Career Paths of Female Vice-Presidents in Community Colleges

Jacqueline Quinn

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Career paths of female vice-presidents in community colleges

By

Jacqueline Y. Quinn

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Community College Leadership
in the Department of Educational Leadership

Mississippi State, Mississippi

May 2017
Career paths of female vice-presidents in community colleges

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the career paths and preparation of female vice-presidents employed in community colleges in the state of Mississippi. There is limited qualitative information available that describes the career paths of vice-presidents in the state’s community colleges. Community colleges are making great strides in promoting women in leadership roles in administration, but research indicates there still seems to be a question as to the leadership ability of women.

This study used the qualitative case study research approach, and 4 female community college vice-presidents shared their career experiences through in-depth interviews. The instruments included a brief demographic survey, interview guide and curriculum vita for each participant. Each participant in this study was currently serving in the position of vice-president in 1 of Mississippi’s community colleges. The conceptual framework of the study illustrates the exploration of female community college administrators in the areas of career paths, professional responsibilities and career aspirations.

The participants described their career paths to their current positions by educational levels, diverse professional experiences, sharing their career barriers they
faced in their career paths, the strategies that helped them succeed. They described their professional responsibilities which involved association with organizations outside their normal responsibilities. They also described barriers or obstacles faced while accomplishing their professional responsibilities, as well as strategies for overcoming those barriers. The participants described their major accomplishments in their professional career and offered advice to aspiring female community college vice-presidents.

The key themes that emerged from the study include professional experience diversity, parental influence, importance of mentor relationships and positive role models, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) participation, facing and overcoming professional challenges, and the positive influence of serving others. Of the 4 study participants, 3 indicated they did not set out to become community college vice-presidents. Each participant felt it was her exposure and diverse backgrounds that got her noticed, and all were well prepared when the opportunity to serve in this role presented itself.
DEDICATION

I was fortunate to have had two strong women in my life who are no longer with me. Both of them were mothers and taught me how to be the woman that I am today through discipline and encouragement. They both had only an elementary education with lots of wisdom to share with each family member. These ladies had the knowledge of how to care for a family, maintain a home and conduct their own business affairs. They would tell you in a heartbeat that it was only possible by the Grace of God. They attributed their well-being to having a strong Christian foundation and instilled that in me. So, I am honored to dedicate the accomplishment of this dissertation to the late Mrs. Reather Singleton Christian and Mrs. Bertha Mae Banks King.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13, King James Version). This dissertation was completed by the divine guidance of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To everyone who has been an inspiration—knowingly and unknowingly, throughout this entire process, I owe to you many thanks.

I would especially like to thank Dr. King, each of my committee members, Dr. Frankie K. Williams, professors, Graduate School staff and administrators, and my proofreader. Dr. King your patience and firm push for completion over the past year and a half has been greatly appreciated. Thanks to each of my committee members for your guidance.

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I especially want to thank my husband, Larry Quinn, for his understanding, encouragement and support over the years in completing the coursework and dissertation.
I would also like to thank my children, Larry, Jr. and Amanda, for their understanding and encouragement along the way. To my sister, Joann Horton, other family members and friends who have provided a listening ear and cheered me on, I say God bless and just know I could not have done it without you!
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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The presence of women is becoming more and more prevalent in today’s workforce. Women are managing their roles and responsibilities in addition to making major strides in stunting the negative effects of demographic characteristics including gender, race, and ethnicity on leadership (Northouse, 2007). Women’s labor force participation rose rapidly between 1960 and 1980, reaching its peak in 1999 with a near 60% participation. The participation of women in the workforce has since declined to 57.2% in 2013, which is relatively high in comparison to historical standards (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). At community colleges women comprise 49.5% of the full-time faculty and administrative leadership compared to only 30.1% at public research universities. Women also hold approximately 28.8% of presidencies at public 2-year colleges, 23.2% at comprehensive baccalaureate colleges and 13.8% at doctorate-granting institutions (Eddy, 2010).

While women have made steady gains in obtaining positions in academic administration, most of the progress has been at community colleges, liberal-arts colleges, or institutions on the lower rungs of the academic hierarchy (Lively, 2000). It is at the community college level that women have held positions such as department chairs, deans, assistant deans, directors, vice-presidents, and ultimately presidents. The
roles of women as department chairs is hard to track because they often retain their faculty titles as well (Eddy, 2010). Eddy (2010) also stated that the future does look promising for female leaders and the most critical position leading to “the corner office” is the Chief Academic Officer (CAO). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) membership database, females hold only about 28% of the total number of college Chief Executive Officer (CEO) positions (“CEO Characteristics,” n.d.), indicating that women have yet to be accepted for their unique leadership abilities.

With an increasing presence of women in leadership positions in educational institutions throughout the country, there is still a need for “college and universities to bring about a more diverse women faculty with structured mentoring activities and professional development programs that will help to prepare these women for ascension to upper-lever administrative leadership” (Ballenger, 2010, p. 17). Their leadership style and effectiveness are under continuous watch compared to that of the male counterpart, which leads to a barrier or evidence of the glass ceiling. The term “glass ceiling” refers to invisible or artificial barriers that many women in higher education encounter, invisible barriers created by “attitudinal and organizational prejudices,” which block women from senior executive positions (Ballenger, 2010).

To further research the career success of females in community colleges, this study sought to describe the career paths, roles and responsibilities, barriers and obstacles, and successful strategies of female administrators employed in community colleges.
Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to describe the career paths of female vice-presidents in community colleges in relation to the challenges they encountered in their educational and career preparation. As the “people’s college,” community colleges have a reputation of being more welcoming of women as students, faculty, and administrators. However, the current percentage of women leading community colleges, which is hovering at 29%, begs the question of why parity is not witnessed with vice-presidents and presidents at the helm of these colleges, especially when 57% of community college students are women (Eddy, 2008). Data from the American Council on Education (ACE, 2007) show that women continue to increase their numbers in positions in college and university leadership. However, the gains have been slow. The presence of the invisible glass ceiling serves as a form of discrimination affecting women in higher education and is an important area of study identifying women’s lack of access to power and leadership status in higher education administration (Ballenger, 2010).

The numbers of women administrators in community colleges are increasing at a slower pace than males. Data show a gender gap when comparing executive/administrative/managerial positions and the presidency (AACC, 2014). Over the past three decades the demographic profile of college and university presidents has not changed a lot. In 1986 the average president was a white male with an average age of 52, who was married, held a doctorate and had served six years in his current position. Today the college president’s profile has not changed, with few exceptions. The average age is 61 and governing bodies seek more experienced leaders (American College President Study, 2012). There is a growing number of college presidents who are aging.
This study was designed to bring awareness of and enlighten the reader on gender disparities in higher education. More specifically, this study highlighted the career paths of female vice-presidents in community colleges as models for administrative aspirants in community colleges. The literature confirms that the career aspirations of female community college administrators are affected by common challenges such as 1) being a female in a male-dominated field, 2) family circumstances and 3) other professional and personal responsibilities. However, these career paths and challenges have not been adequately studied.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the career paths and preparation of female vice-presidents employed in community colleges in the state of Mississippi by interviewing and analyzing the curriculum vitae of four vice-presidents in community colleges. Participants for the study included women employed in leadership roles as vice-presidents. More specifically, the study sought to determine emergent themes regarding the career paths, barriers and obstacles related to female vice-presidents’ professional roles and responsibilities, and their strategies for success. The study is informative and inspirational to other women within the community college system who aspire to administrative positions as well as those who serve in leadership roles in all types of institutions.
The Research Questions

The research question that guided the study was:

What are the career paths and preparation of vice-presidents employed in community colleges in Mississippi?

In addition, the following secondary research questions were utilized:

1. How do participants describe the career paths to their current positions?
   a. What are the levels of academic preparation of participants?
   b. What are the professional experiences of participants?
   c. What career barriers or obstacles did participants face in their career paths?
   d. What strategies did the participants use in being successful in their career paths?

2. How do participants describe their professional responsibilities?
   a. What are the professional roles and responsibilities of participants?
   b. What barriers or obstacles do participants face in successfully accomplishing their professional responsibilities?
   c. What strategies do participants use in successfully overcoming barriers and obstacles to their professional responsibilities?

3. How do participants describe their major achievements and accomplishments?
   a. What are participants’ major accomplishments in their professional career?
b. What advice do participants offer aspiring female community college vice-presidents?

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms will be used:

1. Administrators in the context of this study are vice-presidents from community and junior colleges in Mississippi (Done, 2009).

2. Barrier is any obstacle that prevents forward movement or any event or condition that makes career progress difficult (Domenico & Jones, 2006).

3. Career Pathways are career choices, professional positions, and/or job titles held prior to becoming a community college vice-president (Carter, 2009).

4. Glass Ceiling refers to the invisible or artificial barriers that prevent women from advancing pass a certain level (Ballenger, 2010).

5. Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007).

6. Reflection (self) is the core difference between whether a person repeats the same experience several times, becoming highly proficient at one behavior, or learns from experience in such a way that he or she is cognitively or affectively changed. It is also identified as a problem solving technique (Stoeckel & Davies, 2007).
The Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 provides a conceptual framework for the research study. The conceptual framework for the study illustrates the exploration of female community college administrators in the areas (study variables) of career paths, professional responsibilities, and career aspirations. The data were collected through in-depth interviews, the researcher’s observations, and documents. The interviews offered an in-depth look at the female administrators’ overall career experiences.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical perspective used to frame this study was the Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST). Females in community colleges were asked to share their career pathways to the position of vice-presidency. The participants described their career advancement as it relates to gender disparities, aspirations/characteristics and qualities of female community college vice-presidents, as well as barriers to their success. Creswell (2009) stated that the feminist perspectives view is problematic to women’s diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations.
Feminist standpoint theorists make three principal claims: (1) Knowledge is socially situated. (2) Marginalized groups are socially situated in ways that make it more possible for them to be aware of things and ask questions than it is for non-marginalized groups. (3) Research should begin with the lives of the marginalized (“FST,” n.d.).

A central tenet of FST is that the experience of oppression itself potentially privileges people in terms of their knowledge. In regard to women, this is expressed in various ways, whether in terms of one’s everyday practice having been excluded from analysis, through a feminist rewriting of object relations theory, through the gendered division of labour, through relations of care, and so on. (Mosedale, 2014, p. 1117)

Feminist standpoint theorists and philosopher of science Sandra Harding extended and reframed the idea of the standpoint. “Their principal claim regarding feminist standpoint theories is that certain socio-political positions occupied by women can become sites of epistemic privilege and thus productive starting points for enquiry into questions about not only those who are socially and politically marginalized, but also by those who occupy the positions of oppressors” (“FST,” n.d.). This claim is captured by Sandra Harding thus: “Starting off research from women’s lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women’s lives, but also of men’s lives and the whole social order” (“FST,” n.d., para. 5).

This theoretical perspective is often used to improve the lives of women from a sociological position. “Building knowledge from women’s actual or concrete life experiences is acutely important, feminist standpoint scholars argue, if we hope to repair the historical trend of women’s misrepresentation and exclusion from the dominant
knowledge canons. And only by making women’s concrete life experiences the primary source of our investigations can we succeed in constructing knowledge that accurately reflects and represents women” (Brooks, 2007, p. 56).

The FST has been cited in other narratives and case studies to include Tullos (2011) and Drury (2010). Tullos (2011) used the theory as the theoretical foundation for the possible selves theory. The study involved eight women scientists working in academia who described their journey regarding views of self and career-related experiences. Drury (2010) intersected FST, gendered organizational theory and occupational jurisdiction. In Drury’s study three women discussed the barriers they overcame in pursing their positions as Chief Information Officers. “The findings for this study show the most significant barriers experienced were stereotypic attitudes and beliefs from others; a lack of recognition, support, and trust from others; marginalization; and narrowed pathways combined with “glass ceiling” effects. The methods used to overcome or eliminate the barriers, include support groups; perseverance; education, experience, and skills; behavior adaptations; and selling talents and expertise” (Drury, 2010, p. 70-73).

**Overview of Method**

A qualitative research design was used for this study. The participants were community college vice-presidents in Mississippi’s community colleges. The sample included participants from the community colleges who were identified via each institution’s website with the title of vice-president or a member of the presidents’ leadership team. Participants were sent a document approved by the Mississippi State University Institutional Review Board (MSU IRB) outlining confidentiality and were
asked to provide an updated curriculum vita. The participants were also given demographic questions and a request to participate in the study. Each participant was then asked to participate in an interview.

One of Yin’s (2009) three principles of data collection is the use of multiple sources of evidence. The six suggested sources are documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation and physical artifacts. In this study interviews were conducted using demographic survey information to gain background information on the participants (Appendix C) and an interview guide (Appendix B; Jacks, 2009; Vanhook-Morrissey, 2003). Participants’ curriculum vitae were reviewed. Collecting case study evidence through documentation has the following strengths:

- Stable—can be reviewed repeatedly;
- Unobtrusive—not created as a result of the case study;
- Exact—contains exact names, references, and details of an event; and
- Broad coverage—long span of time, many events, and many settings.

(Yin, 2009, p. 102)

Three interviews were conducted at each participant’s campus office and one interview took place at a local coffee shop off campus. This location arrangement was at the request of each participant. The interviews were conducted using an audio recorder. The data was transcribed from the recordings and coded highlighting themes that emerged. The research questions/instrument matrix in Table 1 below includes the three secondary research questions for the study and a list of the interview guide questions that addressed each research question. Each response was analyzed for the with-in case and
cross-case analysis in Chapter four. The demographic questions were also used in the data analysis.

Table 1

*Research Question/Instrument Matrix*

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<tr>
<td>2 – Describe professional responsibilities</td>
<td>Interview questions 16-20</td>
<td>Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Describe major achievements and accomplishments</td>
<td>Interview questions 21-22</td>
<td>Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Questions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Delimitations of the Study**

The study focused on the career pathways of female vice-presidents in community colleges in one state. Mississippi was selected due to the researcher’s interest in the state as well as a lack of focus on this state in the literature. The research design was qualitative in an attempt to broaden the understanding and viewpoints of the career pathways to this level of leadership within post-secondary institutions in the specified geographical area. Qualitative research was also used to illuminate the assumption that the world is made up of multiple realities, socially constructed by different individual views of the same situation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The sample of participants was delimited to females who were currently serving as vice-presidents in community colleges. The study cannot be generalized because of the small number of the sample population. Females were the focus of the study due to the repetitive literature
highlighting the slow increase of women to top leadership positions and the president’s suite (Jones, 2014). The interviews were conducted during the summer of 2016.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant endeavor in understanding the leadership roles of female community college administrators. The study is beneficial not only to current community college vice-presidents, but also to students studying in higher education/leadership programs who aspire to become administrators as well as community college faculty. This study explored the career development of female community college administrators in hopes of inspiring future female community college leaders. The results from the study and discussion of the career paths and experiences of current leaders serve as a model and will aid future aspirants to reach their full potential in community college leadership by understanding and preparing for the challenges that lie ahead. This study adds to the body of knowledge on women and leadership, organization and culture within community colleges, and on transformational leadership.

The results of this study could be used to promote a positive organizational climate/culture for females within community colleges. Through identifying challenges the female community college vice-presidents in this study faced, leaders could identify necessary areas of training to better understand the potential and ability of female community college administrators and employ practices that would embrace mentorship within the organization to grow their own replacements.
Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter one of this dissertation is an introduction. The background of the study, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the research questions, definition of terms, the conceptual framework, the theoretical framework, overview of the methodology, delimitations of the study, and the significance of the study were discussed in this chapter. Chapter two constitutes the literature review on the career paths of female administrators in community colleges. In chapter three, the methods by which the data was collected and analyzed are presented. Chapter four presents the research findings using case analysis and cross-case analysis. Chapter five presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of literature related to the research study. Key themes that emerged from the literature include career development and profiles of community college administrators—mid-level to presidents; career paths, personal and professional roles and responsibilities of women as leaders; mentorship; leadership styles of women; and career aspirations of women leaders. The first section of this chapter is devoted to women in leadership and gender disparities. The second portion is devoted to aspirations/characteristics and qualities of female community college administrators. Thirdly, the career experiences of female administrators in community colleges and barriers to their success is examined.

Women in Leadership: Gender Disparities

The profile of the typical American college or university president is a married white male who is 61 years old, holding a doctorate in education and having served in his current position for seven years. This profile has not changed in the past 25 years (“Leading demographic portrait,” 2012). The American College President 2012 provides an in-depth look at presidents from all sectors of American higher education and indicates a slight increase in the representation of women at the rank of presidency. The percentage of presidents who were women increased to 26% in 2011, up from 23% in 2006 (Cook, 2012).
According to the AACC’s latest trends, the number of female CEOs is 28% with 72% being male ("CEO Characteristics," n.d.). Other characteristics include ethnicity—81% are white; age—37% are between the ages of 55-59; tenure—the largest percentage has 5 to 9 years; and highest level of education—86% have earned a doctorate (Ph.D., Ed.D., etc.). These percentages suggest that higher education institutions have been slow to expand opportunities for women (Ballenger, 2010).

Gender disparities are present in all areas of industry, including government, higher education, business corporations, medicine and academic medicine (Salas-Lopez, Deitrick, Mahady, Gertner, & Sabino, 2011). It is an issue that has not only been analyzed in the United States, but in China and Denmark. In China economic development and culture differ from the Western world, but the figure for women’s employment is similar (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). Ballenger (2010) stated that the glass ceiling is evident in the supposedly progressive world of higher education. While women have made significant inroads into the senior leadership of American higher education, parity for women presidents has yet to be reached. The presence of female presidents within community colleges is on the rise. However, when female leadership in higher education is examined, the rate of change has slowed since the late 1990s (ACE, 2007).

In the 2007 ACE report (Eddy, 2008), the profile of women presidents was described with three significant comparisons discussed: 1) institutions served, 2) career path and length of service, and 3) family circumstances. The major findings within this report were: women held 34% of the presidencies at public associate’s degree colleges; in relation to career path and length of services, women presidents in 2006 spent less than their male counterparts in their current positions; and women were more likely than their
predecessors in 1986 to have previously served as presidents or provosts. Women were more likely than their male counterparts to have earned a doctorate. In relation to family circumstances, 89% of the male presidents were married compared with 63% of female presidents. More women presidents reported they were divorcees, separated, or widowed.

According to Ballenger (2010), women now make up the majority of students in America’s colleges and universities in addition to making up the majority of those receiving master’s degrees. This holds true in community colleges as well. According to the AACC Fast Facts, women make up 57% of students in community colleges (AACC Fact Sheets, 2016).

Women are well represented as campus administrators but not when it comes to the presidency. Community colleges are challenged in responding to a leadership crisis. Roughly three-quarters of community college presidents surveyed in 2012 indicated that they plan to retire within the next 10 years. The wave is already surging. Based on analysis of the AACC’S membership database, over the past few years about 600 community colleges have hired new CEOs. Data show a gender gap when comparing executive/administrative/managerial positions and the presidency. In 2011, 56% of community college executive/administrative managerial staff were women, but they comprised only 36% of college CEOs (AACC, 2014).

Aspirations/Characteristics and Qualities for Female Community College Administrators

In 1986, the first of the American Council on Education’s (ACE) college president studies was conducted. The study found that the demographic profile of the
typical campus leader was a white male in his 50s. He was married with children, Protestant, held a doctorate in education, and had served in his current position for six years. Thirty years later, there have been few exceptions to the change of this profile. Although the racial and ethnic diversity has lagged, there has been some headway in gender diversity. Twenty-six percent of institutional leaders are female. In 2011, associate degree-granting colleges had the largest share of women leaders. One reason for this shift is likely the closing of a large number of all-female institutions over the past two decades (Cook, 2012, para. 3-8).

The latest edition of the ACE report derives from a 2011 survey of more than 1,600 college and university presidents nationwide. The report’s findings include that the CAO is the most common path to the presidency and has remained unchanged since 1986. Other constants in this report is that presidents have spent their entire careers in higher education and have served as full-time faculty members at some point during their career. These data have remained unchanged since 1986 also (Cook, 2012). In a study which examined career paths and choices leading to the Senior Student Affairs Office (SSAO) for women at community colleges, results indicated an average of four job changes leading to the position. Most aspirants obtained a doctorate, pursuing a student affairs career track and gaining financial management experience, establishing credibility, and seeking and serving as mentors.

Historically, a successful leader is portrayed as being assertive, decisive, and authoritative. In society, men are expected to exhibit these traits, but some are uncomfortable with a woman who exhibits the same traits (Gill, 2013). Aspiring women leaders in higher education can be connected to national networking and professional
development organizations such as Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) and ACE (Hawkins, 2013). HERS is dedicated to creating and sustaining a community of women leaders through leadership development programs and other strategies with a special focus on gender equity within the broader commitment to achieving equality and excellence in higher education.

ACE, which has offered a variety of women’s programs and supports for more than four decades, is now reaching out to a new cohort of senior leaders of color who want to become presidents. It is likely that many current presidents—mostly white older men—will retire over the next decade, creating more opportunities to diversify the presidency. The task leaders are faced with is building “a critical mass of women” primed to assume top posts left vacant (Hawkins, 2013).

**Experiences and Barriers**

The career/work experiences and barriers found in the literature include interpersonal relationships, lack of opportunity and support to move to leadership positions, and balancing professional and personal responsibilities. It has been implied that women have historically banded together to promote women’s rights—to vote and to work outside the home. Their efforts can be continuously seen in campaigns for breast cancer awareness and research and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). However, they are not joining together to help move females into greater positions of authority in professional environments, including the world of higher education. Until women can join together instead of fighting with one another, they as a whole, will struggle to move forward (Jones & Palmer, 2011). Research reveals that relational aggression, including professional sabotage, occurs among women in the workplace. Although the number of
women who engage in aggression is small, the damage they inflict on other women’s reputations, careers, and emotional well-being is great. Collectively, their behavior contributes to erroneous perceptions of women’s ability to lead and to engage in productive teamwork (Brock, 2010).

In a study conducted by Drury (2010) women in higher education information technology organizations shared their barriers or obstacles which included classifications of internal barriers created by the individual, external barriers stemming from societal or institutional practices and beliefs, and those rooted in an androcentric male-centered society. More specifically, the participants encountered barriers such as stereotypical attitudes; stereotypical comments and preconceived notions; fear, denial and credibility; lack of trust; attributes male leaders tend to possess; narrowed pathways and glass ceilings; jealousy; isolationism; tokenism; good old boy network; family commitments; and salary inequities (Drury, 2010).

A common barrier/experience within the literature includes family responsibilities/situations (Jacks, 2009; Nibbelink-Struck, 2013). A majority of the presidents in Jacks’ (2009) study indicated they had family support with one sharing direct family responsibilities, one indicated having children in the home and child care being a big issue and another president indicated having aging parents. Others in the study were married or, divorced; one president had never been married.

Nibbelink-Struck (2013) found in her study that female presidents were faced with choices based on family situations. One participant discussed how she had to make sure her spouse or significant other had to have the same values and be supportive. The participants also discussed child care and being married, living in different communities
and maintaining real property. One participant shared about even delaying her college experience until her child was of school age.

**Related Research Studies**

In describing women’s career choice behavior, Vanhook-Morrissey (2003) interviewed five community college presidents and illustrates the four components of the women’s career development experiences. The components are:

1. **Formative experiences** which describes the background and early career experiences that influenced the women’s career choice decisions.

2. **Key developmental experiences**, describes the work roles, formal and informal learning, and mentoring experiences that helped the women gain technical and professional competence in community college administration.

3. **Multiple role challenges**, describes the challenges of balancing family responsibilities with the demands of a career and the influence of those challenges on the women’s career development.

4. **Career achievement**, describes the importance of work in the women’s lives and their satisfaction in their roles as presidents.

Vanhook-Morrissey’s (2003) study findings “indicate that socialization experiences, lack of exposure to female role models in nontraditional roles, mentors, formal and informal learning experiences, self-efficacy related to the performance of complex job responsibilities, and multiple role challenges were factors that influenced the women’s career development” (pp. 125-136).
After exploring the phenomena of the perceived barriers that prevent the upward mobility of midlevel women administrators, Fisher (2008) interviewed 20 midlevel administrators from Maryland community colleges. The phenomenological analysis of the study revealed six significant themes:

1. Personal time-management and family responsibilities hinder midlevel women administrators from career development;

2. Lack of advanced degrees, sparse opportunity, low pay, and sexism hinder midlevel women administrators from career advancement at the organizational level;

3. Mentoring experiences are positive and help career advancement for midlevel women administrators;

4. Midlevel women administrators aspire to executive level positions or are unsure of their aspirations;

5. Women dominate midlevel community college administration, which is a positive environment; and

6. Midlevel women administrators make career decisions based on family, self-satisfaction, and financial concerns (p. 137).

**Literature Recommendations for Further Research**

The literature on female professional staff in community colleges is limited. The literature review spans from the 1980s to present and suggests further areas of study to include more research to analyze gaps across identity differences like race and sexual identity to better understand factors that both impede and accelerate the pace of change.
along the path to truly equitable representation for women students, staff, faculty, and administrators in higher education (Allan, 2011).

1. Ballenger’s (2010) study recommended further evaluation of cultural and structural conditions and practices that posed barriers encountered by, and opportunities for women in upper leadership positions in higher education.

2. “More research is needed to analyze gaps across identity differences like race, sexual identity, disability, and age and to better understand factors that both impede and accelerate the pace of change along the path to truly equitable representation for women students, staff, faculty, and administrators in higher education” (Examining Women’s Status in Higher Education, 2011, p. 63).

3. “Further research needs to be conducted to explore the working environments of female professional staff in community colleges as they continue to be affected by barriers to career advancement and work and life balance issues. In addition, research needs to be conducted to explore the female working relationship and how women can support one another in their career advancements” (Jones & Palmer, 2011, p. 196).

4. “A recommendation for further research would be to describe how well currently available leadership programs are closing the gap between the numbers of males and females in community college leadership roles” (Gill, 2013, p. 63).
5. “Academia has presented inconsistent findings compared to other sectors. Typically, the public institutions and entities claimed more diverse representation than the private ones. In academia, however, the public institutions and entities have better representation among men and men of color, but poorer representation among women and women of color. All women are better represented in private institutions” (Colorado Women’s College—University of Denver, 2013, p. 24).

6. The case analysis of Drury (2010) “provided a foundation for future research into the barriers faced by other women Chief Instructional Officers (CIO) and women in other roles in higher education technology and methods used in overcoming barriers exploring different groups of women. The study also provided another possible area of future research to explore the barriers experienced by women who ‘worked their way up’ in the organization versus those coming in at the top” (Drury, 2010, p. 75-76).

7. Nibbelink-Struck’s (2013) study recommends future research on “women not supporting each other in the advancement of their career pathways” (p.147).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented a review of the literature related to the research study. Three major areas of research identified for the literature review were (1) women in leadership and gender disparities, (2) aspirations/characteristics and qualities of female community college administrators, and (3) career experiences of female administrators in
community colleges and barriers to their success. The review of literature is related to the conceptual framework of the study, which explores female community college administrators in the areas of career paths, professional responsibilities and career aspirations.

The literature review shows that the profile of community college leaders has not changed in the past 25 years and the increase is considered slow for the women who assume these leadership roles. Gender disparities are present in all areas of industry to include higher education and is not limited to the United States. Even though women are well represented in middle management (i.e., executive/administrative managerial positions), the data show a gender gap when it comes to the top administrative positions.

The literature reveals the career paths for women leaders at the community colleges is by way of CAO and SS AO with an average of four job changes to the position. Those women who aspire to become leaders in higher education are connected through networking and professional organizations. These organizations often provide support and aid in building the next generation of women leaders.

The literature also reveals the experiences and barriers faced by female leaders. These barriers include interpersonal relationships, lack of opportunity and support to move to leadership positions, and balancing professional and personal responsibilities. The interpersonal relationship and support in professional environments sometimes involves fighting among women and professional sabotage which leads to the perceptions of women’s inability to lead. The most common barrier within the literature includes the ability to balance family and work.
Lastly, the other related studies align with the literature review discussion of gender disparities, aspirations/characteristics and qualities of female community college administrators as well as providing the experiences and barriers of these administrators. The studies offer supportive advice to organizations and those women who aspire to become female community college administrators. The studies also share the diverse and similar career pathways of the study participants which included female community college presidents and midlevel administrators.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

Introduction

This chapter includes the research design and method utilized in this study. The study employed a cross-case analyses research design. “Qualitative research explores for understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4).

The study examined the career paths and preparation, professional responsibilities, major achievements and accomplishments of female community college vice-presidents, the obstacles they faced in their preparation and the strategies they utilized to overcome the obstacles and be successful in their positions. This chapter presents the following sections: research design, research questions, research site, participants, instruments and materials used, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures and summary of methods utilized.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design. “Qualitative research employs different philosophical assumptions; strategies of inquiry; and methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation” (Creswell, 2009, p. 3-4). Qualitative researchers learn how individuals experience and interact with their social world and the meaning it has for
them, which is considered an imperative approach in a case study research design (Merriam, 2002).

Qualitative methods include participant observation, in-depth interviewing and life histories. For feminist researchers—for whom qualitative methodologies are well suited—feminist methodologies reflect the goal of research by, for and about women. Despite treatment variation amongst feminists, all share the belief that historically, knowledge has been skewed by androcentric bias within methodologies and methods and that feminist methodologies should seek to correct this. Often, this is achieved through prioritizing women’s voices and through action-oriented research aimed at improving women’s lives (Code, 2000, p. 413).

According to the literature, Yin (2009) is one of the authoritative researchers when it comes to case study methods of research. Yin (2009) defined case studies in a two-fold definition:

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points and one result; relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, as another result; and benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (p.18)
Description of Research Site and Population and Sample

Participants for the study included four female community college vice-presidents within the Mississippi Community College system. The institutions are mostly rural and located in various counties and cities throughout the state. The participant pool was identified as 26 female community college vice-presidents. There are 15 community and junior colleges in the state of Mississippi and the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) serves as the coordinating agency. The 2-year colleges vary in size and “offer a wide variety of curriculum, trades and professional training opportunities to meet everyone’s need at an affordable cost” (Mississippi Community College Board, 2016). Their participation in the study was voluntary and the participants’ names and institutions were coded.

Ideally, the study population could have included all female vice-presidents from the 15 community colleges but this would have required excessive amounts of time. The website link to each of the community colleges was used to identify the vice-presidents at each of the institutions. Many of the institutions have multiple campuses and more female vice-presidents than other institutions. Stratified sampling was used to select participants for study participation. Inclusion criteria consisted of length of experience, previous work experience, ethnicity and education. Obtaining an informed consent was also an inclusion criterion.

After gaining permission from the Mississippi Association of Community and Junior Colleges (MACJC), an application was submitted to the MSU IRB to request a review of research prior to initial contact with the participants. Upon IRB approval (see Appendix A), participants were contacted via email requesting they serve as participants.
in the study. As part of the data collection, participants were asked to complete a brief biographical/demographical sketch and to provide an updated copy of their curriculum vitae.

**Instrumentation**

Data were collected using an interview protocol and through participants’ curriculum vitae. The research question that was used to guide the study was: What are the career paths and preparation of vice-presidents employed in community colleges in Mississippi?

In addition, the following secondary research questions were used:

1. How do participants describe the career paths to their current positions?
   a. What are the levels of academic preparation of participants?
   b. What are the professional experiences of participants?
   c. What career barriers or obstacles did participants face in their career paths?
   d. What strategies did the participants use in being successful in their career paths?

2. How do participants describe their professional responsibilities?
   a. What are the professional roles and responsibilities of participants?
   b. What barriers or obstacles participants face in successfully accomplishing their professional responsibilities?
   c. What strategies do participants use in successfully overcoming barriers and obstacles to their professional responsibilities?
3. How do participants describe their major achievements and accomplishments?
   a. What are participants’ major accomplishments in their professional career?
   b. What advice do participants offer aspiring female community college vice-presidents?

**Data Collection Procedures**

The data for this research were gathered using the interview process. Yin (2009) stated that interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information. The role of the researcher in the interview process is two-fold: “(1) to follow his/her own line of inquiry, as reflected by the researcher’s case study protocol, and (2) to ask actual (conversational) questions in an unbiased manner that also serves the needs of the line of inquiry” (Yin, 2009, p. 106).

There are three types of interviews (Merriam, 1998): (1) highly structured/standardized, (2) semi-structured, and (3) unstructured/informal. This study utilized the semi-structured interview where open-ended questions were asked and flexibility and exploratory techniques applied, and the interview flowed more like a conversation. “A case study strategy of inquiry explores in depth, one or more individuals. The researcher collects detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). Participant perspectives are the focus of the research.
Individuals who become participants are selected on the basis of their experience with the phenomena being studied, and on their willingness to be interviewed and observed (McMillan & Wergin, 2006).

Initial contact with the research participants took place after receiving approval from the MACJC and the MSU IRB. The MACJC identified the representative from each of the community colleges whose responsibilities include planning and research. An email was sent to each representative with a request to contact members of the previously identified pool of participants. Several of those representatives forwarded the request for study participation to the vice-presidents at their respective institutions. Others identified or updated the pool of participants for the study and forwarded to the researcher the email contact information for those individuals.

The email contained the request for the interview and the consent form. Participants were asked to share an updated copy of their curriculum vita for use by the researcher to uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) stated that documents are a third major source of data in qualitative research. Although some documents may have been prepared at the investigator’s request, most were produced independently of the research study. They are thus nonreactive and grounded in the context under study.

The interviews were expected to last 60 to 90 minutes each. They were conducted face-to-face and the actual length of the interviews was 25 to 76 minutes. Being that qualitative research requires field work, three of the interviews took place in the office at the community college where the participants were employed. One interview took place at a local coffee shop. This was at the suggestion of that participant.
Handwritten notes were taken and the interviews were audiotaped. The interview guide (Appendix B) was used also noting the date, time and place of the interview (Creswell, 2013). Merriam (1998) suggested beginning the interview with neutral, descriptive information. This information lays the foundation for questions that access the interviewee’s perceptions, opinions, values, emotions and so on. No follow-up interviews were conducted.

Reliability

According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research is not conducted so that the laws of human behavior can be isolated. Rather, researchers seek to describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it. This means the data collected can be interpreted in various ways, depending on the researcher, but if the research can be conducted by others and observed differently, the actual data should be the same. Creswell (2009) identified this as following a pattern of consistency. This was enhanced by the use of an audio recorded interview, with the participants’ consent.

Creswell (2009) suggested making handwritten notes, audiotaping, or videotaping. Even if an interview is taped, he recommended taking notes in case of equipment failure. Yin (2009) offered three principles of data collection: use of multiple sources of evidence, creation of a case study database, and maintenance of a chain of evidence. The first principle was addressed by the use of the case-study interview and the use of the participants’ curriculum vitae. The second principle was addressed through the application of HyperRESEARCH. HyperRESEARCH is a qualitative software package with a module called, “HyperTranscriber” that allows researchers to create a transfer of video and audio data (Creswell, 2013). Finally, the third principle was
addressed through strong documentation. According to Yin (2009) citations of evidentiary sources and tracing the steps with the case study report, database, protocol topics and case study questions ensures reliability.

**Validity**

Validity is strong in qualitative research studies if there is a good fit between the intent of the research (foreshadowed questions) and what is/was actually studied. Validity ensures accuracy. Validity is enhanced by establishing rapport with interviewees, unobtrusive observation (so that the participant is unaware of being observed), appropriate selection of participants, repeated patterns illustrated by the data, and sufficient detail in the data and depth of the analysis (McMillan & Wergin, 2006).

Validity and reliability are consistent through other dissertations in which case study evidence was collected: (Jacks, 2009; Vanhook-Morrissey, 2003). The validity of this study was enhanced by the random selection of participants who shared their career experiences as female community college vice-presidents in Mississippi’s community colleges. It was further enhanced by the use of the same interview questions for each participant.

As the researcher/primary instrument of the study the objective was to encourage females who wish to serve as future administrators in Mississippi’s community colleges. Attending organizational conferences such as Women in Higher Education Mississippi Network (WHEM) was inspirational and led to an interest of wanting to see how others succeeded in their desire to serve as vice-presidents at their respective community colleges. The study was commenced with the perspective that the number of females in professional and leadership roles are changing; however, there is still underrepresentation
in education. With the instruments and documents used and a review of Creswell (2009) and Yin’s (2009) preparation of collecting and analyzing case studies, the data were analyzed with the highest integrity and accuracy and with no preconceived bias.

**Data Analysis**

The qualitative research design shares some or all of the following characteristics:

- Searching for meaning;
- Constructed reality;
- Natural settings;
- Rich narrative description;
- Direct data collection;
- Concern with process;
- Inductive data analysis;
- Participant perspectives; and
- Emergent research design (McMillan & Wergin, 2006, p. 94).

The face-to-face interviews were transcribed word for word from the audio taped interview using HyperRESEARCH Transcribe software. Thematic structure of the interviews was conducted manually due to technical issues with the HyperRESEARCH software. Demographic survey responses were formatted using a table in Microsoft Word. The coding process took place next to omit the use of names or identifying information of the participants. The researcher presented a within case analyses for each participant, and a cross-case analysis. The interviews were analyzed several times to highlight any new themes that emerged from the interview. There was an exclusion of
irrelevant and redundant comments from the interview that did not contribute to the research study.

Summary

This chapter highlights the qualitative research methods that were used to conduct the research study. The instruments included the demographic survey, interview guide, and curriculum vita for each participant. The participants were identified as community college vice-presidents in Mississippi. A face-to-face interview was conducted with each participant. The interviews were conducted in a natural, comfortable setting—campus office or coffee shop. Each participant was asked for a copy of her curriculum vita and all four were received. The same interview questions were used to ensure validity of the study.

The participants in this study were chosen to provide “information-rich cases” for the study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998).
CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from the study. The chapter includes general information on each of the four study participants. This information includes data from the curriculum vitae, brief demographic survey and interview responses of the vice-presidents who consented to participate. The results of the interviews with the participants are presented in this chapter in response to the research questions below.

In an effort to maintain the anonymity of each participant, they are referred to by participant number. Every effort has been made to omit institutional names and locations that might reveal the identity of the participants.

The purpose of the research study was to investigate the career paths and preparation of female vice-presidents employed in community colleges in the state of Mississippi.

Research Questions and Associated Interview Questions

Research Question 1: How do participants describe the career paths to their current positions?

1. How did you come to be a college vice-president?

2. What were the most important factors that led to your becoming a vice-president?
3. When did you know that you wanted to be a vice-president?

4. What were your career goals when you were a teenager?

5. In high school and in college, how did being female influence your career choices?

6. How did your parents’ socioeconomic status influence your career choices?

7. What role did your parents play in your developing into a community college vice-president? Mother’s Work? Father’s work? Mother’s education level? Father’s education level?

8. Describe other things about your life situation (e.g., people, experiences, socioeconomic status) that influenced your career development.

9. Did you attend any leadership training seminars or workshops to help prepare yourself for the Vice-President’s position? If so, describe those.

10. Describe some of your personal characteristics (e.g., skills and abilities, beliefs, values) that influenced you in becoming a community college vice-president.

11. Was there anything about yourself that caused you to have doubts about becoming a community college vice-president? If so, how did you overcome these doubts/concerns?

12. Looking back over your career path to the vice-president’s position, what relationships have been most important to you and why? (If mentor relationship) Do you feel that the mentoring relationship was affected by your gender? If so, please explain.
13. Did you have any positive role models who influenced you to want to become a college vice-president?

14. Do you feel that you had to make any compromises in order to become a community college vice-president? If so, please describe them.

15. As you progressed up your career path, do you feel that you had to adapt your behavior in order to become a community college vice-president? If so, please explain.

Research Question 2: How do participants describe their professional responsibilities?

16. How do you like being a community college vice-president?

17. What are your current responsibilities as vice-president?

18. Describe professional responsibilities you currently have other than in your position as vice-president.

19. What barriers or obstacles in your life did you have to overcome as you progressed to the position of vice-president and while serving as a vice-president? How did you overcome these barriers?

20. Explain the value/meaning you place on work in your life.

Research Question 3: How do participants describe their major achievements and accomplishments?

21. How would you describe your professional achievements and accomplishments?

22. What advice would you give to other women who aspire to become community college vice-presidents?
23. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your journey to the position of a community college vice-president before we conclude?

Participants

There were four women who participated in this study. Each participant participated in an open-ended, audiotaped interview.

Table 2

*Overview of Participants (Demographic Survey Response)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Current Marital Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Caucasian – European American</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Caucasian – European American</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>61</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Caucasian – European American</td>
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**Within-Case Analysis for Participant One**

Participant One was interviewed on Friday, July 8, 2016. The interview was approximately 76 minutes in length and was audiotaped and transcribed. Table 2 includes a summary of the demographic information for Participant One. The findings from Participant One’s interview and curriculum vita are included below.

**Secondary Research Question 1: Academic Preparation**

Participant One earned an undergraduate degree in sociology, graduated with a master’s degree in sociology and entered a sociology Ph. D. program and was “All but dissertation.” After working several jobs—teaching as an adjunct, working as a full time lecturer, and teaching online at a local community college and an out of state community
college--she later returned to school after getting a divorce and raising a 7 month old child.

She earned all A’s during her senior year of college and finished her masters in two years while living in family housing in college. Her parents did not know how to help her but they knew the key was education. She was a first generation college student and admits to making a lot of bad choices such as not knowing how to withdraw from a class and not to take out student loans. She changed majors seven times as a teenager and failed undergraduate studies twice. She sees herself in a lot of the students that she comes in contact with.

Her favorite teacher taught English. Therefore, she thought she was going to teach English until ending up with her first composition assignment marked in all red. That’s when she ended up with a degree in sociology. After graduating from college she applied to graduate school in sociology.

**Secondary Research Question 2: Professional Experiences**

Participant One describes her professional experiences as a “long, busy road.” She was always juggling more than one thing and wanting to do more. This began with adjunct teaching positions and working in e-Learning at the community college where she is now employed. In e-Learning she developed sociology and other courses online and often did this on her own time. She was able to grow these two programs online. This program went from one course to over 18 and became one of the top ten majors of the college, which she thinks got her noticed over time. The participant was later offered a position as a lead online instructor. In addition to serving as lead online instructor she
became an academic instructor and was able to get involved with Career Technical education.

As the need for more technical programs grew in certain areas, she helped to develop appropriate programs for those who would make employees in those areas but struggled with college algebra. Learning how academics was different from Career Technical Education was a learning experience that allowed her to process the college as a whole. This helped her because as the academic vice-president at her institution she oversees career technical education, health science, academics, and e-Learning.

Upon the retirement of the previous dean of e-Learning she was asked to become the e-Learning coordinator which was a stepping position to become the dean of e-Learning. She struggled with giving away programs she had developed and hiring a replacement for herself. But, in the role as e-Learning coordinator she got to work on a grant with Workforce Development and this too allowed her to see yet another side of the college that she had never worked with. There was an opportunity to do workforce training with industries.

In the position as e-Learning coordinator she participated in statewide meetings, seeing how other colleges were doing things and began to expand programs not just in academics but in Career Technical Education and “dabbling a little bit in health science.” When the dean retired she became the dean of e-Learning. Having a department of her own, reorganizing it and overseeing 27 full-time employees and 150 adjunct instructors and having to do evaluations propelled her forward. In this position she learned administrative duties--assessments, evaluations, policies and procedures, and annual planning.
With the position move of the academic dean and major changes/reorganization at the college she took on many of those responsibilities as the dean of e-Learning. This position led to her credentialing instructors, attending meetings of CAOs, and getting in on the ground floor of the admissions department and offering dual credit courses to high school students.

Upon the retirement of her vice-president, the President’s cabinet received an email announcing the retirement and the participant received an email and had to determine if she was going to apply for the position. The participant felt her pathway had exposed her greatly to include the health sciences. “I felt I had enough to apply for the position, so I threw my hat in the ring for the grueling process.” The participant had four interviews—one with the committee, three with the president. There was an interim vice-president, with who she interviewed with as well.

**Secondary Research Question 3: Career Barriers or Obstacles in Career Path**

Participant One is a single mother and felt that limited some of her opportunities for socializing while in graduate school. She worked really hard and hopes she did not miss out on too much of her child's life. Her son was her motivation, but she does not know if he knows or realizes it. She stated that the male students would get together and go drinking at the bars, so sometimes being a female would limit opportunities to participate in those social activities. She felt that not being in the social group may have limited her opportunities for graduate assistantships. The assistantships are very competitive and pays a stipend to live and attend graduate school.

The participant did not see any barriers or obstacles in her education in general. Being female has not hindered her as far as job promotions and she has seen
approximately 50% male and 50% female employees in her previous department.

Participant One had a difficult boss at one time and she never knew if she had a job or not, or whether she was in the right or in the wrong. This was very difficult and she learned to deal with this person and how to navigate that space. She learned not to take things personally. “I learned it wasn’t about me.” Although she was not alone in the situation, it taught her skills that she applies today—“if someone is having a bad day, in this position, you just let it ride.” As she reflects, the majority of the hardship was unnecessary. Coping mechanisms, learning how to prioritize things, and seeing the bigger picture helps.

There was specifically one person who she thought should have been a mentor and did not offer any assistance even when she asked. Participant One and the other female individual both served in administrative positions and were not competing, and she got no assistance. She could not determine if it was her personality or gender. The two did not know each other.

Participant One feels very confident when it comes to the workload or day to day operations of her position. However, she sees herself as being a shy person and finds the social side of the job challenging at times. For example, presenting at board meetings or social functions makes her nervous. She loves to promoting activities with parents and students, but speaking to other groups is a fundamental part of the job that she is learning. Some parts of the year are busier than others with charity functions and other functions where she has to represent the college.

Participant One states that she has no social life. She is single and is very sensitive about being seen in a negative light at any time. She feels that her dating pool is
“slim” and she would most likely have to go out of state and it would be difficult. She has a busy schedule almost generally four nights a week, so her schedule would require a strong spouse. Wherever she goes she is recognized by people. It can be in or out of town, and those who know her, see her in a positive light which forces her to stay focused and making good choices. Participant One has also learned adaptable behavior when it comes to social media. She does not post anything, even if she is at home. She states, “As a sociologist, we used networking and even in e-Learning we used it to promote the college. In different capacities we have done a lot with social media, but as I became vice-president, I did not want anything misconstrued.”

Secondary Research Question 4: Strategies for Success in Career Paths

Participant One contributes her career path success to being mentored, wanting to do more, accepting challenges and opportunities, family support, and strong work ethics. Mentors include her female predecessor and a male co-worker in administration. The predecessor included her in conversations and internal meetings. Even though the participant did not have a vote, the mentor/predecessor would ask her opinion after a meeting and then in her role as dean of not just academics, but with Workforce Development and student services. Prior to that e-Learning had almost been isolated and she was given the task of building bridges and building relationships.

She states the female mentor never crossed the line of professional and friend, even though they were both females. They worked together for two years and she taught her how to be professional in her job and with others. This is an experience, according to Participant One’s mentor, “that you take the good stuff and build on that.” She taught her
how to respect her co-workers and to stay professional. Again the mentor was very inclusive, which really prepared her for the vice-president’s position.

The participant has strong family support which includes her parents, son, other female family members and friends. Her parents’ socioeconomic status positively influenced her career choice. Her parents both have only a high school education. Her dad was a transmission mechanic and her mother was a stay-at-home mother until she (the participant) began college. Her dad could not afford insurance and her mom later went to work for a bank and then for the county government. They knew education was important, but they could not tell her how to go about it. Today, they do not know what her work consists of but that is not important to them. They are just proud of her accomplishments. By working at her father’s shop, this allowed her to learn skills that now allow her to be able to communicate with career technical instructors in the diesel shop and highly technical shop areas. Her mother gave good advice about taking the good and leaving the bad when interacting with others.

In addition to her parents, her son has been the driver of her career and her life. She has always worked more than one job to make ends meet and while in school she kept a photo of him in her binder for motivation. Her parents and others have helped to rear him while she was able to work on her career. After relocating to Mississippi good friends have been there to care for him when he was ill. Other positive role models who have influenced Participant One’s career path are all the women in her family. She has pictures of her grandmother and mother and other female family members. She comes from a strong line of hard workers. Her grandmother, who has a high school education,
worked in a cafeteria and built several houses with plans they had drawn. Not knowing what she would become, her family supporters encouraged working hard every day.

**Secondary Research Question 5: Professional Roles and Responsibilities**

Participant One states that she loves being at the community college and likes being seen in a role to make positive change. She never thinks of herself as a vice-president. Her favorite time of the year are orientation and graduation where she gets to shake the hands of students and hand them their diploma. She also loves to see students come to get registered for classes. She also enjoys going through the hiring process, especially making the phone calls to new faculty members to offer them a job.

She says, “I always wanted to make change and I finally feel like I'm in a position to make policy and procedure changes that could make a positive change in students’ lives.” She constantly looks at data or new strategies and the way other colleges are being successful ultimately she wants to help each student have a better life.

Participant One is responsible for four main areas of instruction. They are academics--division chairs that report directly to her, career technical deans that have program directors, dean of e-Learning, dean of health science--all the allied health programs, library/learning resource centers, student success centers, writing center, and an orientation program. Within the college’s organizational chart, each area reports directly to her. She has about 200 full-time employees and about 100 part-time employees and she is ultimately responsible for everything from hiring, evaluations, assessments, any kind of student problems, and registration.

Participant One serves as CAO of the college where her role is to serve the president by informing him about anything that has to do with instruction. When the
position of academic dean was vacated, the position was not filled and she has now assumed this role. There are division chairs and ultimately she is responsible for all traditional classes. This means she is responsible for anything that gets a grade at the college—“anything from band to ceramics.” This includes online and career technical courses. The instructional areas have deans, and they all report to the vice-president.

At the time of the interview Participant One’s institution was preparing for reaccreditation with SACS. Part of her responsibility was to write about 20 very lengthy narratives. Additionally, she serves on different committees for the college. A lot of committee work is involved, trying to make sure everyone is operating on the same page. Some of the committees include professional development for the entire college, instructional policy committee and advising committee. She also does scheduling and creates classes. As the CAO she attends meetings with the other community colleges within the state, working together to make sure all courses are the same and to ensure they articulate general course offerings to the eight public universities.

“With the drive of wanting to do more and accepting new challenges and opportunities, Participant One has taken advantage of other professional development opportunities and attended the Mississippi Community College Leadership Academy (MCCLA). The attendees got to hear from presidents and other community college leaders and went through exercises on leadership roles. This program participation required reading several books. She was also afforded the opportunity to participate in the Educational Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP) which brings together representatives from the 15 community colleges. This past year there were representatives from the Alabama Community College system in attendance as well. The participant also stated,
“Of course being in the Community College Leadership program gave me the opportunity to learn and to prepare.”

Participant One does not have many responsibilities outside her position as vice-president. She serves on the e-Learning committee as the CAO and the core part of this committee deals with SACS. She attends all SACS-related conferences and meetings—anything on accreditation or articulation. She plans to attend the Mississippi Association of Colleges and Universities (MAC) Conference and the Mississippi CAOs conference and does not hold any office with these organizations. She tries to present as often as possible; however, she does not present as much as she did in her previous role. In this role she does not travel as much and attends conferences that pertain to the college as a whole; in her previous role she attended more specialty area conferences.

She presented last year at the Creating Futures through Technology Conference. Also in this position she assists with facilitating larger events. For instance in October her college partnered with another community college to facilitate the curriculum realignment for mathematics and science. There is a 5-year rotation where all fifteen community colleges come together with the eight public universities to discuss the curriculum.

Secondary Research Question 6: Career Barriers or Obstacles in Professional Responsibilities

Participant One is a positive person and does not see things as a barrier. She admits there will always be problems and difficult people. She encountered difficult people when applying for the job as vice-president. She finds it amazing the importance people put on a title and how it will make others behave. People said things to come out
against her to block her from having the job. She feels that if she were a man it would have been the same thing. Anybody who applied for the job would have had things said against him or her. As she stated previously, she went through four interviews before being offered the vice-president’s position and the president asked her about some things that had been said.

Secondary Research Question 7: Strategies for Success in Overcoming Barriers and Obstacles in Professional Responsibilities

Participant One states that she responds to barriers and obstacles in her professional role by not rising to the challenge. She has learned to let some stuff roll off her back. She does not get upset or retaliate. Her experience when attempting to overcome the challenges is to not let them bother her and things generally turn out okay. When she applied for the vice-president’s position there were those who tried to sabotage her. She states that once she had obtained the job as vice-president, her president shared things with her that had been said about him and they were able to laugh because that is just part of the experience of being an administrator.

Participant One loves what she does and states that whether it is at her current institution or anywhere else, she likes the challenge. She does not see there ever not being a challenge which gives her excitement and something to work toward in order to facilitate positive change.

Secondary Research Question 8: Major Accomplishments

Participant One still finds it difficult to believe she has completed her doctoral degree. She does not like to be referred to by the title “Dr.” She finds herself getting emotional because she has worked so long to get to her current position, realizing her
progression to vice-presidency within 10 years and how she has watched others work years to become deans. She is humbled and grateful for the opportunities she has been given. These opportunities include being able to complete her degree and the opportunities to work with great people who have helped her along the way.

She is also thankful for the opportunity to have attend the MCCLA and the Mississippi EPFP. Someone had to nominate the participants from their institutions and she says that she is thankful for the faith placed in her to complete the programs. She does not take credit for the achievements. She states, “It’s kind of like raising my child, it took a village to help get me here. There were key people who believed in me, gave me opportunities.”

In addition to the professional experience and achievements previously mentioned, Participant One has received other awards throughout her career. These include the 2011 Lamplighter Award for Effective Teaching in Mississippi Community and Junior Colleges, 2011 Meritorious Achievement Award (institutional award); 2009 National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development Award of Excellence; the 2006 Southern Rural Sociological Association Student Paper Award; and the 2002 Outstanding Masters Student Award.

Her professional service has included serving a president in several professional organizations. She has served as president elect and president of her college’s faculty association, president elect and president of the Mississippi Virtual Community College, CAO and as a charter member of the Optimist Club. Participant One is also a member of civic organizations, has authored two publications, and has participated in a number of group paper publications.
Secondary Research Question 9: Advice to Aspirants

Participant One states the important factors that led her to become a vice-president included her exposure to participate in the development of dual credit course offerings, attending meetings with her previous vice-president, the opportunity to participate in leadership programs and finishing her degree. Other important factors included being part of the CAOs, keeping current on both internal and external events, being in e-Learning, growing both the Career Technical Education and health science programs, and building a relationship with those two areas. The participant never had in mind to become a vice-president, or dean for that matter. She comes from a family who does a 40-hour work week and works hard. Weirdly, administration seems to be a natural and opportunities keep coming up and some days she would wake up wondering, “What am I doing?”

Participant One advises other women who aspire to become community college vice-presidents to stay true to themselves no matter the role, to not take things personally and to try to be mentors to others. She says that “just because you are a woman, you do not have to conform.” Her board of trustees is a thirty member board with three women on it. She does not go in and act like a man. She remembers she is a woman and does not feel she has to change her personality or who she is to interact with them. She says, “You don’t have to become aggressive or submissive. You just need to stay true to who you are.”

The other thing she advises is to not let things become personal. To become a vice-president or to become any top level administrator you must stay focused on the goals. At a community college, no matter what capacity, whether instruction, student
affairs, or even financial aid, it is going to be about the student. Participant One wholeheartedly makes every decision with the student’s best interests first and foremost. She says even if she gets in trouble, she is comfortable with herself at the end of the day.

“Don’t let it get personal, because that can happen really fast.”

Within-Case Analysis for Participant Two

Participant Two was interviewed on Friday, July 15, 2016. The interview was approximately 45 minutes in length and was audiotaped and transcribed. Table 2 includes a summary of the demographic information for Participant Two. The findings from Participant Two’s data are reported below.

Secondary Research Question 1: Academic Preparation

Participant Two holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Human Resource Education and Workforce Development. She also has a Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction and a Bachelor of Arts in English with an emphasis in creative writing.

Participant Two was a first generation college student who grew up in the middle class. Both of her parents grew up poor and worked very hard. When asked at the age of nine in 4th grade what she wanted to be when she grew up she said she wanted to be a college graduate, not knowing exactly what it meant. Going to college had been instilled in her from an early age and this had a great influence on her career as she observed how hard her parents had worked to reach the middle class status.

As a teenager she was greatly influenced by a high school teacher and even went on to earn both Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees to become a certified high school teacher. She has always felt that she would be in education as a high school teacher or
possibly work in administration and even thought she wanted to become a college faculty. When Participant Two returned to school to begin working on her Ph.D. her major professor, who had known her from childhood, informed her of the opportunity for influence at a greater level when in administration. He told her that if she wanted to be faculty that was great, but when in administration one sets policies and procedures that impact a greater level and degree.

Her major professor was a mentor and hired her for a position at a major university while she was thinking about working on her Ph.D. Her major professor literally told her while trying to make a decision to “get started; you’ll waste that money on shoes.” So, she started the Ph.D. program in the summer of 2005. Her brother completed his Ph.D. from another university in December 2005. There was a little bit of sibling rivalry in that she was determined she would need to finish her degree by the time she turned 35 as her brother did. She put a lot of thought into the comments of her major professor while working as an adjunct and working in administration. She then realized there was an opportunity to make a positive impact in administration. This was when the shift took place from being in the classroom to being the one making the policies.

Secondary Research Question 2: Professional Experiences

Participant Two began her current position as an associate vice president of planning and research at a community college when she relocated from a neighboring state to be closer to her husband. With the reorganization of the president’s cabinet each members’ title changed to vice-president. She has also worked in student services, as an educator in the classroom, and with the dean of academic services. Her career experiences also include having worked as a high school teacher in state, regional and
private schools. Prior to working at the community college she had no background experience but started freshman year experience programs and university-wide programs at two colleges and universities. Participant Two has a diverse experience and was later told after being hired for her current position that she “brought to them a really interesting breath of experience.” This diversity includes having worked for state, regional and private institutions in various capacities.

Although her career goals 10 years ago did not include becoming a vice-president at a community college, she is very grateful for the opportunity and feels like she has a chance to grow professionally which was what she was looking for. After having worked at a private institution as the dean of academic services about eight years ago, Participant Two began having conversations with her boss about growth opportunities at that job. She knew that she did not want to remain in that position for the rest of her life so she started to look for the next step. In doing so she became a finalist for positions as an associate vice-president and vice-president at other institutions. She did not get married until she was 36 years old so she focused on her education and career.

When the participant was younger her mother gave her a t-shirt that said, “Anything boys can do, girls can do better.” She told her she could do anything she set her mind to and should not just accept things. Her mother was an encourager and prepared her to push back, if she became weary to push through it and if she wanted something, to go for it. Growing up, Participant Two was involved in Student Government Association and other clubs and organizations.

Both of her parents have played an important role in her career development. While completing her senior year as an undergraduate her mom enrolled in school and
has earned a bachelor’s degree and graduated with a higher grade point average than Participant Two and her brother. Her father really did well for himself and is now retired. He has a high school education and began working as an electrician’s apprentice at the age of 19. He was willing to learn and was promoted to the business office.

Participant Two’s mother worked as a secretary in the School of Vocational Education at the college she attended and when she thinks of vocational education she thinks of training and development that happens in a classroom setting, but also of the job training which is part of the mission of community colleges. This gave the participant a great appreciation for the community college, even though she did not attend a community college because there were none locally for her to attend. It was also through her father’s successful career that she gained further appreciation for training and development in the workplace. His success helped to propel her to be a community college vice-president in that this is how the institutions serve their local employment industries.

After graduating from college with a degree in English, Participant Two entered into a master’s program and received school certification to teach English. She taught in a high school for six years and during her last year teaching she wanted to move back home after several family misfortunes--her grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, her step-brother committed suicide and she had thyroid cancer. She was miles away from her family. After moving back home during the month of September, when all teaching jobs had been filled, she got a job at a regional school. She was only there for a semester. The institution hired her on a “bait & switch” deal and the money was not there as they had promised. The following semester she was hired at a major
university, which Participant Two felt like was a permanent transition to higher education. Once she got her foot into the door she really liked higher education.

Participant Two has attended aspiring leaders’ workshops such as the state’s Independent Colleges and Universities Association workshop and was involved in the National Academic Advising Association. It was while attending the Independent Colleges and Universities Association workshop that she received the telephone call for an interview in her current position. While involved with these two organizations the participant had mentors with whom she connected and attended workshops they conducted that promoted women in leadership positions. Participant Two indicated she has several personal characteristics that have influenced her in becoming a college vice-president. These characteristics include her personality type, faith in God, and the ability to make smart hiring decisions and to meet deadlines.

Participant Two has a Type A personality and feels this characteristic may have influenced her in becoming a community college vice-president. She also feels her faith confirms this Divine appointment (her current position) because she is the only member of the president’s cabinet who has not graduated from her current institution. Participant Two is willing to learn and does not take the glory and credit. She builds on the philosophy of hiring smart people and allowing them to help her look better and giving them the credit they are due. The participant indicated that she had never missed a deadline which meant sometimes being at work as late as 11:00 p.m. while everybody else was at home. She attributes her ability to prioritize and meet deadlines as part of her Type A personality.
Secondary Research Question 3: Career Barriers or Obstacles in Career Path

When Participant Two was asked if there was anything about herself that caused doubt about becoming a community college vice-president, her response was no. However, she does admit to having concerns about the area she is in and does not know which questions to ask. She discussed this with her boss, expressing that she is learning a new system. She has worked in other institutions—private, public, regional, state and high schools. The community college system is a learning curve and she is working to build relationships with others throughout the state and this helps her to deal with her concerns.

Participant Two does not feel that she had to make compromises to become a community college vice-president. She feels blessed and considers her age and the fact that she does not have young children as reasons for not having to make compromises. She has step-daughters and she and her husband made the decision when they got married not to have children. This was decided prior to accepting her current position.

Participant Two referenced Steven Covey’s *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* when asked about having to adapt certain behaviors in order to become a community college vice-president. She iterated that one of the chapters, “Listen to understand, not to respond,” is the title most applicable when it comes to learning to be a listener. In her current role she has had to learn to listen to understand because—being an active listener allows her to respond appropriately. Prior to adopting this behavior she wanted to be a “fixer” and always felt she had to fix things to make things better. Participant Two realized that by adapting that behavior and listening first she could win friends and influence people better (“to borrow from Dale Carnegie”).

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Secondary Research Question 4: Strategies for Success in Career Paths

In addition to building relationships and networking, Participant Two attributes her success to influential mentors and positive role models. Participant Two first and foremost prefaces everything with, “as a woman of faith, believing the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, believes He has influence and impact on my becoming a community college vice-president.”

Participant two made mention of three mentors. One was a former boss who was an “encourager.” The boss was a woman who had risen up in management and saw similar characteristics in her. The two bonded because they were women and were trying to move up professionally. A second mentor was her major professor in college. This mentor was mentioned earlier when discussing professional experiences. He told her to think about administration because she would have the opportunity to have greater influence because “when you are teaching you influence the 30 in your class, when you are in administration you are impacting the larger group.” Her husband also was a great encourager in that he told her he would not marry her until she had finished her Ph.D. He also encouraged her to take a chance.

Participant Two did not identify people in the role of college vice-presidents with whom she had previously worked as positive role models. She saw people in those roles and thought, “I could do that better.” Considering she had worked at large institutions, she did not have direct contact with people at the provost and chancellor levels. Her positive role models were not in the role of vice-president. Participant Two mentioned her former boss as a mentor/role model. This boss was an associate dean in the School of Business at one institution that she worked at and attended. The role model was a woman
who had great influence in a male-dominated area. The second positive role model was the vice-president of a professional association. The participant had worked with her on transfer pathways, and she placed her on committees, and influenced her to move up.

**Secondary Research Question 5: Professional Roles and Responsibilities**

Participant Two feels blessed to be in the position of vice-president at her current community college. She had previously been lied to by the president of another institution she worked at about professional growth opportunities, and worked in a position where her job grew but her salary did not. After transitioning to her current position, she feels she is valued and her opinion matters.

Participant Two serves her institution in the role of vice-president of planning and research. In this position she serves as the SACS liaison (currently in the middle of a 5th year annual report). This position includes oversight of institutional effectiveness, strategic planning and surveys and conducting research. She is also responsible for professional development at the college, which is a familiar task she performed at a previous job. Part of her responsibilities in this position is to reach out to the campus community and workforce to provide the training for employees on campus.

Currently, Participant Two does not have professional responsibilities other than in the position of vice-president. However, she does belong to professional organizations and anticipates her involvement will change since she is new to this area of education and is still learning.
Secondary Research Question 6: Career Barriers or Obstacles in Professional Responsibilities

Participant Two’s biggest obstacle is that she is not from Mississippi. The participant stated that she has a “thick southern accent” but is considered an outsider. According to the participant, “the accent has nothing to do with being an outsider, but it has everything to do with being in a small town. Everybody attends the local community college and they hire from within; they hire their graduates. They also hire people who are connected and being in a small town, this has been a barrier.”

Secondary Research Question 7: Strategies for Success in Overcoming Barriers and Obstacles in Professional Responsibilities

Participant Two says the value/meaning she placed on work in her life has changed within the past five to seven years. She says work has been her identity for so long. She was a teacher, instructor and director of a residential college and that was a big part of her identity. Even though the value/meaning she places on work still has a great value to her, she tries to balance work and other parts of her life. When she was a single teacher her workday began before 7 a.m. and ended after 8:00 p.m. At that time she did not have to care for anyone. She was not married and did not have children.

Again, work is where she gets her identity, but this time it is an opportunity for her to contribute to the community college. Participant Two sees this as an opportunity for her to make a contribution to the lives of young people and nontraditional students. In this role she sees it as an opportunity to give value through the work she does instead of the work giving her value.

Participant Two uses the strategy of connecting with the community to overcome the small town barrier. She attends choir concerts, plays, basketball games, etc. Her
husband has clients in her district and they dine with those clients. When they find out she is from the local community college, they want to know if she knows certain people and this gives her the opportunity to go back to those individuals and say that she met their friends and they now have mutual acquaintances. She considers the community networking as a long term investment.

**Secondary Research Question 8: Major Accomplishments**

Participant Two describes her professional achievements and accomplishments in one word: “diverse.” She has done everything from teaching high school to teaching Master of Business Administration students. She started freshman year experience programs in two different institutions and she has worked one-on-one with students with disabilities and assisted them in developing their academic career. She feels she has added value to every job and institution in which she has worked.

**Secondary Research Question 9: Advice to Aspirants**

Participant Two advises other female community college vice-presidents to know their audiences, know their environments and adapt to them. At the participant’s current institution, she is one of three female vice-presidents. The participant wears a suit to work every day because they have a dress code—men have to wear ties and women dress professionally. She has the highest level of education of all the president’s cabinet members, including the president. She has been there the shortest amount of time and feels she is probably the most respected. Participant Two feels she earns the respect because of the way she handles herself and because of her education. She also thinks she is respected due to the familiarity there and the professionalism displayed in comparison
to one of her colleagues. Participant Two thinks it is a double-edged sword that she had not been at the institution as a student and advises aspirants to be confident because “you deserve to be where you are. Be familiar with the environment, know the rules, play the game and do a whole lot of praying.”

Within-Case Analysis for Participant Three

Participant Three was interviewed on Wednesday, July 20, 2016. The interview was approximately 45 minutes in length and was audiotaped and transcribed. Table 2 includes a summary of the demographic information for Participant Three. The findings from Participant Three’s data are reported below.

Secondary Research Question 1: Academic Preparation

Participant Three did not have an option when it came to going to college. The only option was where she wanted to attend college. She worked throughout high school in a local Chancery Clerk’s office and did not want to go to college because she preferred to stay there and work. After her first year of college she came back and worked during the summer and did not want to return to college. The Chancery Clerk made her go back to college, so she credits him with a lot of her success. She could have easily stayed there and been fine, but she feels she certainly would not have gotten where she is today.

Participant Three’s father had an 8th grade education, but in her opinion he was one of the smartest men she ever knew. Her mother completed high school and did not attend college either. When asked about her parents’ socioeconomic status and the influence it had on her career choice she stated that they were not poor, but certainly they were not rich. She is an only child and her parents would have done anything to provide
a better life for her than they had. Her father worked as a manual laborer most of his life and her mother was a bookkeeper.

Participant Three had a “weird desire” to be a probation officer as a teenager. Her undergraduate degree is in business education. The reason for this path is her favorite teachers in high school were her business education teachers—typing, shorthand and accounting. She always knew she wanted to go into counseling. She wanted to take troubled youth or people and try to help them not to make any more mistakes and become better. This is the objective of her job now, but not as a probation officer. She is glad that career path did not work for her.

Participant Three thinks when considering business education as a career choice, part of that was to be a secretary. When she was in school most girls/females either became teachers or secretaries, and as a business education major she could do either one. So in her preparation to become a teacher or secretary she, in a way, may have followed in the footsteps of her mother who was a bookkeeper. Participant Three does not think she dreamed big enough in college to be anything outside the stereotype.

The participant has earned a bachelor’s degree in business education and a master’s degree in counselor education. Her professional experience stems from working as a coordinator of a child care center in college, coordinator of recruiting at her current institution, director of development and currently serving in the role of a vice president. She frequently attends the Noel Levitz National Conference on Student Recruitment and Retention, the National Council for Marketing and Public Relations, the Council for Resource Development and the Mississippi Inter-Alumni Conferences.
Secondary Research Question 2: Professional Experiences

Participant Three admits that she never interviewed to be a college vice-president. She began her career at the community college as an academic counselor. At the time she began to work at the college, recruiting was not done so she started a recruiting program. She considers herself to have been very fortunate in being in the right place at the right time. Once she got her foot in the door she never interviewed for another job, “just moved up the ladder.”

Participant Three reflected on the day her college president called her into his office. She thought she was in trouble, but he informed her he had decided to promote her to the position of vice-president. She found herself speechless. Although she never set out to be a college vice-president, she prides herself for always trying to do the very best in whatever job or position she holds. She became more familiar with the college, became more and more passionate about it, and she thinks her passion for the institution led her along the lines to move into her current position as a vice-president.

Participant Three stated that starting at the bottom of the rung as a recruiter was the best training and the most important factor that led to her becoming a vice-president. She considers that position as the most valuable position she has ever held. She feels every employee should start out as a recruiter. She observed, “As a recruiter you have to know everything about the college. You have got to know about each campus and every program offered by the college. Recruiters are not expected to know every minute detail. But you have to know enough about it to be able to sell the school.” Participant Three’s experience as a recruiter gave her a broad knowledge of the college as a whole. To her,
when you work in a specific area, you tend to master that area and do not grasp the big picture.

Starting as a recruiter helped the participant to focus on the mission of the college, listen to the students and the questions they ask, understand the students, know where they are coming from, know what is important to them and know what they want to know. The participant says, “As a college administrator you want to tell them how wonderful your institution is and the students want to know about the fun and how to quickly complete their studies.” Participant Three says being a recruiter was the best training she could have had in that area.

Participant Three did not set out to be a vice-president, but when she got the promotion from her president she was extremely excited. Reflecting on the position, she states she likes the ability to be in a role to make a difference. This gives her the opportunity to address things in the college which she thought could be done better. This role gives her a broader audience or a bigger platform to try to push some of those changes or make some things better for the college.

Describing a life situation that influenced her career development was not a difficult task for Participant Three. “A natural disaster in 1979 was the worst thing, but it was also the best thing that ever happened to me.” The disaster hit while she was in college and her family lost everything they had materially—their house, clothes, etc. Her family did not have insurance; her parents were older and had literally had nothing. She had to come home from college to help them. They owned a farm and the livestock died as a result of the disaster.
After returning home to assist her parents, the Chancery Clerk who she had previously worked for called one of the community colleges to see if there were any job openings and that’s how Participant Three began her professional experience.

Participant Three saw this as the worst life situation in that she and her parents lost everything, but because of what happened her parents were able to get a loan and build a house. They lived in a very old house that was hot or cold with holes in it. In spite of the disaster, not only did the participant’s parents build a new home, she relocated and met her husband and began a great career. She shares this testimony of something devastating turning into a blessing and encourages others—“I think that was God’s plan.”

This Participant’s parents were very excited about her coming to work at the community college. The college had a good reputation and they were pleased for her to be a part of the institution. Participant Three is from a neighboring area. Her parents were older and this college was fairly close to home. The reputation and location of the college had a big influence on her going to work at this community college.

Participant Three has taken advantage of every leadership training opportunity and still does. She considers herself to still be in training to be a good leader and reads books on leadership. She was fortunate to be selected for Leadership Jackson which presented lots of great opportunities. She was unable to complete the program because her mother had a stroke and she stopped attending near the end of the program. Leadership Jackson helped her to develop a leadership style, although watching others lead and trying to emulate their style, has been the best preparation for her current position.
Participant Three believes being compassionate and a people person and having strong work ethics are personal characteristics that have influenced her in becoming a community college vice-president. She is compassionate and tends to be a people person and considers those traits important in a leadership role. She considers herself to be a hard worker and is usually at work by 7:30 a.m. and leaves most nights at 6:00 or 6:30 p.m. She does not consider her position to be just a job, but a passion, a calling. She loves her job and does not watch the clock. The participant does not find herself not wanting to go to work.

The participant rarely takes days off work and has accumulated a couple of years of sick leave. Her work ethic is a “big thing.” She works with people and feels that more is accomplished when you work as a team, rather than as an individual. Participant Three applies the philosophy of hiring people who are smarter than herself or who have strong technology or other desired skills. She is not intimidated with this technique and again desires someone who can work with her and they can be a “pretty good” team. She needs a variety of skill sets to complement her team.

**Secondary Research Question 3: Career Barriers or Obstacles in Career Path**

Participant Three has had doubts about becoming a community college vice-president and sometimes she questions if the college trusts her. She does not describe herself as being the most intelligent or polished person. “I am who I am.” She considers herself to be a professional and does not attempt to be the “prim and proper” person. “That’s not me, I like to laugh and have fun, sit down, eat and visit.” Often her doubts bring about the questions of “Am I good enough? Am I educated enough? I don’t have a Ph.D.” Obtaining a Ph.D. is something she wishes she had done a long time ago. She
often questions whether she made the right decision. She rarely makes a decision and
tells her staff not to just agree with her; she wants them to be a sounding board. She
wants them to think of all the positive and negative outcomes of a situation.

Participant Three has always wanted to be her best at work and as a wife and
mother. She considers her most important role as being a mother. She feels her biggest
challenge as a female vice-president has been balancing work and family. She does not
think men have a balancing issue because some of them are too overbearing. The way
she overcame this challenge was to bring her family to work with her (not literally 8:00
a.m. to 4:30 p.m.). There was hardly any event that she planned or was a part of that her
family did not attend. When her children were young, they attended every ball game,
employee appreciation and other events that took place. She tried to keep them involved
with her. Now her children are “grown and gone, so that is not a big issue.”

Participant Three feels she has had to learn patience more than anything else as
she progressed up her career path. When she sees something that she feels needs to be
changed, she wants to change it. By doing so she may have ruffled some feathers during
the climb because of being impatient. She says she does not know if she is odd, but she
describes herself as who she is and that is how she has always been. She does not know
if her gender has affected her and does not feel that she has had to fight against the
establishment to get to where she is.

**Secondary Research Question 4: Strategies for Success in Career Paths**

The strategy Participant Three uses to overcome the self-doubt is to remember
that she works hard or harder than others who may seem to be smarter or possess other
skills. She keeps current with the trends and other information related to community
colleges. She feels that her passion for the job is strong and can override any shortcomings she has about being in the position of a community college vice-president.

The Participant feels that relationships have been very important in her career path to the vice-president’s position. There are several that were shared. The first was the Chancery Clerk she had worked for. He did not give her a job, but helped to open the door for her. There is a relationship with her current president and first lady. The first lady was described as a second mother after the passing of her mother. “She took me in and she would tell me all the time, you know you can do it, hold your shoulders up, don’t slouch and all that.”

Other important relationships have been with people she has worked with on a daily basis. She refers to them as her truly extended family; they are her friends. Many people use the terms family and friend at the institution, but this has a special and true meaning for Participant Three. She considers these relationships with people over the entire campus in different roles as crucial to her success.

One relationship the Participant described that brought tears to her eyes was with the lady who cleaned her office and is now deceased. She would brighten her day. When she would ask the lady how she was doing her response was “Too blessed to be stressed!” Other relationships include both fellow employees and the many alumni and donors of the college. Participant Three has gotten to know many people in her current role and one of the college’s most consistent donors refers to her as her adoptive daughter and they have become very close. This list could just go on and on, but she truly loves the people she works with and refers to these relationships as just excellent.
There are two mentors that Participant Three said have been vital to her success as a vice-president. One is the college president and the former director of development who was her boss for a while. They both took her in and worked with her. They would tell her when she did things they thought were wrong and told her when she did things they thought were right. She does not feel her gender affected their relationship and they have been instrumental in her success as she has learned from them. She recapped on an earlier statement about her current community college president in that she will never manage to be like him, but tries to be more like him—referring to his leadership abilities.

Participant Three was the first female vice-president at her institution; therefore, there were no role models for her to look up to. However, she had high school and undergraduate college teachers who were good influences and good role models. There were also teachers on campus when she came to work who were also considered great role models.

Secondary Research Question 5: Professional Roles and Responsibilities

Participant Three loves her job as a community college vice-president. She has worked for her institution for 38 years and people ask her when she is going to retire. She says they think she is crazy in that she would make more money in retirement. She says she is not ready to retire, but admits she thinks about it more now that her husband is retired and she has grandchildren.

The participant believes strongly in the mission of the community colleges and does not think she would have been very successful as a vice-president at an institution of higher learning. Students who are bright get to attend the colleges and universities and many of the students are not ready. She feels that a student who scores 6 on the
American College Test (ACT) is just as bright as one who scores 36 on the ACT and that the community college is their only opportunity. She loves her role because she can influence some areas that can make a difference and help the students, which is most rewarding. She says 99% of the time she loves her job and keeps in mind everybody has bad days. Participant Three sees her job as a new world every day. Recently she assumed the responsibilities of a fellow vice-president who retired and is excited about the new challenge. It gives her a new perspective on doing things and being bigger and better.

Participant Three has a wide range of current responsibilities which includes enrollment services, student recruiting (marketing and getting the students in), admissions and records, community relations, public relations, sports information, student recreation, a student outreach group, foundation, alumni, marketing, and special events for the college. Her duties also include assisting the president. Examples of this aspect is that she accompanied the Board of Trustees to a trustee convention and she will assist with legislative affairs. However, she is hoping someone will soon assume these duties.

The professional responsibilities of Participant Three do not expand much beyond her current duties in that she really does not have time to do much more. She does serve on the board for a retirement/assisted living home in the local community. This assignment is somewhat in relation to her alumni/foundation responsibilities in that many of the college’s donors live at the facility. Even though she is not serving in any other leadership roles, she takes on the responsibility of being a positive and professional marketer for the college. “Anywhere and everywhere I go, I try to talk up the school and
what we have to offer.” Again, this relates to her current responsibilities, but she sees it as a big part of those professional duties.

Secondary Research Question 6: Career Barriers or Obstacles in Professional Responsibilities

Participant Three’s greatest career barriers or obstacles have been the fear of public speaking and a lack of confidence. Speaking in front of others makes her very uncomfortable and she gets nervous even though she has to do it a lot. She is afraid she will say something wrong, use bad grammar and embarrass herself. The participant does not always feel confident in what she is doing or feels that she does not meet the expectations of her president. She feels that she lacks confidence in those two areas.

Secondary Research Question 7: Strategies for Success in Overcoming Barriers and Obstacles in Professional Responsibilities

The strategy of overcoming the career barriers and obstacles for Participant Three is to continue with the public speaking and she believes the more she does it the more the nervousness subsides. On the day of her interview for this study, she presented during the student services retreat and was nervous. She knew everyone in the room, many of them she considered to be “buds” and was still nervous. She talked with the group about a big event that would soon take place, an event she is excited and passionate about and was still quite nervous. She did not sleep well the night before and kept playing over and over in her head the things she needed to remember to say. She had written notes and should have been able to “wing it” but did not. The participant saw this as the lack of confidence and public speaking fear that took over. Her response was that she thinks it went okay in that she did not receive any negative feedback.
Participant Three considers the value or meaning placed on work as very important to her. She feels that a lot of self-worth come from work. She feels that in her role as vice-president she can make a difference and is doing something productive. She sees her position as helping other people and considers it as a calling and that it is what she was meant to do. The participant’s work is her identity, and she has always wanted to work since she was old enough to work. She enjoys the position and sees her role as an opportunity to give back, helping someone through her service in the role as vice-president.

Secondary Research Question 8: Major Accomplishments

Participant Three is excited about the accomplishments she has made in the vice-president’s position and along the path to that position. These accomplishments include organizing major college events, campaign fundraising, organizing a student outreach group, implementing policies from a college administration level and enhancing techniques in student enrollment services. She is extremely excited about a huge college celebration within the next year that she will be leading.

Her capital campaign efforts have included leading a major campaign to raise money to rebuild a building on the college’s main campus that was destroyed by fire. She thinks that was a great achievement. She also prides herself with the accomplishment of organizing a student outreach group for the college and having the opportunity to serve as a positive role model in the lives of the students involved. She has also worked with others to make it easier for students to register. Even though it does not seem like she has accomplished a lot, she knows the institution has come a long way and thinks that is a big accomplishment.
In addition to her professional accomplishments, she has been the recipient of a number of honors and awards. The awards received at her institution include an award with Emphasis on Excellence and Enrichment, outstanding administrator, distinguished administrator, Life Star and Hero Awards. She has also been recognized by the Mississippi Business Journal as one of 50 Leading Business Women, recipient of the Mississippi and the Arts Week Dedication and the Delta Kappa Gamma Red Rose Award.

Secondary Research Question 9: Advice to Aspirants

Participant Three shares that she did not set out to be a vice-president, nor does she want the responsibility of being a community college president. She is asked quite often about taking on the position as president since she has a broad, strong knowledge of the institution. The participant enjoys the supportive role and restates her opinion of everyone having to start by recruiting, by which one will learn a lot. She considers herself fortunate in having the opportunity to work with “some of the best people in the whole world, at the best college around, and for the best president!”

Her advice to other women who aspire to become community college vice-presidents is to work hard and be passionate about what they are doing. “If they are in an area and lack excitement and passion they should consider another career. If they can work hard and become passionate, it is a position in which they can accomplish a lot. So, go for it, dream big!”
Within-Case Analysis for Participant Four

Participant Four was interviewed on Thursday, July 21, 2016. The interview was approximately 25 minutes in length and was audiotaped and transcribed. Table 2 includes a summary of the demographic information for Participant Four. The findings from Participant Four’s data are reported below.

Secondary Research Question 1: Academic Preparation

Participant Four has received a Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Social Sciences Adult Education, a Master of Arts degree in Secondary Education and a Doctor of Education degree in Administration of Higher Education. As a teenager, Participant Four wanted to be a teacher and mother. While attending a college reunion recently, the participant and college friends talked about how amazing it was that seven close female friends, with the exception of one, had become teachers. They went on to say they did not have a lot of choices back then. She graduated from high school in 1975 and “no women had been to law school at any local state law school” so there were not a lot of choices or a lot of encouragement to do anything different. Participant Four could not stand the site of blood and went with teaching. The career has been very rewarding and pleasing. She states that she has no regrets but neither of her female children are interested in an educational career.

Both of her parents encouraged her to get an education. They made it clear that she and her siblings were going to go to college. “I grew up with a lot of I want you to have it better than we did.” It was not a choice and they made provisions for them. She says, “Looking back, it was a bit of a miracle. I’m not sure how they did it.” Her father was an administrator in education with a specialist degree and her mother was a
homemaker with two years of business school. Her father encouraged her to be a teacher as he could see the characteristic of patience that would be needed for a teacher. This really did not have any direct influence on getting into administration, but her parents were supportive.

**Secondary Research Question 2: Professional Experiences**

Participant Four began her administrative career out of state having served as an assistant dean, director and dean, and interim president respectively. These positions were in different areas of the college in each capacity. These administrative opportunities came about as someone abruptly left the college where she previously worked, and from there, the participant later assumed the upper level roles in administration. She attributes this to opportunity and timing. She feels that having her doctorate, as well as her work ethic and the ability to get along with other people, were factors that led to her position as vice-president.

Although she never aspired to become a vice-president, while serving as an interim president she really enjoyed administration and decided it was something she wanted to do. And at age 40, she received a lot of encouragement. Participant Four’s husband has a family of educators to include his father, two brothers, and aunts and uncles. When she was married she got a job through his uncle working as a library aide and from that a job at a local community college. So, being around family members who were in education gave her knowledge about opportunities and encouraged her to take advantage of those opportunities and “things just went up from there.”

Participant Four stated that she attended quite a few meetings that were at the state level while out of state and currently attends similar meetings in Mississippi. These
statewide meetings include discussions that affect all of the community colleges and serve as very good networking opportunities. It is helpful to know someone at a different college who might have a similar problem or situation. She is knowledgeable of courses and leadership programs that prepare one to become a college president, but she did not attend any of those.

Participant Four has a number of personal characteristics, skills, abilities, and beliefs that influenced her becoming a community college vice-president. She sees herself as open without a lot of mystery behind herself; “what you see is what you get.” She enjoys talking and listening to people. Although she feels that she talks more than listen, she considers herself to be a good listener. She is often sought by others, even back to high school and college, to talk to her about things. She loves to solve problems and does not mind making decisions when one has to be made. The participant is patient, likes working with students and likes being in a service environment helping others.

Secondary Research Question 3: Career Barriers or Obstacles in Career Path

Participant Four faced the traditional career barrier or obstacle of balancing family and work. She started her family late and at age 40 she had an 8 year-old and a 5 year-old. She states that with good support and encouragement from her husband it all worked out. She also had a little concern about being the boss and not having a lot of teaching experience.

Participant Four also faced gender pay discrimination issues. She began her career out of state, and there were administrators at the college where she worked who were all male, and she was the only female on the president’s team as a dean. She took the president to breakfast one morning and asked if he realized these men with less
education (she had a doctorate), much less experience at the vice-presidential level and
less responsibility were being paid more money. The president did think about their
conversation and he left the college and it actually had to come down from the state level
that there was need for a female at the vice-president’s level. This state, about twenty
years ago, had a lawsuit regarding minorities and females in upper level administration.

The participant was also faced with a personal compromise of sacrificing a family
friend relationship. The two were about the same age, working in the same office at the
same college. After the abrupt vacancy of an interim position at the college, the
participant got the job and the family friend has not spoken to her in over 20 years
because of it. The person was part of her extended family and they were family friends.
Their mutual presence has gotten better in the last couple of years, which sheds light on
the beauty of maturity. She would not say anything or even speak to the participant in 22
to 24 years. The non-communication went on during Christmas and even with the death
of a family member.

**Secondary Research Question 4: Strategies for Success in Career Paths**

Success strategies shared by Participant Four involves not hesitating when it
comes to making decisions even if the decision is a difficult decision. She states she can
be objective about the decision but is not sure that is always good. She realizes it does
not make her a great humanitarian, but she can be confident with the decisions she
makes. The most important relationships to Participant Four along her career path have
been that of family, self-appointed mentors and other leaders within the instructional
community of the colleges where she works and has previously worked. She states,
“Family is not always present while attending graduate school or with you when you are
working late, but you have to have that family patience and encouragement and understanding.” The participant has also been able to rely on “extended family who have had experience doing similar things and it was good to go to them for advice and it was wonderful to have them as family mentors.” She says being from out of state, “has also been important to have somebody back home to call and vent to, or ask questions without the intimidation of them thinking you are stupid. It has been good to have my long distance female friend who is almost in an identical position.”

Participant Four indicated she had a self-appointed mentor. This was someone she looked up to tremendously for his judgment. He was a wonderful man who died suddenly last year. She does not believe gender had “a single thing to do with it. He was just a good person and allowed me to pepper him with questions and to whine some.” Another strategy identified by Participant Four for overcoming career barriers or obstacles was to identify leaders within the instructional community at the college who she could listen to, go to for advice and run things by before rolling something out, particularly something new. Participant Four had extended family who worked in similar roles. However, she did not see them as role models. Even though they were successful, it was not that she wanted to be like them. “She felt really lucky on her job.”

As the participant progressed up her career path, she did not feel that she needed to adjust her behavior to become a vice-president. She says she is not a big party person and that eliminated the issue of being concerned that the community colleges are usually in small communities. She thinks that even at age 60, she could use a dose of maturity to take things a little more seriously sometime or feel a little more urgency.
Secondary Research Question 5: Professional Roles and Responsibilities

Participant Four loves being a community college vice-president. She rates her job a twelve on a scale of one to ten. She feels blessed and thankful. Her current roles and responsibilities include the SACS reporting where she serves as the liaison to the agency, all of the instructional programs, vocational development, and the day-to-day operation of two campuses.

In addition to her regular vice-presidential duties, she is a member of the CAOs Association and the chair of the uniform course numbering committee. Participant Four has participated in the MCCLA and the EPFP. She has also served on a Policy Advisory Committee and All Academic Committee (out of state, state-wide projects); she has also served on two off-site SACS visiting committees and approximately six on-site visiting committees and participated in One Substantive Change visit.

Secondary Research Question 6: Career Barriers or Obstacles in Professional Responsibilities

Participant Four describes one of the biggest career barriers or obstacles as that of a foiled family relationship. Others include building mutual trust in people, breaking into the “good-old-boy” arena when working outside Mississippi, job relocation and travel when her children were younger. She also finds herself having to push back from males in her current position. “If you go to work with industry or if you go to a government function, you feel you receive a little girl pat on the head from men who are external to the college.”
Secondary Research Question 7: Strategies for Success in Overcoming Barriers and Obstacles in Professional Responsibilities

Participant Four offers these suggestions for overcoming barriers and obstacles in professional responsibilities. She suggests “building trust so people are not afraid to tell you things you need to know in fear of how you might react. It’s all about trust and keeping confidences.” Although her children are grown now, having that support system in your spouse or family member is important. Finally, she suggests “when you feel that you are not respected by males external to your organization, just blow them off because you do not have to go back and work with them every day.”

Participant Four also suggests having a balance in the value or meaning placed on work in life. Personally, she feels she has placed too much value on work but enjoys it and thinks about it sometimes when she is off work. She recalls reading if your identity is who you are professionally, then you don’t really have much of a life. She states she has a great family and loves being with them. She has been working for 37 years and has been a vice-president for almost 20 years, which is almost one-half of her professional life. She finds work to be a good part of her identity and will need to work on that because when she retires she will miss this huge part of who she is.

Secondary Research Question 8: Major Accomplishments

Participant Four describes her major achievements and accomplishments as low key in that she really did not aspire to get the dean’s job, which led to the vice-president’s position. She has never aspired for leadership roles in state organizations or national organizations or gone for offices in those. She enjoys working locally or at the college and working with people.
Secondary Research Question 9: Advice to Aspirants

Participant Four encourages those who aspire to become female community college vice-presidents to start young, to get as much teaching experience, including online teaching, if they want to aspire to the position of academic vice-president, become familiar with technology, get their education as early as they possibly can, and to get a good network of male and female friends and professional coworkers.

Her advice also suggests to not listen to negative comments such as, “you cannot do it, especially if you can, because you want to have a family. You can do both.” She says to set one’s sights and go for it, to not be afraid to move around and not to expect to move up in one organization from the bottom to the top. She says it is hard to move sometimes, but be willing to move to other positions. “If you love that institution sometimes you can come back to whatever you wanted to be, but going away strangely enough makes you seem more attractive and it certainly gives you great experience to get another perspective.”

Other advice is to be open-minded and not do what she did in terms of not moving. She has seen firsthand a lot of people, men and women, be successful by moving around. She goes on to express her humbleness indicating not every day is perfect. She enjoys the everyday variety, with the exception of work on a SACS report. She says people are great and if you do not like people and students, you should not think about getting into the position of vice-president.

She also shared the results of another dissertation which she participated in on Women in Locus of Control. Prior to the study she had not had it explained in this manner. “Locus of control is how much individuals feel that they are responsible for
what happens to them. Do you feel like you are just being battered around in life or do you feel like you’ve got it? Do you have a path and a plan?” Of all the females in that study who completed the survey, she was the one who had the least locus of control and felt like she had the least effect on what was going on. This was due to two things. One is she really did not aspire to be a community college administrator and two she wanted to be a high school history teacher.

Cross-Case Analysis

The themes resulting from a cross-case analysis of the data from interviews, curriculum vitae, and brief demographic surveys for the four cases are presented in detail. The cross-case analysis findings are presented by the interview questions. Tables are used to summarize the participants’ responses to each interview question. Interview questions 1-15 relate to research question 1 and secondary research questions a, b, c, and d. Interview questions 16-20 relate to research question 2 and secondary research questions a, b, and c. Interview questions 21-22 relate to research question 3 and secondary research questions a and b.

During the coding process, the following themes emerged for secondary research questions of the study.

Interview Question 1: How did you come to be a college vice-president?

The theme that emerged from the interview data regarding the route to the participants’ current position as vice-president was a diverse background. Each of the vice-presidents indicated their various pathways which range from adjunct instructors, recruiters, and department coordinators to deans and directors.
Table 3

**Cross-Case Analysis: Diverse professional experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Diverse Professional Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>Adjunct instructor (in and out of state), lead online instructor, e-Learning Coordinator, Dean of e-Learning/Academic Dean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>Classroom educator, dean of academic services, student services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>Academic counselor, recruiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>Dean, vice-president (out of state)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview Question 2: What were the most important factors that led to your becoming a vice-president?**

The themes that emerged from interview question two included exposure, opportunity, and timing.

Table 4

**Cross-Case Analysis: Exposure, opportunity and timing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Themes: Exposure, opportunity and timing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>Distance learning exposure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>Breadth of experience—public, private, state and regional schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>Broad knowledge of the institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>Just opportunity and timing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview Question 3: When did you know that you wanted to be a vice-president?**

The theme that emerged from interview question 3 was that the participants had no plan to become a community college vice-president.
Table 5

Cross-Case Analysis: No ambition to become vice-president

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: No ambition to become vice-president</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>“Honestly, I don’t think I ever had that in my mind.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>“I knew I didn’t want to be at that job for the rest of my life, so I started to look for the next step.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>“I really did not set out to do that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>“I really never aspired to do that.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Question 4: What were your career goals when you were a teenager?

The theme that emerged from interview question four was that three of the participants each shared the goal of becoming a teacher (one wanted to also become a mother) as a career goal. One participant was interested in becoming a probation officer.

Table 6

Cross-Case Analysis: Educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Educators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>“I thought I was going to teach English.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>“I felt like I would always be in education.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>“Probation officer.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>“I wanted to be a teacher and a mother.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Question 5: In high school and in college, how did being female influence your career choices?

The theme that emerged from interview question five was stereotypical careers for women. The youngest of the participants indicated that being female did not
influence her career choice. One of the other participants indicated that by being a teacher she would secure a job regardless of where she relocated.

Table 7

*Cross-Case Analysis: Stereotypical career choices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Stereotypical Career Choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>“In high school being female really didn’t influence her career choice.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>“I thought if I can be a teacher, then where my husband is, I can have a job.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>“Females either became teachers or secretaries.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>“No women had been to law school…Weren’t just a lot of choices…I went with teaching.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview Question 6: How did your parents’ socioeconomic status influence your career choices?**

The theme that emerged from interview question six was the value placed on education by the parents of each participant.

Table 8

*Cross-Case Analysis: Value of an education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Value of an Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>“They knew education was important.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>“It had been instilled in me from an early age, you will go to college.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>“It wasn’t an option of going to college.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>“I grew up with a lot of I want you to have it better than we did.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Question 7: What role did your parents play in your developing into a community college vice-president? Mother’s Work? Father’s work? Mother’s education level? Father’s education level?

No clear themes emerged from interview question seven. The following table reports that parental influence varied, as well as the parents’ occupations and educational levels. The mothers were encouraging and offered advice which influenced one participant’s location, and the fathers’ occupations ranged from manual labor to education administration. The mothers’ work was both inside and outside the home. The educational level of the parents ranged from 8th grade to a specialist degree.

Table 9

Cross-Case Analysis: Parental influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Parental Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>Mother gave good advice on working with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>Mother was an encourager and taught her to push</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>Parents were excited about the location and reputation of the institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>Parents encouraged education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10

Cross-Case Analysis: Parent’s work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Father’s Work</th>
<th>Mother’s Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>Automotive garage</td>
<td>Worked at the bank and for the county</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>Business office at major oil company</td>
<td>Secretary at a university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>Manual laborer</td>
<td>Bookkeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>Administrator in education</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11

*Cross-Case Analysis: Parent’s educational level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Father’s Education Level</th>
<th>Mother’s Education Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>8th Grade</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>Specialist degree</td>
<td>Two-year degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Question 8: Describe other things about your life situation (e.g., people, experiences, socioeconomic status) that influenced your career development.

The theme that emerged from interview question eight is that each of the participants had the support of her family during her career development.

Table 12

*Cross-Case Analysis: Family support*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Family Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>“My son was raised by a village and I was able to complete my education and work at the community college.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>“Relocated home to be with family after untimely death of step-brother, diagnosis of grandmother and cancer diagnosis of self and made a permanent transition to higher education.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>“Moved home after aging parents lost all material possessions in a natural disaster and landed a job at the community college.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>“My husband’s family are educators and opened the door for a job which led to a job at the local community college.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Question 9: Did you attend any leadership training seminars or workshops to help prepare yourself for the Vice-President’s position? If so, describe those.

The emergent theme for interview question nine is leadership enhancement. Each participant indicated she had attended some type of leadership training or programs through various organizations.

Table 13

Cross-Case Analysis: Leadership enhancement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Leadership Enhancement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>MCCLP (speakers and reading material)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Participant Two       | Independent Colleges and Universities  
                        | Aspiring Leaders Workshop                                           |
| Participant Three     | Leadership Jackson                                                  |
| Participant Four      | State level meetings                                                |

Interview Question 10: Describe some of your personal characteristics (e.g., skills and abilities, beliefs, values) that influenced you in becoming a community college vice-president.

The theme that emerged from interview question ten were the personal attributes of the participants, which included the ability to make decisions, which included hiring decisions.
Table 14

*Cross-Case Analysis: Decision Making*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Decision Making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>“I have the ability to make a decision when a decision needs to be made.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>“Philosophy of hiring people who are smarter than me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>“I look better for making the smart decision to hire someone phenomenal.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>“I don’t mind making a decision when a decision has to be made.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview Question 11:** Was there anything about yourself that caused you to have doubts about becoming a community college vice-president? If so, how did you overcome these doubts/concerns?

The theme that emerged from interview question eleven was professional weaknesses. The professional shortcomings included the fear of public speaking, learning a new educational system, self-doubt, and being the authority figure on the job. Each participant developed strategies to overcome her professional weakness.

Table 15

*Cross-Case Analysis: Professional weaknesses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Professional Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>Speaking in front of others at board meetings and social functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>Learning about a new educational system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>Question ability to perform the job as expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>Concerned about being the boss</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16

*Cross-Case Analysis: Strategies for professional weaknesses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Strategies for Professional Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>Learned to take a deep breath and introduce herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>Builds relationships across campus and throughout the other state community colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>Involves the input of her team and involved others when making a decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>Identifies leaders in the instructional community and go to them for advice before she rolls something out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Question 12: Looking back over your career path to the vice-president’s position, what relationships have been most important to you and why? If mentor relationship, do you feel that the mentoring relationship was affected by your gender? If so, please explain.

The theme that emerged from interview question twelve was mentor relationships.

The mentors were former employers and one self-appointed mentor. The participants did not feel that gender affected the mentor relationships.

Table 17

*Cross-Case Analysis: Mentor relationships*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Mentor Relationships</th>
<th>Gender Affect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>Former boss</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>Former boss, major professor, husband</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>Former Chancery Clerk, community college President and First Lady, former boss</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>Self-appointed mentor</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Question 13: Did you have any positive role models who influenced you to want to become a college vice-president?

In response to interview question thirteen each participant indicated there were positive role models who influenced their career decision. The responses included the females in the family, previous professional affiliate, college teacher, and extended family who were in education.

Table 18

Cross-Case Analysis: Positive role models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Positive Role Models</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>All the women in my family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>Associate dean of previous school, vice-president for a professional association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>Undergraduate college teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>Extended family that had similar roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Question 14: Do you feel that you had to make any compromises in order to become a community college vice-president? If so, please describe them.

The theme that emerged for interview question fourteen was personal sacrifices.

Three of the participants indicated that personal sacrifices had been made along their career pathway. One participant did not feel as if she had made personal sacrifices because she did not have small children.
Table 19

Cross-Case Analysis: Personal sacrifices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Personal Sacrifices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>“Yes, no social life, not able to be seen in a negative light.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>“No compromises, maybe because I don’t have small children.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>“Yes, time with my family.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>“Yes, sacrificed relationship with a female relative.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Question 15: As you progressed up your career path, do you feel that you had to adapt your behavior in order to become a community college vice-president? If so, please explain.

The theme that emerged from interview question fifteen is adaptable behavior.

Three of the participants indicated they had to adapt their behavior in various capacities to become community college vice-presidents. One of the participants indicated she did not have to adapt her behavior.

Table 20

Cross-Case Analysis: Adaptable behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Adaptable Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>“Yes, social media.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>“Yes, learning to be an active listener.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>“Yes, learning to have patience.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>“No, I don’t really think I’ve changed.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Question 16: How do you like being a community college vice-president?

The theme that emerged from interview question sixteen was job satisfaction.

Each participant expressed high levels of job satisfaction in her role as community college vice-president.
Table 21

*Cross-Case Analysis: Job satisfaction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Job Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>“I love it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>“I feel so blessed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>“Love it, love it, love it, love it, love it, love it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>“I love it.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview Question 17: What are your current responsibilities as vice-president?**

The theme that emerged from interview question seventeen was SACS. Three of the participants indicated one of their major responsibilities in the role as vice-president was their school’s accreditation process. One participant indicated her major responsibilities included recruitment and enrollment and the development foundation.

Table 22

*Cross-Case Analysis: SACS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: SACS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>SACS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>SACS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>Enrollment services, student recruiting, public relations, and the Development Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>SACS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview Question 18: Describe professional responsibilities you currently have other than in your position as vice-president.**

The theme that emerged from interview question eighteen is three of the participants were actively involved in professional organizations and held offices within these organizations. One participant indicated she was new to the area and was not
actively involved with local professional organizations. She felt that would change as she becomes more involved with the organizations in the state.

Table 23

Cross-Case Analysis: Professional Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Professional Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>State CAOs Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>None, new to the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>Board for community retirement home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>Academic Officers Association (Chair of Uniform Course Numbering Committee)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Question 19: What barriers or obstacles in your life did you have to overcome as you progressed to the position of vice-president and while serving as a vice-president? How did you overcome these barriers?

The theme that emerged from interview question nineteen was professional challenges. The participants each faced various professional challenges such as sabotage, not being from the area, lack of confidence, and not being respected in external settings as a professional female. They each developed strategies to overcome professional challenges.

Table 24

Cross-Case Analysis: Professional challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Professional Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>“People coming out against me to block me from having the job.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>“Not a local.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>“Public speaking and a lack of confidence.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>“External men (industry or government functions) give a little girl pat on the head.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 25

Cross-Case Analysis: Response to professional challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Response to Professional Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>“Don’t rise to the challenge, get upset or retaliate.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>“Networking.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>“Continue speaking to subside the nervousness.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>“Don’t have to work with them—blow them off.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Question 20: Explain the value/meaning you place on work in your life.

The theme that emerged from interview question twenty is that three of the participants felt, through work, they have been able to make a positive influence on the lives of those whom they serve.

Table 26

Cross-Case Analysis: Positive influence through serving others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Positive Influence Through Serving Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>“I’ve done something to help facilitate positive change.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>“It’s an opportunity for me to make a contribution to the lives of young people and nontraditional students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>“I feel like I have value, giving back.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>“It’s a good part of my identity.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Question 21: How would you describe your professional achievements and accomplishments?

The theme that emerged from interview question twenty-one was diverse achievements. Each participant indicated there they felt they had accomplished a lot and were successful in their various roles at the community college. These achievements
included degree attainment, major fundraising efforts, various professional positions and leadership enhancement opportunities, learning new educational systems and implementing new programs. One participant indicated that her accomplishments were low key in that she never expected to get into administration which led to her current position as vice-president.

Table 27

*Cross-Case Analysis: Diverse achievements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Theme: Diverse Achievements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>Thankful and diverse—degree attainment, various positions and opportunities, MCCLA and fellowship program, working with great people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>“Diverse”—teaching at various levels, worked with disability services for special need students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>Diverse—special events, major fundraising efforts, worked with student groups, enhanced enrollment process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>Low key and diverse—never aspired for leadership role or office in professional organizations, prefers working with local people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview Question 22: What advice would you give to other women who aspire to become community college vice-presidents?**

The advice of the study participants to other females who aspire to become community college vice-presidents is reported in Table 28 below.
Table 28

Cross-Case Analysis: Advice to female aspirants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Advice to Female Aspirants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>1. “Stay true to yourself, you do not have to conform.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. “Do not let things become personal.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>1. “Know your audience.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. “Know your environment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. “Adapt to that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>1. “Work hard.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. “Be passionate.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. “Dream big.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>1. “Go for it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. “Start young, get teaching experience.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. “Don’t let anybody tell you, you can’t do it because you want to have or have a family.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. “Be willing to move.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Question 23: Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your journey to the position of a community college vice-president before we conclude?

Closing comments of the study participants are reported in Table 25 below.

Table 29

Cross-Case Analysis: Journey comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Journey Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>“I have just been very fortunate.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>“Felt like this was a divine appointment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>“It’s been a fun journey.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>“I feel blessed to be able to do it.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings of the study. The findings were presented in the form of within case analyses followed by the cross-case analysis.
The within-case analyses findings was presented in a narrative form in response to each of the nine secondary research questions. The responses were reported by the researcher. The cross-case analysis was conducted in response to the interview questions. The reporting was presented in tables highlighting emergent themes and participant responses.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this chapter is the presentation of the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for the study. The chapter includes a discussion of the major findings, and themes, limitations, general recommendations and recommendations for future research. The purpose of this study was to investigate the career paths and preparation of female vice-presidents employed in community colleges in the state of Mississippi. The study includes the results of the interviews of the four study participants.

Three areas of research were reviewed for this study. The first area was women in leadership and gender disparities. The profile of the typical American college or university president is a married white male who is 61 years old, holding a doctorate in education and having served in his current position for seven years (“Leading demographic portrait”, 2012).

For this study the researcher investigated female community college vice-presidents’ career paths and the literature review provides room for further research as it relates to community college vice-presidents. The average age for the participants of this study was 51 years old, and three of the study participants have obtained a doctorate in education or related field. Two of the participants have held their current positions for
one year or less. One of the other participants has held her current position for 18 years. The fourth participant has been in administration, previously serving as interim president at another institution, for 14 years. She has held her current role as a community college vice-president for the past nine years. The four participants are each of Caucasian or European American descent.

When the findings of this study are compared to the findings regarding the characteristics of a typical community college administrator, it is noted that progress is being made to address the gender disparities among female administrators in community colleges. Data show a gender gap when comparing executive/administrative/managerial positions and the presidency. In 2011, 56% of community college executive/administrative managerial staff were women, but they comprised only 36% of college CEOs (AACC, 2014).

The second area reviewed was aspirations/characteristics and qualities for female community college administrators. The latest edition of the ACE report is derived from a 2011 survey of more than 1,600 college and university presidents nationwide. The report found that the CAO is the most common path to the presidency and has remained unchanged since 1986 (“ACE convenes discussion on women in higher education leadership”, 2012).

Three of the participants in the study indicated their major professional responsibilities included the SACS reporting for their institution. As indicated in the literature, it is the common path to upper administration; however, the study participants did not express a desire to move upward. One participant indicated it was not a desire for her. The study participants each have experienced a diverse professional background
which is characteristic for female community college administrators. Their career tracks involved establishing credibility and seeking and serving as mentors as described in the literature. Mentorship relationships were reported in the study for each of the participants. Three of the mentors had been former employers and one was a self-appointed mentor. The study also found being decisive as a personal attribute of participants, which is usually exhibited by men and causes an uncomfortable environment when exhibited by women (Gill, 2013).

The third area was experiences and barriers. The career/work experiences and barriers found in the literature include interpersonal relationships, lack of opportunity and support to move to leadership positions, and balancing professional and personal responsibilities. This study reported three of the participants made personal sacrifices in order to become community college vice-presidents. The sacrifices included having no social life, limited time with family, and the sacrifice of a relationship with a female relative. Other barriers or obstacles the participants faced included sabotage of the position of vice-president, not being a graduate of the local college and from the local community, lack of confidence and lack of respect of women by external men in industry or government. In the study the participants responded with strategies on how they overcame the experiences and barriers they faced.

Studies on gender disparities revealed that disparities are present in all areas of industry, including government, higher education, business corporations, medicine and academic medicine (Salas-Lopez et al., 2011). The latest trends of the AACC states that the number of female CEOs is 28% with 72% being male (AACC Fact Sheets, 2016).
This percentage suggests that higher education institutions have been slow to expand opportunities for women (Ballenger, 2010).

For this study the FST was used as the theoretical foundation and the conceptual framework. “Starting off research from women’s lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women’s lives, but also of men’s lives and the whole social order” (“FST,” n.d., para. 6). “Building knowledge from women’s actual or concrete life experiences is acutely important, feminist standpoint scholars argue, if we hope to repair the historical trend of women’s misrepresentation and exclusion from the dominant knowledge canons. And only by making women’s concrete life experiences the primary source of our investigations can we succeed in constructing knowledge that accurately reflects and represents women” (Brooks, 2007, p. 56).

The study focused on the exploration of female community college administrators in the areas (study variables) of career paths, professional responsibilities, and career aspirations. The current study allowed the four female participants to share their career paths in response to 23 open-ended interview questions. The case study research method was utilized with each case being analyzed, and all cases were cross-analyzed with various themes emerging.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do participants describe the career paths to their current positions?
   a. What are the levels of academic preparation of participants?
   b. What are the professional experiences of participants?
   c. What career barriers or obstacles did participants face in their career paths?
d. What strategies did the participants use in being successful in their career paths?

2. How do participants describe their professional responsibilities?
   a. What are the professional roles and responsibilities of participants?
   b. What barriers or obstacles do participants face in successfully accomplishing their professional responsibilities?
   c. What strategies do participants use in successfully overcoming barriers and obstacles to their professional responsibilities?

3. How do participants describe their major achievements and accomplishments?
   a. What are participants’ major accomplishments in their professional career?
   b. What advice do participants offer aspiring female community college vice-presidents?

This section summarizes the findings that resulted from the cross-case analysis, which addressed the purpose of the research study. The interview questions addressed the research and secondary research questions of the study which explored the career paths of female community college vice-presidents to their current positions, their professional responsibilities, and their major achievements and accomplishments. The themes that emerged for each secondary research questions are summarized below.
Research Question 1: How do participants describe the career paths to their current positions?

Themes that emerged regarding the career paths to their current position include diverse professional experience; exposure, opportunity and timing; no ambition to become vice-president; career goals as a teenager to become educators; stereotypical career choices; the value of an education, parental influence; family support; leadership enhancement; and personal attributes and the importance of mentor relationships and positive role models. Each of the vice-presidents indicated they have had a diverse background with lots of exposure and growth opportunities along the way.

Three of the vice-presidents did not set out to become administrators, but landed there by chance. A teenage career goal for each of the participants, with the exception of one, was to teach. The other participant wanted to become a probation officer. They have been able to achieve the increased levels of educational attainment with the support of family and friends. The attainment has been accomplished through a legacy of parents who value an education.

The parental influence was strong for each participant. Each participant came from a two-parent household and the educational levels of each of the parents was low, with the exception of one father having a specialist degree and one mother having a bachelor’s degree. The work of the parents ranged from homemaker to one father who worked as an educational administrator. The theme of parental influence was unanimous. All the parents knew education was the key to excel beyond their educational levels, work and socioeconomic status.

Three of the females were faced with stereotypical career choices in high school and college. There is a 20-year age gap with the oldest and youngest study participant
and the youngest participant did not see the influence of gender in making a career choice. One of the participants indicated that she wanted to be a teacher as job security when relocating with her husband. The other two indicated there were not a lot of career choices and females became teachers, secretaries or nurses.

Along the journey to the position of vice-president, the participants learned to balance school, work and family. This was accomplished with the support of family and friends. All participants, with the exception of one, indicated they faced the challenge of working and the role of being a mother. That one participant has faced the issue of being away from family and found that in the time of a crisis, being near family was important, and she provided support in overcoming the challenge they faced.

Two other aspects that influenced the career paths of the study participants were leadership training opportunities and personal attributes of the participants. Each of the females in the study had attended or attends a professional leadership training program or professional organization with leadership opportunities. They each noted personal attributes that were influential. These attributes included the ability to make decisions and to hire a smart staff.

The participants admitted that along the way they have faced professional weaknesses, personal sacrifices and had to adapt their behavior. Their professional weaknesses include the fear of public speaking in certain environments, learning about the community college system, questioning their own abilities and the perception of being the boss. They also developed strategies to address their professional weaknesses.

The personal sacrifices included the fear of being seen in a negative light and sacrificing time with small children and family; one participant sacrificed a relationship
with a female relative. Three of the participants indicated they have had to adapt their behavior in terms of social media, become an active listener, and develop patience. One participant did not think she had changed in terms of becoming a female vice-president.

Each participant was grateful for the mentoring relationships that had been developed over time with former bosses and other self-appointed mentors. They did not feel that gender had affected their mentor relationships. They each identified positive role models that influenced their career choice. The positive role models included family, other administrators with whom they have worked, former college instructors and extended family who have worked in similar positions.

Other study findings that relate to the findings of this study include Vanhook-Morrissey (2003), Jacks (2009), and Fisher (2008). Among the indications of Vanhook-Morrissey’s (2003) study findings are formative experiences and key developmental experiences, which discuss the backgrounds and early career experiences that influenced their career choices. The women in Vanhook-Morrissey’s (2003) study each grew up with the intention of attending college. The women grew up in a time when women were either teachers, secretaries or nurses. The participants in this study indicated they were greatly influenced by their parents who grew up with the same stereotypical career expectations of becoming a secretary, teacher or nurse.

The key developmental experiences in Vanhook-Morrissey’s (2003) study findings revealed women purposefully pursued increasingly complex and responsible administrative job assignments that provided them with opportunities to learn about community colleges. The findings also revealed the significance of mentors in the career advancement of the women. In this study the women did not indicate they diverse
professional experiences were purposefully pursued but prepared them for their current administrative roles. The diversity of their professional experiences allowed them to learn the college as a whole—the mission of the community college as well as academic and Career Technical aspects of the institutions.

Vanhook Morrissey’s (2009) findings indicated mentoring relationships provided an informal way for the women to learn, develop self-confidence, and advance in their careers. The findings of mentoring experiences in Fisher’s (2008) study found that mentoring was extremely beneficial and had a positive influence on the midlevel women administrators’ career advancement. Mentor relationships were available to each participant of the present study and each participant expressed gratitude for the presence of the bonds that were formed. Participant Two indicated how her mentoring relationship attributed to the strengthening of her self-confidence and self-esteem when it came to public speaking.

The present study found that the female administrators experienced personal sacrifices which included sacrificing time with small children and family. The studies of Fisher (2008), Jacks (2009), and Vanhook-Morrissey (2003) each had emergent themes of personal or family sacrifices along the career pathway of the study participants. The midlevel women in Fisher’s findings expressed challenges relating to family responsibilities, namely child rearing responsibilities. Their job demands along with children caused some women to feel torn between career and family and could require additional time away from their family. The midlevel women without children believed that having a child could hinder their ability to advance (2008).
Jacks’ (2009) findings emerged with the theme of family sacrifice of not having time to spend with family. The family was identified as children, grandchildren, husbands, parents, or extended family. In the present study each of the participants faced a personal sacrifice that involved family. These sacrifices were overshadowed with the influence of family support to the female vice-presidents during their career development. Participant One who had a young son during her career development stated that “My son was raised by a village and I was able to complete my education and work at the community college.”

**Research Question 2: How do participants describe their professional responsibilities?**

Themes that emerged regarding the participants’ professional responsibilities included job satisfaction, SACS, professional organization affiliation, facing professional challenges, and the positive influence of serving others. In describing their professional responsibilities the participants unanimously stated they loved their jobs. The vice-presidents often face multiple job responsibilities with three of them being responsible for the SACS accreditation process. The one participant who was not the college’s SACS liaison is currently responsible for enrollment services, student recruiting, public relations, and the development foundation.

The female vice-presidents are part of some professional organizations and may or may not hold positions within those organizations. Two of the participants are affiliated with the CAO Association; one serves on a local retirement home board and one considers herself as new to the area and suspects that becoming actively involved in the local professional organizations will change. However, the participant does attend
professional conferences and is familiar with the learning and networking opportunities these organizations provide.

Professional challenges are inevitable in any environment and certainly not unique in the role of serving as a female vice-president. The challenges faced include people coming out against the candidate for an administrative position, not being a local (not having attended that college, not from the community), the fear of public speaking and self-confidence, and gender respect of external males of the college. The participants developed strategies to overcome the obstacles or barriers they face.

The participants truly value the opportunities they have to make a positive influence on the lives of those who they serve. They consider themselves to be in a position to implement change for the better good. The position they are in gives them value and is seen as an opportunity to give back. One participant indicated the value she has placed on work in her life is a good part of her identity.

Jacks’ (2009) findings revealed the theme regarding the roles of her study participants in a given day and described their responsibilities as “juggling balls in the air.” The participants indicated that a work day extended beyond faculty, staff, and students. The administrator must work with the community, alumni and donors, institutional boards, and national associations. The administrators were heavily involved in local, state, regional and national organizations.

In the current study the themes that emerged included major job responsibilities (SACS, enrollment services/student recruitment, alumni and foundation, and the affiliation of professional organizations). Each study participant’s professional organization affiliation has varied based on their current position within the community.
college. Two of the participants in this study are affiliated with the state’s CAOs association with one participant serving on a local community board and one who is new to the area and continuously networking and becoming more involved.

Research Question 3: How do participants describe their major achievements and accomplishments?

Each participant has achieved so much during the development of her professional career. They each described their achievements and accomplishments as diverse. Participants used the term thankful and low key to further describe their achievements. The participants offered words of advice to other female community college vice-presidential aspirants. They each suggested engaging in various professional experience opportunities to build a strong knowledge of the community colleges’ mission.

They also offer the following advice:

- Stay true to yourself and do not let things become personal.
- Every decision should be based on the students’ best interests, first and foremost.
- Rely on your faith.
- Be passionate

Fisher (2008) revealed the theme of women dominating midlevel community college administration, which is a positive environment. Sixty-five percent of the participants in her study perceived that the majority of midlevel administrators at community colleges are women and 55% of the participants believed their institution had a good policy for promoting women. When comparing the numbers of Fisher’s study and the present study findings to the data in the review of literature, female leaders are
gaining numbers in administration, but nationally at a slow growth rate. The participants in the present study are working hard when it comes to degree attainment and assuming diverse roles within the community colleges. They have each expressed job satisfaction and value the importance of work in their lives and considers it to be a positive influence through serving others, which aligns with Vanhook-Morrissey’s (2003) findings on multiple role challenges influencing women’s career development.

**Implications**

Besides describing, investigating, and understanding the career paths of female vice-presidents in community colleges, the findings of this study suggest that the leadership roles of female administrators is increasing and changing. By understanding the current leadership role of practicing vice-presidents, those aspiring to become female community college administrators can come to the realization of obtaining mutual success in their endeavor. The participants in this study have revealed that their institutions have been accepting and that they did not have to fight against the establishment.

Themes that were discussed in the literature review included gender disparities among women in leadership, aspirations and characteristics and qualities of female community college administrators, and the barriers to their success. The characteristics of the participants in this study involved younger, female administrators who have attained doctorate degrees and are contributing the growth rate or expansion of the opportunities for women in higher education. While the evidence of a breakable glass ceiling was not highly present in the career paths of these study participants as it was nearly three decades ago, evidence does exist and there was mention of the experience of
pay inequity, the “good-old-boy” system and the out casting of those not from the area. During the reporting of the findings each of the participants mentioned at least once, if not several times, their challenge of balancing family and work and it was coded as personal sacrifices. However, when specifically asked to elaborate on the barriers they had to overcome they focused on the professional challenges they faced and responded specifically to work related challenges.

One of the key findings of this study was the women each prepared themselves with a strong educational background, seeking advanced degrees early in their career, if so desired. They also stepped up to the challenge of taking on diverse professional roles which prepared them for their current leadership roles. This was mostly accomplished with the support of family who also served as positive role models and the encouragement of former employers and mentors.

There is a need for current community college administrators to serve as role models to the steadily increasing number of women in positions of community college leadership. The participants attributed much of their success to mentor relationships and other positive role models they encountered throughout life and along the development of their career paths. These influential relationships of mentors and positive role models aid in the ability to assist the next generation of leaders as they face potential barriers and obstacles during their career development.

Another finding of this study that highlights the future success of female community college administrators is that they must earn the credibility of others by taking advantage of professional roles outside their current responsibilities as community college vice-presidents. Each participant in the study has been affiliated with
professional organizations at some point and in some capacity of another. Their affiliation with these organizations may have been vital to their success as practitioners in education administration.

The findings of this study charge professional organizations and leadership programs in higher education, whether gender based or not, to enhance the awareness of the need to move community colleges beyond their current stereotypical demographic leadership to include females. Examples of these organizations include the AACC, HERS, Women in Higher Education (WHE), and the MCCLA. These organizations share a common mission of providing their members or graduates with professional development opportunities and networking opportunities which will broaden the pool of leaders in future generations. Approximately 50% of the current midlevel administrators in community colleges have held their positions for the past ten years or more, and there is a growing need to have groomed a new generation to follow the trail that has been blazed by each of them.

**General Recommendations**

Females who aspire to be vice-presidents in community colleges can learn from the results of the current study. These are general recommendations shared by the participants:

1. “Be true to yourself. You should not conform because you are a woman. You do not have to become aggressive or submissive.” (Participant One)

2. “Remain focused, do not let things become personal.” (Participant One)

3. “Stand strong with decision making.” (Participant One)
4. “Offer a fresh perspective and look for growth opportunities.” (Participant Two)

5. “Work hard.” (Participant Three)

6. “Be passionate.” (Participant Three)

7. “Build relationships and serve as a mentor.” (Participant Three)

8. “Build your teaching experience early.” (Participant Four)

9. “Build a strong network of male, female and professional co-workers.” (Participant Four)

10. “Build a strong support system if you face challenges of school, work, and family demands.” (Participant Four)

11. “Be ambitious—go for it!” (Participant Four)

12. “Be willing to move or relocate to another organization. It makes you more attractive to gain a different perspective.” (Participant Four)

**Limitations of the Study**

The interviews were thorough and were the primary source of data. Curriculum vitae and a brief demographic survey were used to collect data. The interviews lasted 25 to 76 minutes each. Visiting the community college campuses and a local coffee shop was also a great opportunity for the researcher to see other campuses. Those in the pool of participants indicated they had the pleasure of overseeing other professional responsibilities which limited their availability for the face-to-face interview. There was a potential pool of 26 participants and a stratified sample was proposed; however, only four participants agreed to participate and were actually interviewed. This small sample size was adequate for the qualitative research study. However, the small size group has
limitations for generalizability in that age, race and institutional affiliation cannot be
generalized to the larger group.

The literature review of female community college administrators yielded limited
information regarding the position of vice-president. There was a wealth of information
available regarding presidents, CAOs and other administrators. The gap in literature
allows for recommendations for future research.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The study provided in-depth details on the career paths of female vice-presidents
at some of Mississippi’s community colleges. The following are recommendations for
future research on female community college vice-presidents:

1. Qualitative research on female vice-presidents in community colleges in
   other southern states;

2. Quantitative study design to include a state comparison as it relates to
career paths of female community college vice-presidents;

3. A descriptive/demographic study of community college administrators
   that focuses on gender and ethnicity;

4. Qualitative research on female community college leaders and the
   influence of mentor relationships and positive role models;

5. Research on the knowledge base or skill set needed for female community
   college vice-presidential aspirants; and

6. A qualitative study applying stratified sampling of community college
   vice-presidents for institutional effectiveness.
Conclusions

The participants described their career paths to their current positions by educational levels, diverse professional experiences, sharing the career barriers they faced in their career paths, and the strategies that helped them to succeed. They described their professional responsibilities which involved association with organizations outside their normal responsibilities. They also described barriers or obstacles faced while accomplishing their professional responsibilities, as well as strategies for overcoming those barriers. The participants described their major accomplishments in their professional career and offered advice to aspiring female community college vice-presidents. In describing their career paths, the participants also discussed work as an individual’s identity and the passion they have for the job, job satisfaction and major job responsibilities.

Summary

This study was conducted to investigate the career paths and preparation of female vice-presidents in community colleges. The questions which guided this research were: (1) How do participants describe their career paths to their current positions? (2) How do participants describe their professional responsibilities? (3) How do participants describe their major achievements and accomplishments? Chapter one provided the study introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, definition of terms, conceptual framework, theoretical framework, overview of research method, delimitations of the study, significance of the study, and organization of the dissertation. The conceptual framework for the study illustrated the exploration of female community college administrators in the areas (study variables) of career paths,
professional responsibilities, and career aspirations. Chapter two provided a review of literature in these three areas: (1) women in leadership and gender disparities, (2) aspirations/characteristics and qualities for female community college administrators, and (3) experiences and barriers. Chapter two also included recommendations for further research from the literature.

Chapter three described the research design for the study, description of the research sites and population and sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures (to include reliability and validity), and data analysis. Chapter four presented the research findings from the study, research questions, with-in case analyses, and cross-case analysis. Chapter five presented a summary of the findings, conclusions, limitations of the study, implications, general recommendations, and recommendations for future research.
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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
Study 16-137: Career Paths of Female Vice-presidents in Community Colleges

To: nmoebi@ncsu.edu
Cc: nmoebi@ncsu.edu, sking@colostate.edu

Protocol Title: Career Paths of Female Vice-presidents in Community Colleges
Protocol Number: 16-137
Principal Investigator: Ms. Jennifer Quinn
Department: Department of Foreign Languages
Office Phone Number: 303-492-6183

Dear Ms. Quinn:

The Human Research Protection Program has determined the above referenced project exempt from IRB review.

Please note the following:

- Retain a copy of this correspondence for your records.

- An approval stamp is required on all informed consents. You must use the stamped consent form for obtaining consent from participants.

- Only the MSU staff and students named on the application are approved as IRB Investigators and/or key personnel for this study.

- The approval date is valid for 12/31/2019, which was the completion date indicated on your application. If additional time is not needed, submit a continuation request (GOF-04-01 Continuing Review of Approved Applications).

- Any modifications to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project.

- For university requirement, all research-related records (e.g., application materials, letters of support, signed consent forms, etc.) must be retained and available for audit for a period of at least 3 years after the research has ended.

- It is the responsibility of the investigator to promptly report events that may represent unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This determination is issued under the Mississippi State University’s CHRP Federal IRB Assurance #A33889222. All forms and procedures can be found on the IRB website: www.ncsu.edu/irb.

Thank you for your cooperation in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at nmoebi@ncsu.edu or call 303-492-6183.

Sincerely,

Naomi Gads
Compliance Advisor

cc: Stephanie King, Advisor
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE
1. How did you come to be a college vice-president?
2. What were the most important factors that led to your becoming a vice-president?
3. When did you know that you wanted to be a vice-president?
4. What were your career goals when you were a teenager?
5. In high school and in college, how did being female influence your career choices?
6. How did your parents’ socioeconomic status influence your career choices?
7. What role did your parents play in your developing into a community college vice-president? Mother’s Work? Father’s work? Mother’s education level? Father’s education level?
8. Describe other things about your life situation (e.g., people, experiences, socioeconomic status) that influenced your career development.
9. Did you attend any leadership training seminars or workshops to help prepare yourself for the Vice-President’s position? If so, describe those.
10. Describe some of your personal characteristics (e.g., skills and abilities, beliefs, values) that influenced you in becoming a community college vice-president.
11. Was there anything about yourself that caused you to have doubts about becoming a community college vice-president? If so, how did you overcome these doubts/concerns?
12. Looking back over your career path to the vice-president’s position, what relationships have been most important to you and why? (If mentor relationship) Do you feel that the mentoring relationship was affected by your gender? If so, please explain.

13. Did you have any positive role models who influenced you to want to become a college vice-president?

14. Do you feel that you had to make any compromises in order to become a community college vice-president? If so, please describe them.

15. As you progressed up your career path, do you feel that you had to adapt your behavior in order to become a community college vice-president? If so, please explain.

16. How do you like being a community college vice-president?

17. What are your current responsibilities as vice-president?

18. Describe professional responsibilities you currently have other than in your position as vice-president.

19. What barriers or obstacles in your life did you have to overcome as you progressed to the position of vice-president and while serving as a vice-president? How did you overcome these barriers?

20. Explain the value/meaning you place on work in your life.

21. How would you describe your professional achievements and accomplishments?

22. What advice would you give to other women who aspire to become community college vice-presidents?
23. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your journey to the position of a community college vice-president before we conclude?
APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY
1. Age: __________
2. Race/Ethnicity: ____________________
3. Current Marital Status: _____________________