet low position in society. While gender and race affect the Black woman's societal position, the exclusion of their interests, concerns, and views by society also have a huge impact (Thomas, Mack, Williams, & Perkins, 1999). Bias related to gender and race contributes to an inhospitable and unaccommodating work environment. This is especially prevalent to African

American female administrators working on predominately White campuses since they may experience a variety of prejudices that stem from intersectionality (Lloyd-Jones, 2009). The intersection of institutional racism and sexism have been present in conversations at PWIs; however, the ways in which higher education institutions regulate their boundaries or help characterize the indirect forms of racism and sexism that affect the academy have not been identified (Harley, 2007). This creates a question of whether or not predominately White institutions are taking steps to confront issues of racism and sexism on their campuses.

Cobb-Roberts (2011) explains that research focusing on Black women in higher education provide examples of their seclusion, exclusion, and compartmentalization. It reveals a pattern of persecution that is both institutional and personal that these women are experiencing all while attempting to conform in an atmosphere that is immersed in White male privilege. Further, African American women are different from their White female counterparts in that they are not the daughters of White men and inheritors of White privilege. Conversely, they experience a lack of privilege that has resulted in these Black women being referred to as the “maids of the academe” because they experience mistreatment such as gendered racism.

The concept of Black women as “maids of the academe” becomes more apparent when African American women continue to work at predominately White institutions. This is because there are various misconceptions and stereotypes of African American women at predominately White institutions that lead to their mistreatment (Harley, 2007). Harley (2007) further explains by comparing housework and cooking to service in the academy. While service is an important aspect that those working in higher education must be involved in, African American women are often overextended in committee work and other service requirements. Not only do they become “maids of the academe,” but they also become “work mules” due to the number of

responsibilities that they take on (Harley, 2007). Furthermore, this increase in workload results in the fact that African American women are often given responsibilities that others would care not to take on and this is coupled with the fact that these activities are not necessary recognized by the institution (Harley, 2007). Many of these women also experience professional and emotional stressors that often create health problems or aggravate preexisting conditions that can have a negative impact on their overall job performance (Agosto & Cobb-Robers, 2011). As a result, these women must adapt to balancing multiple roles while attempting to succeed as leaders within the academy (Agosto & Karanxha, 2011, 2012).

Organizational barriers such as the inhospitable climates within the institution as well as the lack of support from the organization are also constantly present. Additionally, many black women are faced with the absence of admiration for their scholarship and research agendas as well as professional mentoring that is nonexistent (Generett & Cozart, 2012). Thus, making it extremely difficult to advance and reach ideal positions of leadership. This is especially disturbing when more and more African American women are obtaining doctorate degrees, but a minimal number of these women are progressing within the academy. Many of these women continue to remain within the lower ranks and are promoted at a much slower rate when compared to others (Generett & Cozart, 2012).

Black women in higher education often experience marginalization in various forms (Cobb-Roberts, 2011). Marginalization can have a variety of negative effects on African American women working in higher education institutions. For example, being responsible for extra work related tasks, tokenism, and invisibility are often experienced by Black women in the academy. Although the efforts to define marginalization have been numerous, Hinton (2010) highlights the outsider within status. This concept refers to Black women that are working within

an organization, but are being treated as outsiders. This treatment, which is a form a marginalization, is a result of working with individuals with different social backgrounds (i.e race, gender, class) (Hinton, 2010). For African American women, the outsider within status has provided a significant perspective on identity, family, and society (Collins, 1986). Reflecting upon this notion, Collins (1986) offers a historical reference of Black women that were maids to White families where they cooked, cleaned, and cared for their children. Black women often became honorary members of White families. This is an example of the “insider” relationship, although Black women remained outsiders because they would never truly belong to the White family (Collins, 1986). While the outsider status may seem like a disadvantage, if the concept is understood, it could be utilized as a positive asset in one’s career advancement (Thomas et al., 1999).

The concept of tokenism refers to the appointment of a few individuals that represent particular minority groups to prominent positions within the workplace. Tokens are frequently treated as symbols of the underrepresented group that they are a member of, thus resulting in a number of social and psychological factors (Newman, 2008). Kanter (1977) provides insight into the concept of tokenism through her theory of proportional representation. According to this theory, individuals in token positions within their work environments are confronted with several types of stress that ultimately have an impact on them as they navigate the workplace (Kanter, 1977). The “race card” is a form of tokenism that is often used by important institutions to convince the public that they are allowing African Americans to progress into higher level positions when they are actually not advancing these individuals. Cultural taxation is also an example of individuals being used as the face of diversity within an organization. Padilla (1994) defines cultural taxation as the requirement to display good citizenship toward an institution by

serving its need for cultural or ethnic representation on committees. This can also be commitment to a specific ethnic group that may bring praise to the institution (Padilla, 1994).

According to Bowman and King (2003), one of the most difficult developmental stages is determining how and where an individual “fits in” with those that surround them. Both children and adults pursue groups that allow them to be comfortable and be themselves. They want to be understood by those within the group and not have to provide an explanation of who they are. For some, belonging to one group requires disassociation from another. In addition, being associated with one group can persuade others to disregard possible membership in other groups. As a result of experiences such as these, women of color face pressures to compartmentalize and devote themselves to one particular side (Bowman & King, 2003).

The experiences of African American women are often assumed to be the same as the experiences of African American males or White females. As a result of the assumption that these experiences are comparable, a discussion of African American women is deemed unessential. It is inaccurately acknowledged that no differences exist between being Black and female and Blacks or females in general (King, 1990). Bowman and King (2003) discuss the “double bind” faced by women of color as they attempt to navigate the confinements of both racism and sexism. There are two options that exist for these women: join the struggle against racism while suppressing any feelings related to sex discrimination or support the fight against sexism by separating from race and joining the White feminist movement that supposedly focuses on women universally, although it is apparent that the issues are not congruent to the struggles faced by women of color (Bowman & King, 2003). In addition, when explaining the importance of any particular factor as it relates to the circumstances of Black women, it varies depending on the aspect of the women’s lives that are under consideration and the groups that

they are being compared to. Race may be a more substantial predictor of the status of Black women in some cases, while gender may be more significant in others (King, 1990)

As women of color experience this “double bind,” other women may not completely understand this conflict. In a discussion of Patricia Arquette’s remarks at the 2015 Academy Awards concerning women and how “it’s time for all women in American and all the people of color to fight for us now,” Junior (2015) analyzes the terms “us” and “we” that are used by Arquette to identify women. African Americans have had a turbulent relationship with the concept of women’s rights and some do not classify themselves as feminists. Therefore, when White women use the terms “us” and “we”, they most likely do not mean women of color. This may not be intentional, but the lack of attention to issues regarding race within the feminist movement has negatively affected the feelings that African American women have about feminism (Junior, 2015).

As children, African American women are taught that it is not only essential for them to endure the oppression of race, class, and gender but they must also rise above them in order to succeed. This triad of race, class, and gender subjugation, also known as “triple jeopardy,” has been utilized by numerous scholars to discuss the matrix of oppression (Ward, 2004). Bowman and King (2003) explain that many women of color do think in terms of their race and gender collectively. Due to the fact that these women are shaped by both prominent identities, it is almost impossible to think in terms of one or the other (Bowman & King, 2003).

To explain the concept of double consciousness, Bauman (2007) quotes W.E.B. Dubois’ notion of existing in a state of “double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” In other words, double consciousness describes an internal conflict

experienced by Blacks who view themselves through the perspectives of Whites, while also attempting to maintain their own cultural identity (Black, 2007).

Similarly to double consciousness is a concept known as multiple jeopardy. Multiple jeopardy is an extension of double jeopardy, which was first introduced by Frances Beale in 1972. One of the first and possibly the most widely used approaches for understanding the status of women in America has been the analogy of race and sex. This model creates parallels between the structures and experiences of supremacy for Blacks and women. Subsequently, the race-sex analogy assumes that political mobilizations against racial discrimination and sexism are analogous (King, 1990). Coined by King (1990), multiple jeopardy challenges the concept of double jeopardy that describes the dual discrimination of racism and sexism that Black women experience (King, 1990). While this dual discrimination is apparent, there are additional types of oppression that Black women face. The adjective “multiple” not only refers to numerous simultaneous oppressions, but it also refers to the multiplicative relationships between them. Ward (2004) discusses Deborah King’s multiple jeopardy by noting that identities are not additive because oppression is deals with quality, not the quantity of and individual’s experiences.

### **Summary**

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of African American women leaders in predominantly White higher education institutions, with a specific focus on those African American women that serve as administrators at community colleges. This review examined the barriers that these women face as a result of a history of racism, sexism and persecution, and how these barriers affect career advancement. These barriers add to the challenges that African American women face as they navigate the pathway to the presidency at community colleges.

The applicability of critical race feminism to the experiences of African American women community college administrators is a particular focus of this chapter. The complexity of the effects of race, sex, and class on women of color has created a need for a critical framework that explains the experiences of these women. Critical Race Feminism responds to this need by explaining that the experiences of African American women are different from the experiences of African American men (Berry, 2010). Thus, making the pathway to the presidency for African American women community college administrators is very distinct within itself.

The literature reveals that the makeup of those employed in administrative positions at community college does not match the diversity of the student body. Further research is needed to reveal the barriers and the effects that these challenges have on the career progression of African American women community college administrators. In addition, research is needed to determine the effects of racial and gender related barriers on the career mobility of African American women community college administrators.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of African American women administrators who are employed in executive leadership positions and are direct reports to community college presidents. This research will contribute to the body of knowledge by shedding light on the experiences and challenges that African American women face as they navigate the pipeline to the community college presidency. Critical Race Feminism (CRF) is the theory that will be used to guide this study. CRF will highlight the specific barriers that are unique to African American women. Specifically, those barriers faced by African American women working in executive leadership positions in predominately White community colleges will be the focus.

This chapter will provide an introduction to the research design, sampling frame, and instrumentation that will be used to address the primary and secondary research questions. In addition, data collection and data analysis procedures will be described. Overall, this chapter will provide an overview of the methodology that will guide this study.

### **Research Questions and Research Design**

What are the Experiences of African American women during their journeys to executive leadership positions that exist within the pipeline to the community college presidency?

The following secondary research questions support the primary research question in this study:

1. What challenges do African American women face while working to obtain executive leadership positions at predominately White community colleges?

2. What strategies are used by African American women to advance to executive leadership positions at predominately White community colleges?
3. How do African American women balance their multiple roles and identities while pursuing executive leadership positions at community colleges?

This study aims to provide an understanding of the experiences of African American women working in executive leadership positions at community colleges through the application of a phenomenological qualitative research design. Creswell (2007) draws from Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) definition of qualitative research by noting, "it is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (p. 36). Bryman (2008) further defines qualitative research as an approach that typically utilizes words rather than quantities to collect and analyze data. Qualitative researchers are interested in how individuals interpret their own experiences and the meanings they apply to their experiences. This is derived from a variety of philosophies including constructionism, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism (Merriam, 2014). As noted by Merriam (2014), the general purpose of qualitative research is to create an understanding of how people make sense of their experiences and describe the process of interpretation rather than the outcome. Further, a phenomenological study describes the lived experiences of several individuals. Qualitative researchers using a phenomenological approach focus on explaining the commonalities of all participants as they experience a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

For the purpose of this study and in order to respond to the research questions, the utilization of a phenomenological qualitative research design is the best method to reveal the experiences of African American women and the challenges they face as executive leaders at community colleges. Using a phenomenological approach allows all of the experiences of

several African American women to be studied and analyzed. As a result, commonalities existing among the experiences of the participants can be identified. The primary purpose of phenomenology is to “reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of universal essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). This study focuses on the phenomenon of being an African American woman working as a community college administrator in a predominately White community college. This research reveals the “whats” and “hows” of the experiences of these women (Creswell, 2007).

Critical Race Feminism is utilized to explore the relationship of race and gender and the role they play in shaping how African American women experience leading in positions within the community college presidency pipeline. To understand these experiences through the CRF lens, the researcher must be able to gain a deep understanding of the lived experiences of a group of African American women and what these women have in common (Creswell, 2007). The utilization of phenomenology allows the researcher to reach this goal.

This study uses a qualitative research approach through the process of conducting one-on-one interviews with participants. Weiss (1994) explains that interviewing offers insight into the observation of others. Interviewing provides a closer look into the lives of others and allows researchers to learn about situations and places that they have not experienced. Moreover, the interior experiences of individuals, what they perceive, and how they interpret those perceptions can all be revealed through interviews (Weiss, 1994). For the purpose of this study, the one-on-one interviews were conducted face-to-face or via video conferencing. Utilizing face-to-face or video conferencing to interview participants provides the interviewer with the ability to see body language and facial expressions, which can significantly add to the interview experience. Interviews were conducted following the completion of participant consent document(s). These

interviews will help to amplify the voices of a small group of African American women working in positions that exist within the pipeline to the community college presidency.

Portraiture is utilized to tell the stories of the African American women that are interviewed. For the purpose of this study, portraiture is an appropriate method that will help to illuminate the experiences of the study participants. Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot introduced portraiture to the world of research in 1983 (Hackmann, 2002). A method of qualitative research, portraiture attempts to capture the intricacy and dynamics of human experience and organizational life. Portraitists strive to record and understand the experiences of individuals by documenting their voices and their visualizations. The creation of the portrait is placed in a social and cultural perspective and is shaped by both the portraitist and the individual (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Dixon, Chapman, and Hill (2005) note that researchers can demonstrate a sense of commitment to their research participants through portraiture. Portraiture also allows researchers to contextualize the descriptions of individuals and events (Dixon, Chapman, & Hill, 2005). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain that the voice of the researcher is everywhere in portraiture. It exists in the assumptions, concerns, the research framework, the questions asked, and the data that is collected. Further, the researcher's voice is in the selection of the stories told and in the language, tempo, and rhythm of the narrative (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Through the use of portraiture, the voices of the African American female administrators participating in the interviews for this study are illustrated.

## **Context of Study and Participants**

### **Context of Study**

African American women working in executive leadership positions at community colleges serve as the population for this study. For the purpose of this study, executive leadership

positions include those positions that report directly to the president or chancellor of a community college. This includes, but is not limited to campus president, vice-president, provost, dean, and executive director. The title of positions that report to community college presidents can vary by location and organizational structure.

## **Participants**

Five African American women that are employed in these positions at community colleges and are members of either the National Council on Black American Affairs (NCBAA) or the National Council of Instructional Administrators (NCIA) are the focus of this study. The NCBAA consists of four regions that cover fifty states and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The regions include the north central region, northeast region, southern region, and western region. The NCBAA was established over thirty years ago and is a council of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). It is the principle professional development and networking organization for Black faculty, staff, and administrators of community colleges (NCBAA, 2016). The NCIA is an organization that is committed to the leadership and professional development of instructional administrators. The organization collaborates with the community college leadership program and both are housed on the campus of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Formed in 1977, the overall goal of the NCIA is to enhance the performance of community college instructional administrators. Members of NCIA represent eight regions within the United States of America (NCIA, 2016). The membership of these organizations were utilized to identify participants that are appropriate for this study. Fifteen participants were initially identified with an understanding that all may not be willing to participate in the study. The fact that there are small amounts of African American women who are serving in leadership positions at community colleges supports the reasoning behind the identification of a small number of

participants. For example, 7.4% of women of color serve as leaders of community colleges (Gagliardi et al., 2017). This confirms that the majority of individuals serving in leadership positions are not African American women.

Purposeful sampling was utilized to select the participants for this study. Creswell (2007) explains that purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select participants and locations for the study because they can deliberately provide an understanding of the research problem and main phenomenon of the study. Purposeful sampling is ideal for this study because African American women in executive leadership positions are not the majority when compared to men and White women. Also, the sample size of at least 5 participants is small, which makes it a great model for purposeful sampling. Following the identification of potential participants, they were emailed with details of the study and an invitation to participate.

### **Data Sources and Collection**

The primary method of data collection for this study is semi-structured interviews. Prior to the interview phase of this study, participants were provided with a consent form that is approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and provides the justification of the study and details regarding confidentiality. Data was collected through a set of pre-determined interview questions. Merriam (2014) notes that interview questions should be open-ended in order to allow participants to tell their stories and provide as much descriptive information as they choose. In addition, questions foster a semi-structured interview. As explained by Merriam (2014), semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to begin the interview with some predetermined questions; however, the researcher may explore concepts and themes that arise during the interviews. Therefore, the interview protocol for this study consists of a list of semi-structured, open-ended questions that are designed to reveal the lived experiences of the participants. The

questions are designed so participants are able to speak candidly and offer as much information as they are willing to provide. During the interview process, participants were given as much time as necessary to provide a complete response and to make any clarifications. The researcher was also able to ask additional questions to receive clarification and/or to explore additional topics that emerge.

One-on-one interviews occurred either face-to-face or via video conferencing, with face-to-face being the preferred method. Face-to-face interviews occurred in quiet locations that were free from distractions. Locations included the business or personal offices of the participants, libraries, or public locations that allow for privacy. Interviews were recorded through the use of a mini tape recorder and/or the video conferencing software. Following the one-on-one interviews, transcription of the interviews occurred. A member-checking process was also completed where necessary to allow participants to validate their responses. Member checking helps to establish credibility and allows the participant to play a significant role in the research (Creswell, 2007).

Analysis initially occurred during data collection. According to Merriam (1998), the correct way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it concurrently with data collection. A lack of ongoing analysis can result in the data being unclear, monotonous, and overwhelming in the amount of material that needs to be processed. Data that has been analyzed during the collection phase is informative (Merriam, 1998). During the one-on-one interviews, observer's comments were noted. This allowed the researcher to engage in a critical thinking process during the data collection process and not just solely rely on data that is being recorded. In addition, field notes or memos were written to provide time for reflection following interviews. These field notes also added to the critical thinking process by allowing for an understanding of the

issues revealed in the interviews and how they relate to the larger theoretical and issues (Merriam, 1998).

In addition to one-on-one interviews, the resumes or curricula vitae of the participants were reviewed. The evaluation of these documents provide essential information on education and career history. Further, twenty additional resumes and curricula vitae were collected from individuals that are not interview participants, but are in executive leadership roles at community colleges. This collection of additional resumes and curricula vitae supports a resume mapping component that allows for the comparison and contrast of the education and career paths of those in executive leadership positions at community colleges. This also provides further insight into the paths executive leaders take to reach senior-level administrative positions in community colleges. Creswell (2007) explains that through triangulation, researchers use multiple sources and methods to shed light on a perspective. Using additional documents to learn more about the career history and education of the participants helps to elucidate the themes that emerge from the interviews. Throughout the entire process, the identity of the participants remains confidential. In addition, all documents received from the participants, interview recordings, and transcriptions are kept in a secure location that can only be accessed by the researcher.

### **Rapport and Researcher's Role**

In order to establish rapport and increase the comfort level of the interview participants, the participants were informed of what to expect prior to the start of the interviews. Glesne (1989) notes that, "rapport is a relationship marked by confidence and trust (p. 46)." Informing the participant of the purpose for the research, the interview process, and the overall expectations help to create a more comfortable environment for the participant. The participant was informed that the interview should last approximately one hour and that while the interview is recorded for

the purpose of transcription, their identity and place of employment will remain confidential. The participant was also given the opportunity to ask any questions and raise any concerns that they may have.

Critical Race Feminism as a theory highlights the experiences of African American women community college administrators in this study; thus, providing a foundation for phenomenological inquiry. Further, feminist research approaches attempt to establish cooperative and trustworthy relationships that allow the researcher to become a part of the study, avoid objectification, and conduct transformative research (Creswell, 2007). Lather (1991) explains that feminist research utilizes gender as a basic organizing principle that forms the circumstances of their lives. In addition, Stewart (1994) suggests that when implementing feminist methodology, researchers need to purposefully and analytically include their own roles and how those roles impact their understanding of the lives of women. This is critical to this particular research due to the fact that as researcher, I am a woman who is employed at a community college. Further, the researcher's role in this study is significant because of the focus on African American women community college administrators. I am an African American woman that has been working as a community college mid-level administrator for approximately ten years. The experiences of the women that are the focus of this study are of great interest to me because of my own experiences as an African American woman that is currently employed as a community college administrator. I feel that I can identify with these women and they can offer insight that would be beneficial to my career success. Establishing rapport by sharing my own story as an African American woman working at a community college allowed me and the participants to connect, which, I feel, made the participants more comfortable with sharing their stories.

Prior to interviewing the women who participated in this study, my own knowledge and experiences of African American women leaders in community colleges provided a foundation. As an African American woman who has over ten years of experience working in community colleges, I have always been very aware of women who look like me that serve in community college leadership roles. I am not quite sure if my sense of awareness was a result of my own desire to one-day serve in a leadership role at a community college and seeing another African American woman who had already accomplished this was definitely comforting to me. My own experiences as an African American woman community college administrator provided insight prior to the one-on-one interviews. I have made several career transitions during my pursuit of leadership roles and I personally have experienced issues related to race and gender as a community college employee. One of the questions I asked myself preceding the interviews was, “Will I make a connection with these women as a result of my own experiences as an African woman working in a community college?” This question helped to solidify that my purpose for conducting this research was not only to explore the experiences of African American women administrators working in executive leadership positions, but to also inform my own realities and the realities of other women whose experiences are similar.

### **Data Analysis**

The one-on-one interviews provide the qualitative data and is the primary data source for this study. In addition, background information from the participants’ resumes and curricula vitae serve as secondary data sources. The background information was collected and analyzed prior to the interviews in order to identify commonalities and trends among the interview participants that may contribute to their experiences as African American female community college administrators.

According to Creswell (2007), data analysis in qualitative research includes preparing and consolidating the data for examination. Then, through a process known as coding, themes emerge from the data. Lastly, the data should be illustrated in figures, tables, and/or through a thorough discussion (Creswell, 2007). This research involves all of the aforementioned steps. Specific phases of data analysis began with listening to the audio recordings of each interview. Following the transcription of the interviews, the researcher analyzed the data by first, reading the transcriptions. A review of the field notes for each interview followed with the researcher making connections between the transcription and field notes. The process of data analysis during the data collection phase is significant due to the ability to incorporate this data during the final data analysis. This allows the researcher to utilize notes on research participants' demeanor, body language, and the researcher's interpretation of the participants' experiences. This ultimately helps to bring the research participants' stories to life through the utilization of portraiture.

While interviewing the women who participated in this study, I asked a series of semi-structured interview questions, listened intently, and probed for understanding if I felt it was necessary. The creation of these portraits could not have been possible without my engagement in a reflective process following each interview. This process included the documentation of field notes that included both descriptive and reflective information, an initial review of the audio of each interview, transcription, and an additional review of the audio of the interviews along with the transcripts. Moreover, I listened to the audio of the interviews a number of times after the initial review. It seems as if the more I listened to the audio, something new was brought to my attention. This was definitely significant to the process because I only spent approximately one to two hours during the actual participant interviews. While I learned a

significant amount of information about each participant during such a short amount of time, the listening and relistening of audio, the continuous review of the transcripts, and field notes allowed me to get to know my participants even better.

Content analysis was guided by the research questions and NVivo software was utilized for coding and to identify emergent themes. This not only elucidated the responses from the interviews, but it also illustrated how interview participants are similar in their experiences as African American female community college administrators. Once nodes were created in NVivo, the coding process began. Coding allowed themes to emerge. Creswell (2007) explains that preparing and organizing data is essential in qualitative research. Coding and condensing the codes is included in this process which reduces the data into meaningful segments and allows themes to materialize (Creswell, 2007). Merriam (1998) explains, “The development of categories, properties, and tentative hypotheses through the constant comparative method is a process in which data gradually evolve into a core of emerging theory” (p. 191). For the purpose of this study, the organization of categories and identification of themes included the use of constant comparative methods as additional themes developed. Comparing themes allows the researcher to develop a theory by categorizing, coding, defining categories and making connections between them. Constant comparison allows the researcher to decide what data will be gathered next and where to find the data on the basis of tentative theoretical notions. As a result, questions that have arisen from the analysis and reflection on preceding data can be answered. These questions include interpretations of phenomena, limitations of categories, assigning segments, or finding relationships between categories (Boeije, 2002). Data from each interview will allow for the development of additional themes through constant comparison. During this process, the portraits also began to emerge. I was able to become acquainted with

each participant during the interview process by listening to their stories, paying attention to the body language of the facial expressions of the participants.

Data analysis also included the resumes and curricula vitae that were collected from the interview participants and individuals that are not interview participants, but have been identified as being employed in executive leadership positions at community colleges. NVivo was utilized to compare and contrast the educational backgrounds and career trajectory of individuals employed in such positions.

### **Summary**

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach to explore the experiences of African American female community college administrators who are employed in positions within the presidential pipeline. Chapter 3 provides a detailed overview of the research methodology and the procedures for this study. It is organized into sections that offer an introduction, research questions and research design, sampling frame, data collection, and data analysis. All of these components provide a comprehensive view of how the research was conducted in this study and the reasoning behind the use of qualitative research.

For the purpose of this study, a total of fifteen potential participants were invited to take part in the semi-structured interview process. Five women agreed to participate. That data collected from resumes and curricula vitae and the interviews were analyzed, with NVivo software being used to identify themes. A complete data analysis will be presented in Chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 4: LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS AND PORTRAITS**

This chapter unfolds in two parts. First, I present findings from a document analysis of resumes and curricula vitae from individuals who serve in executive leadership positions. Resumes of the five women who were interviewed are also included in the total. Here, executive leadership roles are those in which individuals report directly to a community college president. As such, position titles vary based on the location and size of the community college. Second, I present leadership portraits of five African American women who currently serve in executive leadership positions at community colleges in order to explore the lived experiences of women serving in these roles. Overall, I find that there are a variety of pathways taken to achieve the community college presidency and the experiences of African American women are unique while navigating that pathway.

### **Pathways to Community College Executive Leadership**

Pursuant to this study, twenty-five resumes and curricula vitae were collected from members of the National Council on Black American Affairs (NCBAA) and the National Council of Instructional Administrators (NCIA), which are both affiliate councils of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). The purpose of the analysis of resumes and curricula vitae is to take a closer look at the career pathways of individuals serving in executive leadership roles at community colleges. During this analysis, the following categories related to the career pathways of those serving in leadership roles that report directly to community college presidents were identified: professional title, highest degree earned, higher education experience, community college experience, and area of experience.

Current professional title emerged as a category through the resume mapping process (see Table 1). Eleven leaders serve as chief academic officers with titles such as Vice-President of

Table 1

*Pathways*


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Pathway	Number of Participants (n=25)
<b>Professional Title</b>	
Chief Academic Officer	11
Vice-President of Student Services	6
Campus President	3
Vice-President of Continuing Education	1
Vice-President of Workforce Development	1
Vice-President of Institutional Research	1
Provost	1
Vice-President of Academic and Student Affairs	1
<b>Highest Degree Earned</b>	
Doctor of Education (EdD)	13
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	10
Juris Doctor (JD)	1
Masters of Business Administration (MBA)	1
<b>Experience</b>	
Higher Education Experience	8
Community College Experience	17
<b>Area of Experience</b>	
Academic Affairs	11
Student Services	6
Combination of Two or More Areas	7
Other	1

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Academic Affairs, Vice-President of Instruction, and Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs. Six leaders serve as Vice-President of Student Services, while three serve as Campus President. Two leaders work in the area of continuing education as Vice-President of Continuing Education and Vice-President of Workforce Development. One leader serves as Vice-President of Institutional Research, one serves as Provost, and one is a Vice-President of Academic and Student Affairs.

A majority of leaders who participated in the resume mapping component of this study hold terminal degrees. Thirteen participants have earned the Doctor of Education (EdD) degree, while ten hold Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees. In addition, one leader holds a Juris Doctor (JD) degree. Lastly, one leader holds a Master's of Business Administration (MBA) degree.

Seventeen participants have only worked at community colleges, making their higher education and community college work experience comparable. The remaining eight participants have a combination of experience from four-year institutions and community colleges. The total number of years of experience for those participating in this portion of the research ranges from six years to thirty-one years. Only two participants have less than ten years of higher education or community college experience, while eleven leaders have twenty or more years of experience. Ten participants have between fifteen and twenty years of experience and two participants have between ten and fifteen years of experience.

Area of experience involves the division in which an individual works within the community college. These divisions or areas include academic affairs, student services, administrative services, and institutional advancement. Eleven leaders who participated in this study have worked in the area of academic affairs throughout their community college career. Academic affairs encompasses all areas of instruction at institutions. These areas are responsible for degree, diploma, and certificate programs at community colleges. All academic areas as well

as continuing education and adult education are included in this category. Six leaders have significant experience in the area of student services. Student services include areas that support student access and success such as admissions, financial aid, and other student support services. One leader has experience in the area of administrative services. This area oversees financial and business activities for the institution. Seven leaders have a combination of experience from two or more of the previously mentioned areas. Most of these leaders have a combination of academic affairs and student services experience, while one leader has experience in all three areas.

Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will provide portraits of five women who serve as executive leaders at community colleges across the United States of America. These illustrations, which are products of the one-on-one interviews I conducted with these women, provide a look into their personal and professional lives. These portraits describe the experiences of these five women community college leaders, through their own voices. Conversely, portraiture allows me to bring these women's stories to life not only through their own voices, but also through the use of my voice. In this chapter, my task is to share the stories of the five women that were gracious enough to share their stories with me. For each woman, I paint a portrait to illustrate who she is, to share her experiences, and to bring her personality to life. Coupled with these portraits are edited commentaries of the participants. They were open, honest and extremely candid in their conversations with me in hopes that their experiences will support African American women pursuing executive leadership positions at community colleges. Triangulation was also utilized to provide insight into who these women are. Interview field notes, resumes/curricula vitae, and interview transcriptions were all used collectively to create each individual portrait. The description of each participant derived from the continuous review of the interview audio

recordings and interview transcriptions. Field notes were also essential, as I was careful to note specific characteristics and behaviors of participants during the interviews. I specifically focused on tone, body language, facial expressions, and personal characteristics to create each portrait and to describe who each woman is as an individual, as a woman, and as an executive leader. Employing these methods was critical in presenting the personalities of each participant. It is my duty to bring their voices to life.

Participants were required to serve in executive leadership roles that report directly to a community college president, so position titles could vary based on the location and size of the community college. Position titles for individuals reporting directly to community college presidents include vice-president, provost, and campus president. Community colleges with presidents often have vice-presidents reporting directly to them. Community colleges located in larger cities often have a community college chancellor or president that oversees an entire system of campuses within a city. Those individuals who oversee campuses with the cities are campus presidents or provosts. The women interviewed for the purpose of this study serve as executive community college leaders, representing four regions that include the north central region, the northeast region, and the southern region of the United States. These women serve as vice-presidents and campus presidents at their institutions. Criteria for participating in this study also indicated that participants should be employed at a community college where 50% or more of the population is White. Most of the participants did fit this criterion, but I did include participants who are employed at community college where the student population is different. Those statistics will also be provided in this chapter.

To maintain confidentiality, I selected a pseudonym for each woman that participated in this study. This was not an easy task, because I wanted to be sure to choose a pseudonym that

accurately described who each woman is; something that would give meaning to her experiences and her journey to her current position as an executive leader at a community college. While creating the initial portraits of each woman in my mind, these pseudonyms emerged and in my eyes, they represent who each participant is as an African American woman and as a leader. It is with great pleasure that I introduce you to Grace, Hope, Serenity, Faith, and Destiny.

Grace serves Vice-President of Student Services at a community college in the southern region. The student body at the institution where Grace is employed is 51% White, making it a predominately White community college.

Hope serves as Campus President at a community college in the north central region. Hope's campus is located in an urban area and the student body is 38% Hispanic, 36% African American, and 16% White.

Serenity is a Campus President at a community college in the north central region. The community college where Serenity is employed has a student body that is 62% White.

Faith serves as the Vice-President of Workforce Development at a community college in the southern region. Faith's institution has a student body that is 59% White and is located in a rural area.

Destiny is the Campus President at a community college in the northeast region. Her campus is one that contributes to a larger community college system that is overseen by a Chancellor. The student body of the system in which Destiny is employed is 70% White.

The women who participated in this study have almost eighty years of experience in higher education combined and their experience serving in executive leadership roles at community colleges is extremely valuable. Table 2 provides participant demographic information that includes position title, institution size, and location of the institution where the

Table 2

*Participant Demographics*


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Pseudonym	Title	Institution Size (Number of Students)	Location
Grace	Vice-President of Student Services	30,000-60,000	Southern Region
Hope	Campus President	60,000+	North Central Region
Serenity	Campus President	15,000-30,000	North Central Region
Faith	Vice-President of Workforce Development	0-5,000	Southern Region
Destiny	Campus President	60,000+	Northeast Region

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participant is currently employed. Table 3 includes a summary of educational attainment and higher education experience. Two participants hold a PhD, one holds an EdD, one holds a JD, and one holds an MBA.

The following portraits have been handcrafted to share the experiences of each woman who participated in this study. Their stories of success and challenges provide an in-depth look into what it takes to navigate the pipeline to the community college presidency.

### **A Portrait of Grace**

*“I will hold myself to a standard of grace, not perfection.”*  
-Emily Ley

As the Vice-President of Student Services, Grace is an extremely confident woman. Her intelligence and professionalism is noticed almost instantly and her confidence and drive is extremely evident. Grace serves in a role that reports directly to the president of a community college. The community college where she is employed is located in the southern region of the United States. Almost half of the student population is White, about 32% is Black, and 12% is Hispanic. Grace has been employed as vice-president of student services at this institution for almost sixteen years. Her first job in higher education was a position as Director of Institutional Research at a four-year university. She entered this position upon completing her Master’s degree and it was her first experience in higher education in regards to a position and supervisory responsibilities. Following the position as Director of Institutional Research, Grace obtained a position as an associate vice-president. She also spent time working at a small liberal arts college that was also a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) and excelled in the areas of enrollment management and strategic planning. Grace had written her doctoral dissertation on strategic planning in the HBCU setting and this really came in handy as she oversaw this initiative. Out of this, also came an enrollment management plan that grew enrollment at an

Table 3

*Participant Educational Attainment and Higher Education Experience*

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Pseudonym	Educational Attainment	Higher Education Experience
Grace	PhD	20 years
Hope	MBA	6 years
Serenity	JD	17 years
Faith	EdD	17 years
Destiny	PhD	17 years

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astonishing rate. This progress with enrollment also initiated a growth in finances and the growth of the campus as a whole.

Grace has taken every position seriously and she has made it a point to familiarize herself with areas where she does not have as much experience. During her time at the HBCU, she inherited financial aid. She found many issues that needed to be resolved and because of working through the problems, she became an expert in financial aid policy. She demonstrated exceptional leadership skills during this process and was able to manage her staff in a way that motivated everyone to contribute to the resolution of the issues that were prevalent in the financial aid office.

Grace is a very poised, confident, and dedicated leader. She is a woman of faith who prays and reads her Bible daily because it keeps her grounded. She is also very athletic. She exercises and works to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Grace knows what she wants and she goes after it elegantly. She is a lifelong learner and strives to involve herself in a process of continuous learning because she understands that this will only help her become more successful. She is a mom and a wife. She is happily married to a supportive husband and has two adult children that she has raised while pursuing a career in higher education. Grace is a woman of dignity. When you meet her, she instantly gains your respect because her voice is so eloquent yet strong. She commands the room, but she is not boisterous. Her controlled demeanor informs you that she is serious, but she is also delicate in her communication and believes in supporting and helping others.

When asked why she chose to pursue a leadership position at a community college, she responded:

Well, I did not choose to pursue an executive leadership position in a community college. The community college chose me. I was more focused on devoting my time and energy to the HBCU environment. At the time I came to the community college, I really did not have a good understanding of what the community college did. I knew that in the community college environment, we serve some of the same students or the same student type, for example, first generation, low income, and minority students. That's a huge population of students we serve, so that was my exposure prior to coming to the community college, but when I came to the community college, I was very pleasantly surprised because not only do we serve that population of students, but we also serve older populations, veterans, and displaced workers. So, my opportunity to provide support in the community college environment has been much more broad and much more rewarding, so I really didn't choose to come to the community college but I'm happy I did because I'm able to do so much more in a larger environment than I would have in the smaller environment. Although, as I said, my first goal was just to serve the students in HBCUs, but this has given me much more of a rewarding opportunity.

Grace's current institution used a search firm to identify her and there was a national search. Grace was fortunate to be selected as a candidate and enjoyed interviewing across campus, with the board, and with the college cabinet. All of the interviews were great learning experiences for Grace and she was extremely successful in sharing her own experiences and allowing those on campus to get to know her better. Grace reflected, "I just told my story. I did not try to fluff or make myself out to be some person that I was not; I just shared my experiences, the things that I had done prior to coming here and what worked." Grace says that one of the most critical things is to make sure that you are open and honest with the board and

that they see that you are or have the potential to be, a great leader and that you treat people with an open mind and with fairness. She feels that she conveyed that to the board during the interview process and she has been able to live up to that during her time in her current position.

As a woman of color in an executive level administrative position, Grace understands that barriers related to race and gender do exist; however, she acknowledges that she cannot recall any negative experiences in her own career journey.

I do not want to speak naively and say that I have not had any adverse experiences with regard to race and gender. I am sure I have, but I have always looked at myself as an individual, and not compared myself with women of any other ethnicity or with men of my ethnicity or any other.

Grace has always just tried to focus on what she could do. “I do not internalize things; I do not make assumptions about being treated unfairly because of my gender or race.” In regards to her career experiences in relation to her White peers, Grace believes that they are very similar. She feels this way because she holds the top ranking position at her institution for a person of her ethnicity and gender. Her salary is also quite comparable and she attends the same meetings and has the same opportunities to voice her opinion. “I have a very large staff who respect my leadership and, I think, respect me as an individual, so I would say we all have a similar journey.” Grace feels that experiences definitely vary among individuals. She feels that she is a great leader and she treats people the way that she would want to be treated. “I do not see any disparity in my position. Now, if you were to ask some other people, they may have a different story, but I do not see that in my position.”

Grace has a very supportive family. She has two children and they are very supportive and encouraging. Her husband has always supported her. He has been by her side through undergraduate, graduate school, and as she navigated her career in higher education.

As my daughter was growing up, I would engage her and my son in opportunities to travel when I could take them on trips and so forth. My daughter will travel with me quite frequently, and my husband, so they are very supportive. My husband goes to meetings and conferences when I'm invited to speak at various areas in the community. He often accompanies me if there is no football on TV! I have been fortunate to try to make sure that I have some type of balance in my life.

Grace also loves to exercise. She's a runner and she takes exercise very seriously. This is something that she has incorporated in her life and she says that it grounds her and her family understands her commitment to exercise and how important it is to her. "My husband doesn't bother me when I'm out running at all because that's the hour that I need, but when I'm off work, I spend the time with my family. It's just that simple." When Grace goes home after a workday, she often finds herself in the kitchen with her husband and her daughter. Her children are gone now, but her daughter comes home often during her college breaks and they spend as much time together as possible. They will go for a walks in the evenings and on weekends and after Grace runs, they sometimes watch football together. They also take trips together as much as possible.

I don't neglect my family. I do not neglect them at all and never have. My daughter and I are often out shopping. I talked to her as I drove in this morning, from the time I got in the car at the house until I made it to my office. So, I engage my family and I always have. After my daughter was born, I was just finishing my doctorate degree so she has only known me in the role of the vice president, but like I said, she has never missed an

opportunity to be with her mother. My son, when he was born, I was getting my master's degree, then I got my doctorate degree, then I got a degree in seminary, so all of his life, all he's known me to be is in school. Regardless of what you are working to accomplish, you never neglect your family.

Two things of the most important things that Grace does every day are pray and read her Bible, because she believes that prayer time is like an investment.

It is an investment, not only in your life, but also in your day. It balances you, centers you and it gets you in a right place mentally and emotionally because you really don't know what the day will be like. When you pray and ask God to order your steps or direct your path or whatever, as you go about your day, you will remember that.

Grace admits that life can be challenging as a wife, a mom, and a vice-president, but her faith in God keeps her going and helps her overcome obstacles she may face as she balances her multiple roles in life.

As for her future, Grace thinks that she may become a college president, probably more sooner than not. She is ready to serve in a presidential role today, so she continues to prepare herself by staying abreast of what's in the news and staying on top of policy and reading *The Chronicle* and *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. She also stays current by preparing her staff. Grace has a large staff and she brags about their commitment and how great they are. She feels that it is her responsibility as the person in a leadership position to prepare her staff and encourage them to do more and to finish their degrees. "I must also open doors of opportunity to promote my staff as best as I can because that is all a part of leadership." So, as she prepares for a possible presidency in the future, Grace will continue to stay abreast of what's going on

nationally, locally, and through travel. “When the presidency I want comes open or if they call me, I will go, but it has to be the right one.”

As a leader, Grace prides herself on helping others and encouraging them to accomplish their career goals. As an African American woman, she understands what it takes to become a community college leader and she encourages other African American women who are seeking executive leadership roles to prepare themselves well. It is extremely important to obtain credentials and build self-confidence, more so than anything else in the world because according to Grace, you're definitely going to need it.

Keep your self-confidence high all the time because there might be situations where you have to prove yourself because people will tend to question your intellect. Just have that confidence because sometimes it will be shaken and tested. Also, if you were aspiring to be a dean, start dressing like a dean. Don't dress like a secretary if you want to be a dean. Not that there is anything wrong with the way secretaries dress, but you have to start presenting yourself in that role. Ralph Emerson said, "Your actions speak so loudly I cannot hear what you are saying." Always remember they see you first.

### **A Portrait of Hope**

*“Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us.”*

-Samuel Smiles

Hope is currently the campus president at one of the seven locations that make up a large community college system within a city. She reports directly to the chancellor of the system and is responsible for the oversight of an urban campus and its satellite locations. Hope immediately grabs your attention when you meet her. She is a very charismatic, joyous, and energetic woman. She never meets a stranger and she immediately engages you in conversation as if she has known

you her entire life. You automatically feel comfortable talking to her because she is so engaging and likeable. Hope exudes confidence. Her facial expressions, body language, and poise are infectious. Hope is the person in a room filled with people that you just have to make sure you meet before you leave.

Hope's background is information technology. She obtained an undergraduate degree in economics with a cognate in computer science. She aspired to be in the field of technology, so, following graduation, she obtained a technology position. Hope worked with an insurance firm and then obtained a position in banking. During her time working in banking, she worked specifically in the area of securities. This position required her to travel extensively and once she became a mom, she knew that she would not be able to commit so much time to travel. As a result, Hope began working for a public school system as the Chief Information Officer. This was where she began her career in education and when she started to support educators. After working in the public school system for about three years, Hope obtained the Chief Information Officer position at the community college system where she is currently employed. While in the community college CIO position, she was enrolled in an executive MBA program. Hope chose to pursue an MBA because she knew she had to start planning for her future. She felt that if she ever wanted to branch out from technology, an MBA would be a good degree to have. Upon completion of her MBA, Hope decided that it was a great time to start searching the job market to see what was available. She soon inquired about a presidential position at one of the campuses within the system where she is currently employed. While she did not pursue that position, her inquiry made her supervisor aware that she was ready for a change. Hope was eventually asked to serve as the interim campus president at her current institution and after serving in that role for about six months, she applied for the permanent position and was hired. This is a very unique

path to an executive leadership position at a community college. Hope even acknowledges that people are always interested to know how someone with a background in technology and limited community college experience when compared to other executive level community college administrators obtains a campus president position.

I served as interim campus president for about six months and I told myself, “Hey I can do the work, I enjoy the work,” and so I applied for the permanent position and I did achieve it. Probably, what people always want to know, how does that happen? How do you go from being a technology person to being a college person?

While Hope was fully aware that her background and career path did not mirror that of most community college leaders, she never doubted herself. She confidently pursued each position and she has utilized her skills and experience she gained the field of technology in her position as a campus president of a community college.

For me, my philosophy as a person in technology has always been, my work is about what users need. So what users and what the business needs is what I have to understand and what I have to implement in order for me to be successful at my job. As a CIO, I spent a lot of time working with "the business" or in this case, with educators, with faculty, staff, and with administrators to really understand how technology could fill the gap so that I can direct my team to implement the very best procedures.

Hope is an extremely busy woman. As a mother of two and a community college campus president, she juggles a lot. She strives to be the best she can be in each of her roles. Hope credits her strong support system for their guidance and the ability to step in when she needs assistance. She confirms that as a working mother, she needs assistance from others in order to be successful as a mom and a campus president. Hope has mastered the concept of balancing multiple

responsibilities and she does not let anything stand in the way of her goals and aspirations. Her self-confidence is admirable. She does not let the thoughts of others impact her negatively and she pursues her goals confidently.

Given Hope's technology background, I was particularly interested to learn more about her reasoning for choosing a community college leadership position. Hope chose to pursue a community college leadership position because the opportunity was in front of her. It is like she was at the right place at the right time. While working in the public school system as the Chief Information Officer, Hope had always thought that higher education was a new opportunity that introduced a new set of responsibilities. That is why she chose to transition from a career in the public schools to the community college. "I also had a desire to be closer to the students, and to the faculty, and to the administrators who were directly responsible for changing outcomes for students." These things really appealed to her and since she had just finished her MBA and was qualified for the position, she pursued it.

It gave me the opportunity to leverage the degree that I had just completed. It gave me a chance to move to the front line to see more of the direct hitter versus the indirect hitter as a technologist. It is a great responsibility and a new learning opportunity.

There are seven presidents within the system where Hope serves as a campus president. Three presidents are African-American, two of which are female and one is male. There is also one Hispanic male, two White females and one White male president in the system. Hope explains that the presidents openly talk about race as a team because they understand that underrepresented populations have certain needs, especially if students come from an area where the high school education or even the elementary education was not strong. For example, in the area where Hope's institution is located, most of the high schools are considered

underperforming high schools. Because Hope's institution receives many of these students, she must focus on their needs and create ways to support them in being successful students. Hope believes that this is why it is important to discuss race as a leadership team and talk about what it takes to educate undereducated minorities. As a woman of color, Hope understands the struggles of these students. "One thing that I have noticed is that you have a different perspective and you have a different empathy or compassion when you come from that group." When reflecting on her experiences as a woman who has worked in a male dominated profession, Hope feels that she has experienced less discrimination in education than she did in the field of technology.

Hope is a very friendly person, but she is also direct. While she is very direct and feels that it is necessary in her role as a leader, she does her best to be kind and respectful when delivering important information. She acknowledges that this can be extremely difficult because sometimes you really want to be nice, but leadership roles occasionally require you to be forceful. Hope explains that you have to say, "I appreciate your feedback but here is the decision." Hope also recognizes that there is no perfect way for a Black woman to deliver that message.

As a Black woman, when you have to be very direct and deliver information with a little force, you immediately are labeled as being sassy or there is a negative adjective that would be used to describe you and it is not the same for other people. For some reason, African-American women can have raw passion sometimes. So, the bar for a Black woman in leadership roles in regards to demeanor and passion is a little different in comparison to others. Even for White women, I see that when White women are passionate, they are labeled as maybe a little emotional. Black women sometimes get emotional, but we are described as being more combative.

Hope knows that in leadership positions you must make tough decisions and you have to make those decisions even though they are unpopular. She confirms that you will be judged sometimes and people will become upset when you make certain decisions, but the way you deliver the decision has to be strategic and professional because there are expectations in regards to who you are and how you should act as a Black woman and what they expect from you. “The bar for demeanor in higher education for Black women is an interesting one and how we are judged as it relates to our demeanor and how we deliver tough messages is very real.”

As someone who obtained a community college leadership role very quickly, Hope knows what it takes to be successful. Not only must you have drive and commitment, but you must also be willing to step outside of your comfort zone and believe in yourself even when it seems that others do not believe in you. Hope’s advice to African American women pursuing executive leadership positions at community colleges is to be willing to do whatever it takes. She says that you should never refer to a task as it is not your job. If you are hired to serve in one role, but you are asked to assist in another area, be willing to take on the task. You should have initiative and participate in all levels of the organization. This is how Hope was able to transition from technology to a president’s position. She transitioned from a Chief Information Officer to become a campus president because she never said, “That’s not my job. That is not something I should be doing in technology.” Hope also suggests that those pursuing leadership positions in higher education get used to talking about what you do well.

In academia, it is not about personality, right? For example, if you say, “My baseball team has a great record. They've won 24 games and only lost 4.” That's meaningful at people. You really have to be good at bragging about what you do well. Let people know why you are so great. I don’t think we do enough of that sometimes.

## **A Portrait of Serenity**

*“Serenity is not freedom from the storm, but peace within it.”*

-S.A. Jefferson Wright

Serenity greets everyone she meets with a smile. She has a very sweet demeanor and she can be described as an extroverted introvert. She doesn't mind mingling in large groups and is very social, but she also loves her "me" time. Serenity is a thinker. She is quiet and she prefers to analyze thoroughly before making decisions. A lawyer by background, Serenity entered the field of higher education as a legal expert. During that time, she worked as an attorney providing legal advice to the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs at a university and also provided free legal advice to students, and was responsible for the student judicial system. Simultaneously, Serenity operated a private practice on the side. While law was her background, Serenity really enjoyed working in higher education, especially in the area of student services. Eventually, her supervisor told her that she needed to choose between being a lawyer and working in higher education. Both careers were extremely time consuming and Serenity knew she could not do both, so she chose a career in higher education. Following her decision to leave law and pursue a career in higher education, Serenity became an assistant dean of student services at a university. After about four years, she moved in to an associate dean position at another university. In that position, Serenity supervised residents and was responsible for life counseling, new student orientation, and judicial issues. During her time as associate dean, she lived on campus and served on the president's executive council. This was the point in her career where Serenity realized how much she enjoyed administrative work in higher education. By living on campus in her role as associate dean, she got to know the students and faculty extremely well. This experience confirmed her thoughts of eventually becoming a full dean.

Serenity was prepared to pursue higher-level administrative positions as a result of her experience as associate dean, but she also became a single parent during that time and she found that she was becoming a bit overwhelmed. She decided to take a step back until her daughter was a little older, so she began searching for positions near her parents' home because they would be able to help her with her daughter. Serenity was ultimately hired as an assistant dean at a university near her parents' home where she handled victim's assistance, judicial, and student diversity issues. She also became involved in working with Greek life during this time. After three years in this position, Serenity's daughter was old enough for her to get back on her career path. She soon accepted a position as associate vice president and dean of students at a small liberal arts college. From there, she returned to one of her alma maters as dean of students. Serenity had remarried right before she accepted the dean of students' position, so she, her new husband, and her daughter relocated.

After serving as dean of students at her alma mater for almost four years, Serenity started to reconsider. She decided that maybe she needed to return to being a lawyer for a while. She left her position as dean of students and took on grant writing and working for the county writing speeches and doing policy development. Serenity was a lawyer again, but she soon became bored because she really missed higher education. Although she had thoughts of working in higher education again, she worked for a private company as a vice president for about a year until a position opened up on the board of trustees at the local community college. Many people in the community encouraged Serenity to apply for the position and she did. The state senator soon recommended her to the governor and she was appointed to the board of trustees. This was where Serenity was first exposed to community colleges and she really loved it.

Serenity served on the board of trustees for a little over a year. During this time, a dean of one of the campuses retired. Serenity felt that this was the perfect time to return to an administrative position in higher education, but she was not sure if she was eligible to apply for the newly vacant dean's position because of her board of trustees' role. She consulted with the ethics board regarding her eligibility and was told that she could pursue the position as long as she resigned from the board. Therefore, Serenity resigned from her position on the board of trustees, applied for the job, and was selected for the position. As dean, Serenity built a community college campus from the ground up and hired all employees.

The people there were so excited about building a community college campus in their community and their neighborhood and that is when I really saw the power of potential community colleges. Not only were the K-12 people excited, but also the business community saw the value in the college and the county commissioners were on board. They had invested money in it.

The way the community took interest in the new campus created a very powerful environment for Serenity and it justified her decision to take on this new role. She had previously worked at colleges that had been operating since the 1700s and she did not feel a strong connection to the community and she also did not feel she was making a difference in the lives of people. She had been employed at large universities with 60,000 plus students on campus and she did not feel like she was really making an impact. "How can you feel like you are making a difference? However, in a community college, every day I feel like the work that I do is important and the mission is important." After about three years of overseeing the construction of the campus and hiring employees, and two additional years of overseeing the campus, an opportunity to become

president of a community college campus where Serenity grew up became available. She applied, was selected, and she now serves in that role.

Serenity's knowledge of the law and her attorney skills have contributed to her success in higher education. As a current campus president of a community college within a large city, Serenity is responsible for the day-to-day operations and oversight of a campus. The system where she is employed has four campuses that serve almost 45,000 students. Serenity has served as campus president for almost a decade. Her current institution is her eighth and she and her staff have worked extremely hard to make significant changes. When Serenity came to her current campus, there were several issues. There were problems with enrollment, retention rates were poor, and the college had little connection to the community. Things have definitely turned around as a result of Serenity's leadership. Community partnerships have been established, enrollment and retention have improved, and opportunities for students have increased. Her twenty-five plus years in higher education, her law background, and her community involvement provided her with the foundation to lead.

Serenity notes that working in an area where she grew up makes what she does more meaningful. She has returned home, to a place where it all began for her, to give back to her own community. The communities that exist around the campus are very depressed. Serenity's institution is in an area in the city where steel mills were previously located, but they are gone now. There are so many poor people in the area and jobs in that area primarily consist of service or retail. There is also a small hospital in the area. There is little to no investment in the region, so the community college supports the citizens by providing educational and training opportunities that will hopefully lead to employment. Students attending Serenity's community college hope to be able to compete for jobs in the area. "That is why I finally feel like I am

making a difference in my career and why I am so passionate about higher education. It really does mean something here.”

When asked about her support system, Serenity smiled. Her support system is everything to her and she credits each individual with helping her to become a successful community college campus president. Serenity’s original two mentors early in her career were both African American men. She was working at a predominately White institution at the time, but she received a lot of nurturing from her mentors. She was able to discuss her career goals and aspirations with them and they gave her advice on how to handle situations and when she made mistakes. While working at a small liberal arts college, Serenity’s boss was a Quaker. This was very interesting to Serenity because he was concerned about peace and social justice. “He was just a nice guy and he really valued my intelligence. So, I was kind of feeling a charmed life for about 12 years.” After leaving her position at the liberal arts college, Serenity really began to experience issues related to race and gender.

I used to be pretty shy and quiet, and pretty much easy to get along with, but I sort of hit a wall with a president and gender was wrapped up in it and I also was the only person of color on his executive team. He and I had a huge fight. It was so bad that I thought he was going to fire me, but he really was disregarding the things that I was saying in executive council, and I called him on it. For example, I would say something that was ignored, then one of my White male counterparts would later say the same thing as his idea, and all of a sudden, it was the greatest thing in the world. So, I called the president on it and he and I had a huge fight.

When reflecting on her relationships with colleagues, Serenity feels as if she was treated as a pet during her younger years in higher education. It was when she became middle-aged that it

became more challenging. She remembers having constant battles with individuals prior to working at community colleges and the lawyer in her was not going to allow people to treat her unfairly. "I can be very intimidating because of the lawyer in me and the logic and stuff."

Serenity says that all of that went away when she became a campus president. She remembers initially feeling some resistance as a new campus president. This was especially true when she approached the concept of diversity and asked that it be taken into consideration in position searches and such. Now she is in a place where she is not concerned with how people feel all of the time.

You know, I need you to do this, I need you to make sure the pools are diverse, that we do not run students of color when they are gathering, away from places where they can be. I had that come up last year. I put furniture in parts of the building and Black students were kind of hanging out, just talking to each other. Well, all of a sudden they are making too much noise. It was not a problem when White students did it. What would happen is White employees would send Black employees to talk to me about it. I'd say, "if people have an issue why don't they just come up and talk to me?" They would then say, "Well you know they're intimidated."

Serenity has now transitioned from the early stages of her career where she was favored and seen as a pet to being the person that is in charge. She reflects on those times in her career when people questioned her abilities and challenged her authority. Now, as the leader of a community college campus, she is respected and her employees value her.

In relation to her White peers, Serenity feels that her career journey is similar in that most of them had a mentor, guide, or a coach who helped them get where they are. Serenity admits that she has been very fortunate. She has had several mentors over the years, mostly men, but

that have been influential in her career journey. "I am older so I am the leading edge of women in executive positions. It had to be men, in my case, to help me get where I am. So, I think a lot of the women who are peers probably had the same experience that I did." Serenity admits that mid-career was where it was extremely different. During that time in her career, she felt as if she was always fighting to have her say and to be heard. When she compares her experience to that of her colleagues, she does not feel that many of them had such a tough time.

When she first began her role as campus president, Serenity could tell that some of her colleagues were uncomfortable with her because they had never worked with someone like her before. She remembers telling one of her colleagues, "You're not listening to what I have to say. I have a lot of experience in higher education. I'm not 12!" Serenity's observations revealed that they were not used to people who are as smart as she is, or had the level of experience that she does. She had to spend a significant amount of time educating her colleagues that not all Black people are the same. So, Serenity feels that her career journey and that of her White peers are similar in that they all have people who supported and mentored them. However, she recognizes that the career journey is also different because she feels like she had to prove herself more to get where she is.

Serenity gives a lot of credit to her mentors and she is excited to share what a tremendous impact they have had on her life. She also recognizes that as you get older and move up the career ladder, your mentors change and even evolve. You lose mentors for a number of reasons and people join you on your journey.

I had mentors pretty early in my career, and when one of my mentors died, I found out about him and I went to the ladies room and came out and my boss at the time saw that I was crying. My mentor died in his early 50s, so by my standards, that was young and it

was sudden. My boss said, "What's wrong with you?" I said, "I'm sad because my mentor died, and I don't know what I'm going to do." He responded, "You don't need to be mentored anymore." It stopped me. I was like, "What, what? Yes I do." He said, "No you don't."

Serenity took some time to analyze what her boss meant by saying she no longer needs a mentor. She knew that she still needed support, but she also understood that she was not the same person she was when she first began her career. She had worked in several positions and gained some great experience. She was at a point in her life where she needed a different type of support. This is when Serenity moved from mentors to coaches, and the coaches were people who were peers or people who were a little bit older than she was. They were people who she could really call and ask for their advice on things. Some are even people that she used to work with or people that she has supervised who have risen in the ranks too. To add to that support system, Serenity has what she calls her kitchen cabinet. Her kitchen cabinet includes those that are closest to her like her sister, other presidents that she has become extremely close to, her husband, and her daughter. These are both men and women that she can hang out with, have a good time with, and share information about their experiences.

Serenity is at peace with her career. She has had numerous experiences and served in a variety of roles and she is extremely proud of her accomplishments.

I am almost to the point where I think we are in a good place, but there is still some work to do. I have a huge project that I am currently working on. I think when I finish that I am pretty much done. My career has been amazing and I would like to see more women of color go into this field because I think our students need it. There are more students of

color that start in community college education than any other form of higher education and they need to see people who look like them.

Serenity credits a strong support system of family and mentors with helping her to reach her goals and she feels that when the time is right, she will retire and focus on herself and her family. Serenity is married to a supportive husband and has an adult daughter who is working in higher education like her mom. Serenity's face lights up when she talks about her husband of twenty-two years and her daughter who is planning to pursue her PhD in the near future. Family is everything to her and she looks forward to spending more quality time with those she is closest to.

### **A Portrait of Faith**

*“Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.”*

-Mother Teresa

Faith is a woman on the move. As Vice-President of Workforce Development, she is responsible for the oversight of the community college's economic development program, community development program, continuing education, and the college's foundation. Faith's plate is definitely full, but if anyone can handle it, she can! Faith is the ultimate multitasker. As she was preparing to speak with me and share her experiences, she hurried to take a bite of her lunch, as she had just left another meeting. Faith has many days like this. Because she balances so much, getting a quick bite to eat is often coupled with answering emails, signing documents, or consulting with employees. Faith believes that you just have to do whatever it takes to get the job done.

Faith's behavior, her appearance, and the way she speaks reveals that she is a leader without her even making her position known. She dresses like a leader. I immediately noticed how professional and stylish her pantsuit was when I met her. She is very approachable and has a

very animated personality. She is very energetic, which makes her enjoyable to be around. Faith is also trustworthy. She is the person you will confide in over anyone else because you know that she will keep everything confidential.

A seventeen-year community college veteran, Faith was a training director for a private company prior to accepting a community college position. She experienced a lay off while working for the private company and took another job with a private agency until a community college director position caught her eye. The position was very similar to what she was already doing and she felt it would be a great opportunity. She was not very familiar with the community college, but she decided to pursue the position anyway. During her interview, she was blown away when she learned of all of the partnerships that existed between the community college and business and industry. The role that the community college plays in helping the community and making sure that business are able to recruit skilled workers was extremely impressive to Faith. She was hired for the position and she admits that, “after they were nice enough to hire me, I was hooked.” Over the next seventeen years, Faith would acquire positions that increased in responsibility. She became an associate dean of continuing education and she served as dean. These positions were on the non-credit side of the college and Faith really enjoyed serving in these roles. However, as she began analyze her career path; she noticed that the only thing missing was experience on the credit side of the college. She then applied for a position as Dean on the curriculum side of a community college and was hired. This position allowed her to gain essential experience on the credit side. She was able to learn how curriculum programs were set-up, what programs of study look like, and how to incorporate work-based learning. While Faith was working on her doctorate, the Vice-President of Workforce Development position became

available and she has served in that role for about five years. Faith admits that her career choices at the community college level have been strategic.

What I've been trying to do is make sure that I have this broad array of experiences so that when the next position comes up, I'll be able to say I've taught along the way, I've also taught curriculum classes, that I've managed continuing education, and that I've been responsible for budgets. There's not much that happens at a community college that I've not had direct or indirect experience with. I've been trying to position myself to be able to take advantage of all these retirements that are going to be coming in the next 5-10 years. I did that by making sure I had the academic credentials, making sure I have the experience, and then making sure I have a good network.

While Faith entered the world of community colleges after being in the private sector, she feels that the community college is exactly where she is meant to be. She transitioned into the community college because a position appealed to her, but as she continued to work in the field she became committed to the community college's goals and mission. That is when she decided to pursue executive leadership positions because she knew that she could also make a difference at the highest levels. Her choice to lead was also in her ultimate plan to position herself to ultimately obtain a college presidency.

It's really all designed to get me to the most senior position because eventually, I'd like to be a college president. There seems no other path to get there other than being an elected official at a very high level then you can go directly from that to a presidency. For the rest of us, we have to put in our time and show that we understand what a community college offers. That's what I've been trying to do.

Faith has pursued a community college president position in the past and she is quick to share that she is very selective about the positions that she will apply for. Not only does Faith oversee a number of areas and projects in her current role as Vice-President, she is also a single mother and the caretaker of her aging parents. As a woman of color and a divorced mother of a son, she realizes that there are only going to be certain communities where she is going to have the opportunity to be as close to being herself at least most of the time. This is why she has been meticulous about which community college presidencies she will apply for. Faith feels that she would be a better fit in a community with proximity to an urban center, a community that is a little more diverse. She also has to consider her responsibilities as a mother and a daughter when selecting presidencies to apply for, so she is intentional for several reasons.

I've got multiple things I've got to think about as I apply for presidencies. If I were single and carefree and had no family, well then, I believe that I could have already had a presidency, but I have to think about my African American male son, and I also have to think about my parents. I hope it works out within those constraints that I currently live under. If not, then I'm pretty happy with the work that I'm doing right now.

In reflecting on her experiences with race and gender as a community college leader, Faith remembers when she was appointed as Dean of a curriculum program. At that time 90% of her faculty were white males and they were very skeptical about her becoming their new supervisor. Faith feels that the skepticism had more to do with her being a woman than with her color. Her background in continuing education was also an issue for many of her direct reports. She wondered if they felt that she was not qualified to oversee a curriculum program after spending so much time working in continuing education. She later learned that her background was the reason for most of the fear. Faith's current position requires her to spend a significant

amount of time in economic development meetings and many times the key players in these meetings are mostly all white males. However, she has found that working in a small rural town and being an outsider seems to be more prevalent than race.

If I'd grown up here, if they knew who my mom and my dad were, that they knew who my grandparents were, then me walking into a room of all white males in this community, I don't think it would actually be that big of a deal. It is something that I am always aware of.

Faith always makes sure that she is not mothering. Women are often seen as the nurturers and the mothering type and Faith does not want to be viewed that way. So, for example, during potlucks at work, Faith does not volunteer to bring casseroles or things that take time preparing. She brings items like cups and plates instead because she does not want her staff to see her as a mom or a wife; she wants them to see her as their boss. Faith explains, "The reality is that I'm actually a really good cook, but I don't want those things mixing." Faith also prides herself on being a very conscious administrator. She has learned that you have to be especially conscious when dealing with issues related to race. She notes that as a member of a leadership team, she feels like it is her responsibility to view all policies and practices through the lens of who may be potentially affected. For example, will a policy disproportionately harm students of color, first-generation, or lower class students in a manner that will not affect other student populations? This is important to Faith and she is always sure to ask such questions, but she also phrases these questions in a way that appeals to all decision makers.

What I'm learning is if I couch those questions directly and if I say, "I think this policy's really going to hurt black people", if I say it like that, well then I'm going to be dismissed as a heretic, right? If I instead say, "I'm concerned that if we implement this policy, that

students who are first-generation are going to have difficulty understanding what this process is. What can we do as a college to make sure that we get the word out to all different kinds of communities to make sure that our open door really is open to all students?" Twenty years ago, I was too naïve to realize that I needed to couch questions about issues of equity and color in that way. Now I understand how to do that.

Faith has also learned that by having quiet conversations with someone who is of the majority, they can often become advocates for students of color and first-generation students more effectively than she can. Faith wants what is best for the students and if she can find advocates to assist her in helping students obtain what they need, everyone wins.

In relation to her White peers, Faith feels that some aspects of their career journeys are similar. She thinks that they have probably been just as strategic as she has been. She also feels that there is a huge difference between the strategies that women and men use to navigate their career paths. When women are deliberately strategic about their career moves and responsibilities, they are often labeled as being overly aggressive or pushy. Faith has seen firsthand how her male counterparts being mentored to get a wide range of experiences so they'll be well-positioned for presidencies, and she finds herself having to ask for those same kinds of experiences. Faith currently works for a president who is a mentor to a group of young White males, but he's uncomfortable mentoring women.

I understand that about him and so I have had to be very intentional about asking for additional responsibilities to broaden my experiences as they've come up. I cannot assume that he will be looking out for me. That is my responsibility.

Faith adores her support system and she acknowledges that her "cheerleaders," as she calls them, each play a significant role in her life. She has what she calls her neutral cheerleaders.

They are individuals like her minister, her mom, and her sister. She can go to them about anything and they will be there for her regardless. Then, she has a group of girlfriends that also work in higher education at the university. She can go to them for advice regarding things she is experiencing on the job since they may also have similar experiences. Faith also has a network of White males who will speak on her behalf when the time comes. This is an important component of Faith's support system and she continuously manages and cultivates this group. Because she is a woman of faith, it is also important for Faith to have a circle of professional girlfriends who are also women of faith. At any time, she can send the women a group text asking them to pray for her when she is in the midst of a situation and she knows that they will. Having these varied levels of support is essential to Faith's success. She understands that she cannot accomplish everything alone, so she leans on those closest to her to help fill in the gaps when needed.

Faith's own journey to community college leadership has encouraged her to give back and support other African American women who are pursuing a similar career path. Faith often reflects on how, at times, her journey has been difficult. She says that tough times require you to have values and a faith system because it those things will help you overcome obstacles during your journey. God is extremely important to Faith and she will confidently give him credit for allowing her to accomplish so much in her life. She also advises African American women on a path to a community college leadership position to accept that you may not move up the career ladder as fast as your male counterparts do and it is okay. She notes:

I think we have to accept that our career trajectory might not be as fast as our male counterparts, particularly those who are single, and that's okay. It's okay to say no to opportunities that will make it difficult for you to be all the things that you're called to be. At the end of the day, when I'm on my deathbed, I am never going to say, "Oh, I wish I'd

worked more." I'll be reflecting on the people I was able to help. I'll reflect on my family, I'll reflect on my relationship with God. I just have to remember it's important to have a great career, but it's also important to be a good human being, to be a meaningful member of your community.

### **A Portrait of Destiny**

*"It is in your moments of decision that your destiny is shaped."*

-Tony Robbins

Destiny serves as campus president on one of seven campuses within a community college system in the north central region of the United States. She has approximately seventeen years of experience as a community college administrator and she has served as campus president for about three years. Destiny is a very focused woman who possesses a lot of determination. A Black woman of Caribbean descent, Destiny came to the United States to seek higher education. She was born and raised on the small island and entered this country as an adult student. At the age of thirty, she found herself entering college as an international student because she knew that education was key to obtaining a leadership position. Her previous career had been in banking, a male dominated field, where opportunities at the CEO level were limited for women. Destiny did not realize it at the time, but her dream to pursue higher education in the United States helped to shape her future as a community college leader.

As an undergraduate student, Destiny became involved as a student ambassador and she also worked in the student center. This was her first experience being involved in higher education and she enjoyed it very much. Destiny pursued a graduate degree once she had completed her undergraduate work. While pursuing her graduate degree, she supported herself through school. It was extremely difficult, but Destiny knew that she had to work hard and make sacrifices if she was going to be successful.

I worked and supported myself through graduate school, sometimes three part-time jobs at a time. It was difficult, but it was what I had to do in order to survive financially.

Whenever I give speeches, I tell my students that if it's one thing I learned as an adult student and as an international student, was the value of a dollar. There were days when I had to choose between taking the bus or buying a slice of pizza for lunch or later in the afternoon, if I had an evening class.

Such experiences also illustrate Destiny's determination. Her mindset was that she would not always have to make choices between eating or taking the bus because an education would help to create a better life for herself.

Destiny was married during her graduate studies. As a result, she had to make some adjustments because she moved to another area with her husband. She remained at the same institution, but she had to commute to and from campus by car, bus, or train to complete her degree. Online classes were not available at the time, so she did what was required of her and she ultimately completed her Master's program. Destiny's background was in business management and economics, so she soon obtained a position as a small business advisor. Interestingly enough, the small business center where she worked was housed on a college campus. This was a perfect opportunity for Destiny to interact and work closely with students.

Destiny's first full introduction to the community college was when she was asked to develop an entrepreneurship course. She created the course for a local community college and taught the course as well. This was the moment her interest in community college work emerged. Destiny taught the course for about two years in the evenings to adult students. She really enjoyed the fact that she was able to relate to these students because she had been an adult student herself.

Destiny was soon approached about being an assistant dean and she jumped on the opportunity. This was her first full-time community college position and after about eighteen months, she accepted an associate dean position. She remained at the same institution for about ten years, gaining a significant amount of experience and completing her doctoral degree.

Destiny reflects on her experiences during this time in her career as a great learning experience, but there were also challenges. It was especially challenging being the only person of color in an administration and students often see you as their advocate when you're in that position. Destiny notes that you do your absolute best to meet all of the needs of students, but sometimes you may fall short and it is difficult when that happens.

When you're not able to meet all of their needs, and then you become known or seen as this radical, then you have to make a decision. The decision for me was, am I going to support my students or am I going to go with the other side. So I made the decision that I was going to stand up for students. It was not always easy, and I'm not saying that students are always right. However, students should always be presented with the opportunity to be heard, and there was a lack of that. That did not happen. So I was seen as the advocate.

Destiny admits that she would definitely do things differently if she could return to this time in her career, but she would still remain a strong advocate for students. Helping students drives her passion and she makes that known.

Choosing the side of students often created tension with the administration during this time in Destiny's career. It came to a point where she had to make a decision about whether or not she should leave the institution. She ultimately made the decision to leave. "In this world, you know when the time comes for you to go, and you're satisfied in going." It was Destiny's

time to pursue a different position at a new institution. She contemplated on what she should do next and began to search for new opportunities. In the end, she became unemployed. That was not the ideal situation for her, but she stands by her decision.

I stood up for what I believed in. If I had the opportunity, I would do things differently, but at the end of the day, I know I did the right thing when it comes to being an ethical person. I'd rather have my character and know that I'm honest and I did the right thing. I see too many of us, unfortunately, go down, and most times it's not that we did anything wrong, but we did something which was interpreted the wrong way. We always have to watch our backs and know who our allies are, and don't be surprised when you think, again it's my own experience, this person has had your back and they really didn't.

Destiny was without full-time employment for about two years. She had to constantly encourage herself because it was a difficult time for her. It was especially difficult because she lived in a small area and everyone was aware of the situation. The job search was also extremely difficult and Destiny kept telling herself that she will be able to find something and return to the workforce. This constant self-encouragement was essential during this time.

Destiny eventually decided to pursue positions in an area close to where her daughter was attending college at the time. Accepting a position in this area would require her to not only move to a different state, but also an entirely different region of the United States. Destiny was content with her decision because she felt that it would provide more options. Obtaining a position in a new area was also a task. Destiny went through a series of rigorous interviews where she was a final candidate for approximately 75% of those positions. She eventually accepted a community college position as Dean of the School of Business.

Destiny was fortunate to have the support of her chancellor in her new role as dean. Her chancellor, who was a woman, believed in her and gave her a chance. Destiny had not always had this type of support during her career journey and she was very appreciative. “I never let my chancellor down. She became my mentor and it's because of her I was able to grow.” To bounce back from being unemployed for two years was definitely a transition for Destiny, but to experience growth and have such strong support from her chancellor was a blessing. This helped Destiny to move forward without dwelling on her past. She served as Dean of the School of Business for about four years. Soon thereafter, she became president of a sister campus within the system.

Destiny’s experiences have contributed to the person she is today. When reflecting on her experiences, she notes that race and gender have definitely played a role in how those experiences were shaped. Destiny feels that her experiences are similar to the experiences of other women and people of color; however, she feels that in regards to women and people of color, there is sometimes a lack of support for one another.

There’s a lack of support for each other. There's so many of us in this business, that when something happens, there's no support. I'm not saying that we all make mistakes, but I've been disappointed in the lack of support for each other. People don't even want to say hello to you. So that's been very, very disappointing. I always say if I were to do something, it would be to support those like me who are in the same field. It doesn't mean that you're right, but at least you could almost depend on that person. I have a few people like that in my circle, and I'm in their circle. There are times in this journey that I'd rather deal with a white woman. There are times in this journey when I'd rather deal with nobody.

While Destiny acknowledges that experiences related to race and gender are real, she always makes it a point to remain focused and not let issues such as these overpower you.

The idea is to always, regardless of what's going on, stay focused, because you can really get bogged down in some of this stuff. Not that you don't address it, but you have to know which hill to die on. Which do you want to die on?

Family is extremely important to Destiny. Her family has always been there for her from the time she entered the United States as an international student to the present. Destiny put herself through school, but her family was always there, whether it was sending money, giving her a used coat, or making sure she ate. She thanks God for the constant and continuous support of her family. Destiny also reflected on the period when she was pursuing her doctoral degree. This was also the time when she and her husband separated and divorced. Her family and friends were essential during this time because not only did they support her, but they were also there for her daughter.

Destiny is also grateful for the support of her supervisor during this time in her life. As a single working mother, it was often difficult to juggle day-to-day responsibilities.

When I was promoted within 18 months of being in a position, I was a bit hesitant because as a single parent, just me and my daughter, you have to be at a meeting 8:00. Trying to drop her off at school before eight and having to leave to pick her up was a challenge. I remember the then-president said to me that, "If you're worrying about her, don't worry about it, we'll make this work." And sure enough, I must say that having his support to make it work was vital. He did stand up to his word and made it work.

Destiny's support system also includes several strong mentors that she is able to confide in and get advice on the various aspects of her professional life. According to Destiny, mentors can be

very instrumental whether you are in a job search or if there is something going on and you need some insight. “A great mentor is going to tell you about yourself. In the long run, it's what you want; it's to your own benefit.” Destiny also depends on her spirituality. She is an active member of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church. She is extremely involved in her church and it has not only been a significant part of her support system, but also her balance.

Even after almost two decades of experiences as a community college administrator, Destiny is not finished just yet. She wants to continue to make a difference in the lives of students, but on an even larger level. Destiny is currently seeking a community college presidency. While she currently serves as a campus president, a chancellor or president's position would allow her to lead at another level. She would report directly to a board of trustees and oversee a college in its entirety.

I think that, I feel within me that I've made a difference, especially for students. And for me, I have one more job in me. And that job is to continue to make a difference in the lives of students but at a much bigger level. Student success, that's my passion.

Destiny has experienced a lot in her career and her life. As an executive leader working at a community college, she prides herself on being a great leader, but to her, her number one focus is the success of students. This is her purpose, her calling, and her destiny.

### **Themes Illuminated by Portraits**

The portraits that have been shared were created with qualitative data that were collected through one-on-one interviews with participants. The purpose of these interviews was to learn about the experiences of African American women working in executive leadership positions at community colleges.

### **Primary Research Question**

What are the Experiences of African American women during their journeys to executive leadership positions that exist within the pipeline to the community college presidency?

### **Secondary Research Questions**

The following secondary research questions support the primary research question in this study:

1. What challenges do African American women face while working to obtain executive leadership positions at predominately White community colleges?
2. What strategies are used by African American women to advance to executive leadership positions at predominately White community colleges?
3. How do African American women balance their multiple roles and identities while pursuing executive leadership positions at community colleges?

By asking participants a list of ten semi-structured interview questions, I anticipated an in depth look into the lives of these women. These women were asked to share their stories and my responsibility as the researcher was to bring their stories to life and to identify similarities, connections, and variances between five unique experiences. These questions steered the conversations and allowed participants to openly discuss their experiences working as executive leaders at community colleges. These ten questions were also guided by the aforementioned research questions.

As a result of the data analysis process, the following themes emerged: (1) Maintaining a strong support system; (2) Work-Life Balance; (3) Spirituality; (4) Overcoming barriers related to race and gender; (5) Planning and creating a path that focuses on leadership; (6) Having a passion for community colleges.

Data provided support for the themes that have been identified through their answers to the semi-structured interview questions. The existence of a strong support system, work-life balance and its effect on career success, and spirituality were noted most frequently among the participants. Issues related to race and gender were also discussed by several of the participants, with some providing more detail than others on the subject. Planning a career path and having a passion for community colleges also emerged as key themes.

The following section will provide an explanation of the themes that emerged during the analysis of interviews. The section headings describing each theme are posed as questions in order to allow for reflection. This reflection is beneficial to both the researcher and others who feel connected to this research because they are an African American woman working at a community college and pursuing a leadership position at a community college. This connection can also be present because an individual has things in common with the research participants. While these themes respond to the research questions for this study, they also respond to the questions of many African American women who are seeking executive leadership positions at community colleges. Following the explanation of themes, paths to leadership in community college will be presented. This section is the outcome of the resume mapping component of this study.

### **Who Can I Depend On?**

Maintaining a strong support system was highlighted as an important aspect of reaching one's career goals in the field of community college administration. All five participants noted that a strong support system that includes family, friends, and mentors has been influential during their career journeys.

Serenity identifies her support system in three distinct groups: mentors, her kitchen cabinet, and coaches. She notes that early in her career that consisted of colleagues, supervisors, and individuals with experience in the field of higher education. Serenity's mentors, kitchen cabinet, and coaches are all different people in her life. She reflected on three mentors during her career. Two were African American men and one was a White man. They provided her with the support and nurturing she needed. This was especially important to Serenity as an administrator at predominately White colleges. They talked to her about aspirations, career goals, and they identified her mistakes during her journey and provided her with advice on how to handle those mistakes. Serenity's kitchen cabinet provides her with the type of support that only close friends and family can. Her husband, for example, does not work in higher education, but she is able to go to him for advice about things she is experiencing as a community college campus president. She explains:

My husband was a business man and he's now retired. Before I send an email because somebody makes me angry, I can call him up and say, "Listen to this. What do you think about this?" He'll say, "Don't send that email." He's not in higher education, but he's a great supporter of me.

Serenity's coaches have emerged during the latter part of her career. As she has gained more experience and become an executive level community college leader, her mentors have become more of coaches to her. These are individuals that have similar current experiences that have risen through the ranks just like Serenity.

Faith describes her group of supporters as her cheerleaders. She feels it is important to surround yourself with people who will support you and have your back no matter what. Her family, her minister, and her girlfriends have been that constant support system for Faith. She

also credits her mentors with constant support during her career journey. She is extremely grateful for the support, but she does acknowledge that it can become stressful when you have to navigate different groups in order to reach your goals. Faith explains:

It's lovely to be able to just get right to the core of it with my professional girlfriends circle and then on the other side, being able to go to my other mentors and express to them my interest in that position and if they'd be willing to make a call or send an email on my behalf. That combination of things seems to have served me fairly well, but again, it adds more stress having to work these multiple channels.

Grace also has the support of her family. Her husband has especially been her rock as he has relocated in order for her to pursue a job opportunity. He travels with her for business purposes and accompanies her to community events. Grace is also able to confide in him about issues she may be dealing with at work. He offers a perspective that is both critical and understanding. She reflects on the importance of sharing her day with her husband:

I go home and I share my day with my husband, unless I just can't tell him because of confidentiality. I do this because your family is the one who loves you the most and they're going to support you the most, so those are the least people that you should isolate. So I say, "Well, what do you think about this?" I find that to be helpful during this journey.

Grace has also had a number of mentors that have been influential throughout her career. Most of her mentors have been college presidents, even early in her career. Interestingly, all of the college presidents that have served as mentors to Grace have been men. She notes that women have never elected to serve as a mentor to her. She feels that this may be due to the competitive nature of some women. She shared the following thoughts:

Some women don't like to see other women succeed, and I don't know if that's a gender thing or a race thing or whatever, but that has been my experience. I guess the reason women may have felt that way is, as I was coming up the success ladder, it was during the time when not too many women had opportunities that we have today. I guess because of this, they were competitive against me. They probably weren't about to let a young, up-and-coming woman take their position.

Grace hopes things have changed and more women are stepping up to mentor women who are on the path to leading community colleges.

Hope and Destiny also acknowledge their family as being strong supporters during their career journeys. Destiny adds that her current chancellor is her strongest mentor. She credits several other mentors in her life, but her chancellor believed in her and gave her a chance. Hope explains that while her peer group has become very small since she has become a campus president, she is thankful for the small group of peers, her family, and professional mentors that have continued to have her back.

### **How Do I Balance it All?**

All five women interviewed noted that balancing family life and career responsibilities is sometimes a challenge. Destiny reflected on a period when she separated from her husband and the separation eventually led to a divorce. She had just begun a full-time position and it was difficult because she was the “present parent” to her daughter. As the parent that is present, she was the one who was there all the time to care for her daughter. Destiny notes that family and friends were extremely instrumental in assisting her with her daughter as she climbed the ladder to her current leadership position. Serenity also credited family as being extremely supportive during the time she became a single parent. This occurred during a time in her life where she was

a bit overwhelmed with the work she was doing. She eventually decided to pursue jobs closer to her parents' home in another state and ultimately obtained a position in the area. This provided Serenity and her daughter with support and allowed Serenity to continue working because her parents were there to assist her with her daughter. Hope also explained the significance of her family and friends in helping her balance multiple responsibilities:

Because of the time that I have put into my work, I have to have a lot of support related to helping me with my children. I have two children. You want them to have a full experience and you do not want your job to stop them from exploring, and learning, and developing as children. So, I have a lot of family that help me. I have family members that help me with the kids pick up. I have family members that help me with keeping the kids when I have things that I need to do on the weekends that are related to work. As a working mother, having a family structure where people are willing to support you is invaluable.

Faith described being a single mother of a young son and the caretaker of her parents. She has to constantly juggle those responsibilities with the demands of her career. She notes that she has to take her roles as mother and caretaker into consideration when making decisions about her career. As someone who is open to career advancement, she also understands that to accept a new position, it would have to work within the constraints of her life. With that, she understands and is content with the possibility of not being able to advance if a position is not a good fit with her responsibilities as a mother and caretaker. She explains:

When we talk three or five years from now, maybe I will not be a president as a result of some of those constraints that I put on myself. That is how it is right now. You have to

remember as a woman, I think we always have a greater level of responsibility for things outside of our work that men do not.

Faith also discussed the differences she sees between mothers and fathers. At the community college where she currently works, she has noticed several male employees in leadership positions being praised for taking a day off to care for a sick child. This has been very interesting for Faith, a mother of a son who suffers with asthma. There have been times when she had to care for her son during asthma attacks that even required a visit to the emergency room. She reflects:

I don't remember any kudos for me being out with my son who had asthma attacks and he was in the emergency room. I don't remember one bit of kudos. The assumption is that as women, as mothers, of course, that's your job. However, when men do it, "Oh, that's outstanding. You took care of your son."

Several of the women interviewed also discussed how their careers have impacted their romantic relationships. Three out of the five women interviewed have been divorced. It is difficult to balance the demands of life as a woman and relationships often are affected. Destiny reflected on a time when she was married and had a commuting relationship due to career responsibilities. The distance jeopardized the relationship and it ultimately ended in divorce. Serenity, who is celebrating twenty-two years of marriage with her third husband, admits that moving around so much in her career journey has been hard on her relationships.

While attempting to maintain work-life balance as a woman in an executive leadership position at a community college, Faith acknowledges that you cannot do everything. This is sometime difficult for women to grasp because they are accustomed to being "all things to all people." Faith explains:

If you are trying to do everything, the reality is that you cannot do everything at the highest level. You've got to, at some point, accept that, and this is a quote from somebody and I cannot remember who said it, but that your best is different every single day based on a whole range of factors. When I've been up all night giving my son breathing treatments every four hours while he sleeps, well then my best that next day at work is not going to be the same best that it would be if I'd gotten a full night's rest. Those are the trade-offs we make.

All five women interviewed for the purpose of this research spoke of the issues related to being wives, mothers, and caretakers while simultaneously working as community college leaders. Depending on the support of others to assist in childcare, the difference between how mothers and fathers are viewed, and the impact of career on romantic relationships are all significant components of work-life balance. So, how do you balance it all? According to five women who experience juggling multiple roles every day, you rely on those closest to you to help because you are only one person. While planning, prioritizing and making sure you include your work and family demands on your daily agenda, you must realize that there will be days when something will not get done or you are not at your best. That is okay! Faith explains, "I think that's just part of what it means to be a woman in a leadership position. You are constantly juggling and balancing, but you do so in a way that allows you to meet the needs of yourself as a working woman in a leadership position as well as the needs of those around you."

### **What Keeps Me Grounded?**

Staying grounded and maintaining the ability to make it through difficult situations can be challenging for African American women in community college leadership positions. Three of the women interviewed discussed their spirituality and the existence of a faith system. Their

Christian values and faith keeps them going when they feel as if they can't take another step. Serving in an executive leadership role at a community college can be very demanding. The demands of the job coupled with all of life's responsibilities can be challenging. Destiny, Faith, and Grace all agree that spirituality is essential in helping one reach their goals and overcome obstacles that are encountered along the way.

Destiny is extremely involved in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church. She serves on the board and actively represents her church in the community. Destiny credits the AME Zion church as being a huge support to her as she has navigated her career and life. She notes, "I depend a lot on my spirituality." For Destiny, her faith is her balance. When she is confronted with challenges in her personal life or in her career, she relies on her faith to pull her through.

Faith believes that having an internal core of values is necessary when pursuing leadership positions. This, coupled with a faith system helps to create a balance that is necessary on this journey. Many days as an executive community college administrator are difficult, thus requiring a tremendous amount of strength and determination. Her faith in God is essential in getting her through those days that are especially difficult. Faith believes that her faith system has greatly impacted her career success and her ability to juggle her other responsibilities.

Not only does Grace have an advanced degree in higher education, she also holds a Master's of Divinity. She prays and reads her bible daily because she sees it as an investment. In turn, that investment creates a balance and allows you to be both mentally and emotionally stable. Grace believes in the power of prayer. She always seeks God for understanding and asks him to lead her down the appropriate path. This is how she stays grounded and is able to

overcome obstacles she encounters as an administrator. Grace does not believe in worrying. She trusts God to take care of her needs.

### **How Do I Handle Issues Related to My Race and Gender?**

Four of the women interviewed discussed issues related to race and gender during their career journeys. Faith has the ability to analyze and separate the obstacles she has encountered into three categories: race, gender, and being the outsider. She explained how her experiences differed in each of these areas. As for race, Faith has learned that as a person of color, it is her responsibility to be extremely conscious when discussions arise regarding the implementation of new policies. She always questions these potential policies to determine whether they will harm specific groups of students such as students of color or first-generation college students. She also has to be strategic about how she phrases those questions to other administrators so they are not viewed negatively. As a woman, Faith does not want to be viewed as “mothering.” It is important for her employees and colleagues to view her as a leader and a supervisor, not as a wife and a mother. Preventing these roles from mixing when she is in the workplace has been instrumental in her success as an executive leader. Faith also notes that her experiences have revealed that sometimes it has nothing to do with race or gender and everything to do with the fact that she is an outsider. Working in a small rural community where she was not raised has been a challenge at times. She explains, “What I find is that there's a moment and it's mostly because I'm an outsider. What I'm learning is it has less to do with my race and my color than the fact that I'm not a known quantity.”

Faith and Hope both note that as African American women, your response to certain questions and situations can ultimately affect how you are viewed by others. For example, Faith reflected on attending a meeting when she first began her position as vice-president. While

meeting various individuals at the meeting, including an older White woman who was an elected official, Faith recalls turning around to speak to someone when she felt her head being pulled. She quickly turned around and the elected official stated, “I’m sorry, I couldn’t help myself. I just wanted to feel them.” Faith’s hair is styled in locks and the woman had taken it upon herself to satisfy her curiosity by touching them. Faith reflects:

Twenty years ago, I would have probably cursed her out and been very unhappy, but I'm a little more mature now and I realize that elected officials hold the purse strings to our funding. How I respond will determine what our relationship is like and how she perceives the college. Unfortunately, my response in that setting has to be, "No problem putting your hands in my hair" with a smile and then just moving on. To this day, I interact with this woman and she gives me a hug and she's very happy to see me. She probably doesn't even recall that incident. When I talk to my male counterparts, they don't tell me about being inappropriately touched, they don't talk about those kind of things.

Hope has been strategic in how she delivers information and responds to issues. She explains that many African American women have raw passion and it is often viewed negatively. It is extremely important to be kind, respectful, and empathetic when sharing information with others. “There are expectations on who you are and how you should act as a Black woman and what they expect from you,” shares Hope. As a result, Hope is very conscious of her demeanor.

Three of the women interviewed noted that while issues related to gender and race can arise during the career journey, a decrease in these types of experiences is often coupled with the attainment of a higher level leadership position. For example, Serenity reflected on a time when she experienced gender and race issues, but once she became a campus president, those issues

decreased tremendously. Grace also discussed her leadership abilities and the respect she has from her employees. As a vice-president, Grace does not experience race and gender issues. She explains, "I hold the top ranking position at my institution for a person of my ethnicity and gender, my salary is quite comparable, and I have the same opportunities to voice my opinion." This is significant to Grace because she is a significant part of the institution and she is valued. While Faith continues to overcome obstacles related to race and gender, she is aware that one day, she won't have to deal with such issues. She states, "I can't get mad every time that happens or I'd be mad all the time. There are just some things I have to put up with until I'm in a position where I don't have to put up with it anymore."

Destiny and Faith both explained that while African American women working in executive leadership positions at community college often encounter racial and gender barriers, it is important not to allow these issues to defeat you. Destiny believes that you must always stay focused because it is easy to become overwhelmed with all of the obstacles African American women face. Faith explains that you have to always remember why you do what you do.

It's the coolest thing in the world to drive by a building and say, "I helped bring them here and I helped make sure that there are people and that their workers are all trained." It's a really cool thing. There are other days when you go to an event and someone asks you to get them coffee or they put their hand in your hair because they have never seen locks. You have to have a clear understanding of why you're doing this. Those microaggressions over time, they can make you really angry and bitter or really steal the joy from the heart of what this work is really about.

## **How Do I Define and Refine My Path?**

All five women interviewed discussed how they have planned and created career paths that focus on leadership. Leadership development and networking were common themes among the women and all of them feel that these are two essential components to prepare yourself for community college leadership roles.

Destiny shared that she has attended numerous leadership training sessions that also included good mentoring. She knew that she wanted to be a college president, so she pursued as many opportunities that would prepare her to one day obtain that top position. Destiny admits that networking and training is key. She also credits professional organizations that are geared toward helping people of color reach their career goals and become leaders in higher education. Destiny explains:

Friends and networking and making the right relationships is extremely important. It is also important to looking for organizations that will benefit you professionally. In my case, joining an organization that promotes the development of community college leaders of color allowed me to get know over 100 presidents of color. Of course, you're not going to pick up the phone and call every one of them, but you try to connect with some. They too can be very instrumental in your job search or if you need professional advice or mentoring.

Serenity also credits professional organizations in being influential in her career journey. She also explained the importance of African American women seeking organizations that specifically focus on the development of African American women, people of color, and women. Serenity agrees that such organizations contribute to the development of African American women in a way that others do not.

Serenity and Faith both encourage African American women seeking executive leadership positions to solicit the support of their colleges and supervisors. Faith notes that she does not have a problem asking her president to invest in her. As she plans to pursue a community college presidency, she will be looking to her president for support. Faith explains, “This year, I will be asking my president to send me to a pre-presidency boot camp just to make sure that as I move into that process, that there aren’t things that I’m doing that may not be the best in regards to how I’m presenting myself.”

Three of the women interviewed plan to pursue a community college presidency. Faith, Destiny, and Grace are preparing themselves for what is next in their careers and the obvious next step for them is to become community college presidents. Faith discussed how she has prepared to take the next step in her career:

There’s not much at a community college that I’ve not had direct or indirect experience with. I’ve been trying to position myself to be able to take advantage of all these retirements that are going to be coming in the next 5-10 years. I did that by making sure I had the academic credentials, making sure I have the experience, and then making sure I have a good network.

Grace also noted several strategies of preparation as she seeks the presidency that is the right one for her:

I think that I may become a college president, probably more sooner than not. I'm ready to do that today, so I prepare by staying abreast of what's in the news and staying on top of policy and reading. So, I'm always staying abreast of what's going on nationally and locally. I also travel. I get out across the country and speak and see people. So, when the

one I want comes open or if they call me, I'll go, but it has to be the right one. I'm not pressed.

Destiny referred to her experience interacting with boards of trustees as being significant in her preparation for the presidency. While she is a campus president, she does not report directly to the board. In her community college system, she reports to a chancellor who reports to the board. However, Destiny has interacted with the community college board regularly due to the nature of her position as campus president. She reflected on her role as campus president and how it has positioned her to take on a role as chancellor or community college president.

In this position, I'm the campus president with the responsibility for an entire campus. So, I do everything that a college president would do. There have been times when the chancellor can't be present at a board meeting and I've had to step in and run the meeting. My point is I have that experience.

Hope has not completely ruled out the idea of becoming a community college president, but she is not currently pursuing such a position. Hope believes that at the chancellor or community college president's level, the PhD is the ideal credential to have and she does not currently have that. Hope elaborates, "I don't know of many institutions that are looking for individuals to serve in a chancellor's position that do not have a PhD and I haven't made up my mind if that is something I want to pursue. For those reasons, it really hasn't been at the top of my list."

As for Serenity, she has served in a variety of roles in higher education and she is looking forward to retirement. She has considered applying for other positions, but she has not done so because she is content with where she is. Serenity explains:

I've never stayed in one place this long before. So, I really don't think I want to pursue a presidency now. I'm old enough now to really want to think seriously about retirement and I plan to retire in the next four years. So, I'll be perfectly good to stay right where I am and make a difference in my hometown.

### **Where Does My Passion Lie?**

Four of the women discussed their love for community colleges and how their passion for the community and helping others pushes them to continue to make a difference. Grace discussed how she did not have the best understanding of what community colleges were responsible for when she accepted her first community college position. Coming from a university background, she understood the general impact community colleges had on higher education as a whole, but she soon began to realize how great of an impact community colleges had on the community. The opportunity to serve nontraditional students, veterans, displaced workers, and provide support to the community as a whole has been very rewarding to Grace. She explained, "My opportunity to provide support in the community college environment has been so much broader and much more rewarding." Destiny reflected on her experience working in community college administration and while some of those experiences were positive and some not so positive, she notes that, "My passion for this work is what keeps me in this work." Destiny has a passion for student success and the community college allows her to play a significant role in helping students achieve their academic and career goals.

Hope's goal as a community college leader is to determine the best way to support families and students not only academically, but in a supplemental way. She feels that working in a community college allows her to assist students in their academic journey and their journey in life. Hope is grateful for community colleges because they provide hope for many that live in

areas of poverty and high crime rates. She is thankful for the opportunity to provide exposure to the community through her role as a community college leader.

Serenity has been able to return to her hometown as a campus president of a community college. This has been especially rewarding for her because she is able to make a difference in the community where she was raised.

The thing that I have to say about my career is that I have found the greatest joy in community college education. When I see our adult students bringing their children to register for classes, it feels good. I have a passion for this. My career has been amazing and I would like to see more women of color go into this field because I think our students need it. There are more students of color that start in community college education than any other form of higher education and they need to see people who look like them.

### **Summary**

Six common themes that emerged from one-on-one interviews were highlighted in this chapter. These themes included: (1) Maintaining a strong support system; (2) Work-Life Balance; (3) Spirituality; (4) Overcoming barriers related to race and gender; (5) Planning and creating a path that focuses on leadership; (6) Having a passion for community colleges. While each participant's journey to an executive community college leadership position was different, the themes that emerged through this research provided a connection. Further, the resume mapping component of this study provided a closer look into the career pathways and educational backgrounds of individuals serving in executive leadership roles at community colleges. An analysis of resumes and curricula vitae revealed five categories that offer a better understanding of the leadership pathways of these individuals. They included professional title,

highest degree earned, higher education experience, community college experience, and area of experience. The data within each of these categories show the existence of particular career pathways within the pipeline to the community college presidency. The pathways taken by individuals working in positions within the pipeline to the community college presidency varies. However, a common pathway is one where an individual moves up the ranks within the community college in order to obtain the presidency. For example, a community college faculty member often moves from department chair to academic dean and finally to Vice President of Academic Affairs or Student Services before pursuing the presidency.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American women administrators working in executive leadership positions that exist within the presidential pipeline at predominately White community colleges. The following primary and secondary research questions guided the study: What are the Experiences of African American women during their journeys to executive leadership positions that exist within the pipeline to the community college presidency?

The following secondary research questions support the primary research question in this study:

1. What challenges do African American women face while working to obtain executive leadership positions at predominately White community colleges?
2. What strategies are used by African American women to advance to executive leadership positions at predominately White community colleges?
3. How do African American women balance their multiple roles and identities while pursuing executive leadership positions at community colleges?

This qualitative, phenomenological study allowed five women who serve in executive leadership positions at community colleges to share their journeys, their experiences, and how they ultimately obtained positions as vice-presidents and campus presidents. Through the utilization of portraiture, illustrations of these women's lives and experiences in their pursuit of community college leadership positions were presented. Their stories ultimately responded to the research questions and provided five unique portraits of leadership.

These women and their stories amazed me. While reviewing biographies, resumes, and curricula vitae of the participants prior to the interviews provided me with a foundation of knowledge regarding their education and career background, I was elated to learn even more during our conversations. This research was especially rewarding due to the opportunity to meet and learn more about successful African American women who are in executive leadership roles at community colleges. It was also personally fulfilling because of my own experience as a African American woman community college administrator. The excitement I felt when the women discussed experiences that echoed my own was incredible. It was as if I was listening to a sermon and I wanted to waive my hand in agreement, but I knew I had to compose myself! I was often on the edge of my seat, listening to the stories of how these women began their careers and progressed while balancing the multiple duties that women often are responsible for. Their stories are inspiring, their experiences are fascinating, and their wisdom is encouraging.

### **Summary of Findings and Common Themes**

This study explored the experiences of African American women community college administrators. Challenges faced during the career journeys of the participants and strategies used to advance professionally and balance multiple roles were also examined. Six themes emerged from the qualitative data that was gathered during this study. These themes correspond with the participants' interview responses. The themes that emerged included: (1) Maintaining a strong support system; (2) Work-Life Balance; (3) Spirituality; (4) Overcoming barriers related to race and gender; (5) Planning and creating a path that focuses on leadership; (6) Having a passion for community colleges.

Several study participants discussed the importance of maintaining a strong support system. They noted their support systems as being influential in their success as community

college administrators. When asked who can they depend on, the participants agreed that family, friends, and mentors have all contributed to their success. A strong support system is critical to the success of African American women who are pursuing executive leadership positions at community colleges. Because African American women often experience obstacles as they attempt to navigate the pathway to the community college presidency, having a network of supportive individuals can be essential in helping them overcome these hurdles. Bertrand Jones and Dufor (2012) explain that mentoring relationships are also essential in higher education. It contributes to the retention of African American women at predominately White institutions. African American women also greatly benefit from mentors that assist them in understanding the expectations of an institution, which ultimately assists them in career advancement (Bertrand Jones & Dufor). The women interviewed all depended on a combination of family, friends, and mentors during their career journey. Their strong support systems have played huge roles in their overall success.

Work-life balance also emerged as a common theme among the women interviewed for the purpose of this study. As wives, mothers, and daughters, women often have to balance multiple responsibilities related to work and family and they generally carry a disproportionate amount of childcare and elderly care duties. Further, African American women experience work-life balance differently when compared to White women. For example, 55% of African American children live in single-parent homes with most of those homes led by women (Hamidullah & Riccucci, 2017). As a result, African American women must often balance the roles of wife, mother, and daughter with career responsibilities by finding ways to be everything to everyone. It is also common among African American women to seek alternative methods to balance family and work responsibilities (Hamidullah & Riccucci, 2017). For many women this

means that they count on family and friends to assist with childcare. While balancing a career and the demands of family is a concern of both women and men, it is particularly important to women because they often carry a significant amount of the load when it comes to taking care of the family (Hamidullah & Riccucci, 2017). All five women who participated in this study noted that the ability to balance work, family, and life have been significant during their journeys to their current executive leadership positions. These women agree that one must be able to rely on others for support and always include the demands of both work and family in their daily schedules.

The ability to remain grounded materialized as a common theme among three of the women interviewed. Spirituality and the existence of a faith system in their lives helps to keep Destiny, Faith, and Grace grounded. This is necessary as the career journeys of African American women community college administrators can be especially challenging. According to Roueche and Baker (1987), outstanding leaders are also spiritual leaders who influence the climate of an organization and overall culture due to their ability to provide specialized attention to specific behaviors. Through an analysis of leadership traits of future community college leaders, Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) reveal that a sense of spirituality is necessary for community college presidents in order for them to be able to embrace and enhance their inward journey. As these women continue on their leadership journeys, their spirituality will continue to be essential to their success. They hold it extremely close because they are aware that challenges will continue to arise and they must be able to move forward and continue to be exceptional community college leaders.

Four participants spoke openly about experiencing issues related to race and gender during their career journeys as community college administrators. Ryan et al. (2012) explain that

women often face barriers as they pursue advanced positions. This is especially true for African American women, as they experience the double burden of being Black and female in the workplace (St. Jean & Feagin, 1998). Several of the women interviewed discussed the importance of being strategic in how you ask questions that include race and/or gender as well as how you respond to such questions. While the women interviewed acknowledged that they have faced obstacles related to race and gender, they were adamant that one should not allow racial and gender discrimination to control you. One participant noted that maintaining focus is key because it is easy to become overwhelmed with issues such as these. In addition, three participants explained how they have experienced fewer racial and gender related obstacles as they have moved up the career ladder. As executive level community college leaders, they have gained the respect of their peers and those they supervise, thus decreasing the amount of discrimination in comparison to earlier in their careers.

Planning and creating a path that focuses on leadership also arose as a common theme during the study. Defining and refining a path is key when one is pursuing leadership positions within the pipeline to the community college presidency. In other words, it is essential to identify your own path and set specific objectives that will help you successfully navigate that path. Study participants agreed that leadership development and networking are essential to planning and creating a successful path. Bertrand Jones and Scott Dawkins (2012) explain that involvement in professional organizations, leadership development opportunities, and some online resources can be essential as women progress through their careers. Further, African American women can purposely broaden their networks by becoming members of professional organizations, holding leadership positions in organizations, and attending conferences and trainings (Bertrand Jones & Scott Dawkins, 2012). Several of the women interviewed discussed

their involvement in professional organizations whose purpose is to develop and support African Americans in their pursuit of leadership roles in community colleges and higher education. These organizations have been essential to their career development by providing networking opportunities, leadership development opportunities, and opportunities to pursue mentoring relationships with experts in the field of community college and higher education. Also noted as being important when navigating the pipeline to the presidency was support from your institution and supervisor. It is important not only to take advantage of the professional development your institution has to offer, but also seek their support in external endeavors (Killian & McClinton, 2012).

Three of the women interviewed are planning to seek a community college presidency. They have been strategic in creating a path that leads to a community college presidency. As they prepare for the next step in their careers as community college leaders, they will continue to hone their skills and gain as much experience as possible. According to these women, continuing to take advantage of professional development and networking opportunities is a key component in pursuing the community college presidency.

Having a passion for community colleges was an additional theme that materialized during this study. Four of the women interviewed explained that their passion for community colleges has been significant in their decisions to pursue community college executive leadership positions. The programs and support that community colleges provide to such a diverse group of students was noted as being essential during the career journey. Having a passion for the community and for student success has contributed to the participants' satisfaction in their careers and their desire to seek additional opportunities within community colleges.

Five categories were identified through the analysis of resumes and curricula vitae that were provided by the interview participants and other individuals who currently serve in executive leadership roles. These categories, which include professional title, highest degree earned, years of higher education experience, years of community college experience, and area of experience provide significant data regarding common career pathways and educational backgrounds of those serving in executive leadership roles within the pathway to the community college presidency. Majority of the participants who submitted resumes currently serve as chief academic officers. Appiah-Padi (2014) notes that historically, the position of chief academic officer (CAO) has been the stepping stone to the community college presidency; however, new studies suggest that many CAOs are choosing not to pursue the presidency. This may allow leadership positions in administrative services and student services to also become more typical paths to the presidency. Twenty-four out of the twenty-five leaders whose resumes and curricula vitae were analyzed have terminal degrees. This is supportive of the notion that individuals seeking executive leadership positions at community colleges should have a terminal degree. In addition, area of experience varied among the participants. Most leaders had academic affairs experience throughout the time they have been employed at community colleges. Several leaders had student services experience and a number of leaders had experience in two or more areas. During the one-on-one interview portion of this research, Faith spoke of the importance of gaining experience in all areas of the college, either directly or indirectly. Doing so can help to position and prepare you for the community college presidency. The interview participants had a variety of experiences from a number of areas of the community college and some also had experience from four-year institutions. Majority of these women also have worked a significant number of years in higher education. This is in line with the results of the resume mapping

process in that those who have reached executive leadership positions at community colleges have many years of higher education experience. Also, the participants in the resume mapping component consisted of men and women who are White and people of color. The results revealed that the path to executive leadership positions are similar amongst all individuals who are pursuing these positions. While African American women may have unique experience while on the journey to these positions, their pathways are similar to that of their colleagues.

### **Implications for Practice**

Ebbers, Gallisath, Rockel, and Coyan (2000) note that while community colleges have more women and minorities in administrative positions when compared to other sectors of higher education, the number of women and minorities in community college executive leadership positions still does not reflect the diversity of the student body. Further, it is essential that women and minorities serve in such leadership roles because it can positively affect the educational experience of minority students (Slater, 2007). These positive experiences can ultimately lead to favorable student outcomes and influence overall student success. Patitu and Hinton (2003) also note that individuals of color in higher education leadership positions provide an illustration of success and career advancement for minority students. Because of the connection between student success and the existence of African American women in leadership roles on college campuses, it is important to understand the experiences of African American women who are pursuing leadership positions within the pipeline to the community college presidency. Awareness of their career experiences, challenges, and successes can help to create a culture that will support African American women in their pursuit of community college executive leadership positions.

The number of African American women serving in executive leadership roles at community colleges has increased over the years, but the numbers are still not comparable to that of White men and women serving in similar roles. As community college leaders look to implement methods to enrich the educational experience of a diverse student body and improve student success, it is important that they look to African American women to serve in executive leadership roles. Additionally, as presidents and senior-level administrators plan to retire, it provides an opportunity for community colleges to engage in succession planning. Klein and Salk (2013) explain that succession planning not only provides an opportunity to make plans when individuals vacate positions, but it can also allow institutions to increase diversity within their organizations. This supports the idea of hiring qualified African American women to fill positions that are vacated due to retirement and/or relocation. Community college leaders and boards of trustees must intentionally include African American women as candidates for leadership positions during the succession planning process. Further, hiring African American women for such positions will increase diversity within the college's administration and provide a more diverse group of role models for minority students.

Several of the women in this study discussed their experiences with race and gender during their career journeys. African American women often face obstacles related to race and gender as they navigate the pipeline to the community college presidency. Critical Race Feminism speaks to the unique experiences of African American women and how they confront and overcome barriers associated with race and gender (Wing, 2003). This is significant to this study because the experiences of African American women are unlike that of White women and men of color. Crenshaw (1995) explains, "Because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always paralleled to

experiences of White women, antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms” (p. 360). Participants in this study discussed how differently African American women in positions of leadership are viewed in community college settings. One participant noted that leadership roles sometime require you to be forceful; however, African American women must be strategic in their delivery because they are often labeled as being sassy or combative, while White women are viewed as simply being emotional. In addition, the manner in which African American women have to utilize multiple identities in order to “fit in” is an illustration of how their experiences are unique. Further, Wing (2003) discusses the concept of multiplicative identity and that “women of color are not merely White women *plus* color or men of color *plus* gender” (p. 7). Alternatively, the identities of African American women must be woven together as one when examining the discrimination they face (Wing, 2003). Viewing the experiences of this study’s participants through a Critical Race Feminist lens is essential in understanding race and gender and how they collectively impact African American women as they navigate the pipeline to the community college presidency.

It is important for community college leaders and board of trustee members to be aware of the obstacles experienced in order to recruit and retain more African American women in executive leadership positions. This awareness should also serve as the foundation for the creation of an environment that will challenge racial and gender discrimination that African American women and other minority women administrators experience. Community colleges must be willing to educate their faculty, staff, and board of trustee members by offering workshops and presentations that focus on diversity and inclusion. This will ultimately help to create a hospitable and comfortable working environment for African American women and individuals of color.

Mentoring, leadership development, and insitutional support is also critical to the success of African American women as they seek postions within the pipeline to the community college presidency. Mentoring promotes job satisfaction and career advancement (Crawford & Smith, 2005). In addition, Bertrand Jones and Scott Dawkins (2012) explain that institutional support in the form of release time and financial assistance to attend conferences and other professional development opportunities is essential. Community colleges must be deliberate in providing opportunities for African American women to obtain mentors. This can be accomplished by encouraging supervisors and those in executive leadership positions to serve as mentors to individuals seeking to advance. Formal mentoring programs can also be established on community college campuses. These programs can also be formed across community college systems to allow African American women who are in or seeking executive leadership positions to network with individuals on other campuses. Internal leadership institutes as well as those offered in local communities, statewide, and nationally are also essential to the career development of African American women community college administrators. Further, institutions should encourage African American women to explore and become members of professional organizations. This will provide opportunities for networking, mentoring, and leadership development.

Balancing the roles of community college administrator, mother, daughter, and caretaker was a common theme that emerged during this study. The women were candid when speaking about the challenges associated with balancing the responsibilities of career and family. Kmec, Foo, and Wharton (2015) explain that mothers working in academic institutions report more family responsibilities than fathers working in higher education. This makes it especially challenging for women to maintain family and work responsibilities while trying to reach their

career goals. Community college leaders and boards of trustees must be aware of the challenges women face while balancing multiple responsibilities. They must be understanding and be willing to support women not only as community college leaders, but also as mothers and caretakers. Support can be provided by permitting women administrators to have flexible work schedules that would allow them to fulfill their work duties and their family obligations. During her interview, Destiny described how challenging it was as a single mother to juggle dropping her daughter off at school, making it to meetings on time, picking her daughter up from school, etc. Her president at the time understood her role as a mother and was extremely supportive by allowing her the flexibility she needed to care for her daughter. This support ultimately contributed to Destiny's success as a community college administrator because it provided her with a way to more easily balance the demands of work and motherhood. In addition to flexibility, family-friendly work policies can also provide support to women as they balance work and family. Such policies can help to establish a more positive working environment for African American women and contribute to their persistence within the pipeline to the community college presidency.

African American women whose goals are to pursue executive leadership positions within the pipeline to the community college presidency can learn a great deal from the women who participated in this study. These women and their experiences can serve as models for other women who are seeking similar paths. Although they encountered numerous obstacles as they continued to advance in their careers, they persevered to obtain positions as community college vice-presidents and campus presidents. These women advise other African American women who are seeking executive leadership positions to establish a strong support system of family, friends and mentors; maintain a faith system to help keep you grounded; make connections

through networking opportunities; develop your leadership skills through professional organizations and leadership development opportunities; and be strategic when making career choices. These recommendations are essential to the success of African American women who plan to navigate the pipeline to the community college presidency.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study on the experiences of African American women in executive leadership positions within the pipeline to the community college presidency provided insight on how African American women have progressed to these positions, the strategies utilized to advance professionally, and the challenges face during the process. This study contributes to higher education research, especially in the areas of community college administration, African American women as community college administrators, women community college administrators, and minorities in community college leadership positions. This study also provides opportunities for further research in a number of areas.

Further research should include an analysis of the relationship between the challenges African American women face while serving in executive leadership positions and the decision not to pursue the presidency. Not all of the women who participated in this study planned to seek a community college presidency. Additional research to explore the reasoning behind this decision is critical in further understanding the persistence of African American women in community college leadership roles.

Future research that examines the experiences of African American women in executive leadership positions at community colleges could offer a comparison of the experiences of women working at predominately White institutions and the experiences of women working at minority serving or predominately African American community colleges. This would provide

additional insight into whether there is a relationship between the makeup of the study body and the experiences and challenges African American women face. In addition, a comparison of the experiences of African American women at community colleges and four-year institutions can be an opportunity for future research.

Finally, an expansion of the current study could also include research on other women of color and their experiences as community college administrators. In addition, adjusting the sample criteria to include African American women who are serving in positions as community college presidents could provide data regarding the experiences, strategies, and challenges faced while seeking the presidency. The experiences of African American women community college presidents would also serve as a great contribution to the research.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the experiences of African American women who serve in executive leadership positions at community colleges. While the women who participated in this study faced challenges during their career journeys, they were able to implement a number of strategies that contributed to their success as leaders at community colleges. This research revealed that certain experiences are unique to African American women who are serving in leadership roles at community colleges. This is because many of these women encounter situations that White men, women, and even men of color do not experience. Much can be learned from the stories presented in this research. The portraits of the women and the themes that were illuminated by their stories are critical as community college leaders and board of trustee members look to increase diversity within their leadership teams. Further, the experiences of these women serve as models for African American women who also seek executive leadership positions within the pipeline to the community college presidency.

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## APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



**EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**  
**University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office**  
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682  
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834  
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · [www.ecu.edu/irb](http://www.ecu.edu/irb)

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB  
To: Katrina Ramsey Arnold  
CC: Crystal Chambers  
Date: 10/24/2016  
Re: UMCIRB 16-001329  
The Experiences of African American Women Community College Administrators

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 10/23/2016 to 10/22/2017. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Cover Letter - Study Invite KMRA 7-5-16.docx	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Dissertation Proposal - K. Ramsey Arnold.docx	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Informed Consent KMRA 10-5-16.doc	Consent Forms
Semi-Structured Interview Questions.docx	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

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IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418

IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

## APPENDIX B: COVER LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant,

I am a doctoral student at East Carolina University in the Educational Leadership department. I am asking you to take part in my research study entitled, *“The Experiences of African American Women Community College Administrators”*.

The purpose of this research is to examine the experiences of African American women administrators working in executive leadership positions in community colleges. By doing this research, I hope to learn how African American women experience leading while being employed in executive leadership positions that exist within the pipeline to the community college presidency. Your participation is completely voluntary.

You are being invited to take part in this research because you have been identified as an individual that fits the criteria to participate in this study. The criteria include African American women who are currently employed in executive leadership positions that report directly to the president of a community college where 50% or more of the student body is White. Data collection for this study will be completed through one-on-one interviews and resume collection. The amount of time it will take you to participate in the interview process is 1 to 1.5 hours. Interviews will be scheduled to occur either face-to-face or through video conferencing.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked questions that relate to your background and experiences as an African American female community college administrator.

This research is overseen by the ECU Institutional Review Board. Therefore, some of the IRB members or the IRB staff may need to review my research data. Your identity will be evident to those individuals who see this information. However, I will take precautions to ensure that anyone not authorized to see your identity will not be given that information.

If you have questions about your rights when taking part in this research, call the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, call the Director of ORIC, at 252-744-1971.

You do not have to take part in this research, and you can stop at any time. If you decide you are willing to take part in this study, please contact me via email at [ramseyk99@students.ecu.edu](mailto:ramseyk99@students.ecu.edu).

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research.

Sincerely,

Katrina Ramsey Arnold, Principal Investigator

## **APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your journey to your current position.
2. Talk about your reasoning and goals for choosing to pursue an executive leadership position in a community college.
3. Have you pursued a community college president position? If not, do you plan to apply in the future?
4. Discuss your experience with community college boards of trustees and/or consulting firms during the hiring process.
5. Tell me about your experiences with race and gender in your career journey.
6. In relation to your White peers, how do you feel your career journey and experiences are similar? How are they different?
7. Discuss any support systems including family, friends, colleagues, mentors, etc. that have been influential during your career journey. What impact did these individuals have on your success?
8. What are your future career aspirations and how are you preparing yourself to reach those career goals?
9. What advice would you give other African American women who aspire to work in executive leadership positions within the pipeline to the community college presidency?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share?

