Community College Changed My Life: A Narrative of Former Community College

Students Who Are Community College Leaders

by
Lisa A. Crawford

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Chair of Committee: Dr. Cameron White

Committee Member: Dr. Laveria Hutchison

Committee Member: Dr. Jane Cooper

Committee Member: Dr. Betty Fortune

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Dedication

I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me.

Philippians 4:13

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11

This dissertation is dedicated first to the Lord, for giving me the strength to complete this process and for having plans for me that I could not see. And then to my village.

To my husband, Dr. Captain Juan Zane Crawford, thank you for inspiring me and allowing me to be a part of your dreams.

To my amazing, intelligent, and loving son, Korbin, I love you to the moon and back, times infinity. Thank you for supporting me and releasing me from some "mommy duties" to pursue this goal.

To my parents, grandparents, and godparents, I hope I have made you proud!

To my siblings, who love me unconditionally.

To my aunts and uncles, who took time with me and for always being "real".

To my sistas, for always having encouraging words.

To my ancestors, who were slaves, to those who could not read or write, thank you for praying for your children's children, children......I am your wildest dream that has come true.

I am forever grateful to the rest of my village. Thank you for allowing me to be a small part of your lives. I could not have done this work without ALL of you either standing on the sidelines or from heaven's bleachers cheering me on.

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Abstract

   Background: Access to higher education would not be possible for some without community colleges. Community colleges play a pivotal role in educating over 11 million students a year. Graduates of community colleges often enroll in four-year colleges and become career professionals, with many becoming community college leaders determined to assist students with completing their education. **Purpose:** Student completion at community colleges is problematic in higher education. The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the perceptions and experiences of community college leaders who began their higher education journey at a community college, completed their education, and then progressed to become a leader at a community college. The following research question guided this study: What are the perceptions and experiences of current community college leaders regarding their journey as previous community college students and its impact on their career path? **Method:** Pursuing a narrative inquiry allowed four community college leaders from a very large urban community college in Texas to express themselves through the storytelling of their lives as they shared their journey from community college students to community college leaders. Participants were selected using purposive sampling and the researcher's social network of community college leaders who began higher education as community college students. Data was collected from three semi-structured interviews that chronologized the participant's lives, member checking sessions, and the researcher's reflective notes. The interviews were held virtually using a video conferencing platform due to the national pandemic of COVID-19. The electronic transcriptions of the interviews were converted into a word document after each interview, allowing the researcher to analyze the data for

themes, conduct word frequency tests, and generate word clouds as a visual for the findings. Member checking occurred before the second and third interviews, which allowed the participants to review the transcript, add or subtract any thoughts, and clarify any answers if needed. **Results**: The prominent emergent themes from this study were path uncertainty, people, and love. The results of this study indicate that uncertainty does not determine one's trajectory. All participants were uncertain about their next steps after high school; however, today, all are community college leaders. The findings also indicated that having a mentor in one's life matters. Every participant was able to identify a mentor who played a role in their growth and development and propelled them to another level. Lastly, the participants perceived love as the underlying element of their successes. All the participants conveyed a type of love for others that was genuine and authentic. They conveyed *philia* love for their friends, *storge* love for their families and students, *philautia* love for themselves, and *agape* love for humanity. **Conclusion**: This narrative inquiry suggests that community colleges, in and of themselves, are not the only transformative entity in community college leaders' lives. The participants' transformation from student to leader is derived from individuals in their personal and professional networks, and the love they shared with others. Specifically, they shared *philia* (love for friends), *storge* (love for family), *philautia* (love for self), and *agape* (love for humanity).

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Chapter I

Introduction

Oh no! What does one do when they do not do well on a college achievement exam? Perhaps there is a student who did not receive an acceptance letter into the college of their choice. What does one do if they are a first-generation college student with minimal financial support? Alternatively, the student is unsure of which path to take and needs guidance and time to map out their future. Many students experience the above scenarios and may wonder what to do and where to go after high school graduation. Community colleges (once referred to as junior colleges) stand ready to help students embark upon their higher education journey.

Community colleges play a pivotal role in educating students. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2019), 5.4 million students enrolled in a public two-year college for the fall of 2019. Community colleges' open-door policy is attractive and provides students a steppingstone to transfer to a four-year institution or obtain a certification and enter the workforce with relevant skills to obtain a desirable job. Furthermore, the open-door policy allows millions of low-income, first-generation, and students of color an opportunity to gain access to higher education (Pagano, 2017). Higher education access would not be possible for some without community colleges.

Mellow and Hellan (2015) and U.S. News & World Report (2019) agreed that there are considerable advantages to attending community colleges. Table 1 is a list of the most cited advantages and benefits of attending a community college. Overall, community colleges have provided and continue to provide students with a safe space to grow, a safe place to discover who they are individually, and a place to accomplish future

goals. All while receiving quality education with quality instruction and keeping cost affordable (Cohen et al., 2014).

Table 1

Advantages of Attending Community Colleges

Lower tuition and fees
Academic flexibility
Available financial aid
Less stringent admission policies
Welcoming environment
Social benefits in that they were developed by the community for the community
Opportunity to improve job readiness and skills
Smaller class sizes
Adaptable for school-life balance
Transfer agreements
Personalized attention

Personal Statement

My higher education path began at a junior college. My family members (I am from a blended family; I have three parents and five active decision-making grandparents) stated in the past that they thought I was a procrastinator. My parents might have even said I did not apply myself. Nevertheless, I was just a high school student who was uncertain about what I wanted to do in life or whom I wanted to become professionally. Either way, my indecisiveness, lack of focus, and unpreparedness placed me in a position where I was not accepted into the college of my choice. I did not have a "Plan B."

One parent proposed that I continue working and attend school at the local community college in the evening. Another parent suggested I become a bus driver because I drove well. One of these options was to become my "Plan B." I thought both plans were ghastly proposals for my life. In my heart, I believed there was stigmatization attached to attending a junior college. As for driving a bus, I thought it was too repetitious for me. I began to question if I were of inferior intelligence. After all, I graduated from one of the top-ranking high schools (then and now) in Chicago. I can remember thinking and stereotyping junior colleges for people who could not get into a four-year university. Quickly, I realized the typecasting I had done of others; it was now me. My higher education would begin at a junior college.

I attended junior college at night because I worked a full-time job during the day. My professors encouraged me and gave me a sense of direction. While they validated who I was as an intellectual, they also counseled me on reaching my goals. During the first semester at the junior college, Dr. Johnson, one of my professors, pulled me aside and asked why was I there? I thought her question was one to trick me. I replied. "I am here to receive an education." She encouraged me to use my time wisely. Dr. Johnson and I would later have conversations before and after class about my potential and future opportunities.

Junior college was not disgraceful; it changed my life trajectory and placed me on an upwardly mobile path for intellectual growth and professional success. I stayed at the junior college for a year. Upon leaving junior college, I had 24 credit hours, a 3.9-grade point average, on the Dean's List, and accepted into a notable university of my choice

with a scholarship. Now, I am forever grateful for that educational experience and the time I spent discovering myself and my abilities while at a junior college.

Twenty years later, I applied for a position with Kensington College (K.C.)* in Texas. I was not the candidate chosen for that job, but they liked me as a person, and my experience as a former community college student was desirable. I was offered a position to work for one of the presidents of the college (who was also a former community college student) until another position became available. The decision to become a part of a community college allowed me to interact with every staff and faculty member at that college and know them by name. That decision also afforded me to be an instructor and guide students who wanted to work in health sciences. As an analytical partner, I have led the institution in creating strategic plans and strategic initiatives. Being a community college leader provided me with the tools and framework needed to win the respected Malcolm Baldridge National Quality Award. My employment at K.C. has allowed me to service students behind the scenes by supplying administrators, faculty, and staff with project management tools to forge the institution ahead. Therefore, junior colleges will forever have a special place in my heart. Hence, it is my pleasure to serve students at a community college and help them along their journey.

One day while at lunch with one of my mentors, I was asked to evaluate the administrative team I led for special projects, which consisted of 14 people, and what they all have in common? All but their leader held a doctoral degree. The mentor advised that if I were going to stay in higher education and have more of a voice, I needed to return to academia and pursue a doctoral degree. I applied for graduate school the following week.

Now, I needed a topic to research. My inquiry began by asking my team members and other administrators how they became leaders at a community college. This inquiry then led me to have critical conversations with colleagues about their educational journeys. I discovered many began their journey at community colleges. I thought to myself that I have a title for my study and persons I would like to investigate: Community College Changed My Life: A Narrative of Former Community College Students Who Are Community College Leaders.

Statement of the Problem

Student completion at community college is a problem in higher education. This study explores the experiences of community college leaders who were community college students. Community college leaders who were community college students can serve as role models and serve as influencers and guides for students to persist to graduation from a four-year institution. The research question required participants to reminisce about their past, articulate their present, and forecast their future with storytelling (Nylund et al., 2010). Interviews and reflections may bring about an intimate awareness and understanding of why the participants work, teach, and lead at a community college (Creswell, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to explore the perceptions and experiences of community college leaders who began their higher education journey at a community college, completed their education and then progressed to become a leader at a community college. To answer the proposed research question and to further appreciate the participants of this study, the researcher will inquire about (a) their early childhood experiences with education, (b) their familial relationships and education, (c) their

thoughts about entering a community college, and (d) and their journey beyond college into academia (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Research Question

The following research question guided this study: What are the perceptions and experiences of current community college leaders regarding their journey as previous community college students and its impact on their career path?

Significance of the Study

This exploratory study attempted to gain knowledge about former community college students who are current leaders at a community college. The information ascertained from the participant's stories is relevant for current community college students and community college administrators, faculty, and staff. Various individuals can benefit from this study. First, current community college students will have an opportunity to comprehend the possibilities of their trajectory. From the participant's stories, current students can be encouraged and feel optimistic about their future endeavors. Another group that can benefit from this study are current administrators. Administrators have the power to change rules, regulations, and policies that can assist students with completing their goals. Lastly, secondary partners can benefit from this study. High school administrators will have the ability to reference several students from this study who paths after high school were uncertain to give their current students possibilities in the midst of uncertainty.

Definition of Terms

Community College: A community college is any non-for-profit institution regionally accredited to award the Associate in Arts or the Associate in Science as its highest degree (Cohen et al., 2014).

Leadership: Goleman et al. (2013) said, "Leadership is distributed. It resides not solely in the individual at the top, but in every person at every level who, in one way or another, acts as a leader to a group of followers" (p. xviii).

Open-door policy: is an administrative policy of accepting everyone who completes an admissions application to attend the community college, even the student without a high school diploma or its equivalent (Cohen et al., 2014).

Self-efficacy: Bandura (1977) referred to self-efficacy as the perceptions about one's own ability to execute a course of action to achieve desired results. Later, Bandura (1995) added self-efficacy as the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2).

Very large community colleges in Texas: According to the THECB, very large community colleges in Texas are located in metropolitan areas with enrollments ranging from approximately 20,000 to 60,000 students. As a group, the very large colleges serve 62% of all students in Texas community colleges. These colleges offer a wide range of educational opportunities. (THECB, 2018).

Conclusion

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter I introduces the narrative inquiry, giving a personal statement from the researcher, identifying its purpose, and the research design. Chapter I also explains the definition of terms and ends with a summary. Chapter II reviews the literature related to the history of community colleges, community

college's mission and vision, community college students, community college leaders, and concludes with social cognitive theory. Chapter III describes and explains the study's research design and methodology used to collect and analyze data. Chapter IV presents the study's findings built with theme identifications within the data and the contributions from interviews with community college leaders. Chapter V provides an overall summary of the study, emerging key points from the findings, implications, and future research suggestions.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

This study accentuates former community college students' perceptions and experiences in becoming community college leaders. The literature review examines five areas that can impact community college leaders and students: community college history, community mission and vision, the community college students, community college competencies and professional development, and social cognitive theory.

Before one can discuss who they are, one must understand the history of where they have been and the variables that may or may not have caused them to choose a specific path. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referenced this process as moving directionally: backward, forward, inward, and outward. This study gives a glimpse of the history, mission, and vision of community colleges, allowing participants to take a look backward. This study also examines who community college students currently are and some of their challenges. Furthermore, this study considers leadership and professional development as presumptions forward. Finally, social cognitive theory gives insight inward for each participant as they embark on their community college journey.

Many authors have studied community colleges, community college students, or community college leadership. However, there is little information on formers students holding leadership roles within the community college. Although this population is small, their talents and insight on community colleges are unique and invaluable. As UNICEF (1948) sensibly pointed out many years ago, today's children (students) are tomorrow's citizens (leaders)
still stands true today.

Junior/Community College History

I have a plan which is at the same time unique and comprehensive, which I am persuaded

will revolutionize university study in this country.

   — William Rainey Harper

The American Community College movement was born thirty blocks from the researcher's home in Chicago, Illinois. At the turn of the 20th Century, William Rainey Harper was president and founding father of the University of Chicago (Vaughn,1985). Several authors have recognized that Harper conceptualized the first two years of college as an unnecessary part of university-level instruction (Brint & Karabel,1989; Geller, 2001; Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005; Trainor, 2015; Vaughn,1985). Harper wanted all universities, but explicitly his university to underscore that universities were for research and were training nuclei for the intellectual elite (Brint & Karabel,1989).

In 1920, Harper laid his plan out in a speech at the National Education Association, that the first two years of college were only a confirmation that one's high school diploma was valid (Boyer, 2015). Brint and Karabel (1989) pointed out that Harper's plan to have two-year colleges would purify universities. The goal was to stop those who were not elite or who were not researchers from obtaining a higher degree. Harper separated instruction at the University of Chicago in 1896. The two colleges were known as Junior College and Senior College. In 1899, Harper created the associate degree for graduates of the Junior College (Witt et al., 1994). In 1900, the University of Chicago bestowed its students at the Junior College an associate degree in hopes that they would stop their education and enter the workforce (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

J. Stanley Brown, a friend of Harper's and the principal of Joliet High School, labored over a strategy to expand his school's curriculum to include college-level courses

(Witt et al., 1994). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (2020b), the first high school-based community college was created at Central High School in Joliet, Illinois. Eells (1931) and Brint and Karabel (1989) concurred that in 1901, Joliet Junior College opened its doors as the country's self-proclaimed first independent public junior college. According to AACC (2020b), the early community college was small, with fewer than 50 students. A distinctive characteristic of the first community colleges was its accessibility to women. Most women who attended college were slated to be educators. All states initially did not require teachers to have a degree or certification degree (Tobin, 2012). However, when they did, the early community colleges served as a pillar for preparing students, particularly women, to become educators (AACC, 2020b).

In the early 20th Century, the United States faced a shift in global economic competition. The Great Depression boosted the junior college movement (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Leaders realized that a skilled workforce was critical to the country's continued economic strength (AACC, 2020b; Vaughn,1985). The community college was at the forefront of the postwar demographic expansion that changed the face of American higher education (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Some have referred to community colleges as the most critical higher education innovation of the 20th Century (Witt et al., 1994).

Community colleges prepared students to be a pivotal part of the nation's workforce (Floyd et al., 2016). Community colleges have been the backbone of shaping Americans to enter the middle class (Heelan & Mellow, 2017). Witt et al. (1994) stated, "by reaching out to the average citizen, these "people's colleges" allowed a generation of

Americans to achieve a goal that would have been unthinkable to their parents- a college diploma" (p. 3).

From colonial America to the present day, educational institutions have transmitted knowledge and cultural values across generations (Mendez et al., 2017). American higher education has been transformed by its community colleges (Mellow & Heelan, 2015). The community college role paved the way for people to be economically viable, contribute to society as a whole, and move away from poverty (Heelan & Mellow, 2017). Education shaped and gave access to the values, ideas, and norms that constituted mainstream culture (Baker, 2014).

The open enrollment policy of community colleges allows all to access higher education (Mellow & Heelan, 2015). Community colleges educate more than eleven million students in the United States, according to the American Association of Community Colleges (2020a). Although community colleges were initially created to separate the elite from others, today's community college is very distinctive. Community colleges offer small classes, a small student-faculty ratio, and programs that include academics and extracurricular activities (AACC, 2020a).

Dr. Edmund J. Gleazer, President and CEO of American Association of Community Colleges (1958-1981), shared in the foreword to *America's Community Colleges: The First Century* (1994) three values of community colleges: (a) community colleges must have a relation with the community they serve focusing on civic education, (b) community colleges must extend educational opportunities by finding the unserved, and (c) community colleges must value diversity.

With assistance from taxpayers, community colleges can keep tuition at a reasonable amount (Heelan & Mellow, 2017). Since tuition is low, it allows community colleges to address students' individual needs and graduate students with the skills needed to go out into the world and make a difference (Heelan & Mellow, 2017).

Community College Mission and Vision

Educational mission and vision statements for community colleges and their most common components were investigated from each state's legislation (Cohen et al., 2014). Cohen et al. (2014) noted the following commonalities of the mission for community colleges: (1) academic transfer opportunities, (2) workforce preparation, (3) continuing education, (4) developmental education, and (5) community service. While Lake and Mrozinski (2011) provided a more comprehensive definition of community college's mission and vision as, "One statement (the vision) is meant to stretch the institution and make it grow, while the other (the mission) is a measure of the institution's daily functioning or a statement of its purpose" (p. 7).

Pierce (2017) postulated that community colleges have remained true to their calling and core mission: to serve the community and focus on the community's health and the citizens it serves. Community colleges are the cornerstone for the community that it serves to aid in their citizens becoming economically viable, contributing to society, and allowing individuals to become upwardly mobile (Heelan & Mellow, 2017). Although community colleges were initially designed for students to enter the workforce, they now equip students with a general liberal arts education and the ability to transfer to a four-year institution (Magloire, J., 2019).

Bailey and Morest (2004) argued that community colleges have multiple tasks, but they cannot be "all things to all people" (p. 35). However, Magloire (2019) believed

that community colleges' overarching mission is to provide their regional community with exceptional educational services. Examples of mission and vision statements for very large, high ranking community colleges are found in Table 7.

President Obama (2009) delivered a speech and summed up the mission and vision of community colleges. He said at New York's Hudson Valley Community College that community colleges give "people of all ages and backgrounds, even in the face of obstacles, even in the face of very difficult personal challenges, a chance on a brighter future for themselves and their family" (p. 1).

The Community College Student

In a video clip from the Tosh O. Show (see Appendix E) on Comedy Central Network, Tosh O. narrates a teen student's video clip and an older adult colliding. He says: "Just another day at community college where kids who can't get into a state school share a campus with old people who want to learn computers" (Zabielski et al., 2014). These types of videos add stigmatization to community colleges, their students, and potential students. To some, community colleges are looked upon as a last resort or only hope (Hornak & Garza Mitchell, 2016). However, the literature suggested that community colleges serve a significant portion of the countries post-secondary students who are diverse in age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, and experiences who are trying to better themselves (Baily et al., 2010).

Community colleges have provided needed access to higher education for nearly half of the nation's undergraduates with their open-door policies (Hornak & Garza Mitchell, 2016;). Community colleges enrolled 11.8 million students in 2018-2019, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019). The American Association of Community Colleges (2020a) wanted to enlighten all that more than half

of all pursuing higher education enter higher education institutions via a community college route. This same year, Texas enrolled over 769,000 students in community colleges (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2020). Community colleges serve as a hub for first-generation, minority, non-traditional, or low-income students (Davis et al., 2015).

According to AACC (2020a), community colleges serve a diverse group of students across the country. Of those who attended community college in 2018-2019, 57% were women, while 43% were men. Most community college students are from a lower socioeconomic background (AACC, 2020a). Many attending may be the first in their family to attend college. Fifteen percent of students attending community college were single parents (NCES, 2020). Single parents are challenged with balancing work, childcare, and academic obligations (Peterson, 2016). Moreover, these same single parents work full-time and attended community college part-time to better themselves (Augustine et al., 2018).

Overall, community college students tend to be older, with 54% over the age of 22 (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). An increasing number of adults who have needed training or additional training turned to community colleges for assistance. Another group of students are those transitioning from military life to civilian life. These veterans have turned to community colleges for support (Williams-Klotz, & Gansemer-Topf, 2018). Twenty-five percent of students who attend community colleges are veterans and students with disabilities (AACC, 2020a). Those transitioning from the criminal justice system to the workforce have also sought community colleges as their first stop for new beginnings (Pierce, 2017). The part-time student body attends at a rate

of 64%. Community college students are disproportionately people of color: 52%

Hispanics and 42% African American and are from low socioeconomic backgrounds

(AACC, 2020a).

The annual cost of tuition and fees for a student to attend a community college is

about $3,700 compared to a four-year college at a whopping $10,400 (AACC, 2020a).

Ortagus and Hu (2019) noted that low tuition and open enrollment policies are attractive

to students and allow students to receive a quality education with the hopes and

aspirations of having social mobility. Another attraction for students to attend a

community college are memos of understanding (MOU) between community colleges

and four-year universities. For example, California offers students who attend a

community college in California the opportunity to receive a transfer with guaranteed

admission to a California four-year university like the University of California

(California Community Colleges, 2020). These agreements allow students to enter the

university as a junior in good standing (Gewertz, 2016).

Achievement Gap

Our nation's educational system has long been plagued by enrollment and

attainment gaps, which can be linked to ethnicity and race. The connection between race,

ethnicity, gender, or culture is of great importance when discussing student completion

and overall student outcomes, particularly regarding African American, Native American,

and Hispanic students (Musa-Gillette et al., 2016). The achievement gap is the difference

in academic performance between two groups of students (Kotok, 2017). Achievement

gaps exist at all levels of education (Murphy, 2010). According to the National Education

Association (2019), students who experience achievement gaps are identified as racial

and ethnic minorities, English learner students, students with disabilities, students from what is considered low-income households, and those who identify as LGBTQ. Additionally, the achievement gap consists of the disparities between standardized test scores of white and Asian students versus standardized test scores of minority students or low-income students. Clark (2013) sums up the achievement gap in two words: equity and access.

Student completion at community colleges is a problem in higher education. The concern for completion rates underlies the belief that community colleges need to consider the complexity of their diverse student populations (McNair et al., 2015; United States Department of Education, 2016). For example, in 2020, 39% of those attending community colleges were first-time freshmen. (AACC, 2020a). However, the completion rate by race from community colleges was nominal. When community colleges examined data by race, 32% of Asian students, 27% of White students, 21% of Hispanic students, 20% Pacific Islander students, 17% of Native American students, and 13% of African American students earned a certificate or associate degree within three years (de Brey et al., 2019). To strengthen community colleges in the future, they must relentlessly address systematic inequities within the higher education system (Long, 2016). When systematic inequities are eradicated, families and students' economic and social mobility can increase (van de Oudeweetering & Agirdag, 2018).

Achieving the Dream

Achieving the Dream (2020, [AtD]) stated that "for the first time in our history, the current generation of college-aged Americans will be less educated than their parents' generation." AtD (2020) is an organization that aims to close achievement gaps and

increase student success. They do this by: (a) helping community colleges to implement evidence-based institutional change, (b) shaping and influencing public policy, (c) generating knowledge, and (d) engaging with society. AtD (2020) challenges community colleges to scrutinize their equality barriers and invest in equity-minded policies, behaviors, and practices. These policies, behaviors, and practices will lead to tremendous success for more students. AtD recognizes education as a great equalizer by valuing education. AtD (2020) has an inherent expectation that higher education institutions will work toward more significant equity for all their students. The fairness and equity principles ensure that each student can be successful and receive what is needed through their college experience to be successful.

Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT)

Culturally relevant teaching (CRT); allows students and educators from different cultures to come into the learning space that values their culturally different backgrounds and incorporate those differences into the learning process (Ray, 2019)**.** Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (1995) stated that culturally relevant teaching rests on three principles: (a) students' success and academic excellence, (b) students develop cultural competence and cultural identities, and (c) students must become critically conscious, and by doing so they can challenge the status quo. Strange and Banning (2015) added that "individual differences are clearly important to student success" (p. 61). President Obama (2009) identified that the role of community colleges is pivotal in post-secondary education. Furthermore, college leaders and administrators have focused attention on ensuring the campus climate is conducive to meeting their diverse student populations' academic and social needs to improve completion rates. Community college educators increasingly

interact with "students from cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial, and social class

backgrounds different from their own" (Howard, 2010, p. 40). Consequently, with a

diverse group of students, educators cannot teach or have the one size fits all perspective.

Trends show that diverse learners are the majority population and an essential part of the

student population in community colleges around the country (Hawkins, 2018).

Community College Leadership Competencies

Community colleges are the lifeline to the American dream and the promise of

opportunity for all (Heelan & Mellow, 2017). The lifeline of community colleges are on

ventilators, with more than 50% of community college presidents looking forward to

retirement within the next ten years, and 21% of these college presidents and their

colleges are without a succession plan in place (Strom et al., 2011; American Association

of Community Colleges, 2018; Boerner, 2019; Eddy et al., 2019; Jaschik & Lederman,

2019). Ullman (2014) suggested that community colleges should have a framework for

leaders and future leaders to acquire the necessary skill set to become the epitome of

community college leaders. To fulfill the dreams of the students that community colleges

serve and for opportunities to come to fruition, community colleges must have leaders in

place or trained and ready to be deployed.

To assist with this mission, the AACC Board of Directors in 2005 approved six

core competencies for future community college leaders. This first edition of the core

competency areas included: (1) organizational strategy, (2) resource management, (3)

communication, (4) collaboration, (5) community college advocacy, and (6)

professionalism (AACC, 2006). In 2012, AACC updated its core competencies for

community colleges. This time AACC (2013) looked at leaders in three categories: (1)

emerging leaders, (2) new CEOs (three years or less), and (3) CEOs (three or more years

on the job). Data-driven decision-making (DDDM) became a vital requirement for current and future leaders in community colleges during this period. Thus, AACC updated its competencies with this shift in mind (Dejear et al., 2018). For the second edition, only five competencies were identified: (1) organizational strategy, (2) institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management, (3) communication, (4) collaboration, and (5) community college advocacy. The most recent updates of AACC core competencies for community colleges were published in 2018.

The third edition of the core competencies is significantly different from the previous two editions. AACC (2018a) developed "a fully comprehensive document to guide the development of emerging leaders and to assist colleges with the selection of employees dedicated to the community college mission, vision, and values." AACC (2018b) identified 11 focus areas for six different leadership types to lead at any level (faculty, mid-level leaders, senior-level leaders, aspiring CEOs, New CEOs, and CEOs). Every community college employee can understand one's possibilities and career trajectory with community college leadership at any level. These competencies allow for all to be leaders at their level (Ullman, 2017). The framework is personalized for every educator. All one has to do is determine their role or destination within the institution and begin their journey (Boerner, 2019). Ullman (2017) reminded all leaders that there is no one size fits all way to leadership within the community college; every road to leadership is unique with many green lights, bumps, stop signs, and detours.

The adapted AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders are found in Table 8. These competencies were used to identify essential and valuable skills needed for community college leaders (Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Cejda & Jolley, 2013). One way

for community colleges to secure the types of leaders that AACC refers to in their competencies is to cultivate the leadership from within (Lambert, 2015). The leaders community colleges seek are right under their noses; they are within the institution (Finkel, 2018).

Social Cognitive Theory

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (1977) comprises four fundamental constructs: observational learning, reinforcement, self-control, and self-efficacy. The theory's four constructs are interrelated and affect motivation and goal attainment (Badura, 1977). This study examined the latter construct, self-efficacy, and how it may play a role in community college leaders' lives and student completion.

Bandura (1977) referred to self-efficacy as the perceptions about one's ability to execute a course of action to achieve desired results. Later, Bandura (1995) termed self-efficacy as the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). His thoughts on self-efficacy beliefs expounded into humans functioning through cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes. Bandura and Locke (2003) suggested that self-efficacy beliefs were rooted in one's core belief that they are the only one who has the power to produce the desired effect needed to move forward. Self-efficacy can regulate one's motivation, aspirations, and internal thoughts about their capacity to succeed (Bandura, 1995).

There have been numerous studies to investigate self-efficacy that add additional knowledge to the body of literature. For example, Pajares (1996) believed self-efficacy to be an essential element of one's self-concept. Bergerson (2009) defined, "self-efficacy is conceptualized as students' ability to set goals, plan for, and actualize their educational aspirations" (p. 94). Zimmerman (1989) summarized Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as

an individual influenced by their environment, behavior, and self. Furthermore,

McCormick et al. (2002) described those with high self-efficacy as motivated persistent,

goal-directed, resilient, and brilliant thinkers under pressure.

In Bandura's SCT (1977), self-efficacy expectations were based on four

significant sources of information: performance outcome, vicarious persuasion, verbal

persuasion, and emotional arousal (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Self-Efficacy Visual

Performance outcome is the most important source of self-efficacy (Bandura,

1977). A strong belief in personal self-efficacy is based on past success or personal

mastery experiences in performing a task or behavior. Successes will raise one's self-

expectations. A resilient sense of efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles by

persevering in the face of adversity and quickly rebounding from setbacks (Zimmerman,

1995). One can emerge stronger from adversity. Performance outcomes provide the

"most authentic evidence that one can muster up whatever it takes to succeed" (Bandura, 1997, p. 80).

Bandura (1977) maintained that vicarious experiences provided by social models strengthen beliefs of self-efficacy and allow one's beliefs to rise when seeing others perform a similar task. By observing new skills and strategies in others, people enhance their task capabilities (Bandura, 1977). If a person sees someone similar to them succeed, it can increase their self-efficacy. McCormick et al. (2002) and Bandura (1995) referred to this as modeling behavior.

Verbal persuasion is when individuals are verbally persuaded to achieve given goals (Bandura, 1977). Verbal persuasion is widely used to influence human behavior because of its ease and ready availability (LaRocca, 2017). Encouragement from a credible person such as a parent, teacher, coach, or mentor can verbally persuade one to succeed. Emotional arousal is another source of information that can affect perceived self-efficacy in coping with threatening situations. Optimistic moods increase perceived self-efficacy; a pessimistic mood reduces self-efficacy (McCormick et al., 2002).

Self-efficacy is not a new concept, nor is its correlation to leadership or education. Cole and Cole (1993) studied self-efficacy in stages as it related to students. Figure 6 is an example of the development of self-efficacy via age. In academic settings, self-efficacy has been repeatedly studied to influence academic aspiration and success (Edman & Brazil, 2009; Klassen et al., 2008; Porter & Umbach, 2006; Zimmerman, 1995). Walker et al. (2005) ascertained in their study that self-efficacy was a significant predictor in academia. Bandura (1977) agreed that self-efficacy was the most essential ability of a student; it encourages the student and leads her to succeed. When one is

provided with specific praise, specifically a student, this improves the student's academic performance, goal, and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Preez, 2013).

Summary

The literature review was designed to examine the history and present landscape of community colleges and community college students. The researcher has covered the following in this literature review: (1) community college history, (2) a community college mission and vision, (3) the community college student, (4) community college leadership competencies, and (5) social cognitive theory. Keeping these strands of literature in mind, the researcher will weave in this study's methodology in Chapter III while adding texture to Chapter IV with the participant's stories.

Chapter III

Methodology

 This chapter outlines the qualitative narrative methodology used for this study. This chapter begins with the restating of the research question, followed by the research design rationale. The next section of the study provides insight into how participants for this study were selected, how purposive criterion-based sampling was beneficial, and step by step instructions on how data was analyzed and collected. Lastly, this chapter will review the researcher's procedures to manage ethical considerations and possible risks to the participants.

Research Question

 The following research question guided this study: What are the perceptions and experiences of current community college leaders regarding their journey as previous community college students and its impact on their career path?

Research Design

 Qualitative research is the study of natural social life (Saldaña, 2011). Klenke (2016) defined qualitative research as a naturalistic inquiry seeking to understand a phenomenon within its natural environment. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand how people make sense of their lives and describe how people interpret what they are feeling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Kozleski (2017) reminded practitioners that qualitative research is also relational and engaging. Qualitative research ultimately wants to understand how people interpret their life experiences. However, quantitative research design wants to test theories and explore hypotheses, which is not the desired outcome for this study (Creswell, 2014).

This researcher selected a qualitative narrative inquiry design for this study to explore community college leaders' experiences and perceptions. Creswell & Poth (2018) asserted that a narrative design requires participants to express themselves through the storytelling of their lives. Moreover, a narrative study is a rich and powerful source that provides meaning to both the individual and the researcher. When participants told their stories, patterns arose, and themes were discovered (Shank & Brown, 2007). This study found themes with an in-depth look at former students who now lead at community colleges. This study provided the reader with the "human" side of the subject matter (Mack et al., 2011, p. 1). The researcher chose a qualitative research paradigm to understand how people interpret their life experiences.

Narrative Inquiry

A narrative inquiry explores the participant's life and allows the participant to tell stories of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A narrative inquiry approach was used for this study because it allowed participants to share their personal experiences about their lives and to tell their stories. This study aimed to explore the perspectives of leaders who began their educational journey at a community college. These leaders are now paying it forward by serving students at a community college and are exemplars for students to complete their education. This study captured their experiences.

A narrative inquiry is "an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narrative within which individuals' experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (Clandinin, 2013, p.18). Creswell and Poth (2018) asserted that a narrative inquiry is articulated via lived and told experiences. Clandinin (2013) furthered the idea and added that the individual experiences are honored and respected. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) noted that a narrative inquiry "is a

collaboration between researchers and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interactions with milieus" (p. 20). Narrative inquiries involve the telling and retelling of one's story. A narrative inquiry may also shed light on how participants see themselves (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the researcher must become "in the midst" of the research and become a member of the landscape as stories are being lived, told, retold, and relived (p.63).

Participants

Permission to conduct this study was given to the researcher from Kensington College's (K.C.) Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the University of Houston's Institutional Review Board. The researcher used purposeful criterion-based sampling to select individuals for this study. This study's participants met the following criteria: a) a leader within Kensington College b) has a minimum of at least three years of leadership experience at a community college and c) a former community college student. The sample size for this study was three to five participants. Patton (2002) noted that "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" (p. 313).

Due to the global pandemic–COVID-19, the researcher recruited participants from her community college colleagues' social network. In an email to the potential participants, the researcher explained the study's purpose and asked colleagues who met the criteria to participate in the study and share their perceptions and experiences as a community college leader. Four former community college students who are now community college leaders agreed to participate in this study. Two males and two females participated in the study. Gender, race, nor age was not a factor for the study.

Sampling Design

For this study, the researcher used purposive criterion-based sampling. The sample of participants for this study had characteristics or insight that the researcher was seeking for the study (Shank & Brown, 2007). Due to the global pandemic–COVID-19, the researcher used her social networks to invite individuals to participate in the study. Specifically, criterion-based sampling reaffirmed that the participants began their secondary education at a community college, they had at least three years of experience at a community college, and their position within the community college was one of leadership. Criterion-based sampling is ideal when all individuals studied represent individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Data Collection

For this narrative inquiry, the researcher collected data from interviews with the participants, journal entries from the notebook that the researcher kept throughout her doctoral journey, and the reflective field notes after each interview with study participants. Each participant received a consent form, signed it, and returned it to the researcher before conducting any interviews. The interviews were conducted using a video conferencing platform. Participants were interviewed in comfortable and familiar surroundings using video conferencing (Archibald et al., 2019). Participants took part in one on one semi-structured interviews. Participants met no longer than 60 minutes on three separate occasions. During the initial interview, the researcher explained the study's purpose and any potential risk of participating in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participant's participation was voluntary, and they had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any point in time.

Additionally, participants did not receive any financial gain for participating in the study. All participants were ensured of confidentiality during the study and after the study. Since all participants hold a unique position with a unique title, their identity was concealed. Each participant was given a pseudonym, and the community college was given a pseudonym as well. Using pseudonyms allowed identity not to be compromised. The participants are listed in this study as Dr. Khloe, Dr. Kylie, Dr. Kooper, and Dr. King. This methodology optimistically furthered ensured confidentiality. The participants will receive a copy of the study upon the conferring of the researcher's degree.

The researcher began with ten interview questions (see Appendix A) to assist the participants in answering the research question: What are the perceptions and experiences of current community college leaders regarding their journey as previous community college students and its impact on their career path? However, when the interviews ended, the original ten questions morphed into 21 questions that were answered by the end of the interviewing process.

The subjects participated in three interviews, which were scheduled a week apart from each other. This timetable gave the participant time to reflect and have a break from the interviewing process. Furthermore, the time allowed the researcher to transcribe the interview and return it to the participant before the next interview for member checking. The interviews varied in time because some participants had more to say than others. However, the researcher did not belabor the process and was mindful of the participant's time. Each interview was no longer than an hour.

During the first interview, participants were invited to share all they could remember and felt comfortable sharing about their past lives until they entered a

community college. The participants articulated their stories by answering questions about their humble beginnings. The researcher encouraged participants to include experiences with their family, friends, classmates, and early education (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These topics were significant, which led to further conversations and questions about the participants. The first series of questions laid a foundation for why the participant began their educational journey at a community college and persisted with their education.

The second interview focused on the participants' present life as a leader at their community college where they are employed. During this interview, the participants also shared their "why" for being at a community college. Seidman (2006) suggested that researchers concentrate on the details of the participant's present life experience. Moreover, Spradley (1979) noted that the conversation should be a friendly conversation that helps the participant relax.

The final interview allowed for a discussion about the participant's career trajectory and self-efficacy. The third interview was also used for member checking and reflection (Creswell, 2014; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Member checking enhances data interpretation and allows the researcher to receive additional feedback and clarification from the participants if needed (Creswell, 2007).

Data Analysis

Upon completing and transcribing all interviews, the researcher modified Braun and Clarke's (2006) *Six Phases of Thematic Analysis* to analyze the data and create a narrative for each participant that was chronologically driven. During the first phase of thematic analysis, I familiarized myself with the data and immersed myself in the data. I did this by reading and viewing each interview two to three times. Then in the second

phase, I identified initial codes from the data and organized them to reflect the participant's lifeline chronologically, the beginning, the present, and the future. The initial coding was done by taking the researcher's notes from the transcriptions and placing them on Post-it® notes. The Post-it® notes were attached to my office wall in my home. The third phase of thematic analysis allowed the researcher to search for themes. The researcher then used the Post-it® app to take a picture of the Post-it® notes and manipulate the notes within the app to search for and identify emerging themes. The next phase allowed the researcher to refine the themes by determining from the transcripts and the Post-it® notes if the themes were categorically a theme, a sub-theme, or needed additional work. The fifth phase was defining and naming the themes by writing a summary of each theme. As a further step, the researcher downloaded the transcripts from the interviews into a word frequency analysis to generate a visual representation of the text data. Word clouds were created and then used to show the thematic analysis of the themes two-dimensionally. The final phase of thematic analysis was writing a report. Chapter IV of this study details the report and findings.

Ethical Considerations

In the process of conducting this study, the researcher was continually aware of ethical considerations. The researcher adhered to the following ethical considerations outlined by Bell and Bryman (2007): 1.) I will not cause my participants harm 2) I will have respect for the participants 3) I will obtain full consent (Appendix A) 4) I will protect the anonymity of the participants and the organization by using pseudonyms 5) I will maintain objectivity in the discussions 6) I will maintain objectivity during analyses of the research 7) I will be open and honest and 8) I will not misrepresent my findings.

The very notion of one participating in any research requires participants to be exposed and vulnerable. When participants share their lives, some of their innermost thoughts, and tell their personal stories, the least a researcher can do is to assure confidentiality and anonymity. After each interview, the researcher reassured the participants that maintaining strict confidentiality regarding all field notes, narratives, recordings, and coding materials will be enforced for the study's lifetime.

Chapter IV

Presentation of Research

  This chapter is the heart of the researcher's findings. It focuses on the journey and perceptions of four former community college students who are currently community college leaders. Their stories reflect their past lives, present lives, and their future aspirations. This chapter begins with analyzing the data collection process, followed by the study's participants' demographics. For anonymity and confidentiality, the participants and their employer, the community college, have all received pseudonym names for this study. The researcher is also a participant in this study. I began my secondary education at a community college, and I met the study's criteria to add my voice to the unique conversations. Finally, I present the underlying themes that connect the participants.

Data Collection Process

  Community college leaders' perceptions were obtained through one-on-one interviews using open semi-structured questions. The interviews were held virtual using a video conferencing platform due to the national pandemic, COVID-19. Each participant participated in three interviews that chronologized their lives: past, present, and future. All interviews were recorded and lasted 35- 60 minutes. The interview protocol (see Appendix D) outlines ten semi-structured questions. Because this was a narrative inquiry, the researcher asked additional questions as they arose. These questions were part of the natural dialogue that occurred during the interviews. At the end of all interviews, the researcher noted that 11 additional questions emerged. After each interview, the researcher reviewed the transcript by watching the video and listening to each participant's interviews from the video conferencing platform. Before beginning the second and third interviews, the participants received a copy of a transcript from their

previous interview for member checking. Member checking allowed the participant to confirm what was recorded was accurate and comment or clarify any interview content. Fictitious names were given to each participant. They will be referred to in the study as Dr. Khloe, Dr. Kylie, Dr. Kooper, and Dr. King. They all work for Kensington College (K.C.), which is a fictitious community college as well.

The Narratives Where We Have Been

This narrative includes four participants' life stories and their journey from community college students to community college leaders. All participants except for the researcher-participant graduated from a community college. Additionally, all participants have completed doctoral degrees while being employed by a community college. Based on a three-dimensional framework that provides chronological progression, each participant began telling their story at the beginning of their life with demographic information: where they are from, information about their families, and early education remembrances. Table 2 gives the demographics of each participant.

Table 2

Research Participants – Pseudonyms and Demographics

Name	Years of Experience	Age	Ethnicity/Gender
Dr. Khloe	30-35	70-75	White/Woman
Dr. Kylie	15-20	40-45	Latinx/Woman
Dr. Kooper	10-15	55-60	White/Man
Dr. King	5-10	55-60	African-American/Man

The Beginning

Dr. Khloe is a white woman in her early seventies. Her journey began in Kentucky's mountains, where she was born in her grandmother's log cabin. She is a

middle child of twelve children from a blended family. Her parents divorced when she was twelve, but she remained close to both parents. Dr. Khloe remembered her first day of school as if it were yesterday:

My first day of school, I still remember. On the first day of school, I walked in with my sister. Furthermore, I remember being just a little bit curious and apprehensive about who these people are. On the first day of school, I remember the storybooks and all of the books that we were expected to read, you know, Dick and Jane. I went to a two-room school. And we would have first grade through third or fourth grade in one of those rooms and then fifth through eighth in the other room. I loved school so much.

I, too, remember my first day of school. I can see the brown school named after a famous poet. It had two floors and educated 550 African American children. I wrote these notes and entered an entry into my journal after my interview with Dr. Khloe:

My older sister's classes began before mine, and my next-door neighbor, Kathy, walked me to school. I was so nervous; I remember thinking, what is school? I did not attend pre-school or any type of daycare. I stayed at home with my maternal grandmother until I was five and ready for school. Kathy told my grandmother I needed 46 cents for school. Six cents for milk and forty cents for lunch. My grandmother placed the money in my pant pocket. She secured the monies by closing the pocket with a safety pin. Upon arrival at kindergarten, we were met by a tall, beautiful black woman who looked like a model to me. Her name was Mrs. Sandra Shields. Her room was massive, and the only classroom with a bathroom. Mrs. Shields was the foundation of my learning. She taught me how to read

[Dick, Jane, and now Anne], write, and add numbers. She was the first person outside of my family who told me I was smart (Personal journal entry 8.11.20).

Dr. Kylie is a Latinx woman in her early forties from Mexico. She is the oldest of three children and attended private school until she moved to the United States at age sixteen. Dr. Kylie describes her early education as structured, and she attributes structure as an essential part of her moral fiber. She describes her primary education:

My primary education was very, very structured. We wore uniforms. We had to have our hair impeccable. They [the nuns] would check our nails. They would check our shoes. If the uniform were not knee-length, you know, they would send you home. On the days that we had P.E. classes, we would have to change into a different uniform. So, I appreciate the structure that I received growing up because it taught me to be who I am today.

Dr. Kooper is a white man in his late fifties from Florida. He is the oldest of two children. Like the researcher, his grandmother cared for him until he was school-aged. He specified his educational journey began at a Catholic school that he attended for twelve years. Outside of school, he was very active within the Boy Scouts and was elected as a statewide representative.

The last participant in this study is Dr. King. Dr. King is an African American man from Michigan. He is the oldest of four children. He does not remember a significant amount about his early education experiences. However, he does remember his early education experiences as continuously being in trouble. He describes what he remembers:

In grammar school, I got in trouble, got in trouble, and got in trouble. I had the man [a teacher] tell my mother in the eighth grade; I do not know what you are

going to do with him. The teacher went on to say that I was not ready for high school. See, I knew how to express myself and get in trouble. I would pop this person on the arm intentionally. Or, I would shoot a rubber band at this person's head. I did not do the schoolwork. I did not do what you're supposed to do. And that's what I remember about my education. It was not until I took a debate class in high school that I learned to express myself verbally. Oh, I also remember so many people telling me……. You can't; you can't, you can't, until you start to think, well, I guess I can't.

Community College Experiences

Community colleges can be a refuge for students. They are conveniently located within communities, offering flexible schedules, and are relatively inexpensive to attend. Community colleges have educators who are passionate about what they do and are excited about helping students achieve their goals. Individuals come to community colleges for a wide range of reasons; whatever the reason, community colleges educate students from where they are in life to where they are headed.

Dr. Khloe was a non-traditional student. She was married at an early age and conceived her first child while finishing high school. While being a wife and raising her son, Dr. Khloe became restless and wanted to learn more. Community college for her was flexible, convenient, and inexpensive. She explains:

I got really restless, and I knew I had to go back to school. And the closest college at that time would have been in Long Beach, California, which was at a distance. I knew I needed to do something else. I began to read George Bernard Shaw and other great writers, and I considered attending another university. My son was

about two, and I had become pregnant with my second child. And then guess what? The State of California built the first junior college in the region. It was called Kelly Junior College, and it was no driving distance. It was about 10 to 15 minutes from my house. I was one of the first students at Kelly. I was thrilled to death because that gave me access! And Lisa, my tuition was $2. Goodness, two dollars, Lisa. That's how it should be!

Community colleges educate a sizable percentage of international students. Dr. Kylie was an international student who was not sure what she wanted to study but thought her English skills could be improved and refined. The community college was a refuge for Dr. Kylie. It allowed her to complete her education and build confidence with her English skills at a reasonable cost. She revealed:

> I did not know what I wanted to do. I knew I was curious about computer science. I did not feel comfortable or confident enough with my English skills. So, I decided that I would take English classes at one of the community colleges. So, I wanted to save money, and I did not want to spend like the amount of money that I would have to pay at the university level since I was an international student. I took a year of English class. It was at a community college, and it was small, and I got to meet different people that knew my name, and professors are very caring, so it was the right fit for me. I did not want to be at a large university where I was just another number. I was afraid I was not confident, and I needed to build those relationships and the skills that I needed before moving on to the four-year institution.

Parents play a pivotal role in the life of their children who are becoming young adults. Dr. Kooper's mother was the one who gave him a push and an ultimatum. He could further his education or enlist into the military. He chose to attend a community college. It was convenient for Dr. Kooper, and it grounded him. He explained:

> I graduated high school and not really having any sense as to what I wanted to do next. My mother was a short, little woman who had immigrated to this country in her teens after the war. She pointed her finger at me and said, you either go to college or go to the military. So, Kingston College was right up the street. I could ride my bike there. I started out with no idea why I was there other than I was continuing school. I took a philosophy class my second term, and that course changed the direction of my life, it grounded me in a way I'd never been grounded before, and that opened up an intellectual world for me that I did not really know existed.

Like Dr. Kylie, I found community college to be a refuge, and like Dr. Kooper, I found that it grounded me. Community college was a place for me to transition from high school to college. I realized that I was intelligent, and I had always been bright. Being in that space gave me confidence. It afforded me the assurances I needed to proceed with my education:

> In my mind, I was an embarrassment to my family and community because I was not going to further my education at a four-year university. What was reprehensible was my father, suggesting I become a bus driver. I enjoy driving, and others in our family had made careers out of driving buses, but I wanted something more. At that moment, I understood that I needed to further my

education because I knew; God had more in store for me than driving a bus. I

headed off to junior college, who took anybody and everybody. I thought, how

disgraceful. I attended junior college at night because I worked a full-time job as a

floater in a bank during the day. While at junior college, my professors

encouraged me and gave me a sense of direction. They validated who I was and

gave me sound advice on how to reach my goals. Junior college was not

disgraceful as I intentionally thought; it changed my life trajectory and placed me

on the road for professional growth and success. (Personal journal entry 10.3.19).

The flexibility that a community college offered is what Dr. King needed.

Because Dr. King was enlisted in the United States Air Force when he received orders

from his commanding officer, he had to go:

It probably took me about six years to complete community college. I was

working full time [Airman] and going to school. Then when you are deployed,

you could not go to school. There were no online services back then. You had to

finish all your schoolwork before you got deployed or take that class over again.

If you are in the middle of a semester, they will not charge you [money] for that,

but you have to take that class over again.

Impactful People

Some people come into our lives for a reason, a season, or a lifetime. I call these

individuals impactful people or mentors. These individuals encourage you, sow seeds

into your life and keep the imposter syndrome at bay. All the participants reminisced

about having someone who held this honor in their lives. Dr. Khloe smiled as she

remembered the impactful people in her life:

I had this incredible science teacher named Mrs. Bee, and I took an I.Q. test that year. And I just remember her raving about my score on the I.Q. test and telling me I had to go to college. I had to get through high school and go to college. And so you know, of course, my dad thought I had to go to college, also. But I remember thinking, gosh, you know, college is so expensive, but daddy always reassured me that yes, I would, and go and so on. But, I really thought college was for people smarter and wealthier than me. And yet, I wanted to learn.

My brother is also an impactful person in my life. When I was going to interview for a position, I can remember my brother saying, remember who you are. Remember where you come from and always have the courage to say yes to what is right and say no, to what is wrong, even if it is not popular, because that's what lets you sleep at night. And if you say yes, because you are trying to make someone else happy, you won't sleep at night, and you will not have any cause that's worth advancing.

Dr. Kylie recalls an impactful relationship with a teacher. Her teacher did not see a language barrier; she saw untapped potential in a student. She saw the possibility of what Dr. Kylie could be and nurtured her potential:

I did not have any family here, and I had a high school professor who took me under her wing. It was a math teacher for calculus in high school. And even though my English proficiency was limited, she asked me: Are you familiar with the concept? And I said yes, and so she took me under her wing. She referred me to other programs when I first came to the U.S. I went to the university when I was still in high school and built my own computer. And I was very grateful for

that opportunity because it was the whole year program where I learned about computers, and I was able to keep my own computer without having to buy it because I did not have money to buy a computer. Then, she also referred me to a calculus class, a college-level class at a prestigious university. And that was a summer program. So, without her believing in me, I would not have had those opportunities that made an impact on my career or my academic life.

Dr. Kooper recalls a professor who intentionally spent time with him and assisted in unlocking his intellectual reasoning and understanding. Dr. Kooper explains:

That was the first place that people considered me to be smart. I had a professor there that kind of took me under his wing. He would come in on the weekends. It was a residential place [the university], and he would come in on Saturdays, and we would have breakfast together, and then we go to the library, and he would teach me how to read and how to write articles.

Dr. King was one of a few airmen who were of color. For this reason, he never gave up on his education but did not know how long it was going to take. An officer of color strengthened Dr. King and cheered him on, mostly when things were intense in the world, which caused Dr. King to be deployed:

There was one officer who cheered me on, and I did not know why but was happy that he did. He told me just to keep moving forward. I was tired, I had no life, and I was about to be deployed again. He said, keep moving forward. It took me a total of 11 years to get an AA and a BA and become an officer. I'm so happy I kept moving forward. I'm so happy I had someone to help me up that hill when I did no think I could make.

Where We Are and Why We Lead

Leadership

Questions shifted from the participant's humble beginnings to their current roles, mission, professional development, and leadership thoughts during our next interviews. One can deduce straightforwardly by the participant's job titles within Kensington College that they are in a leadership position. Although this is true, the researcher posed this question to each subject: *Do you consider yourself a leader?* Moreover, all participants said with self-confidence, certainty, and assurance; yes! Yes, they were indeed leaders. Each shared their definition of leadership and characteristics that they believed are associated with being a community college leader. Dr. Khloe began:

> So, leadership is a commitment. Leadership is seeing a need, recognizing that an action or behavior can make a difference in other people's lives. I've never asked anyone who has ever worked with me, or as my chair, as someone on a committee, or I've never asked anyone to do anything that I wasn't willing to jump right in and take part in and do myself. That's leadership. Leaders should be empowering, have integrity and passion. They should care about the students. But there's a big concept and word that I'm leaving out here……humility. I don't think we ever stop learning. I don't think we ever stop growing.

Dr. Kylie was very passionate about what she perceives leadership to be, and some of the characteristics one should have:

> Leadership is having the ability to influence others. Leadership is being able to roll up your sleeves and help others. You don't need a title to be a leader. You have to have a high work ethic, and you also have to have a high sense of integrity. Leadership is being humble; it doesn't matter how much you know or

how many degrees you have; if you're not humble, it is very difficult to be a leader if you can't relate to others. A leader should have a continuous learning plan because we don't know everything. Treating people with respect and dignity is an important factor in being a strong leader. Just because you're in a leadership role doesn't mean that you treat others like their inferior.

Dr. Kooper elaborated on his definition of leadership:

Leadership is about harnessing the energy of the people for the good. So, when I was in Boy Scouts, the good would be having a successful camping trip, having everything packed on time, or set up in the right way. And, so we harnessed the energy and kind of moved people, we helped move the group in a direction by building consensus. The work [in education] is still the same today. So, if I'm leading or a leader in a situation, my responsibility is to convene the people, to give them a voice and an agency in terms of the way in which you organize the meeting so that we can come to some sense of a shared vision that we can move forward with. It doesn't have to be complete unanimity, but there needs to be consensus in the room that we've hashed this out, and we can move forward. I think the days of command and control leadership is gone. I have to walk the talk is the expression…..we have to guide the institution in terms of being more collaborative. That doesn't mean that we allow things to grind to a halt. That doesn't mean that every decision has to be vetted by everybody. Furthermore, we require leaders who get it, right? But if you don't understand specifically what a community college is for and what it's about and who is trying to serve, you're

never really going to get it. You're never really going to make the difference that's

needed. Most people are in this work to make a difference.

Dr. King echoes Dr. Kooper but from a different stance; from his military

perspective:

I got my leadership skills from the Air Force, and I carried them into my

community college practice. Leaders know when it's time to move. They know

how to lead others to that next place. But leaders don't always have to be right.

You might have a good idea, but somebody else might be able to give you a better

idea. Leaders can use the idea of others and not feel intimidated. Leaders will give

those with better ideas credit for their ideas. Leaders take the responsibility of

moving the group, moving the group forward to achieve the goal. I help move

students forward, and I help them to achieve their goals.

I concur with my colleagues and add that leadership involves communicating

openly and often to those you lead. Leaders need to be compassionate, especially during

the crisis that we are currently experiencing (COVID-19).

Leadership and Self-efficacy

If self-efficacy is one's perception about one's ability to execute a course of action

or the beliefs in one's capabilities, I would announce that all participants recognized this

belief in themselves but at different times in life. For most, it was a look back to

recognize they always believed in themselves but perhaps lacked the confidence that

came later in life. Dr. Khloe explains her perceptions:

There is something inside all of us. I know there's something inside me that just

pushes me forward, still. There's something in me that just makes me want to help

students move forward. That's something innate and my nature. I think some people are born leaders, but I also think that even that needs nurturing. You recognize leadership in others, even small children, and you can say, you know, she's a born leader, he's a leader, and, and you want to nurture that, you want them to know that. However, I don't think we do anything totally on our own. I think we stand on the shoulders of people who come before us. And that we learn from instruction, we observe others, who become our role models.

Dr. Kooper weighs in on self-efficacy and how it is a manifestation of his leadership:

I was told once that, in order to see something in the world, you have to believe that that's true. For example, in order to experience love and to love, you have to be able to believe that love is real and that you're lovable. I think the same is true for leadership. For a leader to be able to lead, they have to be able to have a vision of the future state. They have to be able to see the possibilities; they have to believe in the possibilities of the people that they're leading. That creates the potential for trust. So, on my understanding of myself, my belief in myself is all a manifestation is manifested in leadership.

Dr. King believed he came to know himself and his abilities as he traveled the military ranks. Because he was usually the only man of color in the room, he explains his belief in himself:

You have to know who you are. I've always known who I am. You have to know who you are and how do you get better. You have to know what your deficiencies are. You have to feed your strengths and not run away from your weaknesses.

That's important; that's how you are going to grow in leadership. You want to hope to become a better leader tomorrow than you are today, and that's straight-up self-efficacy.

As I heard Dr. King speak about who you are as a person and as a leader, I was reminded of an event in 1985. I was a member of a youth organization. One weekend, we traveled to Operation Push/Operation Breadbasket. A gentleman approached the podium, and I recognized him immediately. He was iconic, and my classmates' father, Reverend Jessie L. Jackson and he said:

I am, somebody. I am, somebody. I may be poor, but I am, somebody. I may be uneducated, but I am, somebody. I must be, I'm a child of God. I must be respected and protected. I am black and I am beautiful. I am, somebody. Soul power.

The audience echoed his words with a clenched fist raised in the air. I did not truly understand that movement that I was a part of right then in that space. Even then, in my heart, I knew without a shadow of a doubt that I was somebody.

Our Mission: My Why

The literature discussed the mission of community colleges. Each participant of the study discussed their mission as community college leaders and why they do what they do. Dr. Khloe stated:

I love helping students to fulfill those dreams of learning and to discover, in fact, that they can learn. Because many students come to us, afraid that they cannot learn and that they're going to fail. And so, helping them to see that they can learn and telling them, encouraging them they can do it, that you're not going to let

them fail. If they'll work with you, you'll get them through it. That is one of the most fulfilling and rewarding things I can think of.

Dr. Kylie's mission and why for serving at a community college are about helping students achieve their goals academically and fiscally. She gives students an opportunity to work within her division. They receive a small income, learn new skills, and for some, the position can turn into the beginning of a career in education. For some students, working is the difference between having a safe place to lay their heads and being homeless. Dr. Kylie shares:

Because we have so many students that don't believe they can do it. We have so many students that come from low-income backgrounds, from disadvantaged backgrounds, that they don't have the advantage that I had. You know, when I came here, I had a parent that could support me financially. I had a parent that was educated. Many of our students don't have that. They don't have social capital. So, I want to help those students. I want those students to have that education, whether it's a certificate or associate's, bachelor's, master's, whatever it is. But I want them to get out of poverty, and I want them to have a better future. And that's why I'm at the community colleges.

Dr. Kooper articulated his reason for serving at a community college as he remembered a non-traditional student. As he told the story, it was if he had gone to that space and was in the room filled with emotion. He shares:

I remember we did a faculty event for the beginning of a term to talk about learning assessment, and we brought a couple of students in to talk about what they were thinking. The student said, you know, I've made a lot of mistakes in my

life. And I'm back in school now. I'm older, and I don't have the luxury of a do-over. It's encouraging to me that all of you are here to figure out how you can make my experience better. I mean, I still get kind of, I still get a little choked up about that because it's one of those things that was really …… amazing. So, I believe that if we do that well, all of our efforts, then we have the ability to really change the world through the students we serve.

Dr. King believes in giving back to the community. As we discussed this subject, he pointed to the different awards and metals behind him. He explains why he gives of his time and talents at a community college:

To give back, giving back is very important to me. Giving back from the standpoint of the community colleges was there for me. When universities were not, when the job market was not, the community college said, hey, if you come over here, we will teach you something, something that you can use to move yourself forward. And so, it meant a lot to me because that invitation moved me forward. It moved me forward from an education standpoint, moved me forward from a job standpoint, and moved me forward from a career standpoint. And so, all of those things were placed in me, and I got them from a community college. I want my students to get everything that I didn't get. I get to encourage them and help them reach their goals. I show students how to get a certificate in six months and have income in their pockets within the next three to six months. Now that's a mission!

The researcher participant reason for serving at a community college is similar to Dr. King's:

I want to give back to the community and be a role model. I want students to understand if I can make it, they can make it as well. When students help me to my car with equipment after class and tell me they would like an SUV like mine. I try to give them some encouraging words that hopefully helps the students realize that it is not only very possible for them to have an SUV like mine, but it is obtainable. They look at me in disbelief when I tell them that I, too, started at a community college. I then have the opportunity to share a story about myself, hoping they can see themselves in me or my story in their future. I serve at a community college to give back and to give hope (Personal journal entry 10.24.19)

Professional Development

Kensington College's leadership programs were put in place to identify those who aspire to become leaders within the college. The leadership program is an opportunity for you and your works to become known by others within the college, which usually leads to a promotion. Dr. Khloe recalls:

A president recommended me for a leadership program that advanced my career. While passing in a hallway, she said she had recommended me, and she wanted me to take it seriously. I thought I didn't even know what it was because I saw those things as political. And I thought I was just busy doing what I was doing. I realized now that what I was doing was leadership. I was just doing it because it needed to be done. I went straight to my friend/mentor's office, and I said, what is this leadership program? She started laughing, and she said she had already been asked for a letter for me and it is a real opportunity. I saw the invite, but I had

deleted it from my email. She told me to get my letter written. And I did. The next

thing I knew, there I was to train with people for leadership for Dean positions or

above. I couldn't wait for those retreats. I loved it. Hmm, and it was just like fish

to water, child. I loved it. I loved that part of my leadership journey.

Dr. Kylie understood that you have to be persistent. She could not attend the

leadership program the way it was designed, but she finished. The program afforded Dr.

Kylie a promotion. She explains how persistence triumph:

At KC, I participated in the leadership program, which consists of 52 hours. You

do half of those courses online, and several courses you do in person. I was not a

typical student because my work schedule didn't allow me to, you know, go to the

classes sometimes. So, it took me two years instead of taking one year. I did the

extended learning pathway. But I finished.

Dr. Kooper is at a juncture in his career and life where he is intentional about

professional development:

In education, I've done a variety of different things. I attend a lot of conferences

that are specifically selected by me to kind of enhance where I want to go

educationally or where I'm going professional. And so, for example, one of the

best sessions or conferences I've been to in a long time was on the west coast, one

day long, on organizational development. There was next to no one there from

higher education. It was fascinating that people from vastly different backgrounds

had very similar experiences about how to work with people, how to move

organizations holistically.

Like Dr. Kooper, I attend conferences of my choosing for professional and personal growth. I wrote this in my journal after having coffee with my cohort one Saturday morning:

> The most significant leadership program that I could have attended to for personal growth and to progress my career is matriculating through this doctoral program. Personally, this journey began in the midst of Hurricane Harvey, where I lost the first floor of my home. I did not know how I was going to proceed with the program. I received a call from one of the professors who wanted to know how she and the university could support me. That call allowed me to revise my schedule and continue with the program (Personal journal entry 1.25.20).

> Professionally, a terminal degree does not automatically advance your career, but in education, it will give me more opportunities than I currently have. Dr. King credits the professional and personal development he received in life to the military:

>> The United States Air Force trained me and helped advance my career. I added it up once; they spent $750,000 on leadership schools for me. You got all of that training to be a leader and advance your career. You know they really want you to stay in the service forever to get their monies worth. It was training that will last forever. It allowed me to retire, have a second career in education, and I got to serve my country. They trained me to be a leader, so I ought to be able to lead something.

American Association of Community Colleges Competencies

Most community colleges are members of the American Association of

Community Colleges (AACC). AACC is a national voice for community colleges and

serves as an informational resource for community colleges. Kensington College has

adopted AACC's Competencies for Community College Leaders. The competencies are

what a hiring committee is considering when attempting to fill an executive position.

However, when the participants were asked about their knowledge of AACC's

Competencies for Community College Leaders, this is how they answered: *Are you*

familiar with AACC's Competencies for Community College Leaders?

Dr. Khloe: You know, I once read them, but I don't remember them.

Dr. Kylie: I am not.

Dr. Kooper: I am. Don't ask me to quote them. (laughter)

Dr. King: No, I'm not.

The answers from the participants were not aligned with my research. The

researcher-participant panicked and wrote the following after her final interview with the

participants:

Now, I am confused. Am I writing the wrong thing? I cannot believe Drs. Kylie

and King did not know the competencies. I need to make sure Kensington College

follows what I discussed in chapter two (the researcher-participant checked the

college's intranet). What a relief. I am proud to write that when Kensington

College post leadership positions, within the expectations of the applicant's

essential functions are all of the competencies that AACC suggests. The essential

functions are an iteration of AACC's Competencies for Community College

Leaders. Now, I wish I had asked that question differently (Personal journal entry

9.19.20).

Where We Are Going and What We Know

Future Goals

Zig Ziglar declared, "Setting goals helps bring your future into your present."

During the final interviews, I inquired about the participant's future goals. I was not

surprised that all of the participants desired to remain in education and make a difference

in students' lives. Their passion for their students and the love for the profession shows.

Dr. Khloe stated:

My goals are a little bit different now than they would have been ten years ago,

partly; because I have other things I love. However, future career goals for me

means thinking about where I can make a difference; how I can make a difference

because I can still make a difference. Some of the things that I've given thought to

are developing, for instance, material to help students who will probably forever

now be working online, rather than in a face-to-face format. I love to push the

cheese, and I love to work. I really love to work with people and make things

happen. And so, I'm thinking about that actually, right now, and where that might

be possible. how that might be possible. And still part of my career is writing.

Writing what I have to say and make a difference. And so, I'm not sure, but I'm

reflecting on that. We must always be thinking about advancement and growth,

growth, growth, expansion of the mind, and so on for our students and for

ourselves and for those around us.

Dr. Kylie began with her students in mind:

I want to continue to make an impact on students' lives. I don't have a job title that I want to pursue. I can't say I want to be X, Y, Z. I want to continue to make an impact in any shape or form. I want to do research and make policy changes to have and to give students access and support to protect our students. But I do want to continue to work in education and make an impact in the students' lives.

Dr. Kooper has started on his future goal by becoming a fellow. He is preparing to be a chancellor or a president at a community college. He unveiled his plan:

So, the application process for the fellowship I just received asks the applicant whether they see themselves aspiring to community college presidential leadership or chancellorships within the next couple of years and ask their supervisor. The president or chancellor of their institution has to confirm that they consider the fellow ready. So that's the next stage for me. At some point, I'm envisioning, right now, the numbers of applications for College Presidencies are not out there because so many people have put off their retirement plans. Until COVID starts to stabilize a little bit, not returned to normal, but stabilize, I'm anticipating that the spring of next year will be a time where there'll be opportunities to consider moving, moving to a presidency.

Dr. King was full of joy when he responded to the question about his future goals. He, like Dr. Kooper, seeks an elevated position. He revealed:

I aspire to be a president of a college. And I'm excited about that! That makes me tingle in the morning when I wake up. I really love that.

Like Dr. Kylie, I want to impact the students I serve within the education arena positively. I wrote:

I am highly educated, and I have many choices. I need to decide if I want to go

back into the classroom or pursue another administrative title. Nevertheless,

ultimately, I think I will have to leave my beloved Kensington to spread my wings

with this degree. I am stuck in my current position because college personnel will

not retire. We have hundreds of faculty and staff who have been employed by the

college for over 30 years with no plans to retire. Whatever the future holds, I am

excited. I am not afraid or fearful of going to the next level because I know, I am,

somebody!

Emerging Themes

Four educators shared their lives and the perceptions of former community

college students of yesterday and leaders of today and in the future. They all traveled a

different path but shared common goals, dreams, and aspirations for themselves, their

students, and their community. This narrative study aimed to explore the journey of

former community college students to community college leaders. In the following

section, I describe the themes that emerged from the data analysis. I also illustrated the

themes that emerged by using a word frequency database and produced word clouds for

additional analysis at the end of each section. The themes that emerged were path

uncertainty leading to community college, people, and love.

Paths of Uncertainty Leading to Community College

This study's participants were diverse in experience, age, ethnicity, and all from

different geographic locations. However, all shared the uncertainty of their next steps

after high school. Amongst the uncertainty, they all attended a community college. For

example, Dr. Khloe was a stay at home mom. She wanted to further her education but did

not know it was genuinely possible until a community college was conveniently built in

her community. For Dr. Kylie, she was uncertain about her language skills. English is her second language, and she did not feel confident about her abilities at that time. Even though Dr. Kooper had an ultimatum presented to him from his mother, he was uncertain of his path. He understood his choices: college or the military. He chose college; it was conveniently located within his community. Lastly, Dr. King was uncertain about what to do after high school, as well. He moved to California and soon was penniless with absolutely no money in his near future. He passed a military recruiting office, was dared by the recruiter to take the exam, took the exam, enlisted into the military, and was sent to Texas the next week for basic training. Table 3 and Figure 2 below illustrate the participant's uncertainty path leading to community college with the top five words used while discussing: *Where We Have Been*.

Table 3

Word Frequency Table - Paths of Uncertainty

Key Words	Frequency
College	42
School	30
Community	30
Work	12
Air Force	12

Figure 2

Word Cloud - Path of Uncertainty

The People in Our Lives Who Made a Difference

The people who played a role in the participants' lives varied, but they were all

significant and essential parts of their journeys. Dr. Khloe gives credit to her elementary

school teacher for giving her a firm foundation. Additionally, she praised her parents for

being supportive and believing in her. Similarly, Dr. Kylie gives honor to her father for supporting her when she had the desire to move to another country. Additionally, she acknowledged her high school teacher as a person who made a difference in her life and guided her. However, Dr. Khloe and Dr. Kylie hold their students in high esteem, and they cherish their interactions with them.

Dr. Kooper's parents were impactful in his life. However, his college professor's friendship and knowledge changed his life trajectory. He realized, during the encounters with his professor, that he was intelligent. Dr. King notes that his parents were supportive as well. However, he remembers an officer being his biggest cheerleader. He does not remember the officer's name that encouraged him while in college, but he remembers his face and how he felt secure when they spoke. Dr. King attempts to leave that secure feeling with his students every day. Table 4 and Figure 3 below illustrate the people who have made a difference in the participants' lives with the top five words used while discussing: *Impactful People*.

Table 4

Word Frequency Table for People in Our Lives Who Made a Difference

Key Words	Frequency
People	21
College	20
Work	20
Kind	19
Think	15

Figure 3

Word Cloud for The People in Our Lives Who Made a Difference

Love: Philia, Storge, Philautia and Agape

The final theme and the most surprising theme from this study is love. All the

participants conveyed a type of love for others that was genuine and authentic. They

conveyed *philia* love for their friends, *storge* love for their families and students,

philautia love for themselves, and *agape* love for humanity. Table 5 and Figure 4 below

illustrate the love given and shared by the participants in this study with the top five

words used while discussing: *Forms of Love.*

Table 5

Word Frequency Table for Love

Key Words	Frequency
Love	14
Students	12
Family	11
Year	09
Educate	09

Figure 4

Word Cloud for Love
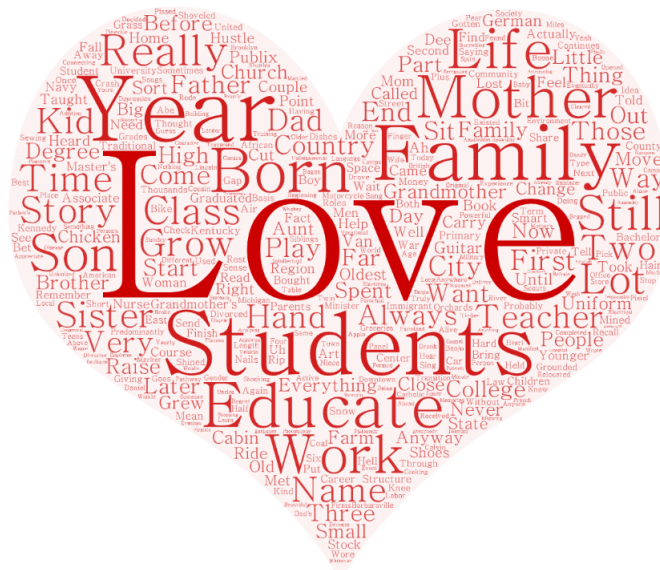
Conclusion

During each interview, participants made meaning of their experiences as they

looked back over their lives, looked at their present-day lives, and looked forward to the

future. While each participant walked a unique path of uncertainty about the beginning of

their education, they had family, friends, mentors, and a belief embedded inside each of

them that they could be successful. All participants have completed a doctoral degree and

are confident of themselves and their abilities. These narratives were glimpses into the

lives of former community college students who are currently community college leaders.

The final message that the participants collectively conveyed is: go. The participants of

this study have done what Minor Myers suggested to graduates at a commencement

ceremony: "Go into the world and do well. But more importantly, go into the world and

do good." The final word cloud below illustrates the summative perceptions of the

participants.

Table 6

Word Frequency - Go

Key Words	Frequency
Go	178
College	161
Student	120
Think	112
Community	99

Figure 5

Word Cloud - Go

Chapter V

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study aimed to explore former community college students' perceptions and their journey to becoming community college leaders. Utilizing a narrative inquiry allowed four community college leaders in Texas to express themselves through the storytelling of their lives as they shared their journey from community college students to community college leaders. The participants looked forward, backward, inward, and outward to ultimately appreciate their experiences and journeys to leadership. After a systematic and thorough analysis from the participants, Dr. Khloe, Dr. Kylie, Dr. Kooper, and Dr. King, I found that community colleges in and of themselves are not the only transformative entity in community college leaders' lives.

Perceptions

The four community college leaders' perceptions and prominent emergent themes from this study were path uncertainty, people, and love. The results of this study indicate that uncertainty does not determine one's trajectory. All of the participants were uncertain about their next steps after high school, and today, they are all community college leaders. The findings also indicated that having a mentor in one's life matters. Every participant was able to identify a mentor who played a role in their growth and development and propelled them to another level. Lastly, the participants' perceived love as the underlying element of their successes. All the participants conveyed a type of love for others that was genuine and authentic. They conveyed *philia* love for their friends, *storge* love for their families and students, *philautia* love for themselves, and *agape* love for humanity.

Recommendations for Practice

There are four recommendations for practice that community colleges could employ to support their students in the future to eradicate path uncertainty.

The first recommendation is offering more student advising services to local and district high schools. Collaborating with high school counselors to identify students who are uncertain about their future and who are uncertain about their steps after high school can be essential for students and their families. If students have not been accepted into an entity of higher education, they have not been offered a job, or they have not decided to enlist into the military, these are the students of path uncertainty. These students may need more guidance and assistance with their next steps in life. Circumstances like the ones above allow community colleges to step in and fulfill their mission to empower their community, enrich, and transform lives by offering affordable education with access for all.

The second recommendation is for community colleges to offer a mentor to each incoming student. The mentor can be a second-year student, a faculty member, or a staff member who has volunteered to serve in this capacity. Mentorship allows for connection and accountability. It allows students to receive socialization and support. Most students at a community college come not knowing what to expect. Mentorship can help students with the transition into higher education, but also into adulthood.

Additionally, mentorship should be made available for all employees. It will allow community colleges to develop succession plans with current employees in mind and allow employees to matriculate to leadership positions that can only make the college stronger. The employees then become vested and connected to the college's mission. Employee mentorship allows college administrations to train the leaders they want from

within their college. Lastly, partnerships with high school teachers and high school counselors are needed to connect students with mentors during their first year in high school. According to this study and its participants, mentorship may decrease path uncertainty.

The last recommendation is to hold a Family Day. A Family Day can align the college, the students, and the community. Students will bring their parents and siblings to observe a class on this day. It can give family members a glimpse into college life, especially for first-generation families, which could turn into additional emotional support for the student from their families. The day could similarly encourage a family member to enroll and receive a higher education themselves.

Study Recommendations

If this study is extended, I would recommend the researcher, and the participants meet in person, in a conference room, or for face-to-face interviews. Due to COVID-19, this was not possible. Despite the conversations being rich, I believe the conversations would have been richer if we did not need to use a videoconferencing platform for the interviews. Furthermore, with videoconferencing, occasionally, technology lagged. If this happened, the researcher repeated a question, or the participant was asked to repeat their answer.

The study can also be broadened by obtaining information from more than one college. Only one community college in Texas was represented in this study. There are over a thousand community colleges in the country. Moreover, hundreds of students began their educational journey at a community college who are community college leaders. I would have welcomed their stories to add to the conversation and this study.

The final recommendation for this study is to consider timing. This study began during the beginning of the fall semester at the college. Due to COVID-19, the registration process was virtual for all students. Additionally, this was the first virtual registration session for all students, and "all hands were on deck." Even if you did not report to a student services division, there were expectations and assignments for all to do during this unprecedented time. Therefore, it was not easy obtaining three hours of a participant's time during non-working hours and peak registration.

Final Thoughts

As a researcher-participant, I looked back over my life and my educational journey. I thought that my leadership experience was unique. I felt this way until I began working in the administrative building at Kensington College. It was eye-opening to discover four individuals who completed their doctoral degrees while working for a community college and started their secondary education at a community college and not at a 4-year university. As I came in contact with those who began their education journeys at a community college, I wanted to know more about their story and humble beginnings. It mirrored my own story of beginning higher education at a community college.

Like all the participants in this study, we all felt an overwhelming drive to give back. Giving back to society, gives back to the community in which we serve. This drive came from a place within us that allowed us to fully embrace the apparent fact that we did not get here independently. Self-awareness has guided us to this place in our journey, and we have an innate desire to help others get to where we are.

We would not be who we are without a connection with a mentor. Every participant benefited from a mentor who showed genuine interest in the participant's

future and education. Each mentor saw more in the participant than the participant could see in themselves. The mentor saw where the participant *could* go and whom the participant *could* become.

In this study, while analyzing the data, the researcher had clarity and a deeper understanding of the love all the participants shared for community colleges, specifically Kensington College. We love our students, and we are on the frontlines developing and putting infrastructures in place for students to be successful today and in the future. We desire to turn uncertainty into clarity and confidence for every student we touch. We love the communities we serve; we access and survey the communities' members to assure we are providing neighborhoods with the best possible education and services. I believe our overarching love is for humanity. We want to leave the space we are responsible for better than when we received it.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and the experiences of community college leaders who themselves were former community college students and their journey to community college leadership. Through this research, the participants looked forward, backward, inward, and outward to ultimately appreciate their experiences and journeys to leadership.

This narrative inquiry suggests that community colleges, in and of themselves, are not the only transformative entity in community college leaders' lives. The participants' transformation from student to leader is derived from individuals in their personal and professional networks and their love for friends, family, students, self, and humanity.

Tables

Table 7

Very Large Community Colleges – Mission and Vision Statements

Community College	Mission Statement	Vision Statement
Alamo Colleges (2019)	Empowering our diverse communities for success.	The Alamo Colleges will be the best in the nation in Student Success and Performance Excellence.
Lone Star College System (2020)	Lone Star College System provides comprehensive educational opportunities and programs to enrich lives.	Lone Star College will be a model college globally recognized for achieving exceptional levels of success in student learning, student completion, gainful employment, equity and affordability.
Miami Dade College (2020)	As democracy's college, Miami Dade College changes lives through accessible, high-quality teaching and learning experiences. The College embraces its responsibility to serve as an economic, cultural and civic leader for the advancement of our diverse global community.	To be the recognized leader in student learning, achievement and success while enriching our community.
Tarrant County College District (2019)	Provides affordable and open access to quality teaching and learning.	Provides affordable and open access to quality teaching and learning.
Valencia College (2020)	Valencia is a premier learning college that transforms lives, strengthens community, and inspires individuals to excellence.	Valencia provides opportunities for academic, technical, and life-long learning in a collaborative culture dedicated to inquiry, results, and excellence.

Table 8

AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders

Eleven Focus Areas	
Organizational Culture	An effective community college leader embraces the mission, vision, and values of the community college, and acknowledges the significance of the institution's past while charting a path for its future.
Governance, Institutional Policy, and Legislation	An effective leader is knowledgeable about the institution's governance framework and the policies that guide its operation.
Student Success	An effective leader supports student success across the institution, and embraces opportunities to improve access, retention, and success.
Institutional Leadership	An effective leader understands the importance of interpersonal relationships, personal philosophy, and management skills to creating a student-centered institution.
Institutional Infrastructure	An effective community college leader is fluent in the management of the foundational aspects of the institution, including the establishment of a strategic plan, financial and facilities management, accreditation, and technology master planning.
Information and Analytics	An effective community college leader understands how to use data in ways that give a holistic representation of the institution's performance, and is open to the fact that data might reveal unexpected or previously unknown trends or issues.
Advocacy and Mobilizing/ Motivating Others	An effective community college leader understands and embraces the importance of championing community college ideals, understands how to mobilize stakeholders to take action on behalf of the college, and understands how to use all of the communications resources available to connect with the college community.
Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation	An effective community college leader cultivates relationships across sectors that support the institution and advance the community college agenda.
Communications	An effective community college leader demonstrates strong communication skills, leads and fully embraces the role of community college spokesperson.
Collaboration	An effective community college leader develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial, and ethical internal and external relationships that nurture diversity, promote the success of the college community, and sustain the community college mission.

| Personal Traits and Abilities | An effective leader possesses certain personal traits and adopts a focus on honing abilities that promote the community college agenda. |

Figures

Figure 6

Development of Self-Efficacy and Examples

Age	Characteristics of Development	Example of Students Exhibiting High Self-Efficacy
Early-mid Childhood 2-6	• Beginning to build the capacity for self control and looking ahead • Developing an understanding of expectations and adjusting behaviors accordingly	• Continuing to find ways to pursue a curiosity or master a task in spit of setbacks • *"I couldn't remember what came after the letter N! I bet if I start over , I can remember."*
Mid-Late Childhood 6-11	• Developing ability to self-evaluate based on competence and perspective of others • Self-awareness of one's limitations, but learning one's ability to control oneself and the environment	• Observing peer models to build a stronger sense of one's own ability to accomplish goal • *"Ms. Smith helped on a sound out the word and the next time, she could read it on her own! I wonder if I can try that, too."*
Early Adolescence 12-14	• Developing an understanding of the self an one's ability to influence outcomes • Reworking understanding of autonomy an initiative • Metacognitive abilities become more developed and help one assess their own capabilities more accurately	• Believing that one can adapt their behavior in pursuit of a goal • *"I don't think I studied enough for the last geometry quiz. I'm sure if I make more time to review the lesson, I can get a better grade on the next quiz."*
Late Adolescence 14-18	• Developing an understanding of what is important to self and one's influence in planning for future goals	• High academic achievement in rigorous goal setting • *"I really want to get to college with my peers if I plan out my applications this summer, I should be able to have everything ready to apply in the fall and make sure I get things in on time."*

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Appendix A

Participant Solicitation Email

Greetings Colleagues!
As you may know, I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at the

University of Houston. As part of the doctoral process, I am conducting a research study

to understand the impact of former community college students who are currently

community college leaders.

I am recruiting those who meet the following criteria:

- you began your post-secondary education at a community college

- you have at least three years of service at a community college

- your position within the community college is one of leadership

In general, your participation in the research study involves you being interviewed three

times by me for 30 to 60 minutes each time. I will use video conferencing, and your

interview will be recorded via TEAMS or Zoom. Participation in the study is voluntary.

There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate, and you may

withdraw from the study at any time. All participants will be ensured of confidentiality

during the study and after the study is complete. Your identity will be concealed using

pseudonyms. All data will be kept secure and password protected.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please reply to this email or email me at

mslisacrawford@gmail.com.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Lisa A. Crawford
Doctoral Candidate
mslisacrawford@gmail.com

Appendix B

IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY of
HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Institutional Review Boards

APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

August 4, 2020

Lisa Crawford
lacrawford2@uh.edu

Dear Lisa Crawford:

On July 29, 2020, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHANGED MY LIFE: A NARRATIVE OF FORMER COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO ARE NOW COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS
Investigator:	Lisa Crawford
IRB ID:	STUDY00002444
Funding/ Proposed Funding:	Name: Unfunded
Award ID:	
Award Title:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Crawford, Lisa _ HRP-503(2.0) w track changes.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol; • Crawford_Lisa HRP-502a (1).pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Lisa A Crawford, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Lisa A Crawford, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.);
Review Category:	Exempt
Committee Name:	Designated reviewer
IRB Coordinator:	Maria Martinez

The IRB approved the study on August 4, 2020; recruitment and procedures detailed within the approved protocol may now be initiated.

- The HCC IRB approval letter must be submitted to the IRB for review via a modification as part of your study record prior to research initiation.

UNIVERSITY of
HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Institutional Review Boards

As this study was approved under an exempt or expedited process, recently revised regulatory requirements do not require the submission of annual continuing review documentation. However, it is critical that the following submissions are made to the IRB to ensure continued compliance:

- Modifications to the protocol prior to initiating any changes (for example, the addition of study personnel, updated recruitment materials, change in study design, requests for additional subjects)
- Reportable New Information/Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others
- Study Closure

Unless a waiver has been granted by the IRB, use the stamped consent form approved by the IRB to document consent. The approved version may be downloaded from the documents tab.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

Sincerely,

Research Integrity and Oversight (RIO) Office
University of Houston, Division of Research
713 743 9204
cphs@central.uh.edu
http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/irb-cphs/

Appendix C

Participant Consent Form

Title of research study: COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHANGED MY LIFE: A NARRATIVE OF FORMER COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO ARE NOW COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS

Investigator: Lisa A. Crawford, Doctoral Dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Cameron White

Key Information:
The following focused information is being presented to assist you in understanding the key elements of this study, as well as the basic reasons why you may or may not wish to consider taking part. This section is only a summary; more detailed information, including how to contact the research team for additional information or questions, follows within the remainder of this document under the "Detailed Information" heading.

What should I know about a research study?
- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Taking part in the research is voluntary; whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide and can ask questions at any time during the study.

We invite you to take part in a research study about community college leaders because you meet the following criteria: you began your post-secondary education at a community college, you are currently employed at community college, and your position within the community college is one of leadership.

In general, your participation in the research involves you being interviewed three times by the researcher for 30 to 60 minutes each time. The researcher will use video conferencing and your interview will be recorded.

There is no known risk to participate in this study. You will not receive any form of compensation for your participation in this study.

Detailed Information:
The following is more detailed information about this study, in addition to the information listed above.

Why is this research being done?

This study is being done to look at how it is possible for former community college students to overcome challenges and obstacles, complete college and are now they are leaders at a community college.

How long will the research last?
We expect that you will be in this research study for two months. You will be interviewed three times for no more than one hour each time.

How many people will be studied?
We expect about three to five participants will be in this research study.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?
You will be interviewed on three separate occasions via video conferencing each time. You may pick the day and the time of the interview. The interview will last for 30-60 minutes each. Each interview will be audio and video recorded. The interviews will take place during the months of August and September 2020 depending on your schedule. You will only interact with the researcher. You will be asked a series of questions during the interview. An example of a question is: "Why did you begin your post-secondary education at a community college?" You make skip any questions that you find uncomfortable.

This research study includes the following component(s) where we plan to audio and video record you as the research subject:

I agree to be audio recorded and video recorded during the research study.
 I agree that the audio recording/video recording can be used in publication/presentations.
 I do not agree that the audio recording/video recording can be used in publication/presentations.
I do not agree to be audio recorded or video recorded during the research study.

You may still participate in the study if you do not agree to be audio and video recorded.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?
You can choose not to take part in the research, and it will not be held against you. Choosing not to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled. Your alternative to taking part in this research study is not to take part.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?
You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you. If you stop being in the research, already collected data that still includes your name or other personal information **will be** removed from the study record.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

We do not expect any risks related to the research activities. If you choose to take part and undergo a negative event you feel is related to the study, please contact the researcher.

Will I receive anything for being in this study?
You will not receive any form of compensation for your participation in this study.

Will being in this study help me in any way
We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to others include examples of how to improve completion rates by looking at the path of former students.

What happens to the information collected for the research?
Your taking part in this project is anonymous, and information you provide cannot be linked to your identity. We may share the results of this research. However, unless otherwise detailed in this document, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

Who can I talk to?
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, you should talk to Lisa A. Crawford, Principal Investigator. Her email address is lacrawford2@uh.edu or by phone at 773-301-4684. You may also contact the advisor for the principal investigator, Dr. Cameron White at University of Houston College of Education. His email address is cswhite@uh.edu. His phone number is 713-743-2255.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also talk to them at (713) 743-9204 or cphs@central.uh.edu if:
- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

May we contact you regarding future research opportunities?
In the future, our research team may be interested in contacting you for other research studies we undertake, or to conduct a follow-up study to this one. There is never any obligation to take part in additional research. Do we have permission to contact you to provide additional information?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this research.

_____   _____
Signature of subject   Date

_____
Printed name of subject

_____   _____
Signature of person obtaining consent   Date

_____
Printed name of person obtaining consent

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Lisa A. Crawford
College of Education
773-301-xxxx
mslisacrawford@gmail.com

Sample Interview Questions

Sample interview questions for this study are found below. Because this is a narrative study, the researcher must remain flexible as the participants share their stories. Thus, the questions may change slightly based upon each participant's response.

1. Tell me about yourself. Start at the beginning (where were you born, where did you grow up, etc.)

2. Tell me about your family (do you have siblings, what did/do your parents do for a living, what was your family environment like).

3. How would you describe your primary education?

4. Share one incident or place in time that was impactful upon your education.

5. Tell me about your experience after high school and how you came to a community college?

6. Did you graduate from the community college? If so, how long did it take you to complete your degree?

7. What is your "why" for serving at a community college?

8. What are the personal and professional characteristics of community college leaders?

9. Are you familiar with the AACC's competencies for community college leaders?

10. Tell me about your future career goals.

Appendix E

Tosh O. Video