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Community College Teaching Excellence: A Distinguished Faculty Perspective

Denise Montoya

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This dissertation is approved and is acceptable in quality and form for publication.

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHING EXCELLENCE

**COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHING EXCELLENCE: A DISTINGUISHED
FACULTY PERSPECTIVE**

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Organization, Information, and Learning Sciences

University of New Mexico

Albuquerque, NM

December 2015

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Dedication

The conception of this dissertation can be traced directly to the distinguished faculty who contributed to this study, sharing their perspectives on teaching excellence in a nationally recognized community college. Aahz, Cedric, Fiver, Goofy, Marie, Mr. K, Nancy, Professor X, and W.F. Godot, your commitment to student success is inspiring. Your passion for teaching and learning is changing lives daily. Through the power of education, your teaching provides hope that creates a better future for all.

To all the teachers, regardless of who or what you teach, know that your excellence in teaching is positively impacting student lives, family lives, and ultimately contributing toward economic prosperity.

“A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.” ~~Henry Adams

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Most importantly, God: Thank you for blessing my life with the ability to learn and with the special people with whom I shared this journey. I am overwhelmed with gratitude; thank you to all.

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Abstract

This instrumental case study examined excellence in community college teaching from the perspectives of nine distinguished faculty at a national award-winning community college in the Southwest. This study utilized an appreciative inquiry interviewing framework approach in order to examine excellence in teaching from an affirmative perspective. This study began by introducing a Conceptual Framework: The Value of Community College Excellence in Teaching, which is designed to understand the potential of excellence in teaching from the viewpoint of human capital. The Conceptual Framework asserts that excellence in community college teaching has the capacity to improve student and family lives, resulting in overall better-quality societal impacts that lead to economic prosperity.

The central question in this instrumental case study was: How do distinguished faculty at a nationally top-ranked community college perceive excellence in teaching?

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The study presented findings from emergent thematic coding from applications submitted by award-winning distinguished faculty participants and from demographic surveys, semistructured interview transcripts, two focus group transcripts, and observation notes taken during the focus groups. These documents were examined multiple times to determine themes and commonalities that emerged and from their community college teaching excellence perspectives of distinguished faculty.

The findings in this study provide a potential model to consider, Community College Teaching Excellence: A Distinguished Faculty Perspective, The AEACSA Model, that community college faculty can apply and include examples of excellence in teaching under each element. The AEACSA Model consists of six elements: authentically connect with students with the intent to create a trustful learning environment, embrace diversity, activate high expectations and encourage excellence, cultivate a passion for lifelong learning, strengthen a student's confidence in their ability to learn, and apply theory to the real world.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Research Study

“Around here, we don’t look backwards for very long. . . . We keep moving forward, opening up new doors and doing new things because we’re curious . . . and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.” ~Walt Disney

Community College Serves as a Catalyst to Transform Student Lives

Jamie was a student at a community college and was enrolled in a “Principles of Management” course that I taught. The concepts of this course apply not only to managing people but also to teaching life success skills in general. Jamie was a star student, incredibly focused, and consistently performed her best in the class. This was clearly reflected in her actions, curiosity, and eagerness to learn. She served as a supportive and encouraging peer. She strived to achieve A’s in all assignments, and her attitude and desire to learn was refreshingly optimistic.

At the end of the trimester on the last day of the 15-week course, I reached out to Jamie and asked her if she had realized her full potential. I told her how impressed I had been with the effort she gave freely in class and that I had noticed how enthusiastic she was about learning and education. I reminded her that she had a great deal of potential to offer the world and encouraged her to continue to perform at her best in whatever she desired to pursue in her life, both academically and professionally.

Jamie teared up as she listened. I asked her why. She replied that when she was in her early 20s, she made mistakes and got involved with the wrong people and sold illegal drugs. She told me that her children were taken from her by the state, and she had realized that it was time to move to another state to pay the consequences. She would be

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leaving soon to serve time in prison in a nearby state. I urged Jamie to not focus on past mistakes but rather to continue to take classes and read as often and as much as possible anything she could access in prison, such as newspapers, magazines, books, and any other reading material.

Jamie's story resonated with me for years beyond that trimester. About two years later, I was dining with my husband, and it surprised me to see that Jamie worked at the restaurant and was our server. At the time, she was the restaurant's customer service manager, a position to which she recently had been promoted. We were elated to see each other, and I was curious to find out what she was up to after serving time on drug charges. She was doing "fantastic," she told me. She was returning to school at the community college, in the midst of regaining custody of her children, purchasing a mobile home in the East Mountains, and had a good job she enjoyed. She told me she was delighted about the direction her life was taking, and I told her I was proud of her accomplishments.

Curious about Jamie and inspired by her story, while writing this dissertation, I felt compelled to reach out to this former drug dealer who had become a positive contributor to society to find out where she was continuing in life and to determine if an education would continue to transform her life's journey. I contacted her via social media and met with her over breakfast in late December 2014. I was inspired by her life story, I told her, and requested her permission to tell her story as an introduction to this dissertation. She embraced the opportunity and requested that I use her real name instead of a pseudonym. Keep in mind, the initial encounter occurred about five or six years after I had taught the Principles of Management course in which she was a student.

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Jamie, now a graduate with an associate's degree from this community college, helps design apps for nonprofit organizations. While at the community college, she learned this skill by using the JavaScript and HTML computer languages. She aspires to attain a bachelor's degree in computer science, but a public four-year institution does not cater to her needs nor offer courses in the evenings or on weekends, so she is looking into private educational institutions to pursue her educational dreams. She plans to be married soon and now has a blended family that includes her children. Together, Jamie and her fiancé bought a house on the west side of town. She is successfully contributing toward economic prosperity and making a positive difference in society.

I asked Jamie during the conversation if a community college faculty member made a difference in her life. Yes, she said, and she described a particular instructor who taught a unique course, Understanding Evil. This faculty member encouraged engagement, self-awareness, and critical thinking about complex real-life situations, she told me. In this class, she actually did some soul searching regarding this topic. The class became a life-transforming experience taught by a faculty member who cared deeply about the students, Jamie said. During our breakfast conversation, she often expressed gratitude for all the people who cared about her and never gave up on her, including community college faculty.

I realized through a series of conversations with Jamie that a community college education can be a catalyst in transforming a student's life for the better, exposing them to opportunities for improvement through learning and education. This is what a community college education did for Jamie: It improved her capabilities and helped improve her life, positively impacting her family and her contributions to society. As a

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part of writing this introduction, I wanted to ensure that I captured Jamie's story accurately. She agreed to edit the introduction prior to publication and did so.

Excellence in community college teaching has the potential to help students learn and build confidence in their ability to learn, to improve their capabilities, and to broaden their employment opportunities and ability to transfer to a university to continue their educational endeavors. Faculty who apply excellence in teaching can increase a student's self-confidence to maximize their potential. The student's life improves positively, impacting their families, and then they become positive contributors to society. As a result, students who once were dependent on government-funded programs can contribute to economic vitality through sustained living.

Background

First, it is important to define both community colleges and their faculty. Community colleges are typically two-year, public, higher education institutions also known as technical colleges, city colleges, county colleges, branch campuses, or junior colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003) that serve a vast array of diverse learners and specialize in graduation toward diplomas, associate degrees, and certificates. Community colleges date to the early 20th century and have grown in numbers over the years. The expansion was a result of social forces, including the need for workers to be trained to operate expanding industries and the drive for social equality, both of which would be enhanced by providing more access to higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). A major reason for creating community colleges was to relieve universities of the burden of providing general education for young people by regulating the function of teaching, which would allow universities to become true research centers (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

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The faculty of community colleges are academic professionals who take on the responsibilities of learning, conveying, and imparting knowledge and skill to diverse learners as well as reflect a love for learning to students. “Without community colleges [and their faculty], millions of students and adult learners would not be able to access the education they need to be prepared for further education or the workplace” (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a).

Today, community college faculty members offer instruction to more than half of all graduates of higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Nine million students are credit-seeking learners at community colleges today while another five million are noncredit learners. In general, credit courses are designed for students interested in earning college credits toward a degree or certificate. Noncredit classes are intended for students seeking workforce training skills and who want to gain general knowledge, learn a new skill, upgrade existing skills, enrich their understanding about a wide range of topics, or develop personal interests. Since the early 1900s, more than 100 million students have attended community colleges in the United States (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a).

Community colleges are a gateway to opportunity for all who desire to learn, regardless of wealth, heritage, or previous academic experience. Despite political affiliation, politicians tend to focus heavily on jobs and the economy. Most recently in January 2015, President Barack Obama’s administration unveiled a plan to make community college free for anyone who maintains a grade-point average of 2.5 or higher (Munoz, 2015). “More than ever, some higher education is the ticket to the middle class. Americans need a way to gain knowledge and skills without having to take on decades of

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debt” (Munoz, 2015, p. 7A). A highly skilled workforce is critical to a nation’s economic vitality, and enrolling at a community college can positively impact the unemployed and underemployed who seek to upgrade their skills. President Obama also has challenged those who work at community colleges to teach an additional five million students by 2020 in an effort for students to achieve degrees, certificates, or other credentials (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a).

Facing these challenges, community college faculty must reform their curriculum by providing online learning, blended learning, massive open online courses (MOOC), special support structures, alternative admissions criteria, recognition of professional competencies or collaborations with companies, and adult or vocational education. Such advancements will help ensure that students come to the workplace prepared, with relevant and timely knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies for continued success.

Education Demands and Education Reform

For several reasons, community college faculty, among all educators, are faced with demands to change and to create educational reform initiatives to improve teaching and learning. The mandate for education in today’s society of knowledge-based and technology-driven workplaces compels educators to rethink and strategize differently the delivery of teaching in institutions of higher education. Economic needs and employer demands are challenging community colleges to produce a 21st century workforce that can be prosperous in an environment where dynamic change occurs, intense competition exists due to increased globalization, technological and innovative advances are the norm, and high productivity is required. Globalization challenges the resilience of higher education (Levin, Kater, & Wagoner, 2006). Furthermore, faculty experience pressure to

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produce higher graduation rates, improve retention, and engage more students in the pursuit of academic success.

Since the inception of the junior (community) college concept late in the 19th century (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990), community college missions have evolved greatly, as have the perceptions of just what makes up the community that each college should serve (Gibson-Harman, Rodriguez, & Haworth, 2002). In addition to the evolving needs of the economy and the changing diversity of the American population, education continues to be criticized in public forums. Specifically, the debate about the need for quality education and the need to evolve with the landscape of education reform continue to be in the forefront with policymakers and the public in general.

According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), community colleges have been considered to be a link between the needs of the labor market and the needs of diverse people seeking to move into the workforce or to continue their education beyond a two-year institution. These researchers documented that the development of community colleges grew because science was seen as contributing to progress, new technologies demanded skilled operators, and the notion was widespread that those who applied themselves most diligently would advance most rapidly.

Levin, Cox, Cerven, and Haberler (2010) stated that community college outcomes and demands for better performance are documented in reports and scholarly inquiries, which are met with debate, that general findings are not relevant and that researchers have little understanding of community college students, who are part-time students, part-time and full-time workers, low-income individuals, and are academically underprepared. These critiques made up a significant portion of published materials, according to Levin

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et al. (2010); yet, their research has limited impact on actual practice in community colleges. These publications ignored what community colleges are doing well—despite the context of low per-student funding, open-door policies, students with a wide range of goals and abilities, and a large workforce of part-time members (Levin et al., 2010).

In recent years, the U.S. higher education system, according to Arum and Roksa (2011), has been considered to be the best in the world. However, findings from a study these researchers conducted revealed no guarantee that undergraduate students are appropriately challenged or exposed to educational experiences that lead to academic growth. These researchers studied 2,300 undergraduate students at 24 institutions of higher education. A stunning 45 percent of the students studied, in their first two years of college, revealed no significant improvement in range of skills—including critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing. Needless to say, education institutions continue to come under increased scrutiny.

According to Arum and Roksa (2011, pp. 124-125), limited learning exists because of other distractions that take place with students, such as the need to work and interruptions for socializing. These researchers also identified growing expectations from five constituent groups: parents, students, professors, administrators, and government agencies. Arum and Roksa (2011) found that parents are disgruntled about increasing costs of education and demand a safe environment where their children can mature, gain independence, and attain credentials to help them become successful adults. Their research stated that academics are not the highest priority because of the interruptions or interferences of the student's educational and academic desires of the universities themselves and the parents are part of the reality. Rather, with relatively little investment

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of effort, students sometimes seek to enjoy the benefits of the collegiate experience, balance social life and academic pursuits, and desire to earn high marks in courses. These scholars, Arum and Roksa, indicated that professors are eager to find time to concentrate on scholarship and professional interests while administrators focus largely on external institutional rankings and the financial bottom line. According to Arum and Roksa (2011), competing demands are partnered with the interest of government agencies in the expansion of scientific knowledge.

Faculty play a significant role in the students' educational process, contributing to educational reform initiatives. Community college faculty members are compelled to make the subject matter being taught relatable to today's everyday life and modernized workplaces in order to prepare students for short-term and long-term success.

“Community colleges are arguably the exemplar of educational institutions that cater to consumers, from their low-cost price structure for their services to students to their goals of fitting curriculum to the demands of the labor market, thereby satisfying two classes of consumers—students and employers” (Levin et al., 2006, p. 20). Faculty serve in the capacity to assist students through teaching high-quality programs that can result in increased student graduation rates and students obtaining gainful employment opportunities.

Problem Statement-need for this Study

Discussions about education often elicit controversial debates about what and how faculty should teach. What works? What does not work? This study aimed to investigate teaching excellence at a community college, from the perspective of distinguished faculty, using an affirmative-action approach that studies what was working rather than

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critiquing what was not working. Students are the direct beneficiaries of teaching excellence, which has the capacity to improve student capabilities, improving lives not only of students but also of families and society, all of which ultimately results in economic growth and prosperity. The stakes to educate this nation's population to be prepared for the future are incredibly high. Because the stakes are so high, distinguished faculty perspectives regarding teaching excellence were the focus of this study. These distinguished faculty were selected through a rigorous process detailed in Chapter 3 under Sample Selection.

The world has changed dramatically over the past several decades, creating a challenge for America's educational community to keep up. Faculty must prepare students to possess the talent to perform the jobs that industry needs in an ever-changing world. The ability to keep up with the trends must be sustainable and impact the ability of community colleges to focus on enriching the student experiences; to supply the necessary infrastructure for the creation of jobs and advancement of knowledge; and to provide faculty with incentives for effective teaching, research, and service to the institution and to their disciplines. Furthermore, pressures on faculty at the time their research was conducted, according to Bernstein, Burnett, Goodburn, and Savory (2006), included:

Intellectual work on learning and teaching has begun to make a place for itself in campus culture, so have pressures in other directions: rising expectations, even in so-called teaching institutions, for traditional research publications, urgings in the direction of more interdisciplinary scholarship; growing commitments to community engagement; new opportunities but also new challenges in the use of

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technology; high-profile imperatives around assessment, accountability, student recruitment, retention, and advising; and—most to the point here—an increasingly urgent public call to move much larger numbers of students toward more meaningful forms and levels of learning (p. 10).

This group of academic professionals is challenged to continue to advance technological skills; expand knowledge of diversity; contribute to andragogy that accommodates the learning needs of the changing population; and provide current, relevant teaching that prepares students for the 21st century workplace.

There is a need for this particular qualitative case study, which examines distinguished faculty perceptions of teaching excellence in a national award-winning community college, Central New Mexico Community College (CNM). According to Creswell (2013), qualitative studies must identify and introduce the advancement of the research problem in a study. However, the concept of a problem statement may be misleading, and individuals unfamiliar with writing research may struggle with writing this particular concept. Creswell (2013) suggested that “rather than calling this passage the problem, it might be clearer if I [we] call it the need for the study” (p. 130). This approach was a better fit for this particular study—understanding the need instead of the problem, because of the appreciative inquiry interviewing framework this research applies, which is explained in detail in Chapter 3, Research Design and Methods.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the body of research on the scholarship of teaching that focused on teaching excellence from the perspective of distinguished faculty, specifically at a nationally top-ranked community college, CNM. Community

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college faculty, as scholars, are learners who practice continuous learning and intellectual renewal through continuous evaluation and reflection over the course of their teaching careers and who are responsible for influencing learning, conveying and imparting knowledge and skill to diverse learners, and reflecting a love for learning to students. Excellence in teaching is a discovery process that includes engaging students in a well-prepared and intentional ongoing investigation to promote a deep understanding of the lesson and applicability to the complexity of real life.

Excellence in teaching can lead to overall student success and can contribute to the scholarship of teaching, which is a scholarly inquiry into student learning, advancing the practice of excellence in teaching, making these research findings public to serve as reference for others, and to continue to develop teaching expertise. In addition, the contribution of this research can enhance the dignity of this particular college's faculty. Despite the challenges that community college faculty endure, as indicated in this study, these distinguished faculty, based on their perspectives, utilize excellence in teaching strategies that can positively impact student success. Several researchers have conducted studies on excellence in teaching practices, which are summarized and described in Chapter 2, Literature Review.

Conducting research on teaching excellence has the capacity to lead to the discovery of new and better ways to assist students to understand and appreciate the ever-evolving nature of learning and how basic principles of learning can inform their thoughts, behaviors, and judgments throughout their lives (Buskist, Benson, & Sikorski, 2005). Tracing the teaching excellence practices of community college faculty may reveal best practices that provide timely and relevant information for community college

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faculty and for administrators to continue to investigate and contribute to this specific body of scholarly work.

These academic professionals are essential to the development of workplace knowledge that can meet workplace demands and contribute to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies of diverse groups of learners. This dissertation defines a student and a learner as a person who seeks knowledge through instruction or study. A student is a learner; a learner is a student; therefore, these words are used interchangeably throughout this document. Diverse learners in community college settings can include students who differ in ethnicity, culture, race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical and mental ability status, their first-generation college student status, veterans, socioeconomic status, and other identifiers.

Although this research was focused on studying what is effective in teaching excellence from an appreciative approach according to distinguished faculty perspectives, this research also can reveal the challenges and pressures that community college faculty experience that require continuous improvement in their areas of expertise and andragogy, all of which can result in enhanced student success. These strategies must be applicable and align with current workplace needs in order to prepare learners for today's work environment. Faculty are challenged to ensure that the teaching deployed in the learning environment prepares students with appropriate and relevant content and life skills to be successful, both academically and professionally.

Rationale and Significance

Researchers realized in the late 1990s and early 2000s that there was a need to conduct ongoing examinations that would produce current and relevant knowledge regarding

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community colleges. Research suggests that “despite the growth of community colleges in our society and the claim that the strength of these colleges is in their faculty, very little research has been done in recent years to provide insight into this group of academic professionals” (Fugate & Amey, 2000, p. 1). Furthermore, “community college faculty receive scant attention from postsecondary researchers—or worse, are simply dismissed as a separate, and by implication, lesser class of college professors” (National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, 1998, p. 43). Fifteen years later, the need to conduct ongoing research exists in an effort to continue to identify teaching excellence, specifically in community colleges. Not only is this study unique because it aims to garner a distinguished faculty perspective, it also provides recent excellence in teaching relevant to today’s standards.

Community college faculty must be flexible and nimble, rise above the status quo, and further advance technological skills, expand workshops on diversity, and contribute to andragogy that accommodates the learning needs of the diverse population and the changing demands of developing a 21st century workforce. Understanding teaching excellence from the perspective of a distinguished faculty has the capacity to evolve and provide insight on innovative teaching methodologies, diverse student success strategies, and the overall importance of community engagement. Partnerships with employers, local industries, government bodies, and organizations are crucial to community colleges.

Because of the increasing demands to shift and change at a rapid pace in teaching in institutions of higher education, there exists an opportunity to contribute to “good qualitative research [that] is relevant, timely, significant, interesting, or [and] evocative” (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). The intent and significance of this study, as Tracy stated, was that

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it be a worthy topic that emerges from past research and contributes conceptually compelling contemporary information for the future, expanding current knowledge available regarding community college teaching practices of excellence. I concur with the research of Twombly and Townsend (2008), who found that community college faculty members “merit attention and respect due to the fact that little attention has been paid to them in scholarly literature” (p. 7).

This research can provide evidence to consider that can transform teaching for the better. This research can contribute to the current knowledge base available and potentially can expand it by continuing to research the scholarship of teaching. This research identified excellence in teaching focused on community colleges from the perspective of a distinguished faculty, advancing the understanding of effective community college teaching and its relationship to student learning outcomes, determining how excellence in community college teaching is supported and/or inhibited by influencing factors, and recruiting high-potential community college faculty.

Scope of the Study

This study examined excellence in teaching from a distinguished faculty perspective, best-in-class faculty at a best-in-class institution of higher education. CNM was recognized in 2014 as a Top 100 Associate Degree Producer. Also in 2014, it was selected as one of the top 50 most affordable community colleges, providing tuition at \$1,188 per year, and only 20% of its student population received financial aid. In 2013, CNM was selected as a recipient of the Student Success Award, the premier award given by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), which represents nearly 1,200 community colleges nationwide. According to the AACC, the Student Success

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Award “recognizes a community college that has demonstrated, through evidence, a sustained commitment to, and proactively advanced, the cause of student success.” In 2013 and 2014, CNM was nationally recognized for student success and high graduation rates. Also in 2013, the president of the college was named as the western region’s best chief executive officer of a community college.

In 2013, CNM implemented a distinguished faculty award program. Each instructional school selected up to two faculty finalists to be considered as distinguished faculty: one full-time faculty member and one part-time faculty member. A point system for evaluating the criteria was used to assist in ranking the applications. Distinguished faculty are recognized by leadership, colleagues, and student representatives.

The accolades achieved by both the community college and the distinguished faculty occurred during 2013 and 2014, thus enhancing its relevance to community colleges as they exist today. Expanding the knowledge base about teaching excellence of community college faculty can provide insight into teaching strategies that are effective in today’s classroom.

Overarching Research Question

This section frames the research question about the participants’ practices of excellence in teaching at a community college. This research explored the teaching philosophy regarding teaching excellence from the perspective of distinguished faculty. The overarching research question for this study initially was:

- How do distinguished faculty at a nationally top-ranked community college practice excellence in teaching?

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However, upon completion of the study and review of the draft dissertation submission, a dissertation committee member challenged my question, specifically the word “practice.” While the data did collect distinguished faculty teaching excellence practices, it is important to emphasize these practices are only determined in this study from the distinguished faculty perceptions. I concluded it was a valid challenge because this study did not observe actual distinguished faculty teaching, nor did I gather data about the impact these faculty had on students. Therefore, the overarching research question was changed to reflect the following:

- How do distinguished faculty at a nationally top-ranked community college perceive excellence in teaching?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are described for the purpose of understanding this dissertation’s content:

- Activate high expectations and encourage excellence: Energize and initiate high expectations of students, regardless of a student’s personal life obstacles, and encourage excellence in learning.
- Apply theory to the real world: Form a plan or idea that merges theory into real-world scenarios.
- Authentically connect with intent to establish trust: Genuinely connect to the student by understanding students at the central most important part of the being, thus establishing a trustful learning environment.
- Community colleges: Public two-year higher education institutions, also known as technical colleges, city colleges, or junior colleges, that serve an array of diverse

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- learners and specialize in graduation toward diplomas, associate degrees, and certificates.
- Community college faculty: Scholars who are learners who practice continuous learning and intellectual renewal through continuous evaluation and reflection over the course of their teaching careers and who are responsible for influencing learning, conveying and imparting knowledge and skill to diverse learners, and for reflecting a love for learning to students.
 - Cultivate a passion for lifelong learning: Develop and grow a passion for students' lifelong learning journeys.
 - Distinguished faculty: In 2013, CNM, noteworthy of national excellence, implemented for the first year a distinguished faculty program. A rigorous process explained in the sample selection of Chapter 3, Research Design and Methods, identified 11 faculty as distinguished. The distinguished faculty under study in this dissertation were nominated by their peers or were self-nominated. Each nominee submitted an application for review by several key stakeholders at the institution that included leadership, colleagues, and student representatives. These stakeholders reviewed more than 100 applications and selected 11 honorees.
 - Diverse learners: Diverse students who differ in ethnicity, culture, race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical and mental ability status, first-generation college students, veterans, socioeconomic status, and other potential identifiers.
 - Egocentric in the learning environment: Demonstrating concern more for self than for students.

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- Embrace diversity: The willingness to accept, understand, and respect individual differences and value the uniqueness of diverse experiences brought into the learning environment.
- Learning environment: Internal and external surroundings and influences, which can be in a classroom setting or in an online environment, that affect a student's learning.
- Learner-student: A person who seeks knowledge through instruction or study.
- Lifelong learning: An ongoing pursuit of knowledge to continuously grow personally and professionally that can enhance social inclusion, active citizenship, personal development, and self-sustainability.
- Real world: Actual experience as it relates to real life as opposed to theory.
- Scholarship of teaching: A scholarly inquiry into student learning that advances the practice of excellence in teaching and makes these research findings public to serve as a reference for others and to develop teaching expertise.
- Strengthen student's confidence in their ability to learn: Create self-assurance in students by appreciating their ability to learn by strengthening their capacity to learn.
- Student centric: Focused on helping students to learn and solve life's challenges with the intent to continuously grow and develop both the students and the faculty.
- Teaching excellence: Excellence in teaching is a discovery process of the best teaching practices, which include engaging students in a well-prepared and intentional ongoing investigation to promote a deep understanding of the lesson and applicability to real life. Best teaching practices can include continuous learning and intellectual renewal through continuous evaluation and reflection over the course of their teaching careers to influence learning, convey and impart knowledge and skill to

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diverse learners, and reflect a love for learning to students. Excellence in teaching was a criteria identified in the distinguished faculty program.

Conceptual Framework: the Value of Community College Excellence in Teaching

Becker (1993) designed a study “concerned with activities that influence future monetary and psychic income by increasing the resources in people. These activities are called investments in human capital” (p. 11). This scholar, Becker, articulated investments such as schooling, on-the-job training, medical care, and migration. These investments improved skills, knowledge, and health, thereby raising money or psychic income (Becker, 1993). There was an “accumulation of a tremendous amount of circumstantial evidence testifying to the economic importance of human capital, especially of education” (Becker, 1993, p. 12) that revealed that the more highly educated and skilled a person is, the more they tend to earn in comparison to those with less education, and their productivity increases. Furthermore, Becker ascertained that “unemployment tends to be strongly related, usually inversely, to education” (Becker, 1993, p. 12). These factors positively impact individuals, families, and society.

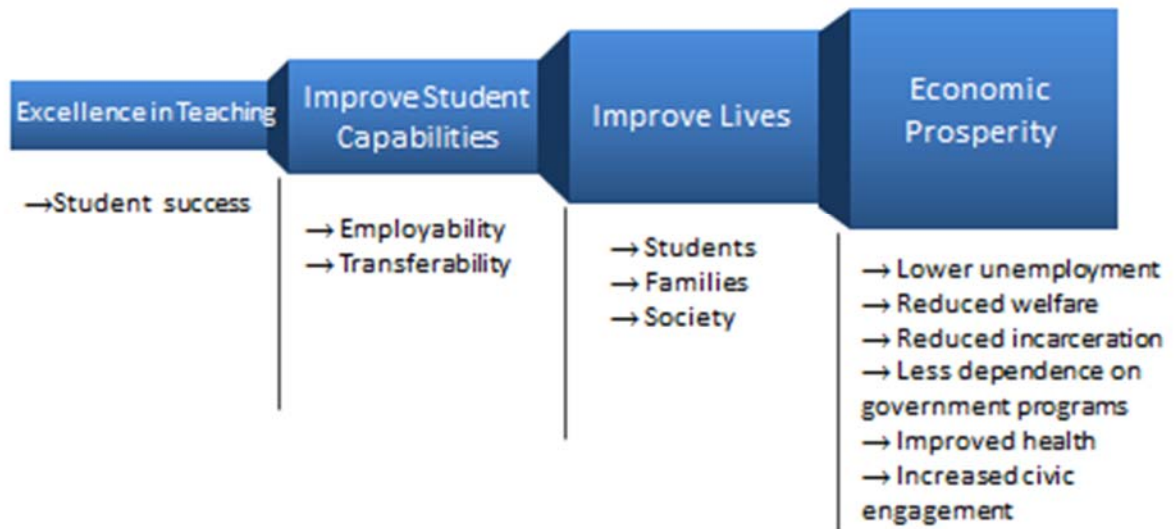
This study utilized Becker’s concept of human capital and the benefits of education as a foundation. A Conceptual Framework: The Value of Community College Excellence in Teaching was designed to understand the potential of excellence in teaching from the viewpoint of human capital, which has the capacity to improve student capabilities. Improved student capabilities improve student and family lives, resulting in overall better-quality societal impacts that lead to economic prosperity. Economic prosperity contributes to lower unemployment rates, reduction in welfare programs, reduction in incarceration rates, less dependence on government-funded programs,

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improved health, and increased civic engagement. The figure below highlights the conceptual framework of this dissertation, the value of community college teaching excellence.

Figure 1. The Value of Community College Excellence in Teaching

The Value of Community College Excellence in Teaching



Excellence in Teaching

First, it is important to define two essential phrases to this dissertation: community college faculty and teaching excellence. Community college faculty, as scholars, are learners who practice continuous learning and intellectual renewal through continuous evaluation and reflection over the course of their teaching careers and who are responsible for influencing learning, conveying, and imparting knowledge and skill to diverse learners, and who radiate a love for learning to students. Teaching excellence defined in this dissertation was a discovery process of the best teaching practices, which include engaging students in a well-prepared and intentional ongoing investigation to promote a deep understanding of the lesson and applicability to real life.

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Considerable conceptual literature has been written on characteristics of effective teaching. Roueche et al. (2003) contributed an early analysis at the start of the 21st century, stating that thousands of studies and reports approach effective teaching from every angle. The definitions used both for community college faculty and teaching excellence were derived from and combined with scholarly work from only a few of these writers and researchers and included contemporary work documented post-2003.

A comprehensive analysis of more than 70 years of historical literature on college teaching excellence was produced by Roueche et al. (2003). In their work, they developed two sets of comparative typologies, learning principles and good practice. The researchers related the two by stating that “we should understand the...factors that influence learning—the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of learning—before considering the ‘what’ of teaching practice” (p. 51). Many researchers have reviewed findings and compared them as described in the work of Roueche et al. (2003). However, these scholars provided a comprehensive summary focused on research findings related to what they deemed “the most common instructional methods used effectively in undergraduate teaching: lecture, discussion, collaborative learning, and computer-enabled learning” (Roueche et al., 2003, p. 39). Roueche et al. (2003) best summarized scholars’ writings on good teachers and effective teaching as such:

Some argue that good teachers—or rather, excellent teachers—are born, not made (Kelley & Wilbur, 1970). Some place the essence of teaching excellence in the personality of the person (Pullias, 1963). Others characterize exemplary teachers as artists, marked by distinctive natural styles, each having his or her own excellence that fits particular definitions of relevance (Axelrod, 1970). Some

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describe the science underlying the art of teaching and characterize teaching exemplars as good scientists (Gage, 1978), or they argue that teaching excellence is best achieved by developing one's craft—an honest, practiced, yet creative endeavor (Eble, 1976, 1983). Still others take issue with the inquiry altogether and claim that “the question should not be ‘What is the ideal college teacher?’ but rather ‘What is the ideal college teacher for different contexts (i.e., courses, students, and settings) and different goals, objectives or desired outcomes of instruction’” (Abrami, 1985, p. 224) (p. 38).

This dissertation considered all previous concepts and sought a perspective based on distinguished faculty perspectives to continue to enrich the literature and offer community college teachers a new paradigm to view teaching excellence with the intent of continuing to improve teaching and to contribute toward more successful learning in a diverse and ever-changing learning environment.

The main scholarly writings I used in this study to define community college faculty teaching excellence are identified in the work of Vaughan, Boyer, and Bernstein, et al. Vaughan (1988), who is described as being a leading advocate on the scholarship at community colleges, wrote “outstanding teaching requires constant learning and intellectual renewal” (p. 28). Boyer (1991) scholarly writing emphasized faculty work as encompassing, among other scholarships, the scholarship of teaching that is defined as conveying a love of learning to students. Bernstein, Burnett, Goodburn, and Savory (2006) stated that “an excellent teacher is one who is engaged in a well-prepared and intentional ongoing investigation of the best ways to promote a deep understanding on the part of as many students as possible” (p. 215).

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Commission on the future of community colleges (1988) wrote that faculty should be analysts of the classroom environment who are “trained to be...careful observer[s] of the teaching process, to collect feedback on what and how well students learn, and to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. This approach...asks faculty to make clear connection between how they teach and what students learn. It establishes the classroom as both a teaching and a research environment” (p. 27). McClenney (2006) emphasized the importance of benchmarking effective education practices to improve the quality of teaching that requires “being humble enough to admit that someone else is better at something and wise enough to learn how to match, or even surpass them at it.”

Benchmarking is a valuable tool in helping community colleges and their faculty rise to the challenges that face them. This study benchmarked teaching excellence practices and strategies from a distinguished faculty perspective and incorporated similar findings that existed prior to 2003 and in the contemporary work of those identified in Chapter 3, Literature Review, Teachers section. The similarities include seeking to learn more about teaching excellence by studying practices and strategies regarding continuous learning and intellectual renewal, continuous evaluation and reflection over the course of a the faculty’s teaching careers to influence learning, conveying and imparting knowledge and skill to diverse learners, and reflecting a love for learning to students.

The strengths in the way that teaching excellence was utilized in this dissertation were that it encompassed several elements used by three important scholarly writings in community college and teaching excellence works, Bernstein et al. (2006); (Boyer, 1991; Vaughan, 1988). Ultimately, past and contemporary scholars have identified teaching excellence as approaches, practices, and strategies based on their findings; thus, the

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definition was determined based on this basis for a theory on the foundational conceptual work. However, the limitation is that not all previous work was encompassed in my definition of teaching excellence. The challenge is to synthesize few researchers' work that I determined encompassed community college teaching excellence in order to continue what Vaughan (1988) suggested, which is an obligation of the scholar to share the research and findings with others and open them to the critiques of those qualified to judge their merits.

Teaching is complex and often is referred to as an art and a science. What determines this study's findings to be unique is that the results demonstrate what the best teachers at one of the nation's best community colleges perceive as excellence in teaching and how they bring their own tools and techniques they believe to be essential to make a difference in student learning. Teaching excellence, for the purpose of this dissertation, includes continuous learning and intellectual renewal through continuous evaluation and reflection over the course of their teaching careers to influence learning to convey and impart knowledge and skill to diverse learners, and to reflect a love for learning to students.

Community college faculty are unique because their primary role is to teach students, a role that differs from that of university faculty, who have other pressing responsibilities, such as research and publishing. "In many comprehensive research universities, research activities are rewarded most highly" (Buskist et al., 2005, p. 113) in comparison to community colleges, which emphasize their critical role in teaching. Often, community college faculty influence a student's first experience in higher education, students who start at a four-year institution of higher education, or students

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who are still in high school (Twombly & Townsend, 2008). The student's exposure to higher education can start with community college faculty teaching; therefore, excellence in teaching can be essential to student success.

Community college teaching excellence has the ability to bring about new ways of seeing life, shifting paradigms in thinking, and of growing individuals academically, professionally, and personally. Faculty can inspire learning in others through teaching excellence, regardless of the subject matter being taught. A teacher's influence can impact students to change majors, to chart new career paths, and to make profound changes in their lives as a result of learning in the classroom or in an online environment (Buskist et al., 2005). Community college faculty focus on the student's potential, in their hearts and minds and in their capacity to transform their lives and to make a difference in the world beyond college.

Improved Student Capabilities

Without community colleges, millions of diverse students and adult learners would not be able to access or afford education that assists them in preparation for the workplace or to further their educational aspirations (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a). Community college students bring to the campus an array of challenges that can be overcome in the learning environment, which include the internal and external surroundings and influences that affect a student's learning in a classroom setting or online environment. Faculty must prepare students to possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the jobs needed in the workforce today. Students must learn the competencies to apply this knowledge and the skills to solve real-life problems in an

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ever-changing world. “College going was [is] for job getting, job certifying, job training” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 27), which lead to higher-paying employment opportunities.

Excellence in teaching can impact students by improving their lives, contributing toward society, and relying less on government-based programs to sustain living.

Education allows students to develop their social skills and work skills to become productive members of society and to reduce the need for public assistance. Current and relevant real-world education creates a brighter future not only for the student but for their families, allowing them to thrive in society and positively contribute to economic prosperity in a dynamic world.

Community college faculty have the capacity to encourage, support, and promote students either to be gainfully employed or to continue formal education in pursuit of achieving their academic and professional aspirations. When students are successful in college, their potential to secure gainful employment opportunities and/or transfer to a four-year institution of higher education to further their educational endeavors increases dramatically.

Improved Lives

The teaching excellence of community college faculty can serve as a catalyst for students to transform their lives through education and can lead students toward professional and educational achievement. When students obtain meaningful employment or continue their education beyond an associate’s degree or certificate, the results add value to the student, their families, society, and increase overall economic vitality.

A fact sheet was published by the American Association of Community Colleges (2014c), Fact Sheet: Where Value Meets Values: The Economic Impact of Community

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Colleges. This fact sheet reported the results of the association's 2012 findings on the economic impact of public education, which documents that a student who will receive a present value of \$469.3 billion in increased earnings over their working lives translates to a return of \$4.80 in higher future income for every \$1 that students invest in their education. A report published by the American Association of Community Colleges (2014a), Report: The Economic Impact of Community Colleges, stated that students see a significant economic benefit. It said that "for every one dollar a student spends on his or her community college education, he or she see an ROI [return on investment] of \$3.80." These statistics prove that students can benefit, through community college education, can contribute positively toward society, and can impact economic progress at local, domestic, and global levels.

Economic Prosperity

Community college faculty teaching excellence can prepare students for the workforce so that the students can contribute to society, actions that result in job training that has the capacity to ease unemployment rates. "America's community colleges create a significant positive impact on the national economy and generate a return on investment to their major stakeholder groups—students, society, and taxpayers" (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a).

The American Association of Community Colleges (2014c) reported that society will receive a present value of \$1.1 trillion in added income over the course of students' working lives and \$46.4 billion in present value in social savings related to less crime, lower unemployment, and increased health and well-being. For every \$1 taxpayers spend on community colleges, society will receive a cumulative value of \$25.90 in benefits for

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as long as the 2012 student population remains in the workforce. Society will save \$19.2 billion in benefits due to a reduced demand for government-funded services. Every \$1 in costs to taxpayers results in \$6.80 in benefits. Post-secondary education is intertwined into all aspects of community and economy. “Examples of benefits attributed to increased levels of educational attainment include: greater workforce productivity and flexibility; higher earnings and more benefits for employees; better health and longer life expectancies; reduced reliance on social services; and increases in civic engagement” (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a).

In summation, community colleges and higher education in general have the capacity to impact the student population as long as students remain in the workforce, depending less on government funded programs; leading to a reduction in the need for welfare, for lower unemployment rates, less crime, and lower incarceration rates; and can lead to improved health and an increase in civic engagement. These factors impact economic growth and prosperity locally, domestically, and globally. The following three data points are significant benefits related directly to America’s community colleges.

Figure 2. Bottom Line -- 2012 Community College Results

- For every \$1 spent on a community college education, \$4.80 is gained in lifetime income for students.
 - \$25.90 is gained in added income and social savings for society.
 - \$6.80 is gained in added taxes and public-sector savings for taxpayers.
-

Source: American Association of Community Colleges (2014c)

Researcher Assumptions

According to Merriam (1988), identifying the researcher’s bias early on in a study is necessary for the reader to understand the researcher’s position and any bias or assumptions that impact the inquiry. I bring to this study “past experiences, biases,

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prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped [my] interpretation and approach to the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251).

To be completely transparent while conducting this research, it was important to reveal my background and research assumptions. I acknowledge that I have a bias about education at a community college level. However, I conducted this research as an explorer and learner examining excellence in teaching at a community college. My experience is that there is something special, unique, and challenging about teaching diverse learners in a community college setting. This experience was derived from the fact that for many years I taught courses at CNM, and I served as the college’s executive director of human resources during the time of this study. Although I do have an understanding from a faculty perspective, I realized that in researching and writing this dissertation, it was imperative to acknowledge these assumptions and, as much as possible, to place them aside. I focused on validation from the participants’ perspective, not from my own, with validation, meaning “a judgment of worthiness or goodness of a piece of research based on the subjects’ input” (Angen, 2000, p. 387).

In qualitative research, a researcher must attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings based on the perspective of the person or community under study (Creswell, 2013). The accuracy is not based on my assumptions about this topic but is based on the assumptions and perspectives of the participants being investigated. Although I brought experiences and knowledge into this qualitative research setting, I set aside my perceptions and listened intently to the participants under study to learn from their stories, experiences, and meanings regarding excellence in teaching at a community college.

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Limitations

The criterion sampling selection imposes a limitation on this study because of the small sample size of 11. I reached out to the 11 distinguished faculty to identify their level of willingness and interest in participating in this study. I contacted them initially by phone and left messages to return my call, without providing details on their voice mails. It was important that these potential participants understood I was acting in this study as a researcher only and not as the executive director of human resources at CNM. Eight of the 11 participants returned my call and allowed me the opportunity to explain this study. All eight expressed interest in participating. Three did not return my call. One distinguished faculty member interested in participating said she was considering inviting the 11 distinguished faculty for coffee and conversation to explore opportunities to learn from each other; therefore, she was excited about participating.

Another limitation that can be posed was that I was familiar with this topic because of my experiences in higher education, explained later in positionality. However, I realized the need to pursue details in an effort to collect valuable evidence from the participants to support the results from the perspective of a distinguished faculty, not from my own experience.

Next, a third limitation was that only nine of the distinguished faculty were eventually interested in participating, after I sent them official written notice, which was one more that elected to participate after the telephone outreach. This research was not intended to cover a 360-degree perspective; a view from students, administrators, or other key stakeholders was not provided in this study. Although leadership, colleagues, and

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students were a part of the decision-making process when selecting the 11 distinguished faculty, their perspectives were not articulated in this study.

The final limitation of this study was that the 11 faculty identities are disclosed on the World Wide Web through communications conducted by CNM. There is potential that individuals could be identified via the communication published on CNM's website that announced the distinguished faculty program and its honorees. I took all possible measures to secure the information and utilized pseudonyms in the data collection and in reporting the findings of this study.

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Chapter 2

Literature Review

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to the change the world.”

~~Nelson Mandela

Overview

The purpose of this study was to understand how distinguished faculty, at a southwestern community college, Central New Mexico Community College, perceived excellence in teaching by continuously improving their teaching practices to prepare students for success into the future. The implications of this research can contribute to existing literature, adding to the scholarship of teaching, examining relevant and timely excellence in teaching practices at a community college that has been recognized nationally for student success, high graduation rates, and for being one of the most affordable in the country for students to attend. This chapter contains current collected works that compares community colleges to universities; provides a history and evolution of community colleges, informs the reader about open access and equitable educational opportunities and scarce resource availability; and provides current knowledge available regarding community college faculty; documents published literature regarding teachers and teaching as a scholarship; and highlights the challenges and opportunities ahead for community colleges. Finally, this literature review concludes by identifying 21st century workforce talent and the need to change.

According to Twombly and Townsend (2008), the two major journals about community colleges are Community College Journal of Research and Practice and Community College Review. Furthermore, books that help provide a description of

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faculty at work in community colleges include *Honored But Invisible: An Inside Look at Teaching in Community Colleges*, by Grubb and Associates (1999); *A Profile of the Community College Professorate, 1975-2000*, by Outcalt (2002); and *Community College Faculty: At Work in the New Economy*, by Levin, Kater, and Wagner (2006).

In conducting this research, I discovered several important topics that are pertinent to community colleges, such as “workforce development, remedial education, distance education, and the use of technology” (Bers & Calhoun, 2002, p. 10). Bers and Calhoun (2002) suggested that although a substantial body of literature about community colleges exists, its individual parts differ in nature, purpose, content, and accessibility.

This chapter does what Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) suggested, that is, joined the conversations among authors and theorists, first by documenting what was said and then by attempting to advance the dialogue from a critical and creative standpoint, thus intriguing the readers of this document who seek a deeper understanding of excellence in the teaching practices of community colleges. This literature review addressed areas of inquiry that were focused on community colleges and their faculty, identifying gaps in current research. This research was not meant to encompass all of what is documented today.

Comparing Community Colleges to Universities

Today, approximately 1,167 community colleges compete for students, influence, and funding against four-year institutions, public and private. Community colleges as well as universities educate students and award degrees. Colleges and universities can be either publicly held or privately held entities. Admission requirements can differ according to selectivity, such as highly ranked universities often being more discerning of whom they

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admit. Community colleges tend to have smaller class sizes (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a); therefore, the perception is that students are able to receive more personal attention from the faculty teaching the courses. Typically, universities offer bachelor, masters, and doctoral degrees, while community colleges offer associate degrees, certificates, and diplomas.

University faculty divide their time and effort between research and teaching while community college faculty primarily teach. “The community college’s educational mission is solely to transmit knowledge, in contrast to the university’s mission, which is to generate knowledge” (Twombly & Townsend, 2008, p. 21). Vaughan (1988) believed that teaching effectiveness is at the heart of the community college mission. Vaughan (2006) found that the mission of most community colleges is to commit to serve all segments of society through an open-access admissions policy that offers equal and fair treatment to all students; to provide a comprehensive educational program; to serve its community as a community-based institution of higher education; and to teach, support, and encourage lifelong learning.

Based on a review of public college revenue charts provided by the American Association of Community Colleges (2014b), college income streams are generated mostly from tuition, fees, and state and local appropriations as opposed to universities, which have multiple revenue streams and include athletic program revenue, which is produced in larger dollar amounts. University programs tend to be longer than community college programs and more expensive overall. Not only are students paying for extra years of education--tuition and fees--but the yearly costs at a university can often be double of what a student pays for a community college course. Additionally,

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community college faculty “may be affected more by managerial and political-economic forces than their university counterparts” (Levin et al., 2006, p. 5).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2008) published a community college executive summary of important developments and trends in education using data available at the time of publication. This report, Community College’s Executive Summary Report, said that 1,045 community colleges exist and have a population of 6.2 million students, which equates to 35% of all postsecondary students enrolled during this time period. This Executive Summary Report pointed out that college tuition and fees were less than half of those at public four-year universities and one-tenth of those at private four-year universities. In addition, the report found that larger percentages of nontraditional, low-income, and minority students were enrolled at community colleges in comparison to those enrolled at four-year universities.

A Historical Perspective of Community Colleges

It is important to understand the historical evolution of the purpose of the community college system: from an emphasis on open access and equitable education, affordable tuition, community college priorities, and the scarce resource availability.

According to Cohen and Brawer (2003):

Community colleges reached out to attract those who were not being served by traditional higher education: those who could not afford the tuition; who could not take the time to attend a college full time; whose ethnic background had constrained them from participating; who had inadequate preparation in the lower schools; whose educational progress had been interrupted by some temporary condition; who had become obsolete in their jobs or had never been trained to

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work at any job; who needed a connection to obtain a job; who were confined in prisons, physically disabled, or otherwise unable to attend classes on a campus; or who were faced with a need to fill increased leisure time meaningfully (p. 28).

The historical perspective on the growth of community colleges also provided insight regarding the influences of a dynamic workforce, of economic demands, and on the expectations that society has had on community colleges for well over a century beginning in the early 1900s. The first community college, Joliet Junior College, originated in Illinois and was established to focus on general education courses. This history will help the reader comprehend a chronological evolution of community colleges.

It was evident that community colleges face dynamic and changing needs and must continue to respond and adapt quickly to better serve the student and the community. Therefore, studies relevant 20-plus years ago, although they form a solid foundation, may not be as relevant in the 21st century. Community colleges continue to offer comprehensive facets of education that include transfer education, career education, developmental and remedial education, continuing education, industry training, and eLearning options.

Cohen and Brawer (2003) noted that American postsecondary education, specifically that offered by community colleges, makes it possible to broaden the mission of higher education to include transfer opportunities from a two-year institution to a four-year institution upon completion of community college work, vocational-technical education, continuing education, basic skills, and community education programs. Increasingly, community colleges are expanding educational opportunities to include

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more offerings in dual-credit or dual-enrollment courses offered to high school students under the tutelage of community college faculty (Twombly & Townsend, 2008, p. 5). Furthermore, some states, including New Jersey, now require public institutions to provide a venue for students to earn an associate's degree at a county or community college and require that courses be fully transferable to any of the state's public institutions as well as count as the first two years toward a baccalaureate degree (Redden). These demands reflect the need for community colleges to be nimble, flexible, and resilient while having the capacity to change quickly, which can be a challenge but is necessary in an environment that can be perceived as that of a bureaucratic, public-sector institution.

The purpose of community colleges evolved, depending on economic needs and the reality that students compete with the rest of the world in the realm of academic knowledge, soft skills, and skills related to technical subjects. Research into community colleges dates to the early 1900s, focusing on reducing entrance requirements and tuition, both of which opened doors for students to pursue civic, career, and degree goals and dreams (Franco, 2010, p. 150). After World War II, the GI Bill was implemented, which made available a large-scale financial aid package that resulted in increases in community college enrollment (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). The purpose of community colleges throughout their history has been to expand educational opportunities beyond "the sons of the wealthy and educated" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 27), creating openness for ethnic minorities, lower-income groups, and those whose prior academic performance had been marginal. Below is a detailed historical summary that reflects significant milestones for community colleges, dating from the early 1900s and continuing into the 21st century.

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Table 1. Historical Summary of Community Colleges

Time period	Community college emphasis	Original sources
1900s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce entrance requirements and tuition • Support local students • Open doors to pursue civic, career, and degree goals and dreams 	Franco (2010, p. 150)
1922	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop curriculum appropriate to larger, ever-changing civic, social, and vocational needs of the entire local community 	Witt (1994)
1920s and 1930s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De-emphasize transfer role • Role of community college is emphasized as a provider of terminal vocational education for marketable skills in local workforces 	Brint and Karabel (1989)
1930s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet community needs • Integrate with the work of the high school and other community institutions • Focus on terminal associate degrees that meet local workforce needs 	Hollinshead (1936), Franco (2010)
1944-1946	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GI Bill passage • 43% of students were veterans 	Franco (2002)
1947	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truman Commission called on community colleges to become centers of learning for the entire community with or without the restrictions that surround formal course work in traditional institutions of higher education • Programs created to serve the needs and wishes of the people it attracts • Made available to all Americans able and willing to receive it, regardless of race, creed, color, sex, or economic or social status • Tuition free 	President's Commission on Higher Education (1947), Witt (1994)
1950s and 1960s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Korean War veterans • Sustained baby boom and rapid economic and technological growth, resulting in greater demand for education 	Franco (2010)
1950s-1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community colleges increase in number from 412 to 1,058 (nearly one community college per week) throughout America • Enrollment soars to 2.5 million students 	Witt (1994)
1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance university transfer and workforce development roles 	Witt (1994)

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1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth in number of student enrollment at community colleges slows • Education of unprecedented diversity of students accelerates • States show concern over budgets and “overeducated” workers as a means to reduce university enrollments and provide students with practical skills as an economic development strategy 	Brint and Karabel (1989)
1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cold War and War on Poverty end • Community colleges now number 1,155, with student increases up to 37% 	Franco (2010)
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,167 community colleges exist today 	(American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a)

Open Access and Equitable Educational Opportunities

Community colleges fundamentally provide equitable opportunities to all students.

According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), “if intellectual ability in the population is distributed on a probability basis, intelligent people will come forth if more are given access to schooling” (p. 70). Social forces contributed to the need for workers trained to operate the nation’s growing industries and the drive for social equality and greater access to higher education (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). “As a society, we have looked to schools for racial integration” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 2). According to these researchers, courts and legislatures insist that schools are a solution to mitigate discrimination while merging students across ethnic groups in various programs.

Social backgrounds significantly affect community college faculty whereas the focus on the community college’s role includes meeting the challenges of equal opportunity in higher education for Americans of all ethnic, cultural, and class backgrounds (Franco, 2010), requiring faculty to teach a wide array of diverse students. Research has concluded that an achievement gap exists when comparing the academic

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success of students of color and/or of low-income and first-generation students with students from a more privileged background (Anderson, 2008; Bauman, Bustillos, Bensimon, Brown, & Bartee, 2005; Harper & Quaye, 2009). Community college faculty have the potential through teaching to aid in closing this gap by sharing their perspectives on strategies for teaching excellence.

Faculty roles include bringing out the best in students, enhancing their ability to learn, and preparing them to increase their skill level for the 21st century workforce-- despite the challenges students bring to the classroom environment. Community college teaching is complex yet supports an open-access mission, which may require more remediation for underprepared students (Alexander, Karvonen, Ulrich, Davis, & Wade, 2012). According to Brown (2004), culturally inclusive content and pedagogies were those that revealed issues of equity, power, and privilege that were rooted in our constructs of race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability status, and other identifiers. Community college faculty teach not only “students whose first higher education experience is in the community college, community college faculty members also teach many students who start at four-year colleges or students who are still in high school. High school students are exposed to community college faculty through dual-credit or dual-enrollment courses” (Twombly & Townsend, 2008, p. 5).

Scarce Resource Availability

Faculty at community colleges rarely operate in an isolated environment; unless, they are accompanied by student-centered success strategies and programs. Both effective teaching and student success strategies are challenged by scarce resource availability. Community colleges, their faculty, and higher education in general are faced with

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balancing competing priorities and scarce resource availability. Faculty pressures include the ability to produce higher graduation rates, improve retention, and engage more students in pursuit of student success. At the same time, administrators struggle with cuts in state appropriations, tighter budgets, and pressure to hold the line on tuition rates. These challenges occur while the college strives to improve its teaching as well as the success of its students.

A report published by Deloitte Development LLC (2014) stated that many institutions of higher education, both public and private, face tremendous financial challenges due to decreasing federal funds, endowment volatility, and the pressure to contain tuition increases. Research suggested that “limited staffing, leadership, and budgets can severely impact the effectiveness of instruction; it takes community” (Silverman & Williams, 2014, p. 241). Community college faculty play a critical role in advancing progress on the important issues reflected in the study, *Where Value Meets Values: The Economic Impact of Community Colleges*, which was resulting in economic vitality. Sufficient funding is essential for community colleges to thrive; yet, historically, community colleges have been challenged by funding that is rarely sufficient and rarely equal to that provided to other educational sectors (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Levin et al., 2010).

Other studies continue to support the assertion that “rising expectations for student learning have come at a time of diminishing resources for higher education, as both public funding and the value of endowments drop” (Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011, p. 10). These researchers suggested that this academic profession is becoming less attractive for the best and the brightest because of the increase in demand for education

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reform and due to the limited resource availability. Furthermore, more than half of today's professoriate hold positions that are part time. This status creates difficulty in sustaining work while balancing institutional agendas for student learning.

In addition, research has revealed that "there is likely a community college teacher shortage on the horizon" (Sprouse, Ebbers, & King, 2008, p. 985). A number of additional scholars predicted that early in the 21st century, community colleges would experience a significant shortage in the number of qualified faculty (Evelyn, 2001; Keim, 1994; Magner, 2000). These researchers suggested there is a need to focus on hiring quality educators who emphasize teaching excellence. Community colleges can be more effective and lean in achieving their mission, working in a constrained environment, by helping faculty to become more effective in teaching students.

Research on Community College Faculty

Studies have been conducted that expand the knowledge available of community college faculty. Twombly and Townsend (2008) claimed that community college faculty have been examined primarily in terms of their characteristics: faculty work in the context of the community college; dimensions of the faculty career and labor market; the influence of institutional factors, such as unions and on faculty work; and community college teaching as a profession. Characteristics cited in an article published by Twombly and Townsend (2008) found that "approximately two thirds of community college faculty members are employed on a part-time basis" (p. 12); "there is almost no research about being a minority faculty member in the community college" (p. 13); faculty gender is evenly split between male and female; and different studies have arrived at different average ages of the faculty.

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These scholars also indicated that community college faculty work is shaped by the institution's mission to provide access to higher education to everyone who can benefit from it and to offer transfer, vocational, remedial, and academic programs at a two-year level; reiterated that their primary work is teaching; and indicated that full-time faculty have the shortest work week among the professorate. "A substantial proportion of the faculty has held previous positions in other settings before moving to the community college" (Twombly & Townsend, 2008, p. 15), and often these faculty positions are hired locally or at best regionally, thus offering significant opportunity for graduate students who might consider the community college as a place to teach. Furthermore, because community colleges tend to hire locally or regionally, salaries often are not subject to market forces, like they are at research universities (Twombly, 2005).

"Unions and faculty governance are the two institutional factors about which the most has been written, but that is not to say that much has been written about either" (Twombly & Townsend, 2008, p. 16). In addition to unions and faculty governance, these scholars indicated that college administrators also are major institutional factors influencing faculty work. Last but certainly not least, there is a "high degree of satisfaction evident in the national studies that have examined job satisfaction" (Twombly & Townsend, 2008, p. 17). However, the downside of community college faculty are "feelings of being disrespected or held in lower esteem by those in a 4-year institution" (Twombly & Townsend, 2008, p. 17). These scholars stated that "there seems to be little evidence that community college teaching is unique and different from teaching in other sections. Community college teaching does not employ different

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methods, require different pedagogical training, or have substantially different norms than teaching in any other section” (Twombly & Townsend, 2008, p. 18).

Teachers

This section of the literature review was based on the current published research and focuses on describing teachers, their influence, and what makes an effective teacher.

First, researcher Darling-Hammond (1997) emphasized that teachers need to be prepared to teach an ever-more diverse group of students for much more challenging work; for framing problems; for finding, integrating, and synthesizing information; for creating new solutions; for learning on their own; and for working cooperatively. Darling-Hammond (1997) stated that teachers will need substantially more knowledge and radically different skills than most now have and that most schools of education now develop. This section covers a portion of what we know about teachers based on past scholarly writings that are published.

Buskist et al. (2005) stated that teaching involves a triad: the student, the teacher, and the knowledge being studied. “A student is a person who seeks or otherwise needs the knowledge ‘possessed’ by the teacher. A teacher is a person who is charged with imparting such knowledge to students. Knowledge, of course, is any sort of information relevant to a student’s life--it may be personal, purely abstract, work-related, or skill-oriented” (Buskist et al., 2005, p. 115). Several researchers and authors of various publications have highlighted the soft skills and the knowledge base a teacher must possess to be effective for the learner (Bain, 2004; Bernstein et al., 2006; Buskist et al., 2005; Chickering & Gamson, 1999; Lowman, 1984).

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“Teachers enhance the likelihood that their students will be receptive to influences by imparting substantive and accurate knowledge, making this knowledge relevant, emphasizing critical thinking, and sharing their academic values, curiosities, and enthusiasm” about learning (Buskist et al., 2005, p. 111). Educators recognize that their work may exert significant positive influence on students’ views about the power of learning, education, and change. Teaching and expanding knowledge bases can broaden the learners’ worldviews and bring about new perspectives and ideas of what is possible. Teaching has the capacity to alter a student’s future if the teaching is interesting, relevant, and intellectually engaging.

Community college faculty are challenged to facilitate the diverse student’s understanding of the subject matter and the acquisition of specific skills that are relevant and useful in today’s workplaces. In general, highly effective teachers were described as being knowledgeable in the subject matter they teach, as having the ability to develop rapport with students, which increases receptivity to the teacher’s message, and communicating information clearly at the students’ level of understanding, regardless of the complexity of the subject matter (Buskist et al., 2005).

In 1986, Chickering and Gamson (1999) invited a small task force of scholars who had conducted research on the impact of the college experience as well as scholars of organizational, economic, and policy issues in higher education to meet for two days. Their work focused on the implications of improving undergraduate education. As a result of the efforts of this task force, scholars claim that good practices in undergraduate education are comprised of seven factors: (a) encourage student-faculty contact, (b) encourage cooperation among students, (c) encourage active learning, (d) give prompt

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feedback, (e) emphasize time on task, (f) communicate high expectations, and (g) respect diverse talents and ways of learning.

Lowman (1984, p. 23) stated that “the ability to stimulate strong positive emotions in students separates the competent from the outstanding college teacher.” Bernstein et al. (2006) found that “an excellent teacher is one who engages in a well-prepared and intentional ongoing investigation of the best ways to promote a deep understanding on the part of as many students as possible” (p. 215). Furthermore, for more than 15 years, Bain (2004) studied approximately 100 teachers in a variety of fields in university settings and wrote “What the Best College Teachers Do.” The Bain (2004) study found that the best teachers create a natural, critical-learning environment in which students are fascinated with authentic tasks that provoke curiosity; challenge students to rethink assumptions and examine their own mental models of reality; and create safe environments where students can try, need improvement, receive feedback, and try again.

Excellence in teaching is essential to student success and warrants study and recognition of its best practices. Bernstein et al. (2006, p. 7) cited the need to recognize excellence in teaching:

As with assessment, efforts to conceptualize, support, and reward good teaching are back in public discourse—certainly so in the United States. In addition to spurring new attention to the role of learning outcomes assessment for accountability, Spellings’ National Commission report urged colleges and universities to embrace a “culture of innovation” in teaching and curriculum (2006, p. 5), a theme that many campuses were also voicing. Even at Harvard University, a distinguished task force sought to identify ways to foster and

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reward pedagogical improvement as a major professional commitment for academic scholars at all stages of their careers (see Harvard Magazine, 2006; Task Force on Teaching and Career Development to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, 2007). Indeed, a consensus seems to have emerged that it's time to revisit expectations for good teaching in higher education and to develop some common understanding about how it can be improved.

Fink (2003) proposed combining foundational knowledge, application, integration, human dimension, valuing, and lifelong learning. Each of these types of learning and learning outcomes stimulated the other to achieve what the research calls significant learning (Fink, 2003). This researcher designed A Self-Directed Guide to Designing Courses for Significant Learning, developing taxonomy of significant learning that illustrates interaction between six kinds of significant learning: (a) learning how to learn, (b) foundational knowledge, (c) application, (d) integration, (e) human dimension, and (f) caring. Fink determined that courses are designed by two closely related but distinct actions. First, the course is designed by gathering information in order to make decisions about the course. Then, the teacher engages in a teacher-student interaction to implement the design. A teacher “must be competent in both course design and teacher-student interaction” (Fink, 2003, p. 1).

While several publications already identify best teaching practices, this dissertation provides current, relevant information from the perspective of community college faculty, one that can align with what has been published and/or can provide a new perspective for consideration. This dissertation also is unique when compared to other published studies because it examined the best-in-class faculty at a best-in-class

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community college and continues the research that contributes toward teaching as a scholarship based on their perspectives.

Teaching as a Scholarship

Boyer (1991) noted that faculty work is comprised of four premises: (a) scholarship of discovery, which is basic research; (b) scholarship of integration, which is analyzing and interpreting research findings; (c) scholarship of application, which is applying knowledge to the solution of technical or social problems; and (d) scholarship of teaching, which is conveying knowledge and love for learning to students. The emphasis of the teaching environment of the community college, and the intent of this section, leads naturally to a focus on the fourth scholarly premise, the scholarship of teaching, and to a consideration of the faculty role in systematically analyzing the classroom as a learning environment (Palmer, 1992). I share a common goal through this study with faculty developers and scholars of this scholastic work: “transforming teaching and learning for the better” (Hutchings et al., 2011, p. 5).

The Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) project began with the 1990 publication of *Scholarship Reconsidered* (Boyer) and later was enhanced in *Scholarship Reassessed* (Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997). The scholarship of teaching is “an approach to teaching that is informed by inquiry and evidence. They [faculty] are trying to find the best ways of incorporating new media into their teaching; they [faculty] are troubled by the number of students who are performing poorly in their science or math classes; or they [faculty] care deeply about educating students for citizenship, and want to explore how best to build student’s knowledge, skills, and confidence” (Hutchings et al., 2011, p. 3).

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Vaughan (1988) has been the leading advocate for attention to scholarship at the community college level. He found a connection between teaching effectiveness, which is at the heart of the community college mission, and scholarly endeavors, maintaining that outstanding teaching requires constant learning and intellectual renewal. Noting that scholarship is the systematic pursuit of a topic through “rational inquiry and critical analysis,” he pointed out that scholarly products may take many forms: “a book review, an annotated bibliography, a lecture, a review of existing research on a topic, a speech that is a synthesis of thinking on a topic” (Vaughan, 1998, p. 27). These scholarship endeavors clearly do not require traditional, original research. “It is the obligation of the scholar to share it with others and open it to criticism of those qualified to judge its merits” (Palmer, 1992, p. 32).

Scholarship of teaching was described as an activity in which faculty engage and separate from the act of teaching (Bass, 1999). Bass (1999) noted that it takes a deliberate act and awareness to look at teaching from the perspective of learning: to focus on questions and problems, gather data, interpret, and share results. These approaches challenge teachers to learn more by investigating the problems that matter most to them as they move toward a scholarship of teaching to legitimize a new set of questions as intellectual problems. This allows for teachers to explore a new landscape that features the merging of disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical practice, evidence of learning, and theories of learning and cognition. Ultimately, teachers learn more about learning and never stop learning as they impart this quality on students.

Much research has been conducted on the scholarship of teaching and learning in post-secondary education. The scholarship of teaching is a scholarly inquiry into student

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learning, which advances the practice of teaching and makes these research findings public to serve as a reference for others and to develop teaching expertise. Many research projects and publications encompass how teachers not only can improve their expertise in their fields but also develop their pedagogical expertise. Researchers understand the need to study and modernize teaching methods in the current educational arena. The scholarship of teaching “may change how teachers teach, shape powerful forms of professional development, link with assessment efforts, and be woven into faculty roles and rewards” (Hutchings et al., 2011, p. 8).

Workforce Talent: Need to Change

In conclusion of this literature review, this section explores further the needs of the 21st century workforce, according to theorists and authors, in preparation of a revolutionary modernized workplace. This section also elucidates the need for the higher education community to realize what the workplace expects from the workforce in order to prepare students for success beyond college graduation and thus positively contribute to economic prosperity. The history of community colleges explained the progression of industry and the workforce skill development that must change continuously over time to meet market and industry demands.

Cohen and Brawer (2003) noted that new technologies demanded skilled operators, and in colleges, the question is not what knowledge is of most worth; rather, the most likely question is what knowledge yields the greatest tangible benefit to individuals and society. By improving the way education is offered and delivered, community colleges possess the wherewithal to change as quickly as the work environment demands change. Community colleges are challenged to implement lifelong

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learning and the practices of excellence and quality improvement in an effort to maintain a competitive advantage and to relate to the demands of the workforce and economy.

Arum and Roksa (2011) stated in their research that students not only come poorly prepared by prior schooling, but they enter college with attitudes, norms, values, and behaviors that are not conducive to academic commitment. These students enter college, the authors said, largely academically adrift. “Students may commute to attend school part-time or full-time while also working full-time jobs and managing multiple responsibilities” (Alexander et al., 2012, p. 851). The traditional student no longer travels on a linear pathway toward an educational goal. Institutions of higher education must respond to satisfy the demand for lifelong learning and become more permeable in order to accommodate the needs of the student whose educational path is nonlinear (Muller, 2014).

One community college study I found noted that faculty “were quick to discuss areas of future development needs including continual opportunities to update technological skills, expansion of workshops on diversity, pedagogical implications of the changing population, and additional opportunities for learning more about colleagues” (Fugate & Amey, 2000, p. 14). This dissertation further expanded the scholarship available regarding community college faculty in today’s shifting world, including demands from society, politicians, and legislation. Faculty must prepare students for workforce development, skill development, and pressures through higher education and also must improve quality in teaching diverse learners preparing for the 21st century workforce.

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The United States, from the Civil War until the 1970s, was seen as the world's most successful mass-production economy (Carnevale & Smith, 2013). The business in organizations consisted of producing standardized goods and services with the least cost and low prices. Masses of unskilled laborers operated machines that produced the standardized goods while a smaller number of skilled labor workers was considered white-collar and technical elites operating at the top of the organization (Carnevale & Smith, 2013). The talent requirements of the workforce have changed significantly since those early times. As the world's economy gained more wealth, standardized commodities decreased, and competition increased domestically and around the world.

According to Carnevale and Smith (2013), economic demands require knowledgeable workers; productivity is pursued between technologies and skill in order to be sufficient to compete in modern-day markets, to meet the flexibility demands of a rapidly changing workplace, and to keep up with new performance standards. These scholars suggested that there existed several driving, new market forces. The scholars highlighted the market demands and identified the new skills required to maintain competitiveness in a domestic and global world. Carnevale and Smith (2013) found that new market forces create demand for new skills. These scholars indicated a shift to a knowledge economy where "productivity is pursued through product investments in the synergies between technology and skill that lead to institutions that are sufficiently robust to compete in modern markets" (Carnevale & Smith, 2013, p. 491). These scholars stated that quality no longer is insulated from global competition and requires new skills, ranging from technical competence to increased responsibility, regardless of the job description. Variety is intensified to satisfy the growing diverse market, both

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domestically and globally, which requires the ability to be creative and to solve problems as one size no longer fits all. Customization now supersedes standardization, requiring the ability to solve problems and empathize with customer wants and needs. Busy people crave convenience, which requires workers who have the ability not only to empathize with the needs of the customer but also to use interpersonal skills, such as effective communication and listening. Consistency is essential and requires workers to be dependable and committed to efficiency, quality, variety, customization, convenience, speed, innovation, and social responsibility one hundred percent of the time. Speed and continuous innovation are critical in generating new ideas and improving products and services incrementally and continuously, getting them into the hands of the customer. Finally, Carnevale and Smith (2013) stated that consumers are wealthier and have more choices; therefore, consumers tend to want products and services that represent their values. According to these scholars, these fundamental changes in skill requirements can be traced to the shift from the industrial era, rote skills of the assembly line, to the knowledge economy, flexible technologies, and high-performance work systems. “In an era of flexible production and service delivery systems and more rapid economic change, workers not only need better technical preparation, they also need sufficiently robust skills to adapt to changing requirements on the job” (Carnevale & Smith, 2013, p. 493).

Community college faculty resemble the new economy worker, aligning with a globalized economy that values flexible, specialized production; knowledge tied to new technologies; and team players who can contribute to reducing costs, increasing profits, or producing measurable outcomes and expanding market opportunities (Levin et al.,

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2006). These researchers noted that globalization is a borderless economic, social, and cultural condition that impacts teaching significantly around the world.

An article published in the Harvard Business Review and written by Fernandez-Araoz (2014) highlighted this author's version of 21st century talent by describing an ever-evolving four eras of spotting talent to hire in organizations and by discussing "why potential now trumps brains, experience, and competencies" (p. 47). This information was relevant to this study because it depicts the need to teach students how to learn and to be adaptable to change in the workplace. Fernandez-Araoz (2014) identified the first era of spotting talent to hire in organizations as "humans made choices about one another on the basis of physical attributes" (p. 49). Despite physical attributes being irrelevant, we still unconsciously look for them when seeking talent. The evolution of spotting talent then in the second era is "emphasized intelligence, experience, and past performance" (p. 49). Important factors in hiring included IQ, verbal, analytical, mathematical, and logical cleverness, all of which were essential to identifying top talent. In the third era of spotting talent, employers were "driven by [the] competency movement still prevalent today" (p. 49). This era tests for competencies and characteristics that help predict performance, such as emotional intelligence rather than just intelligence. Today, in the fourth era, spotting talent is about focusing on human potential. The author suggested that talent in the 21st century must have the potential to learn in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment. "What makes someone successful in a particular role today might not tomorrow if the competitive environment shifts, the company's strategy changes, or she or he must collaborate with or manage a different group of colleagues" (p. 50).

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“The 21st century global economy workforce, culture, and society have created opportunities and promises warranting a fresh exchange of ideas, collaboration, innovation, education, and global mindshare in an open, innovative and comprehensive setting” (Ardalan & Sevanthinathan, 2014). This article cited academics who are professors at Lone Star College and who emphasized the fact that emerging countries were shaping the world and that offering the need for affordable education and a sustainable workforce was the solution to sustained growth and global competitiveness. This newspaper article published in May 2014 cited a Cisco-published white paper under the headline, Transitioning to Workforce 2020. This report indicated that the workforce world was changing at that very moment, suggesting that community colleges must be flexible in addressing global workforce shifts. The findings of this report asserted that “change is accelerating, uniformity is giving way to diversity, and complexity has become every leader’s biggest concern” (Ardalan & Sevanthinathan, 2014). The article articulated the need for organizations of all types to adapt to new workforce realities or face the prospect of losing or failing to attract top talent. At the same time, employees of organizations must shift their expectations, skills, and be willing to change job roles, work environments, organizational cultures, and most importantly be willing to learn.

Because community colleges are the link to the labor market and employers, it is essential that community college faculty realize this link and teach and equip students with skills necessary to be successful in the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment. Students must learn how to learn, adapt, and change to be a successful employee in a knowledge-based workplace and to be an integral contributor to society. These abilities are critical for a student to be successful in the 21st century workplace.

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Chapter 3

“We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change.

And the most pressing task is to teach people how to learn.” ~Peter E. Drucker

Research Design and Methods

Overview

The purpose of this the study was to answer this research question:

“How do distinguished faculty at a nationally top-ranked community college perceive excellence in teaching?”

This chapter outlines and describes the research methodology and methods used for this study. Prior to launching into the research methodology, I started with my positionality to fully disclose my experience as it relates to this topic, knowing that my bias must be set aside as I explore excellence in teaching from the perspective of a distinguished faculty. This chapter covers the rationale for a qualitative instrumental case study and a rationale for an approach utilizing an appreciative inquiry interviewing framework. Provided are a description of the population of the research sample, including where the population is drawn from and the site of the study, and the research protocol. Next, the data collection methods, the data analysis techniques, and components of trustworthiness and ethical considerations pertaining to this dissertation are included in this chapter.

Because minimal opportunity exists to understand renowned faculty in a nationally award-winning community college setting, this study explored noted case participants to develop a pertinent hypothesis and proposition for further inquiry (Yin, 1994) beyond this dissertation.

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Positionality

I have worked in the field of human resources for almost three decades and taught college courses in a private institution of higher education, professional development courses at a four-year public institution, and college-level courses in a community college environment. The majority of my professional experience has been in designing human resources initiatives and programs in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade as well as in post-secondary educational institutions.

I taught courses in business interpersonal skills, group dynamics, business ethics, and principles of management. There is a uniqueness about teaching at a community college, I realized, because of the diverse student population and the need to understand workplace trends and to prepare students for success in the job market and/or to continue education beyond community college. These influences challenge community college teaching practices to continuously improve and to be applicable and relevant to today's workplace needs.

While teaching in a community college, I appreciated the diverse learner population. During my tenure, my students included a 14-year-old high school student taking dual-credit courses; an African American woman in her 70s attending college for the first time; bachelor's degree and master's degree students returning to school for a second, third, or fourth career after retiring or being laid off; Air Force military buddies taking courses while they were stationed in the city; English language learners from Mexico and other countries in South America; veterans who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder; entrepreneurs and small-business owners polishing their leadership and

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management competencies; students who lived with disabilities; and students on their way to prison for mistakes from the past.

I approached this research as an outsider as well as an insider because of the experiences I possessed. However, I realized that I needed to be aware of any bias I may harbor because of these experiences. My role and approach remained consistent throughout this process, which was as a researcher, an explorer, and a learner.

Qualitative Research Rationale

This qualitative research, which explored the excellence in community college teaching from the perspective of a distinguished faculty, was an instrumental case study that provided insight into a particular issue, redrawing generalizations, and building theory (Stake, 1995). Qualitative research is particularly useful in understanding human experience and enabling the researcher to examine and interpret the experience for the purpose of discovering meaning and patterns (Stake, 1995). “In qualitative study, we seek greater understanding of the case. We want to appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of the case, [and] its embeddedness and interaction with its contexts” (Stake, 1995, p. 16). Qualitative research was described as (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Stake, 1995):

The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meaning. . . . Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning (p. 10).

Qualitative methods aim at finding thick descriptions and discovery, with a view to identifying and uncovering the meaning and experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005;

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Merriam, 1988). This study sought to gather deep meaning about community college excellence in teaching from the perspective of a distinguished faculty. This instrumental case study utilized several of the data-collection methods applicable to qualitative case studies: document analysis, demographic survey, semistructured interview transcripts, two focus group transcripts, and observation notes taken during the focus groups (Yin, 1994).

Instrumental Case Study Research Rationale

This qualitative dissertation was an instrumental case study. Stake (1995) carried out a single instrumental case study that focused on a need and then selected one bounded case, distinguished faculty, to illustrate the issue, examining excellence in community college teaching. The two main publications that I relied on to further understand case study methodology are by Stake (1995), *The Art of Case Study Research*, and by Yin (1994), *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*.

According to Yin (1994), case study research contributes to the knowledge of the individual, organizational, and political phenomena, which in this case is excellence in community college teaching. Yin (1994) described the case study methodology as both comprehensive and beneficial because it copes with technically distinctive situations in more variables than data points. As a result, this research relied on multiple data sources of evidence to support the results derived. Multiple sources of data can provide the opportunity to converge in a triangular fashion. Another result is that the case study methodology benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (p. 13). Yin (1994) stated that case studies can be exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory. This case study sought to incorporate all three.

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Yin (1994) cited the main assumptions and features of qualitative study, which fit appropriately with this study: concern with understanding of action and events, focus on an elaborated knowledge of the context, acknowledgement the interaction between the researcher and participant, an interpretive stance, and an allowance for design flexibility.

This experience was one of discovery and understanding, transcending my own experience and enriching the knowledge available today of excellence in teaching in community colleges. Case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2009). However, Stake (1995) argued that case study research is not a methodology but is a choice of what is to be studied; others present it as a strategy of inquiry, a methodology, or a comprehensive research strategy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2009).

As a researcher, I chose to view a case study as a methodology, “a type of design in qualitative research that may be an object of study, as well as a product of the inquiry” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). A case study may identify a concrete entity that includes real-life cases that are in progress so that the researcher can gather accurate information not lost by time and can illustrate a unique case in detail with an intent to understand a specific problem or concern by collecting many forms of data (Creswell, 2013), which this study aimed to accomplish. A case study includes “in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97).

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Appreciative Inquiry Interviewing Rationale

This dissertation's intent was to examine top faculty at one of the nation's best community colleges using a positive psychology interviewing framework, appreciative inquiry, which was a process of questioning that involved capturing experiences through interviews "to draw out the best of the past, to understand what one wants more of, and to set the stage for effective visualization of the future" (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 4). Education is consistently being scrutinized, and the negative aspects are studied often to identify prospects for educational reform. However, appreciative inquiry interviewing provides a framework that is used to study how distinguished faculty members practice excellence in teaching from an affirmative perspective.

Appreciative inquiry is "about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 3). The participants of this study were faculty who were identified by their peers as distinguished, and excellence in teaching is the content I explore. The focus, therefore, was appreciating excellence in teaching practices of these best-in-class faculty at a community college noteworthy of national recognition, which is the essence of appreciative inquiry, a method that studies the positive aspects of the work performed.

Assumptions to appreciative inquiry were addressed by Hammond (1998, pp. 20-21): "a) in every society, organization, or group something is working; b) what we focus on becomes our reality; c) reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities; d) the act of asking questions of an organization or group influence the group in some way; e) people have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known); f) if we carry parts of

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the past forward, they should be what is best about the past; g) it is important to value differences; and h) the language we use created our reality.”

The appreciative inquiry process starts by selecting an affirmative topic choice, excellence in teaching. Utilizing an Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle, the interviewer facilitates the participants to discover, dream, design, and define destiny (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider et al., 2008; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). This research was focused exclusively on an analysis of the factors that contributed to highly functioning entities, when at their best, thus shifting the paradigm from problem solving to possibility seeking. The attempt of this study was to capture “rich and inspiring accounts of [directly from] the positive [highly functioning faculty]” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 3) in which students learn. By appreciative, we mean “valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems; to inquire is the act of exploration and discovering; to ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 2).

Appreciative inquiry interviewing is grounded in positive psychology and is abundance based, solution focused, and typically is driven by fundamental assumptions about human nature that hold that people have within them a natural tendency to want to grow and develop their potential, and when their environment supports them, they thrive (Linley & Harrington, 2005). This approach, appreciative inquiry interviewing, does not avoid concern or identify inhibitors to growth, change, and renewal; rather, issues are reviewed as opportunities to improve.

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Although I did not use appreciative inquiry methodology, I adapted some of its concepts into my interview questions. This study concentrated solely on the first stage of the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle model: discover the best of what is by appreciating and examining excellence in community college teaching. Future studies can expand the work to include each component of the model: dream, envisioning results by asking what might be; design, co-constructing what should be; deliver, delivering and sustaining how to empower, learn; and discover, improvise to the affirmative topic of choice. The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle is identified in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle



Site of the Study

In 2013, Central New Mexico Community College, a college located in the southwestern region of the United States, implemented a distinguished faculty program. These faculty, the case study participants, played a substantial role in this community college's

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recognition as a national award-winning institution and in the national accolades it received in 2013 and 2014. The accolades are described in the section below.

Community College Worthy of National Recognition

Central New Mexico Community College's most recent accolades, among others not noted here, include:

Table 2. Most Recent Accolades: 2013 and 2014

Year awarded	Accolade
2014	Top 100 Associate Degree Producer
2014	Top 50 Most Affordable Community Colleges
2013	Student Success Award by the American Association of Community Colleges
2013	President named best chief executive officer of a community college in the western region

Source: (Central New Mexico Community College, 2013b, 2013c).

According to Central New Mexico Community College (2013b), a CNM publication on the cnm.edu website, factors that contributed to the college's selection for the Student Success Award included an increase in the number of transfers to four-year institutions, an increase in the number of dual-credit students, the college's connect center being a student-support model, and just as important, if not most important, an increase in the number of graduates. Central New Mexico Community College documented in this publication that graduation rates showed a substantial increase from 2,483 in 2008-2009 to 9,609 in 2012-2013.

Sample Selection

This particular sample selection, distinguished faculty, was selected from Central New Mexico Community College, a higher education institution worthy of national accolades. This dissertation utilized criterion sampling because all case participants met the same criterion to confirm quality assurance (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This sample selection

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was derived by a rigorous process described in the next section, Community College Distinguished Faculty, which determined the 11 participants named as distinguished faculty. All participants met the same criterion, worked at the same institution, and applied for this distinction through the same process.

This particular community college sought to recognize distinguished faculty for excellence in teaching. According to *Central New Mexico Community College (2013a)*, a CNM web publication, CNM acknowledges the role of faculty as essential to upholding the college's mission to "create educational opportunities and community partnerships while pursuing a level of community college excellence that is worthy of local and national recognition." Recognition of and reward for distinguished faculty service are important facets of the college's strategy for promoting the mission, vision, values, and goals encompassed in the college's strategic direction: student success, community success, and excellence and innovation.

There is a gap in knowledge currently available that examines the best-in-class faculty, distinguished faculty, at a best-in-class community college. Often, as a society, we tend to want to improve education and use the following as a default question: What is not working. However, this study takes an opposite approach. Therefore, this particular faculty was selected as a target for an examination of teaching excellence. What is important about this dissertation is that it focused on examining in depth what was working and what can be learned from these distinguished faculty perspectives about this critically important topic, community college teaching excellence.

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Community College Distinguished Faculty

Central New Mexico Community College implemented a distinguished faculty award program in 2013. Six instructional schools at the college selected up to two faculty finalists to be considered as distinguished faculty: one full-time faculty member and one part-time faculty member. More than 100 faculty were nominated, and 11 were selected to receive the recognition, representing each of the following schools: School of Adult and General Education; School of Applied Technologies, School of Business and Information Technology; School of Communication, Humanities, and Social Sciences; School of Health, Wellness, and Public Safety; and School of Math, Science, and Engineering.

A point system for evaluating the criteria was used to assist in ranking the applications. The criteria used are indicated below (Central New Mexico Community College, 2013a):

- Excellence in Teaching and Learning: Nominee is recognized by students, colleagues, and supervisor(s) as an excellent instructor of his/her content through the use of best practices in teaching and learning, as well as ongoing engagement in professional development activities.
- Strategic Direction: Nominee has demonstrated a significant achievement in one (or more) of the goals put forth in the strategic direction.
- College Service (required for full-time faculty): Nominee has contributed to CNM through his/her service by engaging in activities in one or more of the following areas:

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- Active participation in school and college activities (such as, but not limited to, developing new curriculum or student recruitment).
- Collaboration with faculty and staff from other schools-departments to promote communication, coordinate schedules, and support student success.
- Collaboration with high schools, universities, business and industry or external agencies as appropriate, and assist with program advisory committees as requested.
- Support collegiality by actively participating in the professional development of new and veteran faculty (for example, mentoring, peer observations).
- Serving on department, school, and college committees and task teams.
- Participating in and assisting with student activities and clubs.
- Contribution to Department-discipline (required for part-time faculty): The nominees must have contributed to the growth and enrichment of their department.

This dissertation focused exclusively on the first criterion, excellence in teaching and learning. While the other criteria may provide evidence to support this study, I narrowed the scope to focus only on excellence in community college teaching.

Anyone could have nominated eligible faculty, including self-nominations. Faculty nominated were provided an application to complete. Applications were forwarded to the dean of each school, then to the vice president of academic affairs (VPAA), who then convened a selection team composed of the VPAA and

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representatives of the Faculty Senate, the Chair Council, and student government. In this process, more than 100 nominees were reviewed prior to the selection of 11 distinguished faculty by this comprehensive selection committee.

Research Protocol

Prior to collecting data, approvals were obtained from two Institutional Research Boards (IRB): the University of New Mexico and Central New Mexico Community College, the institution at which this study was conducted. The targeted institution was asked to provide authorization to study distinguished faculty at its particular institution, and a second approval was obtained from the University of New Mexico to provide consent for this dissertation to move forward with its study (Appendix 2: Central New Mexico Community College and The University of New Mexico Combined Consent and Authorization to Participate in Research).

Eleven distinguished faculty were sent a recruitment email message (Appendix 1: Recruitment e-mail) that described the purpose of the study and asked if they would participate voluntarily. Nine of the 11 awardees who elected to participate were provided a form seeking their consent and authorization to participate in research, fully disclosing the purpose and procedures of the study, expectations of each participant in each of the four phases of the study, its risks and benefits, confidentiality, compensation, participation and withdrawal opportunities, and information to further direct participants' questions. A signed copy of the combined consent and authorization to participate in research form was provided to each participant.

Prior to this study, each awardee was initially contacted via telephone to identify their level of interest in participation. Eight of the 11 verbally responded and expressed

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overwhelmingly willingness to participate. Three participants did not respond to the request initially; their reasons are unknown. Once the study was approved by both IRBs and officially launched in writing via the recruitment e-mail, nine participants eventually agreed to be a part of this study. Participants were assured that they could opt out or terminate the interview at any time, and they received copies of their interview transcripts to check for the accuracy of the content used in the final report that was used in this analysis.

Data Collection

The data collected in this study includes several methods, techniques, and approaches to produce and analyze (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The following provides more information about methods, data collection, data coding, and data analysis as it occurred during each phase.

Phase 1 consisted of collecting documentation, specifically the application submitted by each participant for the distinguished faculty recognition program. I conducted a review of the application responses, seeking commonalities and emerging themes in teaching excellence. In Phase 2, I collected demographics through a survey. Prior to taking part in a semistructured interview, each participant was asked to respond to a demographic survey, which assessed background and characteristics of each participant. I then conducted a semistructured interview with each participant, in Phase 3, utilizing open-ended questions. I digitally recorded each interview and sent them to be transcribed to a professional transcriptionist located out of state. A transcription was provided to each participant as part of the process. These interviews were in-depth and elicited rich data. Rich data revealed the complexities of what was being studied, which

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was an attempt to seek to understand what was being investigated as deeply as possible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Finally, Phase 4 of the data collection occurred upon completion of the first three previous data collection methods, which consisted of two participant focus group discussions.

Phase 1: Documentation Analysis

I asked each participant to provide me a copy of the application for distinguished faculty recognition they submitted. If they did not keep a copy, I obtained authorization from the participant to receive a copy from CNM. Three criteria were used to evaluate and rank the nominees' responses in the applications. The focus of this dissertation was to evaluate one specific criterion from the application process. I then read each application multiple times to identify commonalities and emergent themes related to excellence in teaching:

- Excellence in teaching: Nominee is recognized by students, colleagues, and supervisor(s) as an excellent instructor of his/her content through the use of best practices in teaching, as well as for ongoing engagement in professional development activities.

The documentation retrieved from archives was an essential element to review. Yin (2003) identified strengths and weaknesses of various evidence. Depicted in the table below are those strengths and weaknesses of document analysis and archival records. I remained mindful of both as I reviewed this content for evidence.

Table 3. Evidence for Document Analysis: Strengths and Weaknesses

Source of evidence	Strengths	Weaknesses
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stable: can be reviewed repeatedly• Unobtrusive: not created as a result of the case study• Exact: contains exact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Retrievability: can be low• Bias selectivity, if collection is incomplete• Reporting bias: reflects (unknown) bias of author

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	names, references, and details of an event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad coverage: long span of time, many events, and many settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access: may be deliberately blocked
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Source: Case study research: Design and methods (Yin, 2003, p. 86).

Table 4. Evidence for Archival Records: Strengths and Weaknesses

Source of evidence	Strengths	Weaknesses
Archival records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as above for documentation • Precise and quantitative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as above for documentation • Accessibility due to privacy reasons

Source: Case study research: Design and methods (Yin, 2003, p. 86).

Phase 2: Demographic Survey

By collecting the characteristics of the sample population of distinguished faculty, this process helped understand the participant’s categorization from various demographic perspectives and helped to inform the potential transferability of the study’s results. The demographic information described the participant: who they are, where they come from, some of their history and/or background, their education, and other personal information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This information was collected from all participants at the beginning of the semistructured interview process explained in Phase 3. The following demographics were asked of each participant with the intent to better understand the population under study. The participant demographics are summarized in Chapter 4, where there is a description of the nine participants’ demographics such as gender, age, and ethnicity as well as their experience in teaching and their expertise outside of a community college workplace.

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Table 5. Demographic Survey

Demographic	Options/description
Gender	Male Female Did not answer
Age	20-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61 plus Chose not to answer
Ethnicity	American Indian or Alaska Native Asian Black or African American Hispanic or Latino Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander White Chose not to answer
Teaching subject matter expertise	Focused content area of expertise
Employment status	Full time Part time
Highest educational level achieved	High school Associate degree Bachelor's degree Master's degree Doctorate
Years teaching at a community college	0-5 6-10 11-15 16-plus
Other teaching experience	Kindergarten-12 Graduate-teaching assistant University
Years in subject matter expertise in the field in a nonteaching capacity	0-5 6-10 11-15 16-plus

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Phase 3: Semistructured Interviews

Each participant was interviewed after they responded to the demographic survey questions identified in Phase 2. Interviews can be targeted directly at topics of interest and can facilitate casual inferences (Yin, 1994). Initially, the individual semistructured interview process asked for responses to open-ended questions that sought evidence to support teaching excellence in a community college setting. During these interviews, I asked questions regarding past experience in applying teaching excellence, as well as characteristic-based features and/or attributes.

The interview approach was drawn from the appreciative inquiry interviewing framework that asked about excellence in teaching. Sufficient time was provided to each participant to answer key questions. The challenge was to develop questions and a sequence for interviews that elicited the most meaningful responses for the study. Interviewees were encouraged to talk freely about their experiences, perceptions, and beliefs; informal prompts were used when necessary to gather as much relevant information as possible (Levin et al., 2010). Throughout data collection, interview prompts were revised to understand information that emerged in previous interviews or artifact reviews.

The interviews took place in a private office or conference room of the participants' choice on the college campus, ensuring that the environment was convenient and quiet, located in a private setting, and was comfortable and safe for the interviewee. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. Written participant permission was elicited to digitally record the interview as a part of the consent and authorization process. A professional transcriptionist located in another state transcribed the recordings,

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and they were provided within a few days to each participant to review for accuracy. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described this method used as a member-checking approach which is taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they could determine the content accuracy and credibility of what they contributed as participants. The participants were asked not to edit the transcript but rather to review the content of their transcript for accuracy in an effort to ensure that the data precisely reflected their approach to excellence in community college teaching (Appendix 5: Notification Sent to Participants to Review Transcripts).

The interview was an important facet of this study. Yin (2003) identified strengths and weaknesses of various evidence. Depicted in the table below are those strengths and weaknesses for conducting interviews. I remained aware of both as I conducted the interviews.

Table 6. Evidence for Interviews: Strengths and Weaknesses

Source of evidence	Strengths	Weaknesses
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Targeted: focuses directly on case study topic• Insightful: provides perceived causal inferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bias due to poorly constructed questions• Response bias• Inaccuracies due to poor recall• Reflexivity: interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear

Source: Case study research: Design and methods (Yin, 2003, p. 86).

Interview Questions

The questions developed for both the semistructured interviews and focus groups were designed to gather responses with rich description about the overarching research question: How do distinguished faculty at a nationally top-ranked community college perceive excellence in teaching?

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Excellence in teaching is a discovery process of the best teaching practices, which include engaging students in a well-prepared and intentional ongoing investigation to promote a deep understanding of the lesson and applicability to real life. Best teaching practices can include continuous learning and intellectual renewal through continuous evaluation and reflection over the course of their teaching careers to influence learning, convey and impart knowledge and skill to diverse learners, and reflect a love for learning to students. Each research participant was asked the following questions in the semistructured interview process:

Table 7. Interview Questions

#	Semistructured interview questions
1	What do you believe is unique about teaching at a community college?
2	Describe your personal best teaching practice that has had a direct impact on your students' learning. Please provide examples.
3	How do you practice lifelong learning and intellectual renewal throughout your teaching career?
4	How do you practice continuous evaluation and reflection to ensure your teaching practices are relevant, current, and contribute to overall student success?
5	Have you ever had an "aha moment" where you realized you used an effective teaching strategy, and if so, please describe. (Prompt: What was it that made this an "aha moment"?)
6	From your perspective, what differentiates you as a distinguished faculty member that warrants such distinction?

It was important to identify the intent of the question to help the reader of this study understand the type of question that was appropriate and was more likely to solicit the kind of information desired from this scholarship. The intent of these questions was to seek distinguished faculty perspectives regarding excellence in teaching at a community college that encompass best teaching practices, intellectual renewal, evaluation and reflection, and "aha moments" when applying effective teaching strategies. I also noted that it was important to decipher the questions and to provide open-ended questions to

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avoid dichotomous questions that could be answered with a yes or a no. The most appropriate questions can drive better results of the study.

Phase 4: Participants' Focus Group

After the semistructured interviews and transcript reviews, two 90-minute focus groups with six participants took place to share an understanding of excellence in community college teaching. The first focus group consisted of four participants, and the second focus group consisted of two participants. The interviews were conducted in a conference room or private office, ensuring that the environment was comfortable and safe for the participants to contribute. Participants' permission was sought to digitally record the focus groups, and the same out of state professional transcriptionist used in the semistructured interviews transcribed the recordings.

The focus groups were conducted after reviewing and analyzing the data from Phases 1-3. A draft categorization, which I initially called the AASCA Model, was designed as a result of the data collected in Phases 1-3 to present to the focus groups and to provide a common lens for the focus group participants. The AASCA Model at that time represented: authentically connect with intent to establish trust; active high expectations and expect excellence; strengthen confidence in their ability to learn; cultivate a passion for learning; and apply theory to real world.

The focus group questions were designed based on evidence collected from two data sources at that stage of the study. The main focus group questions were similar to the questions asked of each individual interviewee. Six questions were asked of the participants to focus in on their perspectives of teaching excellence as defined by best teaching practices, intellectual renewal, evaluation and reflection, and perceived impact

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on how their teaching impacts student success. I realized that I submitted four focus group questions to the IRB; however, I did ask the same questions to obtain clarification as I did in the semistructured interviews. The two questions not identified, but asked of the focus group participants included: What do you believe is unique about teaching at a community college? From your perspective, what differentiates you as a distinguished faculty member that warrants such distinction?

Table 8. Focus Group Questions

#	Focus Group Questions
1	The evidence collected thus far reveals . . . Explain any of the content that describes personal best teaching practice.
2	The evidence collected thus far reveals . . . What do you want to add to how you practice lifelong learning and intellectual renewal throughout your teaching career?
3	The evidence collected thus far reveals . . . Clarify how you practice continuous evaluation and reflection to ensure your teaching practices are relevant, current, and contribute to overall student success?
4	The evidence collected thus far reveals . . . Clarify how do you perceive your teaching impacts student success in the short term and long term? Please provide any examples that reflect how your teaching excellence contributes toward student success.

Focus groups create “awareness, which from a theory of science perspective gives the focus group method its specific character as a heuristic process; a heuristic process means that one learns things through which one can make decisions and handle problems” (Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006, p. 131). The participants were able to learn from each other and re-evaluate their own understanding of excellence in community college teaching while I listened and learned from the experts on this topic. Two motives existed in this entire process: understanding and learning.

The advantage of using focus groups in this study was that participants had an opportunity to express multiple understandings and meanings that provided a number of perceptions in their own words, challenging each participant’s paradigms, and responding

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to other participant's points of view (Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006). A participant focus group was used to enhance the data and to build on the document analysis, demographic survey, and on the semistructured interview data-collection methods. A focus group method can be defined as a group discussion in which persons from the targeted population discuss facets of a particular topic (Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006). These focus group discussions resulted in obtaining rich data that identified commonalities and themes and aligned them with other data collected at that stage in the study.

The focus groups provided a venue to listen to each participant's understanding and meanings of community college teaching, challenged each participant's contradictions, and allowed the faculty to respond to various points of view. The intent was to examine and further develop, in a group setting, the ideas that participants shared individually. Focus group research is about the questions and respondent answers and includes the interactions that take place among the individuals in the group of distinguished faculty members (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Data Analysis Techniques

This study collected data in four phases from each of the nine distinguished faculty. The data collection consisted of reviewing the application submitted by each distinguished faculty, collecting demographic information via a survey at the beginning of each semistructured interview, conducting a semistructured interview process with each distinguished faculty, and facilitating two focus groups with participants. My intent was not to provide one solution for community college teaching excellence but rather to provide a theory that is grounded in rich data.

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Utilizing multiple methods of data collection provides triangulation. Researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide confirming evidence and to enhance the validity of the research (Ely, 1991; Erlandson, 1993; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984). The intent is that the data collected from each technique sheds light from multiple perspectives to continue conversation and expansion of understandings and viewpoints about community college teaching excellence from some of the best faculty in a best-in-class community college, an affirmative approach.

Analysis began with the first data collected and intensified after the data collection was completed. “Without ongoing analysis, one runs the risk of ending up with data that are unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed” (Merriam, 1988, p. 124). With this in mind, I carefully read and reread my data multiple times.

I began my analysis by identifying preliminary categories and subcategories for each participant. I conducted this analysis by marking word(s) in the margins of the applications and transcripts that summarized the content. I then sought to find themes that I repeatedly viewed and attempted to color code themes that were common. I categorized the commonalities and themes in an Excel spreadsheet documenting the comments in quotations that supported the themes that emerged. I compared each new set of data with data previously collected in each phase throughout the process. I added and collapsed categories as the interviews and focus groups research progressed searching for links between concepts in an effort to discover common themes. After experimenting with a few different ways of organizing these data, I incorporated the themes and participant

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quotes supporting each theme into an Excel spreadsheet where I could copy and paste and move data around in an eased technique. I presented a draft of the categorized themes identified that supported specific comments made by each participant and presented a draft model to the focus group participants to obtain clarification or enhancement to each theme identified at that stage of the process. The intent was to systematize the raw data into themes and into categories, which means that the participants' actual discussions fell into an appropriate category before the categorized raw data was summarized and combined with an interpretive step that aimed to provide understanding excellence in teaching (Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006, p. 129).

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) were the first to address rigor in their model of trustworthiness of qualitative research. Establishing a trusting relationship between the faculty and me was essential to enhancing the trustworthiness of the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) established their criteria for trustworthiness to address this need, seeking to establish truth value. These researchers explained the basic question, "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). The four criteria used by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for trustworthiness are truth-value (enhancing credibility), applicability (enhancing transferability), consistency (enhancing dependability), and neutrality (enhancing confirmability). The next section covers the four criteria in detail, seeking to address rigor in the trustworthiness of this particular study.

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Truth-value: Enhancing Credibility

Credibility is the “element that allows others to recognize the experiences contained within the study through the interpretation of participants’ experiences (E. Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 152). This criterion emphasized that the participants’ perceptions matched my portrayal of them, ensuring accurate representation of what the participants contributed to the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Multiple methods were used in this study to corroborate the evidence that I obtained via different means in order to triangulate themes and provide as much information as possible from each participant. The multiple methods of data collection in this study represented triangulation, which is a strategy that enhances a study’s credibility.

Each interview and focus group were digitally recorded and documented by a professional transcriptionist. I reviewed the transcripts to seek and identify similarities, patterns, and themes within and across study participants, a step that provided accurate descriptions through quotations or interpretation of the information shared by the participants under study.

I also conducted member checking, also known as member feedback, which involves returning to the participants to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected what was shared to enhance the credibility (E. Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). A transcript of each interview and focus group was provided to the participant to ensure reliability of information. As described by Creswell (2013, p. 253), “reliability can be enhanced if the researcher obtains detailed field notes by employing a good-quality tape for recording and by transcribing the tape.” This approach is necessary to solicit participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). This technique

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is considered to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314).

Applicability: Enhancing Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) determined that transferability is the ability to transfer research findings from one group to another or “how one determines the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects/participants” (p. 290). I provide the results of the demographic survey in Chapter 4 Participant Demographics that summarizes descriptions of the distinguished faculty, which includes categorizing their backgrounds so that should a replicated study be conducted at a later date using the same data collection methods, the study has the potential to be transferable.

In an effort to enhance transferability, triangulation was achieved in this study by using multiple methods, document analysis, a demographic survey, semistructured interview and focus group transcripts with member checking, and observation notes. These methods to collect information were used in an attempt to locate multiple sources that were considered as evidence to document themes in different sources of data in order to triangulate and provide corroboration, which enhance the validation of the findings of this research (Creswell, 2013).

The intent of this study was to seek rich, thick description so that the reader can make decisions regarding transferability as a result of the researcher’s ability to define in detail the participants’ experience (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1988). “Thick description means that the researcher provides details when describing a case or when writing about a theme” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252).

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Consistency: Enhancing Dependability

Dependability takes place when another researcher can follow a decision through an audit trail that can be achieved by “(a) describing the specific purpose of the study; (b) discussing how and why the participants were selected for the study; (c) describing how the data were collected and how long the data collection lasted; (d) explaining how the data were reduced or transformed for analysis; (e) discussing the interpretation and presentation of the research findings; and (f) communicating the specific techniques used to determine the credibility of the data” (E. Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 153). The intent of this research was to be fully transparent in each of the six identified items above, thus enhancing the ability to conduct an audit trail to track the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret this study’s data.

Neutrality: Enhancing Confirmability

Confirmability “occurs when credibility, transferability, and dependability have been established” (E. Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 154). I provided thick description through the use of participant quotations as supporting evidence (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) in the analysis and conclusion of this dissertation to support the results of the study. Thick description was used to communicate a holistic and realistic picture (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) from the participants’ perspective.

Ethical Considerations

As a researcher, I am morally bound to conduct my research in a manner that minimizes potential harm to those involved in this study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This study was approved by two Institutional Research Boards (IRB), and I ensured that dissertation protocol was followed appropriately. “Ethical issues can indeed arise in all phases of the

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research process: data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and dissemination of the research findings” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 111). Administering this study through the guidance of both IRB protocols enhanced the safeguards that protect the rights of the participants through the informed consent and authorization standards, protecting the participants, and ensuring confidentiality as much as possible. I obtained signatures on informed consent and authorization forms from all participants. Care was taken to ensure that participants understood the consent form. Participation in this study was voluntary. The information gathered provided an opportunity to share teaching excellence obtained during this process.

During the time of this study, I served in the capacity of the executive director of human resources at this particular community college under study. However, my role in this study was that of a researcher. In an effort to be transparent, I disclosed both roles and provided clarification to all participants in order to avoid misperceptions or the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Although I took every measure to protect the confidentiality of all personal information, confidentiality of all study data could not be guaranteed. The consent and authorization form indicated that confidentiality could not be guaranteed. I disclosed to each participant the risk of potential loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in this study. While I can ensure that I maintain confidentiality, distinguished faculty have been identified via the World Wide Web via communication from this community college that reported the names of the distinguished faculty. This sample size was small; therefore, names can be revealed via the World Wide Web. I made it clear to the participants that any one of them could withdraw at any time and that

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any documentation collected prior to a withdrawal request would be destroyed. While multiple sources of data were collected, once compiled, the data presented in the results did not disclose personal information, and pseudonyms were used for case study participants.

I am committed to keeping the names and/or other significant identifiable characteristics of the sample population confidential to the fullest extent possible. As a researcher, I understand that the participants' rights and interests are considered to be of primary importance in regards to reporting and disseminating data. To minimize the risks to confidentiality, all information, both hard copies and electronic copies, was stored on a jump drive and in a file cabinet in a home office. I am the only person with the ability to access the key.

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Chapter 4

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”

~~Benjamin Franklin

In this chapter, I provided a summary of the instrumental case study, the population and sample description, the participant’s demographic composition in summary format, the method and data analysis, the research findings that support the emergent themes, and introduce a proposed model with six elements to consider for teaching excellence from a distinguished faculty perspective that resulted from analyzing the data collection. The emergent themes were the results of the overarching research question of this study based on the data collected. The overarching research question is:

- How do distinguished faculty at a nationally top-ranked community college perceive excellence in teaching?

Instrumental Case Study: Distinguished Faculty Participants

This instrumental case study, one that provides insight into a particular issue, redrawing generalizations, and building theory (Stake, 1995), consisted of nine faculty who were studied to identify teaching excellence, from a distinguished faculty perspective, at a community college. The Central New Mexico Community College and the University of New Mexico Combined Consent and Authorization to Participate in Research form asked each participant to agree or disagree to be audiotaped; all agreed. The interviews and focus groups were audiotaped. On the consent and authorization form, each participant was asked to select a pseudonym, and if they opted not to, I assigned one. Each participant chose a pseudonym and identified the chosen name that differed from their own name on the Consent and Authorization to Participate in Research form. The

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pseudonyms selected by each participant are listed alphabetically as follows: Aahz, Cedric, Fiver, Goofy, Marie Stroud, Mr. K, Nancy, Professor X, and W.F. Godot. The instrumental case was distinguished faculty perspectives on teaching excellence.

Population and Sample

The Central New Mexico Community College (2013-2014) Fact Book published CNM's faculty population during the time these distinguished faculty were selected as 1,132.

This study population consisted of 11 potential participants. Two participants who did not respond to the email request to participate in the study were a man and a woman who had nonminority last names; one was employed part time and the other, full time. Based on this limited demographic assessment of what was known regarding the two who did not respond, the sample consisted of the nine participants who volunteered to represent the pool of 11 potential distinguished faculty participants. "One general guideline for sample size in qualitative research is not only to study a few sites or individuals but also to collect extensive detail about each site or individual studied" (Creswell, 2013, p. 155). This study collected extensive detail regarding distinguished faculty perspectives on excellence in teaching.

Nine faculty elected to participate in the interview process, representing 82% of the pool of potential participants. The nine participants completed a demographic survey after completing the consent and authorization form. Demographic data was collected and summarized to understand the composition and background of each participant. Each submitted their application or provided to me permission to obtain their application from the college that awarded the participants the distinguished faculty distinction. After analyzing the nine applications thoroughly, interviews were conducted with each of the

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participants. The interviews averaged one hour in length. Six of the distinguished faculty participated in the focus group study. Two elected not to participate in the focus group process due to scheduling conflicts. One said he would attend one of the two focus groups but was unable to show up for either. The first focus group consisted of four distinguished faculty, two observers, and me. The second focus group consisted of two distinguished faculty, two observers, and me. Each focus group session lasted approximately one and a half hours.

Table 9. Participant Data

Distinguished faculty (9)	Demographic Surveys (9)	Applications (9)	Interviews (9)	Focus groups (6)
Nine of the 11 potential distinguished faculty elected to participate in the study	Nine distinguished faculty participants completed a demographic survey	Nine distinguished faculty participants provided application material	Nine distinguished faculty were interviewed	Six distinguished faculty were able to participate in the focus group discussions

Participant Demographics

The collection of data consisted initially of summarizing the demographic surveys to cross-tabulate the data by determining the frequency of the respondents that have the characteristics requested in the survey. The demographic survey information was compiled data to report in summary format. Gender, age, ethnicity, teaching subject matter expertise, employment status as a faculty member, highest educational level achieved, years of teaching at a community college, other teaching experience, and years of subject-matter expertise in the field in a nonteaching capacity were collected from each participant. Five of the participants were men, and four were women. According to the Central New Mexico Community College (2013-2014) Fact Book, during the same

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year these distinguished faculty were selected, the fall of 2013, CNM faculty was comprised of 58.8 percent females and 41.2 percent males. These data are different when compared to the participant demographic, 45 percent females and 55 percent males.

Eight of the participants were older than 51, and eight indicated White as their ethnicity. It is important to note that one applicant informed me that his ethnic background was Arabic; however, this was not one of the choices provided in the demographic survey. The option he selected was White. These options were selected from census data options. The Central New Mexico Community College (2013-2014) Fact Book documents that in the fall of 2013, CNM faculty was 68.2 percent White and both minorities and an “other” category consisted of 31.8 percent, and the overall age of faculty reported was 49.9 years. The ethnicity data differs when compared to the participant demographic, which were 89 percent White and 11 percent minority. However, the age demographic was similar to that of the participants’ demographic; 49.9 years was the average age as compared to all participants age, 51.

At the time of the study, six of the participants were employed full time while three were part time. One distinguished faculty noted during the interview that he worked part time at the time of this research but had been selected to teach full time after he was recognized as distinguished faculty; therefore, the researcher recorded him as a full-time instructor because that was his status at the time of the interview. The Central New Mexico Community College (2013-2014) Fact Book reported that 29.5 percent of the faculty were full time and that 70.5 percent were part time. The CNM faculty population has a higher ratio of part time faculty, 33 percent, than were selected from the distinguished faculty participant population. Eight of the participants held a master’s

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degree. No further demographic data to compare was published for the overall demographics of faculty during this time period in the CNM Fact Book.

Table 10. Distinguished Faculty Participant Demographic Summary

Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Employment status	Highest educational level achieved
Male: 5 (55%) Female: 4 (45%)	41-50: 1 51-60: 7 61 or older: 1	White: 8 (89%) Hispanic-Latino: 1 (11%)	Full time: 6 (67%) Part time: 3 (33%)	Bachelor’s degree: 1 Master’s degree: 8
Overall CNM: Male: 41.2% Female: 58.8%	Overall CNM: Average age: 49.9	Overall CNM: White: 68.2% Minorities and Other: 31.8%	Overall CNM: Full time: 29.5% Part time: 70.5%	

Two of the nine participants taught math; the others taught other subjects: transportation technology, language arts, accounting, land surveying, religion-humanities, para medicine, and biology-human anatomy and physiology. Six of the distinguished faculty had taught at a community college level for 11 or more years. Five either had taught or at the time were teaching at a university. Eight of the participants have industry experience, which could imply that teaching could be a second, third, or other career choice. This assumption would corroborate the research conducted by Twombly and Townsend (2008) that reflected a substantial portion of faculty holds previous positions in other settings before arriving to a position teaching at a community college.

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Table 11. Distinguished Faculty Background

Teaching subject matter	Years teaching at a community college	Other teaching experience	Years teaching subject-matter expertise in a nonteaching capacity
Transportation technology: 1 Mathematics: 2 Language arts: 1 Accounting: 1 Land surveying: 1 Religion-humanities: 1 Paramedicine: 1 Biology-human anatomy & physiology: 1	6-10 years: 3 11-15 years: 4 16-plus years: 2	K-12: 2 University: 5 Private sector: 1 Other (conferences): 1	0-5 years: 1 11-15 years: 2 16-plus years: 6

Methods and Data Analysis

In summary, the collection of data consisted of analyzing the distinguished faculty applications submitted that identified them with such distinction, the interview transcripts that each participant reviewed, and the transcripts of the focus group discussions that each participant reviewed. Two observers were present during the focus group discussions to document nonverbal communication; therefore, comments documented by the observers also were used as data to support the results of this study. The data collection methods used in this study sought to elicit rich data to reveal the complexities of teaching excellence in an attempt to seek to understand what was being investigated as deeply as possible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

I contacted 11 distinguished faculty to solicit their voluntary participation in this study. Nine agreed to participate and completed the consent and authorization form and a demographic survey. These nine participants provided a copy of the application they submitted for the distinguished faculty program or provided permission to obtain the application directly from the college. I analyzed the nine applications several times, seeking excellence in teaching practices, commonalities, and emerging themes. I initially

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determined several themed categories that emerged from the data that I consolidated into six elements of teaching excellence. I identified several teaching excellence themes initially by marking key words and concepts on the margins of the data collected, and then I color-coded each theme in both the application and the interview transcripts that appeared to be repeated. I then created several columns on an Excel spreadsheet that identified themes and documented supporting comments in the rows below the themes. I discovered similarities in themes and was able to collapse and consolidate by categorizing each theme's comments that supported each one.

Upon completion of the review of applications, I conducted a semistructured interview with each participant. I conducted the interviews and then sent via a shared Drop Box account the digitally recorded interviews electronically to Florida to a professional transcriptionist; the transcriptionist returned the material, transcribed, in a Microsoft Word format. I sent the transcripts to each participant for review, requesting that each respond within three days; all of the participants approved the transcripts with or without minor edits. I had the interviews transcribed, reviewed by each participant, and then analyzed the data in a similar way. I marked in the margins the words or concepts that appeared to be repeated and color-coded each perceived teaching excellence practice. I then consolidated both the application and the interview quotes on my Excel spreadsheet to identify which themes had the most references to support teaching excellence. After multiple reviews of applications and interview transcripts and consolidation of themes, I created an initial draft categorization that was supported by these two data collection results.

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I conducted two focus groups with six distinguished faculty, although, nine were invited to participate. Three distinguished faculty were unable to participate due to schedule conflicts. I presented a draft categorization during the focus groups, Community College Teaching Excellence: A Distinguished Faculty Perspective, AASCA Model: authentically connect with intent to establish trust; activate high expectations and encourage excellence, strengthen confidence in their ability to learn, cultivate a passion for learning, and apply theory to the real world. I obtained reaction and feedback to the original five elements of the model during two focus groups consisting of six of the nine participants interviewed. I followed the same process used for the interview transcripts as utilized for the focus groups. A professional transcriptionist transcribed the digitally recorded focus groups. Then the focus group participants reviewed the transcripts electronically and responded to me with minor edits or no edits. I deleted the shared Drop Box account soon after all transcriptions were received.

Nine demographic surveys were analyzed, consisting of nine pages. Nine applications were analyzed. Each application was two to three pages single spaced; a total of 25 pages of application data was reviewed. Nine participant interviews were conducted with each volunteer participant. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The total interview data transcribed was 87 pages. Each interview transcribed consisted of six to 14 pages of data; however, some data was single spaced, and other data was presented with 1.5 spaces between lines. The next data set collected was the two focus groups. The first focus group lasted approximately one and a half hours. It consisted of four distinguished faculty, two observers, and the researcher. The transcribed notes totaled 14 pages of data. The second focus group session took approximately one and a

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half hours. Participating were two distinguished faculty, two observers, and the researcher. The transcribed notes included 15 pages of data, totaling 29 pages of focus group data that was reviewed. The observers submitted notes regarding the nonverbal behaviors each participant portrayed during the focus groups. Those notes totaled five pages of observation data. Some 155 pages of data were reviewed and analyzed, all of which contributed to the results of this dissertation.

I analyzed 155 pages of data seeking to find emergent themes and was able to categorize several themes that were common. Category 1 consisted of these themes: connect, trust, resourcefulness, sharing personal experiences, caring, and appreciation for students. Category 1 was supported by nine faculty perspectives and was summarized thusly: authentically connect with an intent to establish trust. Category 2, embrace diversity, did not initially exist until a draft dissertation was submitted to a dissertation committee member. One of the questions asked during the interviews was: What do you believe is unique about teaching at a community college? Eight distinguished faculty perceived the diversity in the community college classroom as being a rich factor of the learning experience; therefore, I provided content in a draft dissertation that included supporting comments to this inquiry that these faculty embrace diversity. I submitted the draft a committee member. The committee member read the draft dissertation that included distinguished faculty perspective comments on diversity in the community college learning environment. This committee member challenged me to consider another category in the draft model; thus, the category “embrace diversity” emerged as a result of the distinguished faculty perspectives.

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Category 3 consisted of these themes: high expectations, excellence. These themes were supported by eight faculty perceptions. Category 3 was summarized as this: activate high expectations and encourage excellence. Category 4 consisted of these common themes: enthusiasm, passion, continuous learning, and lifelong learning. Category 4 was supported by eight faculty perspectives. Category 4 was summarized as this: cultivate a passion for learning. Category 5 consisted of these themes: confidence, conquer fear, failure, managing complex tasks by accomplishing small tasks, and problem solving. Category 5 was supported by eight faculty perspectives and was summarized as this: strengthen confidence in their ability to learn. Category 6 consisted of these themes: theory to real world, relevance, and employer partnerships. Six faculty perceived the sixth category as this: apply theory to real world.

Research Findings

It is important to note that this study's findings consisted of distinguished faculty perspectives only and gained insight of what these participants perceived as teaching excellence. This study did not observe the actual teaching of these faculty participants or the impact their teaching had on their students' success. As such, the reader cannot generalize the research findings; rather, the reader can only consider the elements as a proposed approach to community college teaching excellence from distinguished faculty perspectives.

Authentically Connect with Intent to Establish Trust

At the core and center of the research findings, according to distinguished faculty perspectives, was the faculty's desire and need to authentically connect with each student with the intent to establish trust by caring about the students' well-being. Nine faculty

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provided anecdotal evidence to support this theme from their perspectives. An adequate definition was that these distinguished faculty perceived the importance of genuinely connecting with students by demonstrating care. According to their perspective, they take the time to understand each student holistically and at the central and most important part of their being, thus demonstrating they care about the student and their success--short term in the learning environment and long term often throughout the student's life.

This authentic connection allowed these faculty to establish a trusting environment. According to their perspective, faculty do this by sharing personal experiences with the students, helping students become resourceful, caring about the student, and by appreciating the student and the life experiences they bring to the learning environment. Establishing a trusting environment lends itself to creating a safe learning space that provides comfort in the interpersonal interactions between faculty and the learners. Trust, according to McAllister (1995), is "the extent to which a person is confident in, and willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions, and decisions of another."

One of the observers in one of the focus groups documented in their observation notes that the participants were animated when talking about authentically connecting to students with the intent to establish trust. Faculty described their perspective of the importance of learning more about the students early on to include understanding their background, personal challenges in life, and individual learning styles. Another observer noted that during the first focus group, the four participants nodded their heads when they were introduced to categorization of the five elements of teaching excellence, and they were animated when talking about authentically connecting.

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Goofy provided her perspective on the core of the proposed model during the focus group:

I think we as teachers know as a whole we have responsibility, and the one main responsibility is connecting with our students. Once we've reached that connection, we can do just about anything. We can introduce new subjects, we can challenge them, we guide them, we do a lot of modeling. . . . We have to realize that we do have responsibility, and as teachers we have to realize, do we want to share our information or do we want to impress them with our knowledge? And I believe in sharing, and if the students know you're sharing experiences, your knowledge, they're just going to eat it up, and they're going to learn, and I think that's part of the trust building.

According to Nancy's perspective, she said during the focus group discussion that her first impression was that she "like[d] the use of the words authentically connect" because it truly was an authentic connection. She said, "As a student, you can tell the difference whether a professor cares or not; if the instructor is interested in you as a person, or is this class almost over." She also said she appreciated the "use of the words 'the goal to authentically connect' with students." The students often shared more than expected, she said, because of the trust level. She perceived that it is helpful to know what is happening in students' lives outside the classroom so that the faculty can help them identify resources available at the college. College resources can include tutor assistance, the use of achievement coaches, scholarship opportunities, job opportunities, and many other advantages the college provides to aid student success.

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The supporting evidence determined in the coding and analysis for each element of teaching excellence is as follows:

Supporting Evidence: Authentically Connect with Intent to Establish Trust

Aahz's Perspective

During the focus group and in his application, Aahz provided perspective, stated, and wrote:

When I look at the level of trust that they [the students] should be able to have for me, if they've got a problem that has nothing to do with learning, they should be able to bring it to me, and I can try and give them assistance on it. I am able to get to know the students and am in a unique position to identify at-risk students. I am able to proactively work with them to find the resources they need to overcome any issues that might stand between them and graduation.

Aahz said he conducts "lecture[s] based on where we are, where the students are at; every group of students learns at different rates, so I rewrite lectures." His application, interview, and focus group dialogue emphasized his perspective and desire to connect with students to fully understand how he could help support their growth through learning based on their individual needs and learning style.

Cedric's Perspective

Cedric's perspective was that he engaged directly with his students with the intent to help them beyond the learning environment. He described his perspective in his application and spoke of his support for student success in his interview as follows:

On behalf of the students, I have written letters for the Rust scholarships, to parole officers, and recommendations for subsidized housing as well as

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recommendations for degree programs and awards. I foster an environment of community in the classroom through open discussion and personal presentations. I apply my knowledge of classroom retention techniques in group projects and one-on-one check-ins with my students. Overall, it is the positive classroom setting experience and sense of belonging, which is the greatest predictor of student success. I let my students know they are actually a part of a community of teachers. I also tell them to use the resources; I am constantly pushing them to go to the tutoring services, to talk to their instructors to help answer questions or help mentor them so they feel there's a community involvement in their education.

The Rust Opportunity Assistance Fund is one of many resources the college provides to students. This particular endowment is an emergency fund available for students who experience an unforeseen financial need. The need must be beyond the student's control and could prevent them from continuing their education. The fund is intended to assist serious students to continue their studies and earn a certificate or degree.

Fiver's Perspective

Fiver's perspective was that she claimed in her application that her main strategy for achieving student success was getting to know her students. According to her perspective, she learned every student's name on the first day of class. She asks students to share something about them, on day one, describing who they are, their background, and what kind of concerns they have about the program, including "what scares them the most." She then engages her students in a game that requires them to throw a softball randomly to another student in the classroom, and then she says something she knows about that student, including their name. She provided her perspective and wrote in her application:

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I truly care about them and make every effort to create a supportive atmosphere. Since I teach a cohorted paramedic program, I'm with my students for several semesters for up to eight hours per day. This lets me know them personally. I also have my students write a bio about themselves, their interests, and their values. This knowledge lets me thoughtfully match personalities of students to their preceptors during paramedic field internships. Knowledge of students helps when students encounter difficulties. The program runs at such a high pace for us; they're covering fifteen chapters in a day in seven different subjects that I have to catch early if they're having problems. Even one day of missing class because of a car breaking down, kids being sick, can't find a babysitter . . . Whatever the case is can be a major issue. I need to catch it right away so that we can get them help immediately. I've had some students do some unusual things. I had one just about a month and a half ago who was too intoxicated to drive so they called me at 2 in the morning, and they said, "I need a ride." OK, no questions asked. Where are you? I'll come pick you up. So I got myself out of bed, and I went and picked up the student, took him home, talked to him about it later in terms of next time you've got to have a designated driver. I'm not going to tell you whether you should drink or not drink; that's not my purview, but the next time you go out, you need to make sure you've got a designated driver or a way to get home, but thank you for calling me, and I will always come out and get you. I have been able to steer students towards appropriate resources, like the CNM's Rust Opportunity Fund, and I have been able to help create effective success plans. This helped retention in our program. Another way I ensure success is by

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maintaining academic rigor. My students know I care about them because I won't pass them unless they are ready for the next step in their education.

Fiver wrote in her application that she perceives her classroom setting as a student-centered environment. She elaborated in her application and interview that she incorporates a variety of methods to learn that integrates fun and games into the learning environment. She said she:

Strives to use a variety of activities to accommodate different learning styles. Depending on the needs of students, I use direct instruction, independent activities, group activities, and hands-on activities. I use visual props, discussions, and hands-on exercises to meet student preferences. We also play games like Jeopardy or Bingo. All this classroom variety helps to keep the students engaged and learning--a challenge during their eight-hour school day.

Goofy's Perspective

Goofy, during the interview and in the application, said that students come to the learning environment "really afraid to be here; they're very insecure." She perceives the need to get to know the student well and to find a way to relate to them. She said, "Some teachers don't know anything about their students; all of a sudden, they're gone for three days.

They don't know why they're gone for two weeks. I know why." She said:

It's that not everyone learns the same way, and I have to, one, really have a lot of patience, but it's to find different approaches so that I try to take anxiety away from them, and as I get to know them and find out what they fear the most, I try to ease it, and since everyone is different . . . My goal as an educator is to continue to find ways to make my students fear math less and become successful students. .

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. . . You have 30 people; you could have 30 different things that they're afraid of, so I have to get to know them, and because of that it makes me a better teacher because I have to think of different approaches to benefit them. . . . They'll come to me if they need help with math, but they'll also come to me if they have questions about other things in life. I am someone they can turn to and a teacher that wears all hats. I've been doing it for 38 years, and I sometimes know more about my students than probably I should, but it also helps me in how I work with them in the classroom. . . . They also have to realize that you may not have all the answers, but as the person in charge, you're going to assume the responsibility to help them find it and then guide them in that direction.

Marie's Perspective

Marie teaches adult basic education courses. She provided her perspective and said during her interview that her role includes helping students "see possibilities in their future." She learns the names of every student in the class and calls them by name. She also said, "Each student needs to know that the teacher cares about them as a person." She conducts a five-minute interview with each student at the beginning of each course. According to Marie's perspective, that is her chance to meet and learn more about the student, their life, and their goals. She encourages her students to study and find work in a profession that is sustainable and could support their family. During her interview, she said:

As a teacher, it's very important for my students to see a path for themselves, from getting their diploma, to how they can support their families through [their] career. Higher education is needed, whether it's a trade, certificate, or degree to

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ensure a good life. Let's say it gives them a chance at a good life; a much greater life . . . statistically greater chance of being able to provide for their family than if they just have a GED [general education diploma] or if they don't finish their GED. . . . Let them know that they're people to you; this is not just a class. I have five classes and 150 students, but you know what, to that person, you need to make that connection with them. And I put last, but not least, we have fun! I try to inject some humor into every class. I believe students learn more when they are relaxed.

Mr. K's Perspective

Mr. K described from his perspective in his application his strategy that supports student success:

I think that it is very important for teachers to care about the success of their students. If they keep care in mind, it will reveal itself in the quality of teaching. From the beginning of each semester, I encourage my students to use all of the CNM resources available to help them complete the course successfully. I take my students on a tour to the student resources center and show them where the library, computer labs, and tutoring centers are. Occasionally, I hold my office hour in the tutoring center and announce to my students to follow me there if needed. Many times, students show an interest for extra learning time. I invite achievement coaches to visit some of my classes and talk to the students. I schedule with them a good time to meet at a restaurant or café to get a cup of coffee.

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Mr. K also wrote that he writes letters of recommendations for students to obtain scholarships and job opportunities. He said, “All in all, I try to have a positive outlook so that it can reflect upon the students as well.”

Later, Mr. K said he perceives and elaborated during the interview process about how important it is to him to care and connect with the student:

I always look at my students as whole human so I do know that these students, they have families, they have circumstances outside. And I know these families and these circumstances; they get influenced by things that do affect them either positively or negatively. I do always advise them to be close to the people who are helping them to achieve, to go higher, not the people who pull them down or try to downgrade their achievement. I always tell them the first day of class that we are here to help you learn; I am on your side, always on your side. You just tell me what’s on your mind; feel free to talk to me, come to my office hours. I even suggest to my students if they cannot accommodate my office hours that they can meet me outside, they can just arrange with me, and we can go to get a cup of coffee outside the environment of the school...The human part, I think, is a very important part of it, and the students, they feel it, they feel it. When they know you love them and you respect them, they will do everything they can. They want to. How should I say? They want to prove to you that they are worthy of your effort, of your interest.

Not only does Mr. K care about his students, from his perspective, he also encourages them to care about each other by partnering them in groups, emphasizing that helping each other is essential--“Two brains are better than one”--and reminding them that all of

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them are experiencing similar issues at the same time, such as exams, projects, and other challenges.

Nancy's Perspective

Nancy provided her perspective during her interview and said that distinguished faculty show that they care about the students and know what their needs are in order to connect to establish trust. She described it as, "It's the coming to class early; it's getting to know your students, more than just their name. . . . It's getting to know them as individuals so they know that you know when they're not there." She sends emails to her students when they are absent, such as, "Hey Joe, I missed you today." Such support and such an environment can create a trustful learning space.

From Nancy's perspective, she not only supports her student but also encourages them to support each other. She elaborated on this in her application, writing that students "encourage each other by paying close attention as the student speaks, asking pertinent questions, and applauding loudly at the end of the student's presentation." She perceived that as a result, the students "become more relaxed, ask more questions, and interact with each other much more."

Professor X's Perspective

Professor X provided his perspective and said during his interview that he gets to know each student so that they feel comfortable and "feel they're being appreciated for who they are." In his application, Professor X noted the importance of "supporting a student's home life is as critical to their success as their study habits." During the focus group, Professor X said, "You don't want them to fail; you want them to try and really work through their personal situations; and you want them to succeed."

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He said he writes recommendations to the Rust Opportunity Assistance Fund and the CNM Foundation. Furthermore, in getting to know the students better, Professor X said he “keep[s] a list of resources for students on my desk so I can let them know their options for help when they find themselves overwhelmed by life events.”

W.F. Godot’s Perspective

In the application W.F. Godot submitted, he shared his perspective and wrote that student-teacher interaction is a vital ingredient for learning. One of his best practices:

I speak often with my students. As our comfort level increases, students become more accessible, affording a more relaxed dialogue. Engaging students throughout the day is a great way to express interest in their well-being. I regularly drop into the lab and converse with students working there. I often answer a routine question or provide assurance that they are proceeding correctly. When students realize that the instructor is sincerely interested in them, a bond develops that is beneficial to learning. This is another example of creating a trusting learning environment.

W.F. Godot reiterated during his interview that he has a strong desire to:

Try to get to know them [the students]. To try to get a little personal with them once we break the initial ice there at the beginning of the semester and to get to understand what their problems might be, why the assignment is late instead of just being upset that it’s late. There’s all kinds of reasons that they don’t, and most of these students are involved besides in their life like we all are. They have families; they’re trying to work; they’re trying to improve their education so they can improve their future, and so I think really getting to know them and be

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interested in what they're doing--just talk to them. It's not always possible, but if you persevere, you can get a little bit closer to them and I think . . . You can see that they're pleased, that you're interested in them, that you take some interest in them besides just being a body in the classroom. Because I'm interested in them, they want to please me, and I think that's very important.

Embrace Diversity

The first question in the interview portion of this study was: What is unique about teaching at a community college? What emerged from this inquiry's responses was that eight faculty perceived that the rich diversity of the student population in community colleges was vital to the learning environment. Distinguished faculty embrace the diversity in a community college learning environment eagerly. Embracing diversity in this context is the willingness to accept, understand, and respect individual differences and value the uniqueness of diverse experiences brought into the community college setting. Eight faculty provided anecdotal evidence from their perspective to support this theme.

Supporting Evidence: Embrace Diversity

Aahz's Perspective

Aahz described his perspective on diversity during his interview as he discussed the uniqueness of a community college environment. He stated that as students:

Come to college, they have freedom to be in class, to not be in class. The expenses are not that high . . . so it's not a huge financial investment, so in order for my students to come to class every day, they have to want to be here, and

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that's a very unique situation that I've got to make sure the class is something they want to come to.

Cedric's Perspective

Cedric described his perspective as his "love [of] having students from different racial and economic backgrounds as well as different age demographics all in one classroom."

According to Cedric's interview, community colleges welcome those who are experiencing a "career change, if they did not succeed in high school, [or] if they want to increase their skills . . . working people . . . with more interest than just academia."

Fiver's Perspective

Fiver described during her interview a community college classroom as single moms coming back to school, students struggling with some of the basics, students living out of a car, students who lost a job, and students with master's and bachelor's degrees. She stated with enthusiasm during the interview, "The diversity is just unbelievable."

Goofy's Perspective

Goofy described a community college's learning environment as one that has a "mixture of [students] right out of high school to people in their 70s and all the life experiences that they all bring with them." She stated during the interview that is what she likes about working at a community college--"the learning back and forth" because of the diverse population.

Mr. K's Perspective

Mr. K said that diversity in community colleges included varying ages, socioeconomic levels, and languages. He said during the interview when describing the diverse

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population that it is important for faculty to have “student-centered classrooms so we focus on the students’ needs, and we go from there.”

Nancy’s Perspective

Nancy stated during her interview that she perceives that community colleges are “truly unique” because of the diverse population when she compares it to her teaching at the university level. She said community college students “are really here to learn.” Nancy stated that students’ experiences vary from participating in community college learning environment because they are earning dual credit at the age of say, 14, or 70 year olds that are returning to school simply because they want to go back to school to learn.

Professor X’s Perspective

Professor X summed up the diverse community college setting from his perspective:

When you’re dealing with a unique subset of the population that is very hungry for an education and yet can’t actually afford to go to a big university and in many cases they just can’t function at a big university. Sometimes they [students] come here [college] because we have small classes.

He said during his interview that he wants students to “feel comfortable and that they are being appreciated for who they are.”

W.F. Godot’s Perspective

W.F. Godot during his interview said he valued a community college learning environment as being unique because of the “varied student body; it’s so varied and everybody has different experiences coming here for different reasons, different age groups, and different ethnicities, just the amalgamation of everything.”

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Activate High Expectations and Encourage Excellence

Eight faculty provided anecdotal evidence to support their perspectives on this next theme: activate high expectations and encourage excellence. According to eight distinguished faculty perspectives, this ability energizes and initiates high expectations of students, regardless of the student's personal life challenges or learning styles. These faculty raise the bar for students because they believe setting high expectations is essential for growth. The students will achieve high expectations in an environment that not only encourages but expects excellence that ultimately will lead to improved self-esteem and boost their confidence in their ability to learn throughout life, not just in the classroom.

Supporting Evidence: Activate High Expectations and Encourage Excellence

Aahz's Perspective

Aahz provided his perspective and said during his interview:

It's all about the short term, trying to help students figure out how to get past the obstacles. I have the students that you want to give them everything, and those students just tend to disappear in my program; if they're not motivated to get through the program, I'm not motivated to get them through the program.

That statement implied that Aahz expects students to be motivated to learn.

Cedric's Perspective

Cedric described in his application and interview his perspective on his commitment to excellence in teaching:

Teachers are made, not born, and the process of finding my voice as a teacher has had many failings and near misses. I teach to those in front of me and approach

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the profession with passion and openness. I achieve student success in my courses by enriching the learning experience, encouraging excellence, and establishing a clear path to learning.

Cedric said, in his application and interview, that he perceives his classroom has multiple ways to learn and achieve. He sets the tone in the learning environment, one that requires excellence in learning:

I have multiple levels to many of my assignments, such as using an annotated bibliography and article summaries before assigning a research paper. This allows students to practice and become comfortable with academic standards and helps eliminate the fear many students feel before a large assignment. I teach to those in front of me and approach the profession with passion and openness. . . . I encourage excellence by establishing a clear path to learning.

A specific practice he uses, he said, is constant reinforcement that the student is capable of doing it. He claimed that it is about setting the bar high but not making it intimidating. He said in a laughing manner during the interview, “I know you haven’t jumped that high, but it’s only two inches higher than the last time.” He described his practice as providing a broad range of options to meet the needs of the different levels of student learning, and then he pushes the students to attain the next level.

Fiver’s Perspective

Fiver provided her perspective and said in her application that she follows what she called education best practices, and her interview provided examples:

By setting clear expectations with well-defined learning objectives, I use assessment tools that measure the outlined learning objectives, and I give students

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multiple opportunities to show what they have learned through a variety of assessment tools. My standards are high; I am more than happy to help you get there, but I won't lower my standards because you're going to go out, and you're going to take care of the community, and that community includes my family. Here's the standards: I'm very specific; everything is very lined out in my syllabi and expectations. We go through it each day. Does everybody understand what the expectation is for today? And then I'm happy to help them, happy to help them get there, but I won't lower the standards, so that's something that's kind of a real stickler for me.

Students have contacted Fiver years later, she said, to tell her they were glad she failed them the first time because they did not understand the material well enough. She said multiple times in her interview and in the focus group discussion that her students will be taking care of people's families, and she emphasizes in her teaching practices the importance of their service to the community.

Marie's Perspective

During Marie's interview, she said the largest impact on students from her perspective is that she has high expectations of them.

I have many students who have minor to severe problems from their pasts. . . .

What I do is simply talk to them. Everyone has something from their past; how we move forward in our lives from this point on is what matters, so we talk about that. It is easy to say sometimes when you hear the stories, you feel so sorry, but then you need to remember they're here for you to help them, so I've kind of come up with my own formula for what they need rather than get bogged down. .

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. . They didn't come for that; they came here for help to improve their lives; they're ready to move on, and so that's what as a teacher, all GED teachers or any teacher, that is your job. You need to stick with your job. . . . I know that students will rise to the level of the teacher's expectations. I expect excellence from the very beginning, and this is how life works.

Marie said during her focus group discussion that as a result of her participation in this dissertation study, she would write specifically for a school newsletter about the importance of having high expectations and expecting excellence in the learning environment. She was asked to author an article about excellence in teaching and informed the requestor that she participated in this study. Marie recently read a study, *Becoming a High Expectations Teacher*, and said she was willing to conduct a presentation for faculty peers and offer the presentation statewide.

Mr. K's Perspective

Mr. K provided his perspective and reiterated, during his interview, how much he cares about the student. "I do go not just the extra mile, but the extra miles help my students achieve their goals without breaking my standards," he said. He explained that he upholds his standards to help students achieve by "showing them all the other alternatives and options available and helps that are offered by our campus online."

Nancy's Perspective

Nancy said in her interview that she has high expectations of her students and she perceives:

Students here [college] are really here to learn. They're not here for the grade; they're not here for the atmosphere as much. . . . They're not here for the party;

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they're not here for the sorority or fraternity; they're here to learn; and they're much more serious about learning; and in some ways, I think it makes me a better instructor because they have higher expectations of the instructor, which in turn makes me have higher expectations of them. . . . [I] set the bar higher, and it's amazing to me that students will rise to whatever the expectations are. I'm clear what my expectations are up front. . . . I want them to know when things are due and that my deadlines are deadlines, just like in a real job. I really try to help them understand what the expectations are going to be for their employer and that there is no wiggle room, when it is due.

Nancy said during her interview that students recognize and appreciate the fact that she does have high expectations and expects excellence:

I am not an easy instructor. One of the things that I took as a huge compliment was that I had a student tell me one time that my reputation is that I'm not an easy instructor, but when you are out of my class, you will know the material. You will understand and be able to apply it to the real world, but I'm not easy. I can live with that. You're right. I'm not an easy instructor. I do have high expectations, but they meet them, they meet those high expectations.

Professor X's Perspective

In his application, Professor X perceived that it is important to keep a student's "inflated ego grounded in reality. When a student says, 'I get A's in all my classes but yours,' I let them know that I want to challenge them and that my challenges may be more difficult than those that they have ever encountered."

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W.F. Godot's Perspective

W.F. Godot wrote in his application that he perceives:

I have high expectations for my students, and I am rarely disappointed by their ability to rise to the task. A rigorous and challenging course is a rewarding experience for all. It may require effort on both our parts, but once the students realize that I have made a commitment to their future, they will do the same.

W.F. Godot confirmed in his interview that he is “pretty strict, and I do have a lot of assignments that I require, and I think they see the value of that after a while, and all of a sudden they start to get it. . . . My expectations are high, and they are. And I don't lower my expectations for the student because there's a lot of math in survey” work.

Cultivate a Passion for Lifelong Learning

According to eight distinguished faculty perspectives, it is important to cultivate a passion for lifelong learning, personally and professionally. These participants provided their perspective by identifying several examples of how they practiced lifelong learning in the classroom and in their personal lives, all the while exuding passion for learning, which was evident in my interactions with them and confirmed by the observer's notes. These faculty demonstrated animated behavior, enthusiasm in their tone of voice, and positive emotion toward student success during their interviews and focus group discussions. These distinguished faculty's perspectives included the emphasis that they must share their passion and enthusiasm for continuous learning with the students, serving as role models. Lifelong learning is an ongoing pursuit of knowledge to continuously grow personally and professionally. Lifelong learning can enhance social inclusion, active citizenship, personal development, and self-sustainability.

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Supporting Evidence: Cultivate a Passion for Lifelong Learning

Aahz's Perspective

Aahz said during his interview that he perceives it is important to motivate the students' passion for learning:

At the community college level, it's really about getting the students excited about what you are offering and get them to want to be there because they won't be there if they don't want to. . . . They get the impression that going to school is not the endgame; it's just the beginning.

Aahz said during his interview that he "change[s] careers every now and then. I love teaching, but I've been everywhere, done everything. I take on new challenges." This statement indicated that Aahz enjoys acquiring new knowledge and skills so that he too continues to develop professionally and personally. During the focus group discussion, he said that the subject matter he teaches continuously changes, requiring him to constantly be learning in order to teach current and relevant material to his students:

You know, industrywide either in auto or heavy equipment, everything changes every year. Emissions requirements might become greater, fuel economy requirements become greater, so yeah, a big chunk of my time is spent reading what's new and what's going on, so I've got to stay current because I've got to teach current. I don't have a static career field to teach to.

Aahz also said during the interview that he:

Never teach[es] the same class twice. For me, getting to the point where you have rote memorization on what you're going to say today is the most dangerous thing a teacher can do at that point, and I've watched it in a lot of faculty and other

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people. They work really hard for three months to build a class, and they're married to it for 15 years, and that to me is incredibly dangerous. I'll usually write a note to myself somewhere on my outlook calendar that says it worked or it didn't. If it worked, then I polish it and make it new again, make it a little better the next time through. I take risks. I try stuff. Technical education in my mind is [an] expert model; you've got to know your stuff before you teach it, but it is also modeling, so if I want to teach my students that they can do anything, I've got to prove to them that I can do anything.

Aahz's continued to describe his learning environment as one that encouraged students to "take a chance; if it works, great. If something breaks, here's the place to break it; you don't want to break it out in the real world, so let's see what your thought process is."

Cedric's Perspective

Cedric said that several students have said to him that he is passionate about the topic he teaches. He provided perspective and defined his teaching philosophy as being a triad: the teacher, the student, and the subject matter. The subject matter is something he "love[s] and want[s] to offer to them, and so they come to the table and have a taste." His job is to get the students excited, he said. He uses emotion to "arouse" interest. Then you can convert them; then you can get them to do all kinds of things." He described his perception of his teaching excellence as such:

My courses are enriched by using different teaching modalities: video, music, poetry written and text, and oral presentation to engage students learning at all levels. I have students experience learning outside of the classroom, such as attending a religious service or cultural event they are unfamiliar with. I believe

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students who are actively engaged in their learning and given challenging or unfamiliar experiences are more likely to succeed.

Cedric said during his interview that he gives himself assignments to ensure he is continuously learning:

Each term, I will want to deepen my knowledge in a particular field. Since I teach world religions . . . Two years ago, or two terms ago, I decided that I would begin investigating Hindu religious practices, particularly temple practices, in more detail, and I would have more emphasis on that in my class. So I try and switch up the class both for my benefit by deepening my knowledge and to broaden the scope of what I can teach at the same time. So I always have a project. I read two new books every semester in my field, either in religion or humanities, and then I bring some of that to class.

The only real measure of students' long-term success, Cedric said, is when the students return to inform him that he made a difference in their lives. He follows up by saying, "They contracted the virus [passion for learning] I guess about the time they took my class."

Cedric said he believes it is his responsibility to be a role model for lifelong learning in a classroom setting. He solicits feedback from other faculty to collect opportunities for his own improvement. He experiments with new assignments. "It's mostly the one-on-one teaching practices and comparing notes with others that's the most stimulating and reward[ing] to me," he said.

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Fiver's Perspective

According to Fiver's perspective, she wrote in her application and interview that she uses assessment tools in her student-centered classroom to determine if the students understand the concepts being taught. She explained:

A favorite assessment tool is the use of white boards. I ask a question in class, and everyone writes an answer on the board and holds it up. If they do not know the answer, they can just put a question mark. This allows me to quickly assess understanding and requires that the students be actively engaged in a way where they feel safe to participate. To help me reflect on my teaching, I consistently do plus-delta [what worked in the classroom and what would you change] evaluations with my students. This allows me to know which techniques are effective. I also carefully analyze my exam results to refine questions and adjust content emphasis. I use technology to help me be a better teacher and to help my students learn. I strive to keep learning, so that my students keep learning, too.

In her interview, Fiver said after teaching a class for a while, faculty in general can become complacent, so faculty in her program rotate teaching classes on a regular basis to compel them to step away from the familiar and to learn something new. "If I haven't taught environmental in a few years, then I need to go back and make sure all medicine is right before I start teaching it again," she said during the focus group discussion.

Fiver said in her interview that she teaches classes such as pharmacology, neurology, and cardiology. They are "heavy-handed courses," she said, "which I absolutely love to do, and what I'm good at is taking a topic that's very complex and making it simple for them." Fiver attends national conferences on various topics, such as

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OBGYN emergencies targeted toward physicians, shock and sepsis, and courses in prescribing narcotics. She learns new material and returns to teach her colleagues and students. Her husband is a nationally certified middle school science teacher. Together, they share teaching philosophies and teaching practices. She reads American Medical Association newsletters and journals and participates in faculty and curriculum meetings.

Fiver teared up several times during the interview, a clue to the compassion she feels about her students and her passion for teaching, a profession that obviously is important to her based on her emotional reactions. She ended her focus group contribution by saying, “I love teaching. I love being a paramedic, too!”

Goofy’s Perspective

Goofy provided perspective in her application by writing that the day she began teaching was the day she made a pledge: “I made a commitment to stay on top of my subject and learn as many techniques-strategies to ensure that they would become successful math students.” During the interview, Goofy admitted she had to learn patience. “I had to learn not to interrupt, get through, not to give answers,” she said. She reads professional journals, conducts research on websites, specifically noting how to use a graphing calculator to ensure technology is part of the learning, and she shares excellence in teaching practices among peers in the college, public schools, and universities.

Marie’s Perspective

In the interview, Marie shared her perspective on teaching excellence and said she thoroughly looks at every paper and homework assignment and corrects it minimally at the beginning so that she does not “hurt the student’s spirit for learning.”

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I want to be a good teacher that many of my students never had. I want to share my excitement for learning, so that they may have a chance at a good life for themselves and for their families.

During the focus group discussion, Marie confirmed her commitment to lifelong learning when she said, “In my 60s, I have decided to learn how to swim. It’s something that I always wanted to do but either I never had the time or inclination.” She compared learning to swim to the experience students have when they enter her classroom for the first time to begin their journey to obtain a GED. She reiterated that she is both a teacher and a learner.

Yeah, everybody’s a little scared but just to say you know what? I’m going to try it. This is what I tell myself, “I am going to try it.” I know I won’t drown because there’s going to be an instructor right there. So I saw that as a commonality among the other participants in my class, and I think that’s what our students are going through as they come into ours [classrooms].

In the focus group discussion, Marie said the human brain has not changed a lot; however, we are learning more about the brain’s functionality and what we can do to help people learn. As a teacher, she said, it is her role to keep up with what is happening neurologically, too.

Nancy’s Perspective

Nancy, during the interview and in an animated fashion, exclaimed, “Taxes rock!” She clearly demonstrated a passion for the work she performs and said she holds a certified public accountant (CPA) certification, which requires 120 hours of continuing professional education credit every three years. She also said she consistently “picks the

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brains of other accounting instructors throughout the U.S. and doing their activities, what they have found to be successful at their colleges, and implementing them into my classes.”

Professor X’s Perspective

During the interview, Professor X discussed the importance of relating his teaching subject matter of human health and physiology to aspects of culture, politics, and a variety of fields that intersect with human health and physiology. This allows him to provide a broader perspective for student learning while maintaining a focus on this field of study. Here’s how Professor X defined his perspective and teaching philosophy:

My whole philosophy is this: . . . It doesn’t matter what subject matter you’re teaching; it’s can you actually generate that excitement for learning, and that’s what you really want them to have. It’s like I’ll tell my students, you can get a B in this class, and that’s fine if it got you excited about what you’re doing, about going toward your career to just life in general--great! That’s really what I want to achieve because that’s what I wanted to achieve.

Professor X emphasized the importance of learning in life and compared life to the 1950’s film, *Auntie Mame*. He described it as one of his favorites because of “the main crux of the film and it’s repeated a couple of times, ‘Life is a banquet, and most poor suckers are starving to death.’” The following paragraph emphasized his theory on cultivating a passion for learning in a community college setting:

I think if you can pique a student’s interest, if you can get a student to really think rather than just regurgitate, if you can get students to really want that idea of “I’m going to think differently about a subject and maybe I’ll actually find something

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new,” that’s really what a college education is about. It’s not just about trying to get people out and put them into a job; it’s about trying to get people out and using their brain, their mind, to the fullest extent that they can. And I really think that’s the most important thing that I want to get out there; education is really not just about learning a subject. It’s about wanting to learn about life, and your subject is one part of it, and yes, you can learn a lot about it, but go out and experience as much, as many things as possible. . . . Go out, use what you learn, but experience life; don’t just experience one thing. Experience as much as you can.

Professor X discussed his perception of his own learning through teaching during the focus group discussion with his peers:

I was a lecturer, and I gave some quizzes, and I gave some tests, and that was pretty much it. The students kind of went OK; they saw they had to work. This was what they needed to do. But over time, and especially after being in this particular environment of a community college, you realize that doesn’t always work, and you lose a lot of people. The one thing I really feel discouraged by is to see the number of student bodies decreasing because they don’t feel like I’m really connecting with them. So I felt I needed to change; it was me. I needed to do something, so I started exploring a variety of things, and it started with technology. So where should I work in technology? How can I get students to participate, if not in the classroom, at least outside of the classroom? How can I get them to participate? I have 48 students in a classroom, and a lot of them just sit there, so how do I get them to really become active in their learning process?

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So that led to development of new ideas and new things for them to do--getting them out of their seats and making them into molecules, trying to let them see this is how things work rather than just me standing there and talking to them. And then finally, I've gone to the complete opposite. I've gone to the flipped classroom now where we sit, we talk, we discuss. I give them problems to solve. I give them cases to solve. They can watch lectures on videos if they want to; that's great, but we come to the classroom to really solve problems, and in science, that's really what it's about. Science really is about solving problems; it's not just memorizing things. They can do that at home. Come to the classroom; we'll show you how to solve it with what you've learned.

W.F. Godot's Perspective

W.F. Godot provided his perspective by emphasizing the importance of his own learning and development by writing in his application, "Technological development in several disciplines I teach are rapid and industry altering. To provide the best opportunities for my students, I must keep abreast of these changes." He documented his efforts in learning to include membership in professional societies, attending workshops and conferences, maintaining subscriptions to professional journals, reading newsletters, and conducting presentations to surveying organizations, attorneys, real estate agents, college classes, and public schools. He said in his interview, "I've finished my career, and now I'm teaching, and I'm just doing it for the love of it. . . . And I think it shows."

W.F. Godot stressed in his interview that he is interested in learning about nearly everything and is involved in many things. "I'm always reading, or I'm drawing, or researching something." He also said his approach to teaching is that when he sees a

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student struggling to learn the material, he looks inward at his teaching approach to determine how he can modify it. “I look at the situation where I think the student can really do this so maybe I need to change my approach rather than just say you have to work harder.” He said his students comment on how enthusiastic he is about learning in the classroom, and it is reflected in his excitement when he stands before his class.

Strengthens Students’ Confidence in Their Ability to Learn

These distinguished faculty perceive that they can strengthen a student’s confidence in one’s ability to learn through teaching excellence. Eight faculty provided anecdotal evidence based on their perception to support this theme. This element can be described as a faculty creating self-assurance in students by appreciating their individual ability to learn and by applying strategies that strengthen their capacity to learn. When students learn, they are more engaged in the learning environment. When students achieve small tasks, they build confidence in their ability to conquer and achieve larger tasks. When students learn, they are motivated to stretch beyond what they believe they are capable of accomplishing. According to these distinguished faculty’s perspectives, excellence in teaching includes helping students embrace taking chances by conquering fear, allowing students to fail and understand the lessons in failure, becoming problem solvers, and providing feedback as often as possible, all of which help to increase students’ confidence in their ability to learn and overcome barriers.

Several participants perceive that one of their teaching excellence practices is the ability to help students understand that getting ahead often means simply getting started. Their excellence in teaching included breaking down complex and sometimes overwhelming tasks into small, manageable tasks and then starting on the first one in

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order to progress toward the more complex task. This particular part of the study reminded me of the Chinese proverb, “A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.”

Supporting Evidence: Strengthen Students’ Confidence in Their Ability to Learn

Aahz’s Perspective

As Aahz summed it up from his perspective, “It is all about the short term trying to help students figure out how to get past the obstacles.” Aahz said in both his interview and focus group discussion that students lack confidence when they come to class on the first day, thinking they:

Do not know how to do anything, and so I foster that for a couple of months, and then they come across something that to them is really, really hard to do, and I let them struggle, let them struggle, and I say, OK, you can do it. My best teaching practice that helps the students learn the best is I will let them make mistakes. I will let them explore, figure it out themselves. They can make mistakes; they can break things. . . . They get to experiment; they get to prove to themselves that they have enough knowledge about how the engine goes together, enough research material to go through, that even when they encounter a problem and things don’t go good, they can figure out how to fix it. A mechanic who is not confident in his abilities never fixes anything. A good mechanic is a life support for his or her ego; it’s that simple, and this is helping them build within themselves that realization that, hey, I can do anything. I tell them [the students] everything I have fixed in my life, which goes everywhere from a nuclear power plant to just about every piece of equipment you can imagine that goes on or off the highway. They always

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come back with the impression, so basically you think you can fix anything? And I go, “Yes, I do, and I’m confident that you can, too.” Once they get the confidence, once they realize that all the theory comes together, and yeah, they don’t necessarily remember specifically what the textbook says . . . but they do remember that there is a way to go about doing everything, and basically by instilling the confidence in them, I’m not teaching them to do tasks; I’m teaching them to think about a concept, a complete problem, and break it down into its component steps and build up a solution that’s going to work. My students are usually excited about what they learned; they’re confident they have the skills they need to perform work.

Cedric’s Perspective

During the interview, Cedric said he measured students’ success by their willingness to engage with the assignments and by whether the student is “terrified” by an assignment. Cedric provided an example of his perspective regarding teaching excellence by strengthening student’s confidence in their ability to learn:

A terrifying assignment that I’ve often given in the past is called the research paper, and a lot of them run screaming, “I haven’t written a paper since I was in high school 18 years ago,” or “I haven’t taken English 101 yet,” and so for a while I try to sort of nurse students through that, and I still wasn’t having a lot of success. I was having students who would resort to plagiarism, would give up and give me half a paper or not really the material that I was asking for. So I spent a lot of time talking to other faculty and decided that first of all I needed to change the term because “research paper” or “term paper” is a frightening term for many

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students. Secondly, I divided this large assignment into several parts. One of the parts of an academic assignment like this is to construct an annotative bibliography, to do background research for your chosen topic, so I give them several small assignments. . . . I feed them little bits of some of the tools that they need.

Cedric offered an example of a student enrolled in his class but who dropped out because of family problems and then years later returned to school. He said during the interview that the student reappeared in his class for three semesters and brought her husband the second time.

She ended up taking two of my classes. So I enjoyed having her; she was a familiar face. I like having repeat students; it makes the atmosphere comfortable for everyone because I can joke with people I already know at the beginning of the term, but at some point when she came back, she was in my cubicle, and she told me that I had made a difference, that she realized she could do this work--that the real academic work, the research and the bibliographies and all those things, was really intimidating to her, and she realized she could do this work.

He perceived this enhancement to teaching excellence as breaking the assignments up into parts so that students could see that their education is really just a series of tools and practices. Cedric perceived that this teaching excellence practice allowed faculty to maintain high standards and build confidence in students' abilities to learn and that they can minimize the fear of the assignment by breaking it into manageable components. He also leaves enough breadth in his assignments, he said, so that he can assess where people are on the learning journey.

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Fiver's Perspective

Fiver said in her interview that she perceives that she builds confidence in students by providing three positive feedback comments and identifies one thing she urges that they change. This allows a student to receive more positive feedback than negative feedback, and then, she said, the students “start to see that they are more confident and that they’re building that confidence as they get better at things.” For example, she said she teaches students how to read an EKG, which is a “big deal.” She does not want to make it look unattainable and does not expect the student to function as a cardiologist. She tells them, “I’m expecting you to be able to do this” and “if you can give them small pieces along the way, that will do all that you need for confidence.”

Goofy's Perspective

Goofy said during her interview that she perceives that she challenges the student; yet, she also attempts to simplify the material they are learning. “I may introduce a difficult subject but in a very simple form so that the fear is gone, and then they’re willing to try,” she said. She uses a lot of storytelling to explain math concepts, especially work problems, while slowly building confidence in the students. Here’s how she describes the process:

They do better on tests. They’re willing to try; they’re not afraid, and now they make the effort to try the word problem. And they don’t quit, and the same way they do the word problems, they treat life. Take that step, take a chance, and that’s what I want them to do is learn to take a chance. All right, we got the problem wrong; I’ll try again. You take a chance at life. It didn’t work out the first time; who says you can’t try again? You want to go for that raise? What do you have to

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do to do it? Well, maybe you've got to work a little bit harder. In order to get the raise, you have to move to the next level. . . . The worst that can happen is that you fail; it doesn't mean you can't pick yourself up and try again, and that's what I try to do in math. Everything is a process; algebra teaches you how to break something apart, evaluate it, and see what the solution is.

Marie's Perspective

Marie perceives helping students gain confidence is essential to their learning. She initially stated on her application, "While good teaching is imperative, I've learned what is important is to help students develop confidence in their own abilities to learn." She reiterated in her application, interview statements, and in the focus group discussion that her role as a teacher is to "get the students to believe in themselves as learners." Marie said during the interview process and on her application:

I would say 90% have low confidence in themselves when they come into class. You have to get that out of them, that mind-set, that you have to get them thinking in a new way; don't replay that old tape of, "I'm not very good at math." You have to replace it with new ways of thinking and talking about themselves, and so I give that from just the very first time. . . . I start working on building their confidence individually. . . . You know, they have low confidence, and just build them up little by little. Once they see that they are having some success and that, hey, I can learn. . . . Whatever they've said about themselves, then it builds on that. Then I give them hints about how they could help themselves even a little more, and I try to tell them it's just. . . . There is a path, there is a way you can do

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this, and you build on this. I look at where students need to be for mastery of the skill and then prepare activities that move them toward the goal.

Marie said she provides the students with encouraging remarks on their papers to help build their confidence in their ability to learn. She described this encouragement in both her interview and elaborated during the focus group discussion:

My students are affected in both the short term and long term by learning to have confidence in themselves. I've had many students say to me at their graduations, "You believed in me before I believed in myself." Students need to learn this first in order to become successful, and I give a lot of time and attention to developing this confidence at the beginning of the term. As soon as they have that confidence and they learn to trust in themselves, and whatever we can do to foster that, because sometimes a lot of my students have had so many negative things said to them as they were growing up, and they internalized them; they believed it. So you have to first get them to believe in themselves.

Professor X's Perspective

Professor X provided his perspective and said in his application:

I like to tell my students that I have more faith in their abilities than they do. I've seen so many students come into a college science class with such low self-esteem that they need to know up front what I think of them. Building a sense of confidence has to be among the most basic things that we as teachers can do for students such as ours.

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W.F. Godot's Perspective

W.F. Godot wrote in his application that he presents new material that appeals to diverse learners by using a variety of techniques in his presentations, including “the use of whiteboard sketches, PowerPoint slides, digital photos, question and answer, class discussion, and anecdotes.” According to W.F. Godot’s perspective, he constructs these exercises and delivers them in an animated and enthusiastic manner, he said. “Successful completion of the exercise builds self-confidence and makes the material relevant; the more time a student spends with new material, the more likely its successful mastery will occur,” he said. W.F. Godot shared his perspective and also wrote in his application that he emphasizes the importance of building a student’s confidence in their ability to learn:

Reasoned thinking and problem solving. . . . I solicit thoughts from students as to how they would proceed to solve a problem as we work towards a cohesive solution. The interplay of ideas is stimulating and reinforces newfound mastery of the subject matter. Successful students feel that they are a part of something. They are not alone, treading water in the vast educational ocean. As they continue on their path, their confidence grows along with their knowledge base.

Apply Theory to Real World

The final theme that emerged was the distinguished faculty’s perspective on the importance of applying theory to the real world. This concept forms a plan or idea that melds theory in the learning environment into real-life applications. Theory refers to a statement of concepts that provides an explanation of how or why a phenomenon occurs or explains the relationships between phenomena. Theory helps to advance thinking and provoke new thoughts.

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Six of the distinguished faculty shared their perspective and stated they help students understand how theory informs real-life situations and determines how these concepts can be applied to solve real-life complexities in an effort to solve problems and find alternative solutions. According to the perceptions of these six faculty, they do this by teaching relevance to employment and relevance to preparing them to take exams that will increase their chances of employment opportunities.

Supporting Evidence: Apply Theory to Real World

Aahz's Perspective

Aahz shared his perspective and wrote in his application that he was able to eliminate 80,000 pounds of outdated or broken training equipment and replace it with state-of-the-art training equipment. During his interview, he described the program and his efforts:

We've replaced equipment; we've replaced tools; we've modernized. . . . We went from a fleet where our newest engine was 20 years old to now where we have four engines that are current-emissions technology, 2015 engines. I incorporate technology, computer technology. I get newer vehicles so that we have the newest electronic systems on board.

Here's how Aahz described his efforts to connect with employers and merge real-life practice into the classroom.

I look at overall job placement statistics. I start with 20. I already know that I've got about 10% that's just not going to get employed, so my employability statistics that I shoot for is about 90%, and I usually run about 90% to 95% employability. Just getting a job, however, is not good enough for me so I do keep track of my students to the extent that I'm able. . . . I know all of our local

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employers; I visit them at least two, sometimes three times a year, so I go out to shops, and I see students that I worked with three, four years ago on the auto side. I've run into students that I've worked with 15 years ago, and they are being successful. I talk to their employers. I've worked really hard to adjust employers' attitudes about our students. Well, you just graduated school; you ought to be a journeyman, and I ought to be able to buy you for \$8 an hour. That's not what it is; we're building entry-level people; we're not building people with 10 years of experience, and \$8 an hour, they can make at McDonalds. If you want somebody [employers], I'll get you somebody that can work safely in an environment, can read a shop manual, can figure out problems.

According to Aahz's perspective, students go through a college program for one year, and then the student graduates. They go straight to work because of the relationships that instructors have cultivated over many years. Employers provide equipment, software for scan tools, and expertise to share with the students. Aahz said one of the companies he works with has had representation on a college advisory committee for about 20 years.

A college advisory committee is made up of faculty, administration, and businesses that provide input to ensure the school and its programs are up to date on current and relevant business, industry, and community needs. The committee recommends course or curriculum design for new programs, reviews proposed curriculum changes in existing programs, and suggests additions, deletions, and revisions to curriculum. The committee participates in surveys for local employment needs and determines skill levels needed by the business and industry community. The committee also engages in marketing the college programs.

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The same company that Aahz described earlier donated a \$100,000 piece of equipment to the college. During his interview, he said:

They come over and meet our students during their first term. We take them to their place during the second term to tour their facilities. Third term, they usually take two or three of our interns. We have an internship program that lasts one week; the last week they're in school where we have students go out and actually work in the field for one week so they at least get a taste of what it is to work for a living before they leave here. They've hired probably eight of our graduates in the last four years; seven of them are still there.

That particular program works on establishing apprenticeship programs for the students, and Aahz continues to build the college's relationship with employers so that more students are hired.

Cedric's Perspective

Cedric perceives applying theory to real world as essential to the community college learning environment. He wrote in his application that he wants his students to experience learning outside of the classroom:

I enrich student life through the campus experiences of Arts Jam and Novel Slam each spring and fall. . . . Arts Jam is an arts and cultural event each spring, which showcases the musical, dramatic, and literacy talents of students and faculty. . . . Spring is Novel Slam; a week is devoted to literature, poetry, drama, and music.

Fiver's Perspective

Throughout the process, Fiver provided examples from her perspective of how she ensures that her course accurately covers the evolving national paramedic curriculum and

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balances that with awareness of current local employment trends. Her department surveys employers that hire the college's students, she said, and she ensures that the employers' feedback is incorporated into her teaching. She said she served as a clinical coordinator where she facilitated "initial partnerships and contracts with the ambulance and fire departments that provide students with crucial paramedic internships and the hospitals that provide clinical rotations." She continues to build relationships with several major, local healthcare entities.

The program has been in existence for approximately 15 or 16 terms with 15 or 16 cohorts, she said in her application, interview, and focus group discussion. Fiver said:

We have a 100% pass rate of 100% of our students now through our licensing exam, through the national paramedic licensing exam. So we've had several hundred, a couple hundred, paramedic students come through the program since it started in 2005. So every single student that's ever taken the national licensing exam through us, that has completed our program, is now licensed, so we have 100% percent pass rate. That's huge; it's kind of unheard of across the country.

During the interviews, it was apparent that Fiver and her colleagues were ahead of the curve by preparing for the portfolio testing that was scheduled for the near future. She planned to attend a national conference to understand how to integrate the anticipated portfolio testing changes. She elaborated on her participation in national organizations by explaining that she solicits opportunities to share the information with students:

I'm actively involved in national associations, national EMS [emergency medical services] associations, and so I get the information from the policymakers that are making the decisions that are going to affect us two or three years down the road,

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and so I have networked with people across the country to know what kinds of changes are occurring or what is going to come down the pike so that we will in our department go portfolio [a new standard of assessment] a year before it's actually required so that we can test it and make sure that things are working OK and know what kind of tweaks we need to make before it's actually mandated.

Goofy's Perspective

Goofy teaches students, in her math classes, how to balance checkbooks and create budgets. She also organizes team projects and emphasizes the need to develop strong communication skills and the importance of becoming a problem solver; these skills prepare students for the workplace from her perspective. In the application she submitted for consideration for the distinguished faculty distinction, Goofy wrote:

I create problems where I use the students in class as the subjects in the problem dealing with relevant everyday events such as investing money and determining the compound interest earned and determining the amount of money they may need to put in the bank today so that they have enough money to finance their child's education 15 years from now.

Nancy's Perspective

In her application, Nancy provided her perspective and documented the importance of applying real-life scenarios to the learning environment:

Besides using many real-life examples in my class discussions from my own work experiences and encouraging students to share their work experiences, I also use a variety of assignments to help the course material come alive. . . . I typically require a current events report and presentation in my accounting classes. In class

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after class, students have really gotten into researching their current events articles and often do much further research than what I require. Many robust classroom discussions have occurred because of someone's current events article. Another example of real-life application in the classroom is through the use of ethical dilemmas. In most of my classes, we discuss ethics and what it means to be ethical. In several classes, students are required to use an ethical decision-making model to analyze ethical dilemmas that they face in the accounting profession. This model lays out the steps to consider when you are in the midst of an ethical dilemma. Last year, I heard from one of my accounting students that she had used this model to help her work through a situation that she was facing at work. It was great to see that she was able to take something that she had learned in class years before and use it to help her make a decision in her current job.

During the interview, Nancy reiterated the importance of taking material from the textbook and fitting it into real life so that the students can "really grasp the knowledge."

She explained that her role is to:

Be sure that they're [students] able to take that material in the textbook into the real world. I'm all about real-world application, and so not only is that through my personal experience in working for various be it for-profit or nonprofit companies, but also when I worked for a CPA firm, but also what are their experiences?

Nancy is the chair of her department and serves as the moderator for business advisory committee discussions at the college, events that are a collaboration of the college and the business community intended to align expectations of what is being taught and what is

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needed to be successful in the workplace. The discussions are an information exchange. The committee consists of potential employers for the college's students. She said employers need students or will need students who have strong public speaking skills; therefore, Nancy incorporates a presentation in class by the students regarding their current events articles.

W.F. Godot's Perspective

W.F. Godot wrote in his application that he offers career advice to students and counsels them on educational requirements while offering a "realistic picture of employment possibilities." He provided perspective and also said:

I am aware of job openings through my membership in professional societies and peer contacts. I pass these on and work with interested students. Many students use CNM's two-year degree as the first part of their academic journey. Their early success at CNM will set the tone for their quest [for employment].

In his application, he also wrote that he approaches teaching from a practical perspective, relating subject matter to real-world situations.

In the interview, W.F. Godot shared his thoughts on the importance of applying theory to the real world and provided examples of his teaching excellence practices in the classroom.

If I see something's going on, I bring it up in class. Did you see the flooding in the valley last night? And I can usually even bring that in to relate to the subject matter I'm talking about, especially in surveying because we work all over the place, and with the valley flooding thing, I can really relate that to you. . . . Why did it flood? Well, the water main broke, and they couldn't find where to shut it

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off. And that's really a surveying matter because those valves should be located, and they weren't on the map or they maybe were on the map but got paved over. I just relate all kinds of things, and I think that kind of makes it more fun, makes it real world.

W.F. Godot provided several examples during his interview of real-world projects he was assigned when he worked as a surveyor. He uses real-world projects in class as student assignments to figure out complex assignments, such as surveying a plane crash. Another interesting example W.F. Godot provided was a project where he was assigned to survey private land because a German shepherd was killing some chickens, and the woman who owned the chickens shot the dog. She was within her rights to do that if she could prove that the dog was more than 300 feet from its owner's house. Another example involved a project to survey a lake. The difficulty was that the topography was difficult to measure. He does not tell the students how he accomplished the projects; rather, he assigns that task to the students and shares his approach after they tackle the task in their own way. He said, "What I find valuable in that is I make them think, and it's a problem-solving thing."

Emergent Thematic Coding and Analysis: The AEACSA Model

Initially, I developed a draft categorization to consider for Community College Teaching Excellence: A Distinguished Faculty Perspective, The AASCA Model, to show to the focus group participants for feedback. This draft categorization was developed initially based on the research findings collected from the applications and interview transcripts. AASCA stands for: authentically connect with intent to establish trust, activate high expectations and encourage excellence, strengthen confidence in their ability to learn,

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cultivate a passion for learning, and apply theory to real world. The applications and interview transcripts documented comments made that serve as evidence of each emergent theme identified. As a result of feedback obtained when a draft dissertation was reviewed by one of my dissertation committee members, the model was enhanced to identify a sixth emergent theme: embrace diversity. Thus the model emerged to the Community College Teaching Excellence: A Distinguished Faculty Perspective, The AEACSA Model.

The AEACSA Model consists of six emergent themes based on data collected from the applications submitted that honored the distinguished faculty, interview and focus group transcripts, and observation notes taken during the focus groups. The observation notes documented participant reaction to the initial draft categorization during the focus group process. The six emergent themes identified are in the order of most frequent cited to least frequent based on the perspectives provided by the distinguished faculty participants: nine faculty provided comments to support: authentically connect with the intent to establish trust; eight faculty provided comments to support: embrace diversity; eight faculty provided comments to support: activate high expectations and encourage excellence; eight faculty provided comments to support: strengthen confidence in their ability to learn; seven faculty provided comments to support: cultivate a passion for lifelong learning; and six faculty provided comments to support: apply to real-world.

A Venn diagram was the pictorial selected to identify the six elements that were essential to the proposed model of community college teaching excellence from the perspectives of distinguished faculty. The Venn diagram portrayed each element

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intersecting in the middle, emphasizing the core element, which was the only element supported by the perceptions of all nine distinguished faculty, as authentically connecting to the student with the intent to establish a trust in a learning environment.

Figure 4. Community College Teaching Excellence: A Distinguished Faculty Perspective AEACSA Model



Goofy described her perspective of the initial draft categorization presented during the focus group as follows:

You have your nucleus, like the mother nucleus, and then all the pieces that go with it. As we establish the trust with the student, then we can do things like challenge them, and we can build their self-esteem, make them want to learn. If you have the right center, right core, then all the branches that come from it will build upon it, and it looks like these are strong branches that go with it.

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Professor X provided feedback during this process, commenting that the core of authenticity and the ability to connect is a “very, very important aspect” of teaching excellence. He explained his version of the model by noting that an instructor establishes these core elements by linking each one: “You have the ability to expect a lot from the students, giving them the ability to strengthen their confidence, which then leads to passion, which then leads to the application, which helps to build more high expectations.”

Aahz perceived the initial draft categorized model presented during the focus group as:

I never really thought of what I was establishing with my students as trust, but it’s a very good word for it . . . that core, that makes getting there setting the bar very high and setting the high expectations. Once they trust you and know that you’re not going to do something that’s going to make them fall flat on their face, then you can start increasing expectations, and they match their performance to you.

Without that trust, they’re just lost.

Fiver said during the focus group that the draft categorization, The AASCA Model, was concise and “captured everything that I try to do as a good teacher, and I did see aspects of all of this in my first application and also the way I really do things here.”

Excellence in Teaching Improves Student Capabilities, Improves Lives, and Contributes to Economic Prosperity

During both the interviews and the focus groups, several distinguished faculty shared perspectives, comments, stories, and emails to support the belief that excellence in teaching at a community college can improve student capabilities, improve lives, and

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ultimately contribute to economic prosperity. Chapter 1 introduced a Conceptual Framework: The Value of Community College Excellence in Teaching that suggested that excellence in teaching can contribute toward improving student capabilities, improving lives, and ultimately contributes toward economic prosperity by reducing a reliance on government-based programs to sustain living. An education allows a student to develop social and work skills to become a productive member of society and to reduce the need for public assistance. Current and relevant real-world educations create a brighter future not only for the student but for their families, allowing them to thrive in society and positively contribute to economic vitality in a dynamic world.

This study suggested that according to these distinguished faculty participants' perspectives, community college faculty have the capacity to encourage, support, and promote students either to be gainfully employed or to continue formal education in pursuit of achieving their academic and professional aspirations. The following excerpts are examples of the distinguished faculty's perspectives on how their teaching excellence has had a long-term, positive influence on improving student lives.

Aahz's Perspective

Aahz summed up his perspective on this topic during his interview by saying:

A really good faculty person has self-confidence and is willing to try just about anything and do just about anything to reach the goal of producing a student who can go out and become a productive member of society. I talk to employers, find out what gaps the students have. What I'm finding is I can still, in the Albuquerque area, find about 60% of my students working in the field. That to me is long-term success.

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Furthermore, this particular program works with employers to place students in apprentice programs and then place graduates in employment throughout New Mexico, West Texas, and southern Colorado.

In his interview, Aahz provided two examples, describing a student's long-term success that resulted from teaching excellence in a community college. The description of the first student appeared in his interview transcript:

This young lady was the first lady I had ever taught. It was a brakes class, I think. And she was in that class, and I ran into her about a year later at a function, a collective of small-business people that are basically an advocacy group here in town built up of small-shop owners. She started in brakes class as a part of a parole agreement [and had] to get an education, and 15 years later she was the owner of a shop in town, still doing hands-on repair work on cars. I didn't recognize her; she had to introduce herself. She had to say what a difference I made in her life.

The other example Aahz shared came during the focus group discussion:

I had a student go through my program, employed as a parts counter person in a local dealership, and he saw that as a dead end. I don't want to die a parts counter person; just no money in it. So he had come to class, and he wanted to learn to be a mechanic because he worked with mechanics. And they make money and have fun. But he never really touched a wrench in his life. Now, in my program, I'm fortunate. My program lasts a year; my students join me in January, they leave in December, so I have a year to work with them. He came into the program very timid, very scared, not very talkative. And just by modeling and having high

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expectations and saying “Yes, you can,” at the end of the year’s program, he got his certificate. He went into his boss’s office and said “I’m quitting tonight!” This was a Friday night. He said, “I’m quitting tonight. I’m coming back Monday as a mechanic, and this is how much I’m going to be making.” And the boss agreed and put him on 90-day probation. He made it through his 90 days probation. He’s now been in the shop for about two and a half years, and he’s well above the curve in terms of advancement within the shop and on to factory training. Really, it was just a function of saying “Yes, you can.” I know you can. You need to be able to do this. You need to be able to do that. These are the skills you need. Let’s practice, let’s practice, let’s practice, and build some confidence in the young man. I couldn’t have gotten three words out of him on the first day of class, but by the end of the program, to march into your boss and say, “I quit, but I’m starting again on Monday,” that was just great. So that’s a real quick example of impact on a student.

Cedric’s Perspective

Cedric volunteers as an instructor with the adult literacy program because he “feels all people should have the opportunity to read and expand their world.” Cedric provided his perspective and said it’s essential to help students expand their world beyond the classroom by offering assignments to learn outside of the classroom environment.

Fiver’s Perspective

Fiver shared students’ long-term success stories in her interview and focus group statements; the students became physicians, nurses, physician assistants, and medical directors. She noted that a previous college medical director was one of her former

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students. As she shared her perspective and her stories of her student's success, she beamed with a smile while tears rolled down her face during the interview.

I've got students who are currently in med school. I've got students that just decided to teach, and they went on, and they practiced medicine for a while. There's only one full-time faculty, two full-time faculty, right now that weren't my ex-students. All my other faculty members were ex-students of mine, associate deans that were ex-students of mine. I've got ex-students that are high up on boards of national associations of EMS.

Fiver shared a story about her mother having seizures. She called 911 because she did not have the proper equipment at home to manage the situation. A former student showed up frequently after 911 was called and managed her mom's care on a regular basis and took her mother to the hospital.

Fiver said in her application, interview, and focus group discussion that her students go to prehospital settings to do internships for a period of time during the semester. Fiver and her colleagues meet with employers, working collaboratively with students and employers throughout the semester. She described feedback opportunities for her students:

Our students go out for 40 hours a week for five weeks in a row, so they're with the exact same preceptor 40 hours, five weeks in a row. So we meet with those preceptors, and those preceptors give us information about, "Hey, I've had three of your students in the last year; all three of them had problems with this or we needed to work on that." So I get the feedback from them as well as to what needs to change or what is good. That is information I don't know is available to a lot of

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people, that employer information. I get constant feedback. My students from three, four, five, 10 years ago are still emailing me saying, “Hey, are you aware of this? Did you notice that Bernalillo County changed their protocols on this? Are you guys comparing and contrasting nationally on this?”

On the day before her interview was conducted for this study, Fiver received two emails from a former student. The former student teaches in class a cricothyrotomy procedure, which is an invasive procedure that makes an incision in a patient’s throat during a life-threatening situation to open the airway and allow one to breathe. Fiver cried while sharing the email:

It’s a very invasive thing to have to do in the middle of the street, but it’s the only way to save the person’s life, you know. Someone just graduated in May ended up running that call, and the patient survived. That’s a procedure that’s not done very often. You’ll take seasoned medics that have been out for 10, 15, or 20 years that have never had to do that procedure, thankfully. But this is a student that’s brand new; she graduated three months ago, and she had the confidence. She went in; she did it. She did it correctly, and that patient survived because of her. She said in the email, and it was specific to me, this was to the whole department, but she said you guys drilled it in so much, that skill, to do it so automatically, that even though it was an incredibly freaked out scene and everybody was . . . It was chaotic. She says I had done it so many times, and I had the muscle memory there that just boom, boom, boom, it occurred.

The day after the focus group discussion, Fiver sent to me another email she had received the day of her focus group discussion. The email was from a former student:

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Good evening Fiver,

I wanted to write and just let you know that I had a pretty cool experience today.

☺ While transporting a pt [patient] on ILS today, I found them to be hypotensive and hypovolemic. Although they were quite hypotensive, they had a HR [heart rate] that was low compared to how I thought it should be presenting. As I looked through their medications, I found that they were on Beta-blockers and immediately remembered that it can mask symptoms of shock. It was a really cool experience to apply what I have been learning, and although it was something small, I recognized it right away and wanted to tell you and say thank you.

Learning is happening, and it is awesome.

[Former student's name]

Goofy's Perspective

Throughout her interview, Goofy provided her perspective and repeatedly said that faculty roles included finding ways to help the student learn and understand the material. She described a creative way to teach geometry to a blind high school student who used a wheelchair. Years later, she saw the student taking a statistics class at the college, and Goofy had the opportunity to tutor her as a college student. This same student took courses at the local university and “lived until she turned 30, and she died a month later.” While the student was alive, this distinguished faculty helped learning occur via teaching excellence, all the while overcoming the student's physical challenges.

She suffered from juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, rheumatism. She couldn't walk anymore; her hands were bent to where she could not use her left hand at all, and her right, she could just barely hit her Braille writer. . . . I had to find a way to

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work with her because she was in my geometry class. . . . So I taught in groups; I did a lot of teaming, and I put her in a group where the girls knew her. Everything had to be explained to her; she had to process it in her own brain; and then she would tell you what to draw for her or what to write for her; and this is how we worked in class. . . . We would do things like for graphing; we got a tag board; I drew the grid and used Elmer's glue to make the axis so she could feel the axis with her hand. Her mom and I got together. We did the grid, and we poked dots so she could feel the holes so she would count over, and if she wanted the point, she could feel and tell us, "Put a pin there." And we'd put a pin or a tack, and then we'd get a pipe cleaner so she could feel the line. So everything had become more hands-on, and I had to figure out how to do it.

Marie's Perspective

During her interview, Marie shared her perspective and her stories of students who attained their GED and continued to achieve degrees at higher levels. Often, students drop out of school simply because they are bored. One student in particular was a Navajo woman who was living on the streets at the age of 15 and was eating prairie dog. Her mother and father were alcoholics, and she and 15 other children were raised by her grandmother. She was fluent in Navajo, married a man of Mexican descent, and became fluent in Spanish. She obtained her GED. This student soon after having a baby phoned Marie from the hospital because she had no one else to call. Marie recalls "encouraging her to become a teacher because she enjoyed helping the other students in our GED classroom and because she was trilingual." Over time, she did just that; she now teaches elementary school on the reservation where she grew up.

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Mr. K's Perspective

In Mr. K's interview he shared his perspective, he said he drills into his students the value of education:

In two years, you can move yourself and your family to another level. You can be moved from a place where you are a person or a family who needs help to a family who is independent, and they are able to help others--to help in building our American dream and to be a person and a family who is not a burden on the system. On the contrary, on the opposite, you are a person or family who are helping more people around you. I also keep talking to them [the students], if they have kids, how they should always encourage their kids to learn more and to use opportunities that are available all over.

Mr. K told me that he once received an email that "almost made me cry when I read it" from a former student from five or six years past. Mr. K said he felt valued because he was able "to help one person and one family move to a good level, to a place where they are producers in this community, in society." Those kind words had a profound impact on this distinguished faculty member. The memo read something like this:

Dear Mr. K,

My name is so and so. I was your student in Math 930. I am proud to convey to you that I earned my bachelor's degree in mathematics, and I am very happy and very proud, and there are a few people who helped me to achieve that goal, and you were one of them. And I wanted you to know that whatever you told me did influence me positively, and the fruit of it is already here. I am now a

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mathematics teacher in a middle school, thanks to you and all of these people around me. Without you and your help, I couldn't be here.

Nancy's Perspective

Nancy, in her application, shared her perspective and wrote that her support for student success included meeting with students who are failing, discussing graduation and job postings in class, serving as a liaison by working with local CPA firms to place students during tax season, collaborating with a state chapter of the Society of Certified Public Accountants to obtain mentors for the students, and helping students build a network of professional contacts.

Students often come to the college, she said, to “get just their 30 hours of accounting and business law, and that qualifies them to then sit for the CPA exam.” During her interview, she said she helped some of her students gain long-term success by recalling:

One of the things that as an instructor you always love to hear is when I get emails from someone who has now passed the CPA exam, and it's really cool because I know I played a very small part of that, but it's awesome that they have now really succeeded and are on the career path that they really want to be on. It's also really cool. I do a lot of recommendations for students, job recommendations, and when they email me back, and they're all excited because they've gotten this job. And it's exactly what they wanted, and it's just fun to celebrate with them on their successes. And so that's always the fun part.

During the focus group discussion, Nancy perceived teaching excellence in her accounting course by stating that she volunteers and asks that students volunteer to

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prepare taxes for members of the community's low-income population through a Tax Help program offered by the college. She works alongside her students. At times, the students may have questions that she is unable to answer so she helps them navigate the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) website to find answers. She said this practice demonstrates the continual learning that is necessary to keep up with tax laws that change regularly.

Professor X's Perspective

During his interview, Professor X provided a teaching excellence practice in his science classes based on his perspective. He said:

One of the issues that will frequently come up is they'll [the students] have a family member who has some kind of a disease or they're taking care of a family member. Maybe they may even have something, and they'll start asking questions. And I actually freely encourage that because it applies what they're learning to their lives, and I think that what makes education important is that you have to be able to make it apply to their life in some way.

During the interview, Professor X said he attended a recent graduation ceremony and got goose bumps because many of his students were graduating. He saw more students graduating that year in the nursing program who have repeated classes with him or took multiple classes, such as introduction to biology, anatomy, and physiology courses, he said. He asked that his students keep in touch with him beyond graduation and noted, "Who knows, I'll get some of my own students taking care of me." Furthermore, during Professor X's focus group, he said that one of his students was accepted by a chiropractic

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college in Washington state and that Professor X had committed to be one of this student's first patients when he opened his own chiropractic business.

Professor X also said that many of his students have continued their educational careers through medical school or have participated in graduate-level biomedical research. One student moved cross-country to Boston and later contacted Professor X via email to say her work was being published. The student also thanked him for his teaching. "Those are the kind of stories that you really love to hear where people are taking some of the things that you've taught, and they're trying to apply it" to real-world practice, he said.

W.F. Godot's Perspective

During the interview, W.F. Godot said he perceives that his teaching and encouragement positively impacts student success. To be a licensed surveyor, one needs a four-year degree in surveying, and few places around the country offer such a program. The college has an agreement with a state university for a two-year degree at the college, and then the student transfers to the university program. W.F. Godot described a student who wanted to become a licensed surveyor.

He was having a lot of trouble. He understood surveying, loved surveying, but the calculus, that abstract stuff, to him was difficult, and he, of course, put that off 'til the end. We had developed a really good rapport. One semester, I got him a job and so he could earn a little money and things like that, so we have a very good relationship. And he said, "I'm going to do this." And I would encourage him, and we'd meet and talk and email and stuff like this. He got into the last semester with the physics and the calculus, and he was having a lot of trouble. He got really

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discouraged. And I would talk to him. I didn't have him in any classes at the time, but I kept encouraging him, and I'd run into him. And I knew he was going to take the test so I'd email him before and say, "Good luck on that test. I know you're going to do great," and I'd see him, and he'd say, "I did terrible; I flunked it!" So I made him hang in there, hang in there, hang in there. And so he ended up barely passing it, and he thought he didn't get his degree. I looked into it and found out that he did. There was nobody to tell him. So he'd gone back to Alaska; his family is up there. I don't remember if I called him or emailed him and said, "Hey, you know what? You've graduated, and I'm very proud of you!" He called me back, and he's all excited and his family's all excited, so it was just wonderful, but I really kept after him for a couple of years. And now he's just thrilled and on top of the world. He's going to go down to the local university in the fall to start his bachelor's degree. He's our first graduate!

These examples provided by the perceptions of distinguished faculty are a few that depict the impact that teaching excellence at a community college can have on improving student lives, family lives, and ultimately contributing toward economic prosperity. These students, through education, ultimately end up serving the community in their chosen professions.

Synopsis -- Community College Teaching Excellence: A Distinguished Faculty

Perspective

The following summary is based on the research results of the contributions of what these distinguished faculty perceived as teaching excellence in a community college setting.

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Authentically Connect with the Intent to Establish Trust

Nine faculty provided perspective and content to support excellence in teaching as authentically connecting to students with the intent to establish trust in the learning environment. I consolidated the emergent themes: connect, trust, resourcefulness, sharing personal experiences, caring, and appreciation for students.

These faculty went beyond getting to know more than just the students' names. They knew the students at a deeper level, starting out by learning individual names and dedicating time for one-on-one interactions, for expressing care and appreciation about the student's well-being by learning more about who the student is that represents the whole human, by creating a sense of belonging in learning spaces, by sharing personal experiences as part of the learning environment, by learning more about the student's individual learning styles, and by applying excellence in teaching practices that are individualized.

These faculty perceive they build and enhance trust so that the environment is open, welcoming, and supportive for the student to share both successes and challenges, thus minimizing the students' fear of learning. The ability to authentically connect with the students created a trusting learning environment that supported a more relaxed classroom, encouraged students to ask more questions, and increased interaction in the classroom.

Another excellence in teaching theme that the data collection revealed based on distinguished faculty perspectives was that these participants aided students when students encountered challenges in learning the material or just in the challenge of daily life that may negatively influence their learning or prevent them from learning. These

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faculty provided resources or access to resources (tutoring, achievement coaches, scholarship information, recommendations, and job opportunities) for students to resolve short-term challenges and to focus on long-term learning successes while maintaining academic rigor. These distinguished faculty perceive they encouraged students to persevere and overcome challenges, allowing them to stay focused on creating solutions and learning from the experiences they encountered.

Interestingly, these distinguished faculty said they are not egocentric in the learning environment. It is essential, according to these faculty perspectives, to be student centric, focused on helping students learn and solve life's challenges with the intent of continuously growing and developing both the students and themselves.

Embrace Diversity

Eight faculty provided in their interviews their perspectives on the importance of embracing diversity in a community college setting after describing the diverse population in their classrooms. The distinguished faculty perceive it is essential for teaching excellence to embrace the diverse student population and use it as a rich opportunity to challenge diverse thinking. These faculty perceive that community college students are truly in college to learn, and the faculty recognized that they have a responsibility to teach regardless of the barriers the students face that can hinder their learning. These faculty provided perspective on the essential need to create an inclusive environment in which students feel a sense of belonging in a learning environment.

The faculty strived to satisfy student needs similar to that of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: physiological; safety; social, belongingness, and love; esteem; and self-actualization (DuBrin, 2011). These faculty perceived that students must have the

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resources available to help satisfy their physiological needs through the use of resources, such as scholarships that will help them overcome short-term obstacles that may hinder their learning. According to these faculty perspectives, then they were able to create a safe environment for the students to feel free to express themselves and to investigate and be curious about the learning taking place. Then these faculty, according to their perspective, can create the environment where students are integral to the learning environment and feel a sense of belonging. Embracing diversity allows students to focus on improving self-esteem and to aim for achieving self-fulfillment and personal development as a result of learning, all essential factors of the hierarchy of needs that explains human motivation, according to Abraham H. Maslow.

Activate High Expectations and Encourage Excellence

The next element in the AEACSA Model was to activate high expectations and encourage excellence. I was able to merge high expectations and excellence themes into this category. The data revealed, according to eight distinguished faculty perspectives, faculty must provide clear expectations, along with well-defined learning objectives, as part of the learning process in order for teaching to be effective.

These faculty gauged students' progress with a variety of assessment tools to ensure that expectations and learning objectives were met. The data showed that distinguished faculty perceived excellence in teaching practice was to activate high expectations and encourage excellence in the classroom, including expecting students to move past obstacles, overcome challenges, and resolve problems through enriching the learning experience, encouraging excellence, and establishing a clear path to learning.

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Faculty raised the bar for student expectations and pushed them to the next level; once achieved, the faculty continued to raise the bar in increments that students could achieve. These distinguished faculty said they provided constant feedback to encourage continuous growth. Sharing compliments with students provides feedback that encourages them; however, constructive criticism is necessary to learn from mistakes. These faculty stated that they do not lower standards of achievement; rather, they assess and modify their teaching strategies and approaches to meet the students at their level. These faculty explained that they allow students to fail in order to learn lessons that are meaningful; however, faculty emphasized the need for students to move forward from failure and continue to focus on achieving excellence. These faculty implied that failure is not a negative and means that there is something left to be learned.

These distinguished faculty perceive that the student will rise to the level of expectation of the faculty and will remain focused on the fact that the student is enrolled in college to improve their life. These faculty stated they accept responsibility and felt pride for being faculty with high expectations of their students.

Cultivate a Passion for Learning

Eight distinguished faculty perceived that they must cultivate a passion for learning by creating a zealous environment that encourages and supports intellectual curiosity. I was able to combine themes that I thought were common in the responses: enthusiasm, passion, continuous learning, and lifelong learning.

These faculty stated they use a variety of modalities, such as lectures, videos, music, poetry, real-world experiences, written and text assignments, team activities, experiential learning, and others strategies that activate a variety of learning abilities.

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These faculty stated that they arouse emotion in students. They encouraged students to think differently about complexities and to learn how to learn, rather than focusing on students' ability only to regurgitate or memorize information.

Faculty perceive that they create an awareness that the demands of the workplace change rapidly and accentuated to the students that they must be adaptable to the skills needed in order to be marketable and to provide high-value work to employers. These distinguished faculty stated that they realize the need to teach current knowledge for students to be relevant and valuable in today's workplace, and the faculty provided specific examples of how they keep current in their field of expertise supports this realization.

Faculty deepened their own knowledge of the subject matter they teach. They do so by reading books, articles, newsletters, research publications; holding seats on national boards; and utilizing professional associations' resources. According to these distinguished faculty perspectives, they expand their knowledge base and improve their teaching methods by collaborating, learning, and sharing excellence in teaching practices with other faculty, locally and nationwide; changing the courses they teach frequently, based on learning experiences; soliciting feedback from students and peers; participating in curriculum development; and utilizing assessment tools to understand the teaching taking place in the classroom in order to make adjustments when necessary.

Faculty said they perceived the danger of becoming comfortable or complacent in teaching and recognized the importance of reflecting upon their own teaching practices often so that they can improve the content or method of teaching to benefit the students' individual learning.

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Strengthen Confidence in their Ability to Learn

According to the perceptions of eight distinguished faculty, excellence in teaching includes strengthening the students' confidence in their ability to learn, which is a practice that was repeated and that created a learning experience for the students to make mistakes; to arrive at solutions on their own; and demonstrates to the students that they can learn. I was determined common themes I could consolidate based on the similarities: confidence, conquer fear, failure, managing complex tasks by accomplishing small tasks, and problem solving.

Answers are not provided until after the student struggles or grapples with the problem at hand and then arrives at their own alternatives or solutions. When students resolve issues on their own, they realize their potential, their confidence increases, and therefore their self-esteem is boosted. These faculty perceive that it is their role to create safe environments where students can try, make mistakes, receive feedback, and try again; until, they achieve success. When a student succeeds after multiple tries, their confidence in their ability to learn improves.

Excellence in teaching, from a distinguished faculty perspective, includes a faculty's ability to break down difficult assignments into manageable tasks for the students to increase their confidence level as they tackle the smaller tasks at the onset of the assignment. A strategy used by these faculty included providing three feedback comments that are positive, followed by one element that can be changed or improved upon. Other teaching excellence strategies that supported this element of the AEACSA Model were that faculty perceive that the students can learn by helping the students minimize their fear in learning; increase intellectual curiosity; and encourage students to

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take chances. These faculty stated that they challenge students to change their mindsets and replace their former ways of thinking with new ways of thinking as their perspectives about life broaden.

Apply Theory to Real World

The participants in this study perceived it was crucial to modernize their teaching content, which includes teaching relevant technologies. I was able to combine the themes: theory to real world, relevance, and employer partnerships to this category, apply theory to real world.

It also is essential to establish relationships with employers in an effort to understand the needs, both hard skills and soft skills, of employers, and to incorporate those needs into their teaching curriculum. In addition to distinguished faculty partnering with employers to understand the needs, faculty obtained feedback from employers, which from their perspective adds value to the learning that takes place in the classroom in preparing students for the modern workplace. Excellence in teaching, according to these distinguished faculty perspectives, included frequent contact with employers through business advisory groups, employer visits, and employer outreach activities. Faculty collaborated with employers to provide apprenticeships, internships, and employer visits in which the students participated.

Faculty said that they actively sought opportunities to learn about state and national exam requirements in order to better prepare students to pass these assessments to enhance their opportunities for employment. According to these distinguished faculty perspectives, it was essential to attempt to be ahead of the curve, learning changes that

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occur at the state and national levels and preparing students as early as possible for those upcoming changes before mandates are established.

Faculty, from their perspective, provided examples of how they created real-world problems that students could relate to and to which students could apply learning. Real-world issues were generated in daily problem solving, financial planning, and budgeting activities to relate to course content that students experience in their own lives. Faculty stated that they provided experiential learning activities by exposing students to learning events outside the classroom environment, such as enhancing the syllabi with opportunities to attend cultural events. According to these faculty perspectives, it is essential to help students relate subject matter to events that occur at the time of teaching to enhance the students' ability to apply real-life application to the issue at hand; this includes ethical dilemmas that challenge the students' way of thinking.

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Chapter 5

“Who dares to teach must never cease to learn.” ~John Cotton Dana

Summary of Preceding Chapters

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the research study and included the background, need for this study, purpose, rationale, scope, and introduced the overarching research question to answer in this study that eventually was modified to highlight that this study’s focus was based solely on distinguished faculty perspectives of teaching excellence.

Chapter 2 presented a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to this study.

Although the literature review was thorough, it was not meant to be all encompassing.

Chapter 3 discussed the research design and methods employed, including the demographic survey, applications submitted, semistructured interviews and focus groups, and the positionality of the researcher.

Chapter 4 presented the findings gathered from the data collection and introduced a potential model to consider for teaching excellence. This chapter provided this instrumental case study’s rich, in-depth data that focused on the perspectives of distinguished faculty who pursue excellence in teaching at a community college. These cases were developed through careful examination and analysis of data collected.

Two figures are important in this dissertation, The Value of Community College Excellence in Teaching (Figure 1, p. 21) and The AEACSA Model (Figure 4, p. 140). Faculty provided perspective through anecdotal evidence and through their students’ stories that were shared with distinguished faculty, all of which support the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 1, The Value of Community College Excellence in Teaching. Chapter 4 reported the comments that the distinguished faculty perceived

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regarding excellence in community college and identified the emergent themes that materialized from the data collection and analyzation that suggested a potential model to consider for Community College Teaching Excellence: A Distinguished Faculty Perspective, The AEACSA Model. Based on the perspectives of these faculty, community college faculty who are committed to excellence in teaching at a community college have the potential to influence the success of students, both short term and long term, by applying a proposed model, The AEACSA Model: Their journey would start at the core, connect with students with an intent to establish trust, activate high expectations and encourage excellence in the learning environment, strengthen each student's confidence in one's ability to learn, cultivate a passion for lifelong learning, and apply theory to real-life situations.

This chapter, Chapter 5, reviews the purpose and research question; compares and contrasts past research documented to this study's findings; emphasizes the need to teach relevant skills and competencies in the 21st century; discusses recommendations of the study, including the limitations of the research; provides implications; and recommends future research opportunities. This chapter closes with a reflection on my learning and an overall conclusion to this study.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the body of research on the scholarship of teaching that is focused on teaching excellence from the perspective of a distinguished faculty, specifically the faculty at a nationally top-ranked community college, CNM. Community college faculty, as scholars, are learners who practice continuous learning and intellectual renewal through continuous evaluation and reflection over the course of

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their teaching careers and who are responsible for influencing learning, conveying, and imparting knowledge and skill to diverse learners, and for reflecting a love for learning to students. This study did not attempt to generalize teaching excellence in a community college; rather, it offered insights, from a distinguished faculty perspective, and proposed a potential model to consider applying when excellence in teaching is desired at a community college.

The initial overarching question that guided this study was:

- How do distinguished faculty at a nationally top-ranked community college practice excellence in teaching?

I explained in Chapter 1, Overarching Research Question, that upon completion of the study and review of the draft dissertation submission, a dissertation committee member challenged my question, specifically the word “practice.” While the data did collect practices of excellence among a distinguished faculty, it is important to emphasize these practices are determined in this study only from the distinguished faculty perspective. I concluded that it was a valid challenge because I did not observe distinguished faculty teach, nor did I gather data about the impact these faculty had on students. Therefore, the overarching research question was changed from “practice” to “perceive” to accurately document the inquiry that represented what the data collection reflected, and the question was modified as follows:

- How do distinguished faculty at a nationally top-ranked community college perceive excellence in teaching?

The interview and focus group questions identified below supported the investigation and were asked of each participant multiple times throughout the individual

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interviews and focus groups. These questions align with the concept of teaching excellence focused on best teaching practices, lifelong learning and intellectual renewal processes, evaluation and reflection, and impact on student success.

I explained in Chapter 3, Data Collection, that the focus group questions were designed based on evidence collected from two data sources at that stage of the study, analysis of the applications and the interview transcripts. I realized that I submitted four focus group questions to the Institutional Review Board (IRB); however, I did ask the same questions to obtain clarification as I did in the semistructured interviews. The two questions not identified, but asked of the focus group participants, included: What do you believe is unique about teaching at a community college? From your perspective, what differentiates you as a distinguished faculty member that warrants such distinction?

Table 12: Interview and Focus Group Questions

Interview and Focus Group Questions	
1	What do you believe is unique about teaching at a community college?
2	Describe your personal best teaching practice that has had a direct impact on your students' learning. Please provide examples.
3	How do you practice lifelong learning and intellectual renewal throughout your teaching career?
4	How do you practice continuous evaluation and reflection to ensure your teaching practices are relevant, current, and contribute to overall student success?
5	How do you perceive your teaching impacts student success in the short term and long term? Please provide any examples that reflect how your teaching excellence contributes toward student success.
6	From your perspective, what differentiates you as a distinguished faculty member that warrants such distinction?

Comparing and Contrasting Theoretical Foundation

When I started this study, I focused the research question on community college teaching excellence from a distinguished faculty perspective. I thought it was important to conduct thorough research about this topic to understand what other researchers have found. I

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compared and contrasted past work and this current research to contribute to the scholarship of teaching. A significant learning moment that took place for me was that I was able to confirm more than contrast existing research. The most significant contrast to what has been published was a new model to consider that was supported by research of earlier scholars. I provided a new paradigm for teaching that was organized from a new perspective, and each element was supported by research of previous scholars and writers—and my findings and their findings reached similar conclusions and confirmed that what we found were important practices of teaching excellence.

Chapter 2's Literature Review and reference to continuing the research is not meant to document all that has been studied regarding teaching effectiveness. Rather, it is to demonstrate that a great deal of research has been published portraying the importance of continuing the conversation regarding excellence in teaching. Boyer (1991) claimed that faculty work is comprised of four principles: (a) scholarship of discovery, which is basic research; (b) scholarship of integration, which is analyzing and interpreting research findings; (c) scholarship of application, which is applying knowledge to the solution of technical or social problems; and (d) scholarship of teaching, which is conveying knowledge and love for learning to students.

This study contributes toward the scholarship of teaching, which was described by Boyer (1991) and later was enhanced by Hutchings et al. (2011, p. 3) as “an approach to teaching that is informed by inquiry and evidence. They [faculty] are trying to find the best ways of incorporating new media into their teaching. . . . They [faculty] care deeply about educating students for citizenship, and want to explore how best to build students' knowledge, skills, and confidence.” This study focused on the scholarship of teaching. As

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Bernstein et al. (2006, p. 7) commented, “A consensus seems to have emerged that it’s time to revisit expectations for good teaching in higher education and to develop some common understanding about how it can be improved.” This study aimed to understand how excellence in community college teaching continues, through informed inquiry and evidence based on distinguished faculty perspectives, the research on the scholarship of teaching.

Vaughan (1988) believed that teaching effectiveness is at the heart of the community college mission. The scholarship of teaching is “an approach to teaching that is informed by inquiry and evidence. Scholarship of teaching is described as an activity in which faculty engage and separate from the act of teaching (Bass, 1999). Bass (1999) noted that it takes a deliberate act and awareness to look at teaching from the perspective of learning: to focus on questions and problems, gather data, interpret, and share results. These approaches challenge teachers to learn more by investigating the problems that matter most to them as they move toward a scholarship of teaching to legitimize a new set of questions as intellectual problems. This allows for teachers to explore a new landscape that features the merging of disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical practice, evidence of learning, and theories of learning and cognition.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) suggested in their research that it is important to connect the conversations among authors and theorists. First, elaborate by documenting what was said and then by attempting to advance the dialogue from a critical and creative standpoint, thus intriguing the readers of this document to seek a deeper understanding of excellence in the teaching in community colleges. The following content extends the scholarship of teaching from previous studies, mostly corroborates the findings of other

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published studies, and provides a creative standpoint based on distinguished faculty perspectives.

The literature reviewed included research that answered this inquiry: What makes an effective teacher? It is important to compare and contrast other researchers' work with this study's work. This study supports research by Darling-Hammond (1997) that declared that teachers need to be prepared to teach an ever-more diverse group of students for much more challenging work and for framing problems; finding, integrating, and synthesizing information; creating new solutions; learning on their own; and working cooperatively. The AEASCA Model suggests the importance of embracing diversity and cultivating a passion for learning. Two findings both studies emphasized as important to teaching excellence. Lifelong learners approach life with intense curiosity about people and the world around them, which both studies suggest.

Several researchers have made claims that an effective teacher must possess both the knowledge base and the soft skills in order to enhance the student's learning (Bain, 2004; Bernstein et al., 2006; Buskist et al., 2005; Chickering & Gamson, 1999; Lowman, 1984). The AEASCA Model is comprised of several soft-skill elements that a community college faculty member must possess, according to distinguished faculty, in order to be effective in applying excellence in teaching in the learning environment. Buskist et al. (2005), in particular, emphasized not only the importance of influencing curiosity but also bringing enthusiasm to the classroom. The reactions from distinguished faculty gleaned during the research for this study were evidence that they do indeed bring enthusiasm to their classrooms. For example, these distinguished faculty demonstrated passion with their tone of voice, hand gestures, and animated facial expressions. Those

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clues were evident to me when I interviewed them and also were recognized by the observers of the focus groups, as noted in the documentation in their observation notes. One faculty, when telling the stories of her students' success, was so moved during the interview process that she cried when she realized the impact her teaching had on students long term. Lowman (1984) stated that an outstanding teacher has the ability to stimulate positive emotions. The distinguished faculty interviews displayed the ability of these faculty to stimulate positive emotion in their tone of voice, hand gesture motions, and animated facial expressions. I felt excited about their work when I listened to their responses during my encounters with each participant.

Throughout this study, distinguished faculty discussed their approaches to teaching that aligned with Chickering and Gamson (1999) seven practices in undergraduate education: (a) encourage student-faculty contact (similar to authentically connecting element); (b) encourage cooperation among students; (c) encourage active learning (similar to cultivating a passion for learning); (d) give prompt feedback (many distinguished faculty perceived the importance of this excellence in teaching practice); (e) emphasize time on task; (f) communicate high expectations (similar to active high expectations and encourage excellence); and (g) respect diverse talents and ways of learning (similar to embracing diversity). Furthermore, these distinguished faculty provided specific examples of what the best college teachers do, which, according to Bain (2004), is to create safe environments where students can try, be shown ways to improve, receive feedback, and try again. Bain (2004) work suggested that a best teaching practice is when work can be revised and improved prior to being graded, thereby affording the opportunity for the student to learn from mistakes as part of the

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learning process. These distinguished faculty perceived that it is important to allow students to struggle until they can figure how to solve the issue at hand on their own, which is a process that builds confidence in their ability to learn and which confirms and extends past research findings.

Fink (2003) taxonomy of significant learning is comprised of six factors: (a) learning how to learn, (b) foundational knowledge, (c) application, (d) integration, (e) human dimension, and (f) caring. This research was used for instructional designers and defines significant learning as learning that creates a meaningful impact for students' post-learning environment. The learning that takes place often does something to improve the students' lives, work, or performance in other classes. This taxonomy is similar in many respects to the AEACSA Model. Fink's factors of significant learning emphasized the need to engage students in the course work, care about the students, and enhance the connectedness in the classroom, similar to the AEACSA Model, which suggests the faculty should authentically connect with the student with an intent to establish trust and cultivate a passion and enthusiasm for learning how to learn. The AEACSA confirmed Fink's taxonomy of significant learning. The emails shared by distinguished faculty corroborate Fink's theory that significant learning creates a meaningful impact for students' post-learning environment. The stories students shared with faculty post-completion of the courses taught by these faculty demonstrate meaningful impact beyond college.

Other studies contributed work on best teaching practices that are supported by this model, such as the Five Standards of Authentic Instruction (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993) which are (a) higher-order thinking, (b) depth of knowledge, (c) connectedness to

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the world beyond the classroom, (d) substantive conversation, and (e) social support for student achievement. The work expressed in this study through the perspectives of distinguished faculty directly relates to the standard of connectedness to the world, which enhances the value and meaning beyond the classroom, i.e., a lesson gains in authenticity the more there is a connection to the larger social context within which students live. In addition, these faculty perceive it to be essential to help students become resourceful identifying how needs can be met outside the classroom in an effort for the student to be focused on learning inside the classroom. “Instruction can exhibit some degree of connectedness when (1) students address real-world public problems . . . [and] (2) students use personal experiences as a context for applying knowledge” (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993, p. 10). These practices corroborate distinguished faculty perspectives that connecting real world issues to theory is a necessary component to learning. Several examples were provided in faculty comments that discuss their strategy using real world examples as problems to be solved in the learning environment.

Additional research would ensure that we understand excellence in teaching as it relates to today’s students and their environments. Current research can contribute to the relevance and new work so that the conversation about teaching excellence in a learning environment can keep pace with the ever-changing workplace and world. Continuing to add to the body of knowledge that exists in examining community college teaching excellence has the potential to link research to practice to enhance teaching effectiveness that ultimately can positively impact the welfare of the student, their families, societies, and the economy.

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Teaching Relevant Skills in the 21st Century

My interest in launching this dissertation resided in learning about recent and relevant distinguished faculty perceptions regarding teaching excellence at a community college and in utilizing an appreciative inquiry interviewing framework, to understand specifically what works. The importance of collecting data today is to continue the conversation of determining excellence in teaching to ensure the relevance to the changes occurring in the 21st century workplace, either through corroborating existing research or contributing new applications to teaching excellence.

I read a recent publication, *Humans are Underrated* (Colvin, p. 101), that said that “as technology keeps wiping out jobs, here are the skills you need to thrive in the workplace.” The article called for the need for faculty to be aware of the changing demands of employees in today’s workplaces because of the competition between humans and computers. Computers indeed will eliminate jobs; therefore, faculty need to strategize the skills humans needed to be prepared for the workplace changes of the 21st century. Employers’ top priorities, the article said, include “relationship building, teaming, co-creativity, brainstorming, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to manage diverse employees’ right brain skills of social interaction” (Colvin, p. 108). The article said that Global Institute research found that between 2001 and 2009, the numbers of transaction and production jobs such as bank tellers and checkout clerks decreased by 3.4 million; however, jobs requiring human interaction such as doctors and teachers increased by 4.8 million and have become “the fastest-growing category of employment in advanced economies” (Colvin, p. 108). Research into excellence in teaching, which includes best teaching practices, should continue to evolve over time to ensure that the

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teaching that occurs aligns with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies that students need that is current and relevant in order to be employable.

Limitations

The results of this study consisted of analyzing 155 pages of data to determine a summary that demonstrates the demographics of the participant population and an analysis of applications, interviews, focus groups, and observation notes regarding what distinguished faculty perceive as teaching excellence in a community college learning environment. This study did not review actual teaching practices or the impact on students of the teaching excellence of these distinguished faculty. As such, I advise the reader to not generalize the results of the study; however, the elements of the AEACSA Model proposed may be useful to consider in an environment of teaching excellence in a community college and potentially in other types of learning environments.

It is important to emphasize that a few limitations affected the quality of this study. This section below identifies steps that should be taken in future studies to overcome these limitations. The methodology limitations of this study as well as potential considerations that can overcome limitations are reported.

This research provided current data collected that was based on distinguished faculty perspectives that added to the scholarship of teaching. This study collected data from the perspectives of nine participants who were selected during the Distinguished Faculty Program's first year of implementation. This study would have been stronger had there been more participants; however, when this study was launched, the next cohort of distinguished faculty had not yet been announced. A greater number of participants may be possible in the next few years as more distinguished faculty are recognized through

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this program at CNM. Data collection also could be extended to other college's distinguished faculty.

This study possesses another known limitation because only the individual faculty perspectives were provided in the data collection. Students, peers, administrators, and employers did not contribute to this in any fashion to this study; their input would have provided a 360-degree view. Therefore, this study offers only a one-sided distinguished faculty perspective. In addition, I did not observe distinguished faculty teaching or collect data to study their impact on student success. Broadening the study to include students, peers, administrators, and employers or studying their impact on student success would increase the richness of the data and provide a varied perspective on teaching excellence in a community college.

The next limitation is more of a risk that still remains. The identities of the 11 distinguished faculty are disclosed on the World Wide Web through communications conducted by CNM. Information about each of the participants can be found in the communication published on CNM's website that announced the distinguished faculty program and its honorees. I disclosed this possibility both in writing in the Consent and Authorization to Participate in Research form under the risks section and verbally notified each participant during their interviews. Participants did not express concerns when signing the consent form nor did they verbally express concern during the interviews. I took all possible measures to secure the information and utilized pseudonyms in the data collection and in the findings of this study.

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Discussion and Implications

A Conceptual Framework: The Value of Community College Excellence in Teaching was introduced to the reader in Chapter 1. The data collection emerged into a new potential model for community college teaching excellence to consider that was introduced in Chapter 4, the AEACSA Model. Many of the findings demonstrated teaching excellence according to the perceptions of these nine faculty, all of whom can assist in continuing research efforts to explore teaching effectiveness in a community college learning environment. By using the instrumental case study method, these perspectives revealed rich information that led to the development of the proposed AEACSA Model to consider. Furthermore, the research results corroborated the findings of existing research and provided opportunities to examine and understand excellence in teaching from a distinguished faculty perspective to ensure that its applicability is current and relevant for the 21st century workplace. This study can serve as a pilot to be tested in community college teaching and provides an opportunity to for additional research that could not be accomplished in this work.

Recommendations for Research Opportunities

This study provoked several other questions that resulted in other research prospects to consider for in-depth knowledge regarding teaching excellence in a community college as it relates to unionized colleges, establishing trust in an online learning environment, faculty diversity, retention of distinguished faculty, and 21st century teaching. The following excerpts can be considered future research opportunities.

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Arbitration between the College and the Union

This study was conducted after the first year of implementing the college's first distinguished faculty program and utilized the first cohort of distinguished faculty. While this study was taking place, the distinguished faculty program was arbitrated by the union that represented faculty at the college. The faculty union alleged that the implementation of the faculty recognition award violated the collective bargaining agreement between the college and the union. Arguments were heard from both parties. One of the honorees was awarded a \$1,000 increase in pay to the level of a full-time faculty member's base salary. The arbitrator ruled that the college had violated the collective bargaining agreement by its award of the \$1,000 recurring increase in base salary to that of a full-time faculty member. The grievance was sustained. Although the distinguished faculty program could continue, the college was directed to cease and desist from making such monetary awards in the future; recipients of the lump-sum cash awards were permitted to keep the payments they had received.

If community college administrators continue to treat all faculty the same, the research opportunity to further understand teaching effectiveness from the perspective of a distinguished faculty could be hindered. In concept, unions represent the perspectives of the majority of faculty, perspectives that can be in conflict with programs that provide recognition to a few. This arbitrated decision provides an opportunity for further inquiry on the debate of the effectiveness of recognizing faculty in union environments for outstanding contributions toward student success.

According to C. R. Thomas (1976), the clout of faculty unions was a reality on many college campuses. Debates about unions in colleges include public criticism of

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unions' insistence on seniority over merit in hiring and promotion, which discourages managerial decisions by the administration. Exploration of this debate creates an opportunity for further research to determine the impact of such merit-based recognition programs in union environments.

Establishing Trust in an Online Learning Environment

Another opportunity to expand research is the impact of establishing trust in an online learning environment. A core element of the proposed AEACSA Model is connecting at the core with students to establish trust in the learning environment. This important facet of the model raises the question about whether it can be applied in an online learning environment where rich, face-to-face interaction is not available, which would impede the possibility of establishing meaningful trust. External factors in an online environment, such as time of day, distance, and technology, also can impede the development of trust.

Faculty Diversity

As cited in Chapter 2's Research on Community College Faculty, Twombly and Townsend (2008) stated "there is no research about being a minority faculty member in the community college" (p. 13). Therefore, additional examination of the relevance of diversity in faculty that reflects the diversity of students in the learning environment can be a future research opportunity.

Several faculty described diversity in the student population that exists in a community college setting. A diversity of students can include those who differ in ethnicity, culture, race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical and mental ability status, first-generation college students, veterans, socioeconomic status, and other potential identifiers. This collection of nine distinguished faculty who

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participated in this study did not represent a wide range of diversity in age or ethnicity; yet, the distinguished faculty both described the diversity in these two demographic areas of the student population. Therefore, further inquiry could be conducted to determine the impact, if any, on a diverse faculty and its relationship to excellence in teaching in a community college setting.

Distinguished Faculty Retention

A few weeks after completing the collection of data for this study, one of the distinguished faculty contacted me via email to notify me that he was leaving the college to launch a program for a new college locally. This instructor wrote that he was recruited to establish a new program in his area of expertise for a private college that is establishing itself in the state, in effect bringing additional competition to CNM. Because of the intense growth of global competition in higher education, there may be room to conduct further studies on the retention of distinguished faculty.

21st Century Teaching

This dissertation cited two articles that were published in the Harvard Business Review over the past year that referred to recent studies that examined the need to prepare students with 21st century knowledge, skills, and abilities in order to be successful in the modern workplace. It is imperative that faculty continue to seek opportunity to improve the way education is offered and delivered to keep pace with the demands of the 21st century workplace. Technology advancements continue to challenge the learning environment. The world economy continues to change and mandate new skills to compete globally. Community colleges possess the ability to change as quickly as the work environment demands change. Another potential study is one that further

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investigates how faculty can prepare students to compete in the contemporary employment world. Community college education systems must be rigorous and continue to help prepare students for good jobs and good citizenship.

Reflection

Throughout this study, my two motives remained the same: to understand and to learn about teaching excellence from the perspective of distinguished faculty. My intent was not to provide one solution for community college teaching excellence but rather to provide a theory that is grounded in data.

This study allowed me to apply my own learning in the doctoral program, theory, to real-world practice, by conducting an actual intensive dissertation study. This study invoked my curiosity about additional research that could answer more questions that arose as I sifted through the data. I also appreciated the challenges my dissertation committee posed to provoke my thoughts on the research conducted.

I was intrigued by the distinguished faculty perspectives shared during this study. The faculty's enthusiasm and passion for teaching was visible in my interactions with each one and documented in the notes taken by two observers during the focus group process. Lowman (1984) wrote what separates the competent from the outstanding teachers is their ability to stimulate strong positive emotions in students. It is my assumption based on the interviews and focus group interactions that these participants do just that. I imagine that many studies have been conducted to measure the impact of demonstrating passion in teaching and the impact that passion has on student learning. From my perspective, these individuals practice and role-model lifelong learning and explore life through a curiosity lens. I was inspired by the instructors' commitment to

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improve the world through their strategies of teaching excellence. These faculty, from my perspective, realized the importance that in order to teach, you must be willing to learn.

One element that I was surprised by was that these faculty were humble in answering the question: From your perspective, what differentiates you as a distinguished faculty member that warrants such distinction? I did not obtain solid evidence that was supported by several faculty; rather, these faculty were humble in their responses stating that they do not believe they do anything different than other faculty committed to teaching excellence.

I was not necessarily surprised to learn that my findings were supported by previous research. Rather, my findings proposed a new model to consider that emphasized teaching excellence in a new paradigm that contributes to the scholarship of teaching publication. These findings provoked in me additional curiosities worthy of research. I also realized the essential need to continue the work of investigating teaching excellence in community college settings and in education in general. Much of the existing research is similar, and this study corroborates documented findings. This study also reminded me that teaching can be both an art and a science.

Finally in 2015, the year of this dissertation's publication, President Barack Obama and chairwoman Second Lady Jill Biden, launched the College Promise Campaign to raise awareness and support tuition-free community college programs (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a). This campaign challenged leaders to join a national campaign for tuition-free community college for responsible students. Interestingly, I learned in the research that the President's Commission on Higher Education (1947) reported that in 1947, tuition was free in order to make community

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colleges available to all Americans able and willing to receive it, regardless of economic or social status.

I am curious to know if studies have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of free tuition. Regardless, the relevance to this study seems timely. It is highly appropriate to continue to add to the knowledge base that provides insight to the institution that prides itself on being a teaching institution during a time in which presidential attention has placed an importance on such higher education institutions, specifically community colleges.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges that faculty endure, as indicated in this study, these distinguished faculty provided perspective into excellence in teaching that they utilize in the community college learning environment. Faculty hold significant roles in student lives contributing toward adult learning, andragogy. Andragogy “is usually described as self-directed” (Cranton, 2006, p. 3). “In many countries there is a growing conception of andragogy as the scholarly approach to the learning adults” (Knowles, 2011, p. 335). In the U.S.A., andragogy is considered a tradition of Malcolm Knowles who claimed a theoretical and practical approach to adult learning “based on a humanistic conception of self-directed and autonomous learners and teachers as facilitators of learning” (Knowles, 2011, p. 336). Interestingly, the first use of the term andragogy that is documented was in 1833 by a German high school teacher, Alexander Kapp, who described the “lifelong necessity to learn” (Knowles, 2011, p. 336). Andragogy makes the following assumptions about the design of learning: adults need to know why they need to learn something; adults need to learn experientially; adults approach learning as problem-solving; and

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adults learn best when the topic is of immediate value. These four assumptions directly align with the elements of the model proposed to consider in this dissertation.

Other theorists have continued to elaborate through research the theory of adult learning. Most recently documented is the scholarly work of “Mezirow (2003) [that] suggests transformation has not taken place until an individual has acted on the learning” (Cranton, 2006, p. 4). Students participate in sustained formal learning activities “to acquire new knowledge, skills, or values; revise their basic beliefs and assumptions; or change the way they see some aspect of themselves or the world around them” (Cranton, 2006, p. 2). This is the andragogy challenge for all faculty, to shift the paradigm of thinking and challenge the student’s to act on their learning beyond the college environment.

It is important to note that a community college learning environment is not purely made up only of adult learners. Dual-credit courses for high school students, typically younger than 18, are also a part of the student population that community college faculty teach. The Central New Mexico Community College (2013-2014) Fact Book reported that the average age of the student population was 27.7 and that students 18 and younger comprised 16.9 percent of the student population during the time of the study.

Distinguished faculty selected and honored in the future should continue to be studied to examine excellence in teaching what is working that can lead to student learning outcomes that benefit student lives, their families, and society, all of which can contribute to economic prosperity. This can be an investment to the future of our country. This research was intended to provoke further inquiry into a topic that should raise more

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questions and thus lead to more solutions for a continuous journey of seeking excellence in teaching at a community college at a time when much attention was being paid to the value of community colleges.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Recruitment e-mail

Date

Dear Participant:

My name is Denise Montoya, and I am conducting a qualitative instrumental case study, Community College Teaching Excellence: A Distinguished Faculty Perspective. This study will serve as my dissertation for completing my doctoral degree in Organization, Information, and Learning Sciences at the University of New Mexico.

You have been identified as distinguished faculty at a community college noteworthy of national recognition, Central New Mexico Community College, which makes you a prime participant. The purpose of this study is to gain insight and contribute to the knowledge available regarding excellence in teaching at a community college from a distinguished faculty perspective. The data collected will be used in the final dissertation.

If you are amenable, I would ask the following of you:

1. Please reply to this email indicating your willingness to participate in the Spring 2015 within five business dates from the date of this email date.
2. I will send you a consent and authorization form informing you thoroughly of the research study. If after reading the consent and authorization form, you are willing to be a volunteer participant, please provide a signed copy to me via email at montoyad@cnm.edu indicating that you have read the consent and authorization fully and are willing to be a participant in this study. This document will serve as the consent and authorization agreement required by both Central New Mexico Community College and the University of New Mexico for human subject's research.
3. Upon receiving your permission, the study will consist of a 4 phase approach:
 - a. Phase 1: Document analysis – I will ask you for a copy of the application you submitted that awarded you the distinguished faculty distinction. If you do not have a copy, I will ask you for permission to garner a copy from Central New Mexico Community College.
 - b. Phase 2: Demographic survey – I will conduct a short demographic survey to gain an understanding of who you are, where you come from, and some of your history and/or background and education.
 - c. Phase 3: Semistructured interview – I will conduct a 1 hour semistructured interview using an appreciative inquiry interviewing framework. A transcription will be provided to you for review to ensure the content accurately captures your experience in excellence in community college teaching.
 - d. Phase 4: Focus group with all participants – Upon review of the evidence provided in Phase 1 – 3, you will be asked to participate in a one and a half hour focus group with all participants to share an understanding of practices of

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excellence in a community college setting from a distinguished faculty perspective.

I would greatly appreciate your willingness to participate in this study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my co principal investigator, Dr. Frances C. Wilkinson, or me. You may find our contact information below.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing back from you regarding your participation.

Sincerely,

Denise Montoya
Researcher/Principal Investigator

Frances C. Wilkinson, Ed.D.
Co Chair/Co Principal Investigator

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Appendix 2. Central New Mexico Community College and The University of New Mexico Combined Consent and Authorization to Participate in Research

Central New Mexico Community College and The University of New Mexico Combined Consent and Authorization to Participate in Research

Dissertation Study

Community College Teaching Excellence: A Distinguished Faculty Perspective

Introduction and Purpose

You are being asked to participate in a qualitative instrumental case study. The data you provide through a series of phases will contribute towards a dissertation conducted by Denise Montoya, a doctoral student at the University of New Mexico in the Organization, Information, and Learning Sciences program, who is the Principal Investigator. Mrs. Montoya is also the Executive Director of Human Resources at Central New Mexico Community College, the same location the participants of this study will be selected. In an effort to be transparent, Mrs. Montoya's role in this research is as the researcher and not the Executive Director of Human Resources.

You have been identified as distinguished faculty at a community college noteworthy of national recognition, Central New Mexico Community College, which makes you a prime participant for this topic. The purpose of this study is to gain insight and contribute to the knowledge available regarding excellence in teaching at a community college from a distinguished faculty perspective. The data collected will be used in the final dissertation.

This form will explain the research, the possible risks involved, as well as the possible benefits to you. I encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. If you have any questions, please ask one of the principal investigators identified below.

Purpose of This Study

This study is designed to contribute to the knowledge available regarding excellence in community college teaching from a distinguished faculty point of view. This study can offer potential for building capacity in teaching excellence in a community college learning environment. In addition, the contribution of this research can enhance the dignity of this particular faculty. Despite the challenges that community college faculty endure, as indicated in this document, an abundance of community college faculty already utilize best teaching strategies that positively impact student success.

Procedures

If you agree to participate, the following procedures will take place:

4. Upon receiving your permission, the study will consist of a 4 phase approach:

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- a. Phase 1: Document analysis – I will ask you for a copy of the application you submitted that awarded you the distinguished faculty distinction. If you do not have a copy, I will ask you for permission to garner a copy from Central New Mexico Community College.
- b. Phase 2: Demographic survey – I will conduct a short demographic survey to gain an understanding of who you are, where you come from, and some of your history and/or background and education.
- c. Phase 3: Semistructured interview – I will conduct a one hour semistructured interview using an appreciative inquiry questioning approach format. A transcription will be provided to you for review to ensure the content accurately captures your experience in excellence in community college teaching.
- d. Phase 4: Two focus groups with participants – Upon review of the evidence provided in Phase 1 – 3, you will be asked to participate in a one of two focus groups for one and a half hours to share an understanding of practices of excellence in a community college setting from a distinguished faculty perspective. An observer will be in the room along with the researcher asking the questions.

Communications between the researcher and the participant will be conducted initially via email. The researcher will provide a time and location that will be convenient for the individual interviewees and the focus group who voluntarily select to participate. With your permission, I will record the interview and the focus groups and have a professional transcriptionist transcribe the recordings. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide and will be used for transcription purposes only. Quotes will be used as evidence from each phase to support the results of the study. If you agree to be audiotaped but feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, I can turn off the recorder at your request. Or if you do not wish to continue at any time, you can stop the process and elect to opt out at that time. All materials will be destroyed if that you have contributed up until your request to withdraw.

Risks

Risks associated with this study are minimal to moderate. However, in an effort to be transparent, it is important to disclose that I am the Executive Director of Human Resources at Central New Mexico Community College.

Participants may experience risk of possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in this study. While you will be able to choose a pseudonym (or be assigned one), and the key linking you to your pseudonym will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office, your identity may be ascertained because the names of distinguished faculty are published via a Central New Mexico Community College communication accessible via the World Wide Web.

Once data is compiled, the data presented in the results will not disclose personal information; rather, the data will be produced in summary format. Every measure will be taken to protect the security of all personal information, but confidentiality of all study

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data cannot be guaranteed. The eleven distinguished faculty are identified in a public manner via Central New Mexico Community College's communications on the internet World Wide Web.

This study is processed through the Institutional Review Boards by both Central New Mexico Community College where the distinguished faculty are employed and the University of New Mexico (UNM).

Benefits

The potential outcome of participating in this study will benefit the College and community colleges at large by expanding the literature currently available pertaining to teaching excellence in a community college learning environment. Participation will contribute towards this effort.

Confidentiality

Information contained in this study is used by the principal investigators. I will keep the records of this study strictly confidential. It is important to note that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Distinguished faculty names are published via a communication published on the World Wide Web via Central New Mexico Community College. However, in any report made public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. You will choose or be assigned a pseudonym so that your responses are confidential. The only form linking your real name to your pseudonym will be this consent form, which will be locked in a file cabinet in a locked office. All data collected, both hard copies and electronic copies, will be stored on a jump drive and in a file cabinet in a home office file cabinet. All data will be destroyed after five years.

This study will be processed through the Institutional Review Boards by both Central New Mexico Community College and the University of New Mexico. The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human subject research and/or other entities may be permitted to access your records. There may be times when we are required by law to share your information. Your name will not be used in any published reports about this study.

Compensation

Participants will not be paid for taking part in this study. There is no cost to participate in this study.

Participation and Withdrawal

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Participants are free to decline to take part in this study. Participants can decline to answer any questions and are free to stop taking part in the study at any time. The researcher may also withdraw the participant from this study if circumstances arise that warrant such action. Participants can withdraw from this study at any time. Participant's request will be honored immediately. If the participant chooses to withdraw, all data collected up until this point will be destroyed.

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Whether or not participants choose to participate in the research and whether or not participants choose to answer a question or continue participating in the project, there will be no penalty to the participant.

Questions

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact the researcher Denise Montoya, Principal Investigator, at 505-480-7383 or by email at montoyad@cnm.edu. If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Frances C. Wilkinson, Faculty Chair Member, at 505-277-2678 or fwilkins@unm.edu.

This study has been approved by Central New Mexico Community College Institutional Research Board (IRB) and The University of New Mexico (UNM) IRB. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may call the UNM Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (505) 277-2644. The OIRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human participants. For more information, you may also access the OIRB website at <http://research.unm.edu/irb/>. You may also contact the Central New Mexico Community College Institutional Review Board (IRB) at irbcnm@cnm.edu or at (505) 224-3450.

Consent and Authorization

You are making a decision whether to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you read the information provided or the information was read to you. By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this study. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

I agree that the interview(s) can be audiotaped.

I disagree that the interview(s) can be audiotaped.

Name of Participant (print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Your Chosen or Assigned Pseudonym (one word or phrase)

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Investigator Signature

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

Name of Investigator/ Team Member (print)

Signature of Investigator/ Team Member

Date

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Appendix 3. Demographic Survey

Demographic Survey

Demographic	Options/description
Gender	Male Female Choose not to answer
Age	20-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61 plus Chose not to answer
Ethnicity	American Indian or Alaska Native Asian Black or African American Hispanic or Latino Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander White Chose not to answer
Teaching subject matter expertise	Focused content area of expertise
Employment status	Full time Part time
Highest educational level achieved	High school Associate degree Bachelor's degree Master's degree Doctorate
Years teaching at a community college	0-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16 plus years
Other teaching experience	Kindergarten-12 Graduate/teaching assistant University
Years in subject matter expertise in the field in a non-teaching capacity	0-5 6-10 11-15 16 plus

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Appendix 4. Semistructured Interview Questions

Semistructured Interview Questions

#	Semistructured Interview Questions
1	What do you believe is unique about teaching at a community college?
2	Describe your personal best teaching practice that has had a direct impact on your students' learning. Please provide examples.
3	How do you practice lifelong learning and intellectual renewal throughout your teaching career?
4	How do you practice continuous evaluation and reflection to ensure your teaching practices are relevant, current, and contribute to overall student success?
5	How do you perceive your teaching impacts student success in the short-term and long-term? Please provide any examples that reflect how your teaching excellence contributes toward student success.
6	From your perspective, what differentiates you as a distinguished faculty member that warrants such distinction?

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Appendix 5. Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

#	Focus Group Questions
1	The evidence collected thus far reveals...Explain any of the content that describes personal best teaching practice.
2	The evidence collected thus far reveals...What do you want to add to how you practice lifelong learning and intellectual renewal throughout your teaching career?
3	The evidence collected thus far reveals...Clarify how you practice continuous evaluation and reflection to ensure your teaching practices are relevant, current, and contribute to overall student success?
4	The evidence collected thus far reveals...Clarify how do you perceive your teaching impacts student success in the short-term and long-term? Please provide any examples that reflect how your teaching excellence contributes toward student success.

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Appendix 6: Notification Sent to Participants to Review Transcripts

Notification Sent to Participants to Review Transcripts

Date

Hello Participant,

Thank you again for participating in my research study, Community College Teaching Excellence: A Distinguished Faculty Perspective. I appreciate your time and contribution. I attached a copy of the transcript for the interview I conducted with you.

Please review the professionally transcribed interview for accuracy. Please inform me if the transcript accurately reflects your experiences in teaching excellence in a community college setting.

Please provide me feedback within 3 days from the date of this notification. You can provide me your response at montoyad@unm.edu. If I do not hear back from you by this date, DATE, then I will presume that you found the transcripts to be an accurate reflection of your experience.

Thank you for your time and for participating in this study. Congratulations once again for your recognition as a distinguished faculty.

Sincerely,

Denise Montoya