

DISSERTATION

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL AND LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF
LATINA FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS:
A TRAVÉS DE SUS VOCES (THROUGH THEIR VOICES)

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ABSTRACT

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL AND LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF LATINA FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS: A TRAVÉS DE SUS VOCES (THROUGH THEIR VOICES)

The Latina population in the United States is one of the largest of all racial and ethnic groups, and it is expected to grow exponentially within the next forty years. Despite these large numbers of Latinas in the U.S., there is a disparity with this population who are leading our nation's four-year colleges and universities. A reason for this may be what some education researchers call a "broken pipeline," where many Latinas reside in poorly-funded k-12 schools and are inappropriately tracked out of college preparatory classes and programs. Many Latinas are also tracked into trade or two-year community colleges where their opportunities for advanced degrees are delayed if not limited. However, those Latinas who successfully transfer from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities, as well as those who begin their baccalaureate programs in a four-year institution, are sometimes met with cultural, racial, and gender bias which can discourage their future professional leadership aspirations.

This study, "The Socio-cultural and Leadership Experiences of Latina Four-year College and University Presidents: A Traves de sus Voces (Through their Voices)" considers the framework of intersectionality, where race, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic issues may contribute to the overall recruitment and retention of Latinas into presidential positions of four-year colleges and universities. Additionally, this study explores the notion of leadership from a Latina perspective, which often emphasizes themes such as character, competence, compassion, community servant hood and role modeling received by elder Latinas.

It is my hope that this study will highlight the stories from this marginal population and also provide much-needed credible narratives to academic research.

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DEDICATION

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I – INTRODUCTION

Background

There is ample research demonstrating the impact and contributions of women in leadership. However, there is little that speaks of women of color in leadership, primarily Latinas (Mendez-Morse, 2004, p. 583).

For the purposes of this paper, the word “Latina” represents a general term used in reference to female members of populations who have either linguistic and/or cultural connections to the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America and Mexico. This population can be diverse. Its members can also be from Puerto Rico, Cuba, or other countries in Latin America (Shartrand, 1996).

According to Gilroy (2006), in 2005, Latinas represented 48.9% of the total Latino population in the United States, which were about 20.5 million people. By 2050, Latinas are expected to comprise nearly one-quarter of women of all ages in the United States, and their numbers will approach 51 million (Gilroy, p. 37).

Conversely, with the number of four-year colleges and universities in the United States in the thousands, there are fewer than a dozen Latinas who are leading these institutions (de los Santos & Vega, 2008). This is an issue of concern given that in 2016, one of every six undergraduate students in the United States will be Latino (Carnevale & Fry, 1999). With this increase in students attending our nation’s colleges and universities, Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, and Talbot (2000) state that one way Latino college students can achieve academically

and socially is if they are surrounded by students, faculty, and administrators who are of the same racial, ethnic, and socio-economic background (p. 522).

One has to question why, then, the numbers of Latina four-year college and university presidents are noticeably low when their leadership skills and talents are obviously needed to shepherd the influx of Latino undergraduates who are entering our nation's higher education institutions. In my own thoughts, it could be due to what can be called a "broken pipeline," which can be analyzed as follows: Many Latinas grow up in poor neighborhoods where their school systems do not always embrace the advancement of students of color. In particular, girls of color are not encouraged to pursue honors, advanced placement, or gifted and talented programs, which tend to be college preparatory in nature. As a result, their "cultural capital" is often different from the mainstream student. According to Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, and Talbot (2000), cultural capital "encompasses implicit and internalized beliefs and values, including attitudes and perceptions toward education" (p. 516). So even though many Latina students have high intellectual abilities, their school systems often devalue their cultural knowledge, which also "reinforces and perpetuates social inequality" within their school systems. This is a break in the educational pipeline for Latinas (p. 516).

Latinas who do manage to succeed in their k-12 educational system often find they are tracked into trade schools or two-year community colleges where if they are not given the proper advising and guidance from school officials, their opportunities for advanced degrees are limited or non-existent. This creates yet another break in their educational pipeline. Finally, those few Latinas who are afforded a post baccalaureate education and ultimately graduate with an advanced degree often find themselves in a racist, classist, and gender-biased hierarchal

environment that does not always encourage their aspirations to become someone as distinct or as reputable as a university president (Segura, 2003, p. 31).

Ideally, there would be a strong pipeline for Latinas that would embrace their advancement not only through their baccalaureate degrees, but through their attainment of advanced degrees. With their degrees in hand, there would be the opportunity for more Latinas to lead our nation's four-year colleges and universities and to serve as advocates for the large numbers of Latino students who are expected to attend our nation's higher education institutions in the near future.

More pointedly, given that nearly 50% of Latino students begin their higher education in community colleges, having Latina presidents in four-year colleges and universities can be valuable to these students. In an ideal situation, these Latina presidents can provide much needed leadership for Latino students while they sit on k-12 committees and advocate for dual or concurrent enrollment programs that will be beneficial for Latino students. Additionally, with their knowledge of the structure of the Latino family, these Latina presidents can also provide much needed advocacy, validation, and influence to the parents of those Latino students who will be transferring from a community college to a four-year college or university. Many Latino parents may feel more at ease in supporting their children's advancement into higher education if they know that there is a Latina president at their institution who is looking out for the best interest of their children.

Are there different barriers facing Latina women versus majority women leaders? Are these barriers affecting their recruitment and retention in their presidential positions? In this study, one notion I will explore comes from the Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), which acknowledges issues such as language, immigration,

ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Within these theories, the theme of intersectionality is developed where race, ethnicity, gender, socio-cultural issues and other forms of oppression discussed may uncover why some of these Latina four-year college and university presidents were successful in their positions and why some were not

According to Knudsen (2007), the term “intersectionality” refers to “the classical models of oppression within society, such as those based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, class, species or disability do not act independently of one another; instead, these interrelate creating a system of oppression that reflects the ‘intersection’ of multiple forms of discrimination” (p. 61-76). Additionally, according to Delgado Bernal (2002), the idea of intersectionality has been brought forth by Critical Race theorists and LatCrit theorists in a way that “one’s identity is not based on the social construction of race but rather is multidimensional and intersects with various experiences” (p. 118).

Similarly, the term “socio-cultural” relates to how humans interact with their social worlds through their familial rules, practices, values, beliefs, and assumptions. It also refers to “the attitudes and dispositions that influence a person’s thinking, comprehension and perceptions that are learned from the social and cultural groups to which the person belongs”(State of Victoria, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007). Additionally, socio-cultural theory was created from the work of psychologist Lev Vygotsky who believed that “parents, caregivers, peers and the culture at large were responsible for the development of higher order functions” of a person, where the higher functions appear as actual relationships between individuals. Vygotsky argued that a person’s cultural development appears twice within their lifetime. The first is on the social level between people, which is considered interpsychological. Then the second is on the individual level, which is considered

intrapsychological. Both processes “apply equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory and to the formation of concepts” (Wertsch, J., del Rio, P. & Alvarez, A., 1995).

In relation to Latina leadership and how one can distinguish it from mainstream leadership traits and values, Ramirez (2006) describes a study conducted by the National Community for Latino Leadership, Inc. (NCLL), where more than 3,000 Latinos of all backgrounds were asked to identify their visions, values, and expectations of Latino leaders and leadership. Through their responses, NCLL organized four clusters of traits Latinos expect their leaders to possess. These are identified as the Four C’s of Latino leadership. They include character, competence, compassion, and community servanthood (p. 86). Additionally, NCLL relates Latino leadership traits to those that are typically displayed by women and African-Americans. Latino leaders are often known to be more “communal, collectivist, and people-centered” (p. 86) while also demonstrating leadership traits that are “interpersonal, participatory and collaborative” (p. 87).

Latina leaders also encompass the notion of “exercising one’s power, knowledge, and access to change those aspects of society that are inequitable” (Bordas, 2007, p. 98). Also, Latina leaders are advocates for social justice and equal opportunity, and are also consensus builders and community organizers where they are often noted as “weaving social and political unity from diverse Latino subgroups” which motivate people to address the many critical issues that affect the lives of the overall Latino community for future generations (Bordas, p. 103, 105, and 129).

Mendez-Morse (2000) notes how Latina leaders tend to place emphasis on improving their communities through their leadership practices (p.590) while also noting that their leadership would not be possible without the strong role modeling they received from other

Latinas in their lives, who are usually mothers or aunts (p.591). On the notion of role models, (Practical Wisdom: Where Leadership Is Really Learned, 2005) the author (unknown) notes that it is often the Latina immigrant mothers who are the most influential in developing leadership skills in their daughters. They are the first to introduce the concepts of stewardship, community engagement, and interdependence that are carried throughout their daughters' adulthood leadership positions (p. 56). Additionally, Latina mothers also teach their daughters that power and resilience come from within and leadership or followership "requires vision, courage and wisdom to know which one is needed and when" (p. 57). Finally, the author describes this type of leadership development as a "delicate dance," which requires "an agile, giving spirit, unity, trust and cooperation that seeks the overall good" (p. 57). Based on the research presented in this dissertation, many Latina leaders gain strength from leaders who have come before them, who also happen to be role models who are within their family structure.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand the socio-cultural and leadership experiences of selected Latina presidents of four-year colleges or universities. By telling the experiences of these women, it is my hope that the academy can learn more from this marginalized population. Also, I believe their stories will provide hope and inspiration to other Latinas who are coming through the educational pipeline. Finally, this research will add important and credible narratives about the experiences of Latina presidents in academia, which is not often told in academic research.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

- Have the participants' educational, socio-cultural, and leadership experiences influenced their presidency at their college or university? If so, how?
- Have intersectional (race, gender, and social class) issues influenced how they lead their college or university? If so, how?
- Regarding the participants' philosophy of leadership, what would be their views on the future of Latina presidents in four-year colleges or universities?

Researcher's Perspective of Study

As a student in the Community College Leadership Program at Colorado State University, one program goal is to learn how higher education leaders lead, what makes them thrive, and how to emulate them when we become leaders in academia. During my doctoral program, we visited college presidents at their respective institutions and also learned about other college presidents in our class literature. During this process I met only one Latina president; the literature we discussed in class only spoke of presidents who were from non-diverse populations. This led me to question why this was and why there were so few Latina presidents in four-year colleges and universities. I also questioned what was being done to recruit and retain other Latinas who would someday become university presidents? Finally, what are the barriers Latinas face while in these positions of leadership? These are some of the questions that have sparked my interest in this particular topic. It is my hope that through narrative inquiry, my participant's stories will help the higher education community better understand the socio-cultural and leadership experiences of this select group. It is also my hope the stories of these leaders have the potential to make a lasting impression on future Latino leaders and other leaders in academia.

Summary

The Latina population in the United States, one of the largest of all racial and ethnic groups, is expected to grow exponentially within the next 40 years. Despite these large numbers of Latinas in the U.S., there is a disparity amongst this population and those who are leading our nation's four-year colleges and universities. A reason for this may be what some education researchers call a "broken pipeline," where many Latinas reside in poorly-funded k-12 schools and are inappropriately tracked out of college preparatory classes and programs. Many Latinas are also tracked into trade or two-year community colleges where their opportunities for advanced degrees are delayed if not limited. However, those Latinas who successfully transfer from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities, as well as those who begin their baccalaureate programs in a four-year institution, are sometimes met with cultural, racial, and gender bias which can discourage their future professional leadership aspirations.

This study will consider the framework of intersectionality, where race, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic issues may contribute to the overall recruitment and retention of Latinas into presidential positions of four-year colleges and universities. Additionally, this study will explore the notion of leadership from a Latina perspective, which often emphasizes themes such as character, competence, compassion, community servanthood, and role modeling received by elder Latinas.

It is my hope that this study will highlight the stories from this marginalized population and also provide much-needed credible narratives to academic research.

II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Even though the numbers of Latina leaders in all professional sectors are slowly increasing, there continues to be few Latina leaders who are leading our nation's four-year colleges and universities (Catalyst, 2010; de los Santos & Vega, 2008). This is crucial given the Latino population is on the increase and the likelihood that more individuals from this population will be entering our nation's higher education institutions in the near future is very high. It is important for Latino students to have role models and mentors available at their respective institutions. Additionally, these Latina leaders can also provide great influence and advocacy to their faculty and staff as well.

There are three primary themes that will be studied in this research study. The first question asks if the participant's educational, socio-cultural, and leadership experiences influenced their presidency at their college or university and if so, how? The second asks if intersectional (race, gender, and social class) issues influenced how they lead their college or university, and if so, how? Finally, regarding the participants' philosophy of leadership, what would be their views on the future of Latina presidents in four-year colleges or universities?

Historical Background and Statistical Information on Latinas

The percentage of Latinas who occupy leadership positions in Fortune 500 companies in 2009 was 3.1%, where Latinas held 25.9% of all women of color board directorships (Catalyst, 2010). Latinas continue to be the fastest growing group in the United States workforce, with 56.5% of Latinas participating in the workforce in 2009 (Catalyst, 2010). Despite their significant presence in the workforce, in 2008, Latinas' median weekly earnings were the lowest

of all race, ethnic, and gender groups (Catalyst, 2010, p. 1), where “Latinas who work full time earn 89% of what men earn each week, compared to 81% for women overall” (Reveron, 2007, p. 1).

Latinas’ educational attainment in the United States lags behind that of White women. In 2006-2007, 8% of Latinas received a bachelor’s degree compared to 70.8% White women; 6.1% received master’s degrees compared to 67.7% White women; and 3.8% received doctorate degrees compared to 61.9% White women (NCES, 2008). This lag in educational attainment is clearly an indicator of Latina’s broken educational pipeline.

Distinct Characteristics of Latinas

Socio-Economic, Educational, and Cultural Challenges

Latinas can often be termed as possessing a triple minority status: they are women; they are members of a racial and ethnic minority group; and the majority of the time, they are in a low socio-economic status group (McGlynn, 1998, p. 12). There are many socio-economic and cultural factors for Latinas that are not necessarily present in the lives of women in the majority in society. For example, in a socio-economical context, as indicated by Segura (2003) and Gonzalez (1996), Latinas traditionally are positioned in a working class, blue collar environment where many tend to live in poor, racially-segregated neighborhoods where the school systems do not necessarily prepare them for higher education. Such environments can result in a broken educational pipeline (Segura, p. 30).

In a cultural context, as noted in Gonzales-Figueroa and Young (2005), the theories associated with assimilation, acculturation, and ethnic identity seem to correlate when analyzing the experiences of Latinas, particularly within educational and professional settings. For example, assimilation occurs when one experiences a loss of ethnic identity, undergoing changes

or transformations until she is accepted into the majority culture as “blending in” (p. 215). Acculturation occurs when individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds spend an extended amount of time with one another and cultural patterns are altered. Whereas acculturation can weaken one’s ethnic identity, assimilation often results in the loss of one’s ethnic identity (p. 3). One example that highlights the difference between assimilation and acculturation for Latinos is that even though Latinos and Latinas tend to experience assimilation and acculturation in various phases and stages in their lives, those who are bilingual (Spanish/English) tend to retain and utilize their Spanish language skills as a means of demonstrating their solid ethnic identity (Gonzalez-Figueroa & Young, 2005, p. 3).

As Gil and Vazquez (1996) note, those Latinas who break their stereotypical mold do so while compromising familial, cultural, and traditional beliefs that are passed along from generations past (p.7). This “going against the grain” process can be very painful given that the women may have to acculturate or assimilate into the mainstream White American culture, which may entail sacrificing many cultural and familial beliefs and practices (Gonzales-Figueroa & Young, 2005, p. 215). One must question if the acculturation or assimilation process, which can involve giving up one’s native language and constantly monitoring one’s communication methods or ways of dress, are indeed worth the personal and emotional sacrifices these women make. Or if there is a way to remain connected to cultural beliefs, traditions, and values while merging her thoughts, attitudes and actions into the mainstream, White American culture.

In continuing with the cultural aspects of Latinas, the notion of “marianismo” can exist for many of them. This theory holds that in the Latino culture, women must “live in the shadows, literally and figuratively, of the Latino men, the (Latino) children, and the (Latino) family” (Gil & Vazquez, 1996, p. 7). Gil and Vazquez term “marianismo” as a “no-win” situation because

Latinas are often subjected to a life where submission is prominent, and, at times, is expected by the family (p. 7). Ironically, the authors note that marianismo, which they also term as “the noble sacrifice of self,” is often validated and practiced by the elder women in the Latino culture (p. 8). Some of the more insidious “Ten Commandments of Marianismo” dictate that a traditional Latina’s self-esteem include: not being single, self-supporting, or independent-minded; not wishing for more in life than being a housewife; not forgetting that sex is for making babies—not for pleasure; and not putting your own needs first (Gil & Vazquez, 1996, p. 8). However, the concept of marianismo does not fare well with many acculturated Latinas in the United States given that it is an “invisible yoke” that binds “capable, intelligent, ambitious Latinas to a no-win lifestyle,” given that marianismo “insists that Latinas live in a world which no longer exists and which perpetuates a value system equating perfection with submission” (Gil & Vazquez, 1996, p. 7).

Family Connections

The structure of the Latino family plays a significant role in the progression or regression of many Latina females. Often times, Latinas can struggle with maintaining their family obligations, duties, and gender role expectations while they aspire to compete and ultimately advance in the United States educational system (Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000, p. 517). Many of their parents question their choice of higher education while noting that only “rich kids” attend college or that they should place more emphasis on getting married and having children (p. 517). These dilemmas add additional stress to those Latinas who are already venturing outside of their comfort zone to either acculturate or assimilate into their educational system.

However, Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, and Talbot (2000) note that family expectations are vastly different for Latinas who consider themselves to be “high achieving.” Within these households, the stereotypical patriarchal, authoritarian Latino family is non-existent, but rather the parents are non-authoritarian. They also place great emphasis on their children being self-reliant and highly educated (p. 520). Additionally, high-achieving Latinas who attend middle-class schools are academically competitive with their classmates and their teachers tend to place higher expectations on them, which ultimately raise Latina’s overall confidence in academics (p. 520). Often times, these high-achieving, academically-challenged Latinas steer away from traditional gender-role expectations and behaviors and find that being single and without children is not only acceptable but is positively associated with achieving in higher education (p. 520).

Although Latinas often live in patriarchal families, some family members champion their efforts to achieve socio-economic and educational advancement despite cultural expectations. Mendez-Morse (2004) states that many Latina leaders indicate their parents are their strong advocates who stress “a strong work ethic, the importance of education, and concrete support of academic efforts” (p. 581). Latina parents often emphasize to their daughters that education is key to not work as farm laborers, and work “out in the sun,” as they, themselves, had to do (Mendez-Morse, p. 577).

According to Avery (1982), some Latina leaders report that it was their parents who provided the most encouragement, even when they, themselves, had minimal education levels (p. 590). These unskilled laborers or service workers often stressed to their Latina daughters to achieve what they were unable to given their limited educational and professional opportunities (Avery, p. 590).

Mendez-Morse (2004) state that many Latina leaders still consider their mothers to be their first mentors and advocates. These mothers would often take an active role in the educational successes of their daughters, despite that they, themselves, lacked educational credentials (p. 578). Many Latina mothers are the first to stress to their daughters the importance of completing homework prior to engaging in extra-curricular activities. Mothers also model female competence and often stress to their daughters that “women can do anything” and “never use being a woman as an excuse for doing certain things” (p. 578), which is clearly an opposing view of marianismo. These data about marianismo clearly state that Latina leaders are ignoring some of the cultural belief systems that have been placed upon them and are moving forward with a more progressive thought pattern that encompasses a strong sense of modern-day feminism.

The Latina leaders in Mendez-Morse’s (2004) study note they had distant female relatives, often a cousin or an aunt, who inspired them to seek a post-secondary education. These individuals were often enrolled in or had completed a degree, and in turn, provided information on admission, financial aid, and other support services to these emerging Latina leaders. These relatives often validated that acquiring a college degree was indeed possible despite sometimes conflicting expectations given by other members of their families (p. 579). This process can be considered providing another generation with cultural capital of sorts.

Despite the continuing presence of marianismo in many Latino environments, Mendez-Morse (2000) notes some Latinas often credit their husbands as sources of encouragement. Many of their husbands provide them with flexibility so they can concentrate on furthering their educational and professional endeavors. They often give their Latina wives moral support when their leadership development becomes burdensome and helped with housework, shopping, and

childcare, to facilitate their wives' personal and professional development (p. 586). Once again, data shows that many Latino families are shifting away from the theme of marianismo and are moving more toward a progressive way of thinking and supporting Latina leaders in their families.

Connection to Spirituality

The firm connection to religious and spiritual practices remains constant with many Latina leaders. When considering the notion of spirituality, Latina leaders tend to be different from other women leaders (Rodriguez, 1999). Traditionally, many Latinas are reared in the Roman Catholic religion, where many of its practices tend to be the foundation on which the Latino family operates. Because Latinas are raised in this patriarchal church environment, as adults Latinas often retrieve and integrate their traditional Catholic beliefs with their newly-founded spirituality by “reclaiming the Spanish language, strengthening and reinterpreting key religious symbols such as Our Lady of Guadalupe, providing and introducing ancient rituals, and transferring communal/inclusive ritual practices into their organizational leadership” (Rodriguez, 1999, p. 5).

Many Latinas must work outside of the home in order to financially support their immediate and extended families, which often creates a shift, or sense of imbalance in the rest of their lives. This “shift” of responsibilities is at times frowned upon in the Catholic religion given that women are traditionally expected to remain in the home, tend to their children, and to exercise their domestic duties first and foremost (Rubio & Lugo-Lugo, 2005). This shift often forces modern-day Latinas to either choose their church life or nothing at all, which can be a very troubling decision for them, and can often result in their disconnection from Catholicism entirely (p. 105).

If a Latina chooses to leave an organized religion, such as Catholicism, she may experience personal conflict and struggle. Her religion may have been a strong source of connection between her and the Latino family (Rubio & Lugo-Lugo, 2005, p. 105). When Latinos venture from Catholicism, for example, they move away from a “cultural identifier,” which assumes that they are not only fulfilling their societal role as good Catholics but are disrespecting their parents in the process as well (p. 111).

According to Guzman (2003), Latinas are shaped by many identities such as being a feminist, mother, vegan, or activist. These identities can also influence their shift away from organized religion (p. 131). Many Latinas note that the teachings of the church “feel oppressive” as they grow older and become more integrated into the White culture, they choose to view organized religion, and in particular, Catholicism, more critically (Guzman, p. 132). Yet the rituals of Catholicism, such as the sacraments, holidays, and certain prayers remain a rich part of their history given that they are closely associated as a Latino cultural identifier (Rubio & Lugo-Lugo, p. 109).

Regardless of whether Latinas choose an organized religion or gravitate toward another source for personal strength and growth, being spiritual remains paramount in their lives. Rodriguez (1999) states, “Latinas bridge leadership with inner spirituality while recognizing the importance of human dignity, shared solidarity, respect, inclusion, and interrelated values learned in their formatted leadership style” (p. 4). Also, Latina leadership and spirituality is one of inclusiveness, of enabling others, of being “a part of” instead of separate. This process is accomplished with “the body, the heart, the hands, and the head” (p. 3). Additionally, Latinas are often grounded in formal knowledge (which requires one to extract information from historical text books and other typical sources) and informal knowledge (which comes from myths,

proverbs, songs, and spoken narrative experiences); informal knowledge is spiritually a part out of the rich Latina culture (Rodriguez, 1999, p. 1).

Latinas as Professionals

For the purpose of this study, the term “professionals” refers to someone who is employed outside of the home in various industries. For the purpose of this study, the term “professionals” refers to someone who is employed outside of the home in various industries. Latina professionals face many barriers that are unlike those faced by other women in our society. Many often face obstacles with regard to wages, fitting in to their work environments, and language, to name a few.

As stated in Gonzales-Figueroa and Young (2005), when Latinas enter the workforce, “they earn less than their male counterparts and female counterparts of other ethnic groups” (p. 1). Gilroy (2007) indicates women of color continue to have a significant wage disparity. For example, African American women earn 32% less than their male counterparts and Latinas earn 43% less than their male counterparts (p. 14). Latinas are over-represented in the service industry, where they hold 30% of service positions, compared to African American women who are at 27%, and White women at 18% (Hite, 2007, p. 21). However, according to Gilroy (2006), Native born, educated Latinas achieve professional and managerial positions (21%) more often than Latino men (14%, p. 37).

Latina leaders often spend additional time “fitting in” their work environments, which can “impede their professional success” or prevent them from advancing in their respective career (Catalyst, 2003, p. 23). The notion of standing out or blending in is often emphasized for Latina leaders in the workforce. In particular, bilingual Latinas are less likely to report differences in behavioral styles and their cultural differences are less accepted (p. 22). Many

Latina leaders in professional settings report that maintaining a conservative style of hair and make-up and conforming to the corporate norms in dress are often encouraged more with them than with their White counterparts (Catalyst, p. 24).

Additionally, Catalyst (2003) suggests that Latina professional leaders are often forced to modify their behavior. Modifications may include toning down their direct communication style, appearing to be less feminine for the fear of being perceived flirtatious (p. 16), or altering their Spanish accent to succeed in corporate environments (p. 24). Many Latina leaders often negotiate their ethnic identity within the workplace, which leads to stress for them. For example, many Latina leaders struggle when deciding if they should reveal their ethnicity to their colleagues for fear that negative stereotypes of a specific ethnic group will be projected upon them (p. 25). The above-mentioned stressors are just some of the issues reported in research that examines how women leaders, preferably Latina leaders, fall victim to gender-specific, stress-related diseases such as the Watkin-Lanoil syndrome, ulcers, and cardiac disease (Scott & Spooner, 1999).

According to Gilroy (2006), many Latina leaders are choosing to be self-employed rather than to face barriers in professional leadership positions. By choosing this route, it allows these women more flexibility with their family obligations while giving them more room to avoid interpersonal, cultural, and socio-economic differences they may face while working side by side with members of the dominant culture (p. 37).

Latinas in Academia

While on their leadership journey through academia, Latinas have extraordinary challenges to overcome. For example, the American Association of Community Colleges (2010) reports that Latinas and Latinos make up only 6% of all executive/administrative and managerial

positions in higher education. Additionally, in 2003, there were more Latina full-time administrators than Latino administrators in higher education institutions, yet there were more Latino males as presidents or chancellors (de los Santos & Vega, p. 157). In that same year, there were 42 Latino presidents or chancellors of four-year colleges and universities and only 9 were female (de los Santos & Vega, p. 158).

For those few Latinas who are in academia, either as administrators or as professors, they have similar “standing out or blending in” experiences as Latinas in other professions. Most Latinas in higher education leadership positions are concentrated in student services, such as counseling, student life, and academic support programs (Deitz, 1992). The unfortunate aspect of this is that Latinas often remain in these positions throughout their career higher education, which is often called a “Hispanic box” (Martinez, 1999). Student service positions may not provide room for advancement or lucrative financial compensation given that there are not many opportunities for research, publishing, or professional exposure, which can also result in the lack of support by their higher education supervisor. Spending time in these student support areas, Deitz states, is typical for Latinas because they often place themselves in mentoring positions where they feel obligated to work with and build the skills of Latino students (p. 12).

The lack of Latina/Latino professionals in higher education institutions, which includes community colleges and universities, was described in a 1999 U.S. Department of Education Report (Segura, 2003). The report found that less than 1% of full-time faculty members were Latina with only 0.4% full professors, 0.7% associate professors, and 1.3% assistant professors. Race, class, and gender also play a significant role in the stages of advancement for Latinas in academia, or lack thereof. As Segura (2003) notes, from 1981 to 1991 the affirmative action

practices of higher education were successful in recruiting and hiring women for full-time faculty positions, yet nearly 88% of the women hired were White.

There are other notable issues that face Latinas in academia, according to Segura (2003). First, many are associated with developing interdisciplinary studies such as Chicana/o studies, ethnic studies, or women's studies that may not be seen as credible disciplines in mainstream academia; these programs are also in jeopardy of being eliminated (p. 34). Latinas in these areas often find themselves repeatedly validating the importance of these disciplines with senior faculty who are unfamiliar with their research interests, methodologies, and non-traditional approaches (p. 38). Second, those Latina academicians who have become affiliated with a traditional academic department often find themselves quite isolated in these traditional White male settings (p. 37). More so than White academics, Latinas must negotiate the "publish or perish" mentality of academia while trying to stay true to their traditional expectations of Latina motherhood, which often dictates having children should not only happen early in life but should also be a priority (p. 33, 43).

Finally, Latina academicians, because they are so few in number, are often called upon to be involved in various campus-affiliated projects that support students of color. Or they are called on to participate in community service projects that are focused toward the betterment of the Latino community in general. While engaging in these activities, the Latina academician receives inadequate recognition from her departmental chairs and deans, and also tends to be penalized by her supervisors for her involvement (p. 40).

Latina college and university presidents often function in two socio-cultural environments, which include dualism or negotiation (Hansen, 1997). In dualism, the Latina

president must draw on her identity while upholding the institutional values of her university. In negotiation, she must draw on her identity while also socially transforming her university (p. 5).

Viernes Turner (2007) notes that Latina college and university presidents attribute their success and survival in their respective positions to the following experiences: (a) the importance of early educational and career success, (b) the importance of interpersonal connections, (c) their nontraditional leadership style focused on community-building, (d) their immediate responses to their challenges in their role as president, (e) their courage to accomplish way beyond what was expected of them, (f) acknowledging that they are indeed trailblazers in their respective areas, and (g) acknowledging that their individual selves clearly matched their institutional setting (p. 15).

Martinez Ramos (2008) talks of top-ranking Latina university officials, with an emphasis on presidents, and notes the structures, institutionalized filters, and other social selection factors that affect their trajectory toward their presidential positions. Martinez Ramos (2008) also notes mechanisms that can be put into place to increase the number of Latinas in presidential positions such as recognizing bias in higher education, and noting the importance of providing mentors, champions, and strategic measures to assist in the promotion and retention of this subpopulation in higher education (p. 12).

Most research regarding the experiences of Latinas in presidential positions has been about those in community colleges. Knowlton (1993) studied one Latina chief executive officer of a California community college and compared her socio-cultural experiences to eight other Latina community college presidents. Knowlton noted how their family ties, cultural identities, family's educational expectations, and gender-related experiences affected all of their presidential experiences (p. 284). Knowlton (1993) also discussed the collaborative leadership

style possessed by the featured Latina chief executive officer and how that style was exhibited by the other Latina presidents who were interviewed.

In another study, Rodriguez (2006) examined four California community college chief executive officers' experiences from their working-class, immigrant families to their trajectory to their presidencies. The themes developed from this narrative inquiry included: (a) the powerful influence of family; (b) a sense of struggle, overcoming obstacles, and resilience; (c) positive connections to schools and learning; (d) benefits from quality mentoring experiences; (e) growth from participation in leadership programs; (f) an unusual commitment and dedication to public service; and (g) an impact of race, gender, and culture on their presidency (p. 163).

Finally, Munoz (2008) discusses the conditions and experiences of 13 Latina community college presidents. Particular issues featured in this research included: (a) specific influences of the Latina presidents that impacted their personal and career success, (b) strategies they have used to overcome barriers during their trajectory toward their presidency, and (c) the organizational climate and practices of their community colleges that either assisted or hindered their professional development (p. 100).

Summary

What is demonstrated in this literature review is that the Latina population in the United States is quickly growing yet they still lag behind in educational attainment and in positions of leadership and influence in the professional and academic sectors. Additionally, many Latinas in positions of leadership often experience distinct socio-economic, cultural, spiritual, and familial issues that can either impede or contribute to their leadership development.

Many Latinas have indicated that they have learned how to combat gender and ethnic bias in their professional settings via their development of mentorships with other strong Latinas

in their lives, who are usually relatives or work colleagues. Furthermore, despite the challenges that many Latina leaders face involving issues of cultural and personal identity while being “the only ones” in a position of influence either in their workplace setting or in academia, what remains clear is that resiliency and commitment are traits that they should possess in order to survive and ultimately succeed. Emerging Latina leaders can indeed benefit from the experiences and lessons learned by these women where their own contributions can reshape the fabric of leadership in our society.

III – STUDY DESIGN

Introduction

In this study, it was my goal to better understand the socio-cultural and leadership experiences of Latina four-year college and university presidents. It was my belief the best way to accomplish this was to use narrative inquiry as the research approach. By doing this, I believe the readers will see the depth and richness of the experiences of these women whose stories have rarely been told in academia. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of my qualitative research design. I also will describe the data collection processes, analysis processes, and trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

The stories and experiences of Latina four-year college and university presidents are limited in academic research. By excluding this information from academia, this subpopulation continues to be marginalized and overlooked by mainstream academia. The acknowledgement of their contributions is especially warranted given that they can be viewed as influential role models to the large numbers of Latino students who are projected to attend our nation's colleges and universities in the near future.

An interpretive narrative inquiry approach was effective in telling the stories and experiences of these Latina leaders. It brought forth the valuable experiences of these women, which positively adds to the research surrounding women in leadership in academia

In order to successfully obtain the depth and breadth of the socio-cultural and leadership experiences of the selected Latina four-year college and university presidents a constructivist approach was taken. According to Clandinin (2007), the constructivist approach allows for “less

separation between the researcher and the narrator, as the narratives are socially constructed from semi-structured interviews or conversational interactions, reflecting the theory that participants' intentions and interpretations are as important as the researchers' (p. 151).

In my opinion, using the constructivist approach was ideal for this study for many reasons. First, I viewed this process as a relationship-building venture where I built trust with my participants by engaging in informal introductory conversations with them. During this time, we shared life experiences with one another rather than engaging in structured, rigid interviews. I also used open-ended questions with my research participants, which allowed for more free-flowing, thought-provoking responses from them.

One may question why I observed the participant's setting and why I spoke to others regarding the participant's leadership style when this is a narrative inquiry. The constructivist approach called for me to observe the participants' environment, which in this case included presidential offices, campus buildings, and areas surrounding their universities. This approach also involved my interacting with those individuals who assist in the everyday activities of the participants. These interactions added more substance and depth to the participants' stories. According to Charmaz (2006) as cited in Creswell (2007), the constructivist approach allows the researcher to learn about the participant's experiences from "hidden networks, situations, and relationships" that are formed with the participants and others, as there is also valuable information drawn from "views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions and ideologies of individuals" during this process (p.65).

As noted in Clandinin (2007), I used a nondirective listening stance and conversational style to elicit the stories from my participants. I also relied on my ability to share commonalities

with my participants, given that I related to certain socio-cultural situations that arose from our conversations (p. 154).

Method

Narrative Inquiry

When deciding on the appropriate methodology to use for my study, it was apparent that I would use the qualitative paradigm given that it “is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). I also used an interpretive narrative inquiry approach because it was optimal for studying the oppression of others through the collection of their stories and experiences, which is what I intended to accomplish via my study (Creswell, 2009, p. 17).

Clandinin (2007) talks of the importance of using interpretive narrative inquiry when working with members of marginalized, underserved populations in a research setting. When implementing this approach, the researcher often “gives voice” to the participants, especially to those underserved populations whose stories are not often told accurately (p. 548.) The act of “giving voice” clearly reflects my goals of sharing the stories of the selected Latina four-year college and university presidents. It is evident that many of their stories have been overlooked in academic research, which I believe can only further silence this underserved population. Therefore, it was my goal through this research to bring the experiences of these Latina college and university leaders to the forefront of academic research.

As Clandinin (2007) notes, this process of “giving voice” to these underrepresented individuals was a collaborative effort among myself and the participants. Within this framework, the participants served more as the “authority” of the information where I “grounded the ethics

of the report” within the participants’ words, thoughts, and vision, and together, this product was a coproduction of sorts (p. 548).

Interpretive narrative inquiry is “the act of making sense out of a social interaction” (Glesne, 2006, p. 27). This theory, or “thick description” as reported by Geertz (1973), “goes beyond the mere or bare reporting of an act (thin description), but describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action” (Denzin, 1989, p. 39). This then translates to the act of showing one’s lived experiences instead of abstract generalizations (Glesne, p. 27).

Within this interpretive narrative inquiry I applied the technique of counter-storytelling as my analytical framework. As stated in Solorzano and Yosso (2002), counter-storytelling is “telling the stories of those people (on the margins of society) whose experiences are not often told” and “it is a tool for exposing, analyzing and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 32). Additionally, counter-storytelling serves four functions, according to Solorzano and Yosso (2002): (a) “they can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice, (b) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems, (c) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position, and (d) they can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone” (p. 36). In my view, this counter-storytelling technique was effective when working with the Latina college and university presidents because their experiences leading to their presidencies as well as those experienced during their presidencies

have been largely overlooked in academic research. The experiences of these women showed other aspiring Latina leaders, who at times are at the margins of society, that they, too, can succeed in a reputable profession such as a college or university president.

Participants

The sampling process I engaged in was what Creswell (2007) calls *purposeful sampling* (p. 125). Creswell (2007) notes this process “can purposefully inform the understanding of the research problem and the central phenomenon of the study” (p.125). I also used two different typologies in this process. The first was *criterion* sampling, which Creswell (2007) states works successfully because all individuals sampled tend to have had the same experiences or phenomenon (p. 128). The second was *convenience* sampling, which allowed me to have easy access to my participants saving time and effort (p. 127).

The three sitting Latina four-year college and university presidents I identified are in East coast, Southwest, and Midwest states of the United States. These women are from the following Latino subgroups: Puerto Rican and Chicana.

When researching for current and accurate numbers of Latina presidents in four-year colleges and universities, I referred to research by de los Santos and Vega (2008), which documented Hispanic presidents and chancellors of higher education institutions in the United States in 2001 and 2006. I also conducted my own internet search of states that typically have the highest Latino/Hispanic populations, which were the southwestern states, New York, and California. Then I searched the colleges and universities located in these states and noted if they were led by a Latina. If the name of the president was a Spanish surname, I conducted another internet search to verify if she indeed considered herself to be Latina/Hispanic. I did not want to assume all Latinas had Spanish surnames so I also cross-referenced my list with the list in de los

Santos and Vega (2008), which listed Latina four-year college and university presidents who did not have Spanish surnames. When I narrowed my list down to five potential participants, I conducted yet another extensive internet search on these women to see whether they still held or had left their positions at their respective colleges and universities. I did this by checking the home pages of their institutions. I also collected supporting information on these women via doctoral dissertations, and magazine, internet and newspaper articles, which noted their education, family experiences, and professional accomplishments. I did this to get a better sense of their histories prior to my interviews with them.

Data Collection

The data collection process was very deliberate and carefully coordinated by me and my selected participants. First, I contacted each participant by email, where I introduced myself and described my study. At that time, I invited each to participate in my project. Then I gave them a two-week to consider my request after which I followed up with a phone call and an email asking for their final decision.

When all participants had confirmed their involvement, I sent each a follow-up letter that described my plan for our interview. I also sent them a synopsis of the topic areas that would be covered during the interview. As noted in Glesne (2006), providing the participants with this information ahead of time allowed them to reflect on their lives in more depth than they may have in the past (p. 84). Also, I kept in mind that these interview questions were not a binding contract, but could be changed or altered at the time of the interview based on the flow and the mood of the conversation (p. 79).

I then made travel arrangements to visit two of the participants at their respective colleges or universities. The third participant was unable to meet with me due to scheduling conflicts so

we decided to meet via Skype. I began my interviews in October of 2010 and concluded in August of 2011. I spent a day and a half with President Maria and members of her faculty and staff on her respective campus in October of 2010. Then I spent two days with President Rosa and members of her faculty and staff on her campus in December of 2010. My time with President Rosa was unusual given that I was invited to stay at her home during my visit. Finally, with President Juana I had two 90-minute Skype conversations and two 60-minute phone conversations with members of her faculty and staff, all of which occurred in the spring and fall of 2011. All participants' responses were audio recorded with their permission.

I created an observational protocol to document my field notes and supplement my observation collection process (see Appendix A). In this protocol, I noted descriptive observations that included the participants' physical setting and a synopsis of my conversation with the participant. I also noted reflective observations, which included my personal thoughts about the process and any hunches I gained while interacting with the participant (p. 135). Finally, I included another section for demographic information about the time, place, and participant being interviewed (Creswell, 2009, p. 182). I also noted on my recorder particular details I observed and how I interpreted body language, tone, and emotion in the participants' speech while also noting if any follow-up should take place based on my observations and interpretations.

Following the in-person interviews with Presidents Maria and Rosa, I conducted a 90-minute phone interview to continue discussing our topics. During this time, as Glesne (2006) notes, I searched for "opinions, perceptions, and attitudes" toward specific topics from my participants (p. 80). These phone interviews also allowed me time to clarify any questions I had

during our in-person interview. Finally, in the time between interviews participants thought more about their answers during our in-person interviews and provided more elaboration.

There are a number of issues I noted when answering my research questions. As stated in Creswell (2009), I collected my data in a natural setting, which, in this case, was at my participants' four-year colleges or universities. This natural setting allowed me to talk directly to my participants and their constituents while noting their verbal and non-verbal communication styles (p. 175). Also, even though I used my interview questions as the instrument to guide my interviews, I did not rely solely on them to obtain my data. I used other sources such as personal observations, newspaper and magazine articles, internet sites, and curriculum vitae. Also, as stated in Creswell (2009), during this data collection process, it was important for me to learn the meaning of the questions posed to my participants (p. 175). That is where I not only served as an active listener but also a collaborator in the conversations with my participants. Finally, the overall intent of my interview questions was to extract responses and then tell a narrative story from the experiences of these Latina leaders.

Data Analysis Methods Used

In this interpretive narrative inquiry, the data analysis I used was inductive data analysis, which Creswell (2007) describes as a “bottom up” process rather than one that is derived from a theory or from experiences of the researcher (p. 38). This process can occur when the researcher and the participants work in conjunction and their interactions can construct themes or patterns from the stories presented (p.39).

I also used a critical events approach when analyzing my data (Webster & Mertova, 2007). This holistic approach allowed me to “make sense of the complex and human-centered information” presented to me by my participants (p. 77). Critical events also: (a) exist in a

particular context, such as formal organizational structures or communities of practice; (b) have an impact on the people involved; (c) have life-changing consequences; (d) are unplanned; (e) may reveal patterns of well-defined stages; (f) are only identified after the event; and (g) are intensely personal with strong emotional involvement (p. 83). What made these events critical, according to Webster and Mertova (2007), was that they not only challenged the participant's understanding or worldview, but they will likely inform their future behavior and understanding (p.74).

Furthermore, I analyzed the data by creating narrative sketches. There are two criteria in this process: (a) *broadening*—which occurred through generalization of the data, and (b) *burrowing*—which allowed for more focus on the qualities of the event while reflecting on the overall meaning of the event and noting the present and future considerations (p. 87). The use of burrowing was most effective with my study given that it called for me to focus more on human-centered issues as I collaborated and listened to my participant's stories.

Methods Used to Summarize Data Collected

In order to gain a true perspective of the narrative data I collected during this process, I engaged in an extensive document analysis before my interviews took place. During this process, I reviewed all supporting data I collected, which described each participant in detail, their educational backgrounds, family structures and influences, and other experiences they have had both prior to and during their presidencies. This information came from newspaper and magazine articles, internet sites, curriculum vitae, and other sources. Additionally, it was important for me to validate all data received for this study, which is why I used reflective listening techniques as well as member checking.

For the purpose of this study, all presidential, faculty and staff participants and their institutions were given pseudonyms in order to secure their anonymity.

Ensuring the Trustworthiness of the Study

When considering the trustworthy approaches I used for this study, I reflected on Glesne's (2006) approach on prepilot testing (p. 85). This process calls for using the expertise of collaborators who are outside of my research project who will review my research processes and questions for clarity and fit. These individuals also offer their perspectives on the people to be interviewed given that their own experiences may be similar.

During my doctoral program, I engaged in a prepilot project. During this project, I interviewed a person who closely resembled those individuals whom I will feature in my dissertation. This person is Latina and was once a community college president, but was asked to leave her position. I used this experience as preparation for what I should expect when I interview my selected Latina four-year college and university presidents for my study. During this project, I used the constructivist approach where I carefully observed her surroundings, watched her body language, and noted her emotions while discussing the many nontraditional experiences she had as an emerging Latina leader and then as a community college president. I also gained great advice and validation from her on the content of my research questions I will use for my Latina university president interviews. She also validated that my qualitative/interpretive narrative inquiry methodology would be the proper way to approach this particular population given that their stories have the ability to be extraordinary, especially in academia, and she also believed the proper way to convey them will be *atravéz de sus voces* (through their voices).

Finally, I reflected on research on trustworthiness as presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This process states that the researcher first must establish (a) *credibility* and confidence in the truth of the findings, (b) *transferability* in showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts, (c) *dependability* in showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated, and (d) *confirmability*, where the findings of the study are shaped by the respondents and are not researcher biased (p. 290).

IV—MARIA

62 years old, Puerto Rican

Author's comments—Maria was the first president to respond to my request for an interview. I received a response from her almost immediately after my email request was sent. She assigned a staff member to serve as a liaison to me who assisted in all of my travel arrangements to her university. As per her directives, Maria arranged that I stay, free of charge, at the university Presidential house, which was a spacious, two-story, Victorian home on the outskirts of her campus.

Her university is located in a unique community. In the 1950s, the city housed a thread company and it was the largest manufacturing plant in the area. In fact, the first job that Thomas Edison had after he invented electricity was to wire that plant. It was also during that time when the plant owners would travel to Puerto Rico and fly people back, promising them that they would have jobs for them within the city. There was also a prominent poultry processing plant in the city that employed a large number of Puerto Ricans. In the past 60 years, the town has continued to have a large Puerto Rican population. Approximately 45% of the people in this town are Latino, which is three times the state average.

When I arrived at her campus, her student staff member escorted me to a meeting that she was conducting with her IT staff. This was one of the numerous meetings she has on a regular basis with her departmental staff members. When I walked into the room, there she sat, at the head of a small conference table, the only person of color and one of two women. She immediately stopped her meeting and, much to my surprise, gave a rather extensive introduction of me,

complete with my university affiliation, my dissertation topic, and my purpose of visiting her campus. Then she stood, all five feet of her, and rather than extending her hand to greet me, opened her arms and welcomed me with a strong embrace, almost as if she and I were friends from long ago.

After shadowing her in a number of meetings throughout the day, she and I sat down in her presidential suite and engaged in a conversation about her personal life and her trajectory to the presidency.

The Early Years

I was the oldest in my family [of six children]. I had only brothers, so I was the only girl, which meant that I had to take care of them because my parents worked. And they have memories of me doing a lot for them. I learned how to cook at a very early age. I think I may have been eight when I started cooking, which today you would never allow an eight-year-old to cook. But it was because my mother had taught me because she would get home late and my father would get home late that I would have to cook. So by the time my mother got home most of the meal was done. I had a lot of responsibility early on. Because it was a traditional Hispanic culture they didn't have that expectation for the boys, only for me, which is interesting.

I think the family position does matter because what happened in my family was that because no one was able to speak English and I started to learn how to speak English, the family began to rely on me for translation, advocacy, and those things. As more people learned English in the family, I had less of a burden. But my position in the family, even without the English, was that I was the oldest, I had only brothers, so I was the only girl which meant that I had to take care of them because my parents worked.

Being the only girl in a traditional Puerto Rican family, Maria had culturally appropriate gender roles ascribed to her. Within her family structure, her parents refer to the historical, traditional patriarchal family roles that were referred to in the literature review. Because of this structure, she often believed that her parents treated her differently than the sons in her family.

My father has this expression which he says every once in a while which always makes me laugh but there's a lot that you can read into it. If somebody does you a favor, he would say, 'thank you, gracias, and may God reward you with a male child.' So that's very telling. He laughs and I use it, too.

But being a female in the Hispanic culture is very different than being a male. My father actually said that if my brothers touched a vacuum cleaner, they'd be gay. That's how they didn't really understand. I don't criticize them for it because they just really don't know. But they felt that those were feminine things—cleaning, cooking. It was very different.

But I think the expectations for me in terms of education were the same. But my father said that if you were a girl, you should be a teacher. So in his mind I would go to school and become a teacher because that was what he knew. But he would say to us the only way to get out of this hell hole was to get an education. But there were definitely differences in the way he worked with each of us.

Even though Maria's dad had prejudices regarding roles for the sexes, which, she said were painful to her as a young girl, she has now overcome the pain of these stereotypes that often filled her childhood home. As an adult, she now realizes that her father's comments were not meant to be hurtful toward his only daughter. In fact, he was proud of her accomplishments when she was a young girl and continues to be proud to this day. She said that her father is often found bragging about his daughter to folks who live in his small Puerto Rican community. Also, her

father often visits her university and gloats about his “daughter who is the President” to the campus community members.

Additionally, now as Maria is an adult, she realizes that beneath her father’s tough exterior lives a man with dignity and pride that is often recognized by many who have interacted with him. With great humility, Maria talked of a legendary story about her father where he repaid a long-standing debt to another man in Puerto Rico and how this repayment process was a priority to him throughout his life.

When I went back to Puerto Rico as an adult and I was walking around the plaza in the town, in San Sebastian, which people do, a man came up to us. He said, “I want to tell you something about your father.” I didn’t know what he was going to say. He said, ‘six people borrowed \$60 from me to go to the United States and the only one who ever paid me back was your father.’ And I said ‘I’m not surprised.’ And we laughed. And he would send \$5 every month until he paid the debt back.

America – The Land of Opportunity

Maria speaks of her father’s desire to live the American dream and the importance of his transition from a then depressed Puerto Rico to the United States, which carried many possibilities for him and his family.

So my father’s dream was to come to this country to find a better position for him to work. Puerto Rico was then depressed, I mean, it was moving from an agricultural economy to a manufacturing economy. He didn’t want to live with anybody, no relative, he sort of wanted to do it on his own and that’s why he came.

My parents went back after they retired in the U.S. at the age of 65 back to the town where we were born. That was their dream to go back there. They’re 85 today. So they’ve lived

20 years in retirement. They have a beautiful house with a built-in pool and my father's dream was to go back there to show people that he had made it. So he realized his dream.

When thinking about her own transition to the United States from Puerto Rico, it brought back some negative memories for her.

I was born in the western mountains of Puerto Rico. My father moved our family to Newark, New Jersey, when I was very young so that we could have a better life. He never let me forget that education was the ticket out of the housing projects.

My father came here first and then he sent for us. My memories of the transition from Puerto Rico to the U.S. are harsh. I remember living in very small quarters. This was in the apartment we were renting in Newark, New Jersey. I remember a lady with red hair because I had never seen red hair and I remember being very scared. She was the landlord. Isn't that funny what you remember? And I think my father explained to me that sometimes in this country, people have red hair. I had never seen anyone with her hair. I found her terrifying.

Educational Inequities at an Early Age

Then Maria was enrolled in the American school system, she recalls this experience as negative and unforgettable.

I remember sitting in a classroom in a corner with another boy and his name was Darryl, I'll always remember that. Now I realized that he must have been developmentally disabled or slow. In those days they would just put them in a corner. But he drew horses. He drew beautifully. And I sat next to him because I couldn't speak English. And they put us in corners—nobody taught me anything. I wasn't taught how to read, how to write. I just sat there. I couldn't draw for beans but Darryl could draw. So I would pretend that I was drawing something and I would be listening and the first word I learned in English was "jump rope" because the girls in

the playground, when I went outside, they were playing and when they saw me and they said 'do you want to play jump rope?' They said 'jump rope' and I learned the word 'jump rope.' I remember being very isolated, lonely, very ostracized and that went on for a long time before I felt like I was integrated into the community. It was all because I didn't speak English and they didn't know what to do with me.

Even though she spent many of her school days in a corner or isolated from her classmates, the inequitable education she received at school was positively compensated at her home. Her parents reinforced the value of education and often taught their children the fundamentals of reading in non-traditional formats.

I think my father did a good job ingraining the importance of education. Even though we didn't have books in the house, we just couldn't afford them, he had the newspaper every single day and so he would read the paper cover to cover. Sometimes, I would sit on his lap as a little girl, and he would read the paper with me. He would give us pieces of the paper to read. I remember there was that emphasis on reading the paper so that was something that I grew up with, that we read. I think that if he had money to buy books he would have purchased books. But at least I had the newspaper, which I think was a good thing. He valued education.

While we didn't spend much time detailing her elementary and secondary education, she asserted on several occasions that she succeeded in high school, which ultimately resulted in her getting numerous scholarships to attend college and earn a bachelor's degree. She and all but one of her brothers attained a higher education as first generation college students.

I was one of the fortunate people in my neighborhood to go to college, but I would not have made it without the support of a very special professor. Professor McGee was a WWII Veteran and a paraplegic, and he took me under his wing. During my first semester in college,

he would have me working on my writing in his office while he read or wrote. He would look up from his work and comment on my writing and encourage me, and he made me feel at ease in class. I graduated from college because of Dr. McGee. He saw my “Achievement Gap” and was determined to help me close it.

Advancing in Higher Education

Maria earned her bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate degrees from prestigious East Coast institutions. She then began her career in academia as a tenured faculty member in a public liberal arts college on the east coast where she taught English. From there, she advanced to positions such as Dean of the Faculty, Dean for Academic Affairs, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Provost, Vice Chancellor of a state system, and then to the position of President of a university.

In her opinion, it is common for a student affairs professional to follow her trajectory in becoming a president of a community college. Yet it is atypical for a student affairs professional to eventually become the president of a four-year institution. In reflecting on her own career, she talks of the importance of a president doing as she did—working her way up the academic ladder prior to becoming a president of a four-year institution.

I often tell people the best thing in the world is to go through the trajectory because to be a president and not have been a faculty member, to be a president and not have been a dean or a provost, you don’t understand what it takes to do those jobs so that when you’re managing from the top at the macro level and you’re demanding things of people, you actually know what the challenges are.

There are a lot of challenges being a faculty member; trying to get promoted and tenured, raise a family, teach four courses/semester—that was my load as a young faculty

member is the same as it is here—and I was tenured and promoted through the ranks. So when the faculty here complains, I generally agree with them because it was hard. And I remember my dining room covered with papers because I taught English and I remember the exasperation I felt because I had so many papers to correct, and committee work and all of the responsibilities as a faculty member . So that experience is invaluable when I speak to the faculty.

The same [workload issue] with being a dean. I remember being a dean without having the resources. I remember being a dean and having a supervisor that was very good. I remember being a dean and having a supervisor that was not very good. You really do have a sense of what it is to do those jobs so that way when you become president, you say, ‘uh huh, I’m going to ask the provost to do this but I know these are the things that the faculty will not cooperate,’ or ‘you know, she may have trouble with the legislature or the department of higher ed.’ So I will have a sense of the parameters of what I’m asking of her, and I think that’s really valuable.

I think that when you jump around a lot, and when young people sometimes become president and they skip [the other positions], I think you pay a price for that because you haven’t really had the on-the-ground experience.

Maria’s Journey to the Presidency

In addition to rising through the academic ranks, Maria discussed the importance of a university president being the right match for her institution, which in her mind, is necessary in order for her to be successful in her position.

I was much younger and I took a class that ACE gave me on institutional match, I practically laughed through the whole workshop. I said ‘that’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve heard—institutional match.’ I was young and inexperienced. And then I saw my husband become president of Central State and then I really understood the idea of match. He was the perfect

president for that moment in time, for that university and the board knew it. And he may have not been the best president for that place ten years before or ten years after, but for that moment in time, it was a great match.

When he was president, I decided that I wouldn't apply for a presidency because we have children, and now we have grandchildren, and I didn't want to have such a disruptive life with two presidencies that we would jeopardize our marriage or our relationship. So we decided that I would wait until he finished his presidency. He decided he would step down and go back to faculty and I would get a presidency. I'm eight years younger than he is. And so he had to go first because age does matter. So he was president over 12 years and when he got his institution into one of the top research universities, he decided that he needed to step down. [During those twelve years, Maria was working her way up the academic ladder as she served in numerous leadership positions in four-year institutions.]

So, having seen him having a successful presidency, I decided that I would be best at a state college, at a public institution. I decided that I would only apply to schools that would be a good match for me because I went to a public state college and I was a faculty member at a public state college and even though I was provost at a private institution, I was vice chancellor at the largest urban university in the nation. I still felt that's where I could best serve.

So I applied to two presidencies—at Western and this one. And interestingly enough, that search started ahead of this one and so I got an offer from them way before I got an offer from this one. And the reason that I didn't take that one was because we were negotiating salaries. They low-balled the salary and offered me less than what I was making as vice chancellor. And I said to them, 'you have got to be kidding me. I'm not going to take a presidency and make less

than what I'm making now.' In the meantime, the search that had started behind had started creeping up, the Southern search.

And so, my friend, who was the vice chancellor in our state at that time, had always said to me, and it stayed in the back of my mind that the best institution for you is Southern. And I used to say, 'why?' She would say because the community is Hispanic, which I didn't know at the time. She said, it's got a wonderful faculty. It's the state's only public liberal arts college. I was a faculty member at another public liberal arts college. So she thought it was a good match but I never listened to her because she was a friend. So as the search progressed more at Southern, I got more and more interested in it because I loved the chair of the search committee. I liked the students. I absolutely respected the faculty and I fell in love with the campus. And so just as I was negotiating the salary, they came back and she made me an offer, matching what I was making. And I said, let me think about it.

I had the privilege of getting to know Maria and to appreciate her sense of humor; a humor that some of her staff members call "wicked." This particular sense of humor was definitely displayed as she, in a very nontraditional manner, accepted her position at Southern.

And so it was the Friday before Mother's Day and I had take that day off to take a trip with my husband. So I was taking a shower and the phone rang, I quickly took a towel, and here I am, in the middle of my bedroom, totally naked, with my hair wet, and I picked up the phone and I hear a man's voice and it was the chairman of the board. He said, 'I'm here at a Board meeting and the board has just voted to appoint you the president of Southern.' Here I am, butt naked, with a towel! It wasn't my image of accepting an offer, and I said, 'oh my god,' and I could hear my voice vibrating because they're all listening. I couldn't say, 'let me get dressed.' I

said, 'I'm honored.' I said the right thing, I said, 'oh my god, what a thrill this will be to represent Southern.'

The concept of institutional match has proven to be effective for her. As the sixth president of her institution, she assumed this position in 2006 and continues to believe that her institution is the right place for her at this particular time in her life.

The story about match ended up being that I've never been happier than I am here. I work hard and I can't say there are not imperfect days but this was truly a good match. I talk to the faculty comfortably; I don't have to be somebody else. My scholarly record is very good; I've published a book. But I was never at a research university. So if I would be a president at a research university, I would be asking my faculty and staff to do things that I, myself, have never done. If I was at a community college, I couldn't lead it as well as I lead this institution because I've never had the teaching and administrative load that they have at community colleges. So I was a student at a state college. I did transform my life at a public institution so I feel that I can lead this institution because my values connect with theirs.

One notion that came to mind as Maria talked about her trajectory to her presidential position is that she has not ever asked of others what she has not asked for herself. It was evident that she values the concept of “walking the walk and talking the talk.”

Bill and Dave Reflect on President Maria

I found myself reflecting about Maria's ideas and beliefs and how it was a real advantage for her to work in the various positions with a state, four-year institution. I also understood her concept of institutional match and its importance to a leader like herself. Bill, a vice president, and Dave, a senior staff member walked into the room. With Maria's recommendation, I invited

them to participate in our conversation. I asked Bill and Dave what it was really like when Maria transitioned to the university. Bill's comments were as follows:

She's an interesting woman. We all wondered how was this going to happen. She is the first Latina president in New England. It was a smooth transition. People accepted her as a smart visionary, she's a great planner. She came in when our strategic plan hadn't been done, it was a new one, she had the planning skills, the vision, and she really set the tone.

She firmly believes that because she's walked in the shoes of the faculty, staff and students who attend her university, and because she knows what it means to be a part of a public institution, she feels very authentic in representing them as their president.

Maria felt comfortable to comment on her relationship with her university constituents, even when Bill and Dave were still in the room with us.

I don't have to think about what to say to the faculty, or what to say to the students in the sense of am I saying the right thing. I really almost feel like I should always tell them the truth on how I feel about it because that will connect on some levels. And if I tell them and if it's authentic, they will understand. So I really think this thing about institutional match is really important.

How Maria "Shows Up" as President

As president of an institution with nearly 6,000 undergraduate students and over 500 part-time and full-time faculty members, she prides herself in having open communication with all who walk the halls of her university. For example, during the fall semesters, she meets with each of her administrative teams. Then during the spring semesters, she meets with each of her academic departments in small group settings.

People appreciate being talked to and that it's in a small group. And also they appreciate that I make the effort to meet with them. When I need something, or when it is contentious, they

already have a relationship with me. It's not a relationship with Joe their supervisor; it isn't the same. It's not like I'm going there to ask for something. I'm going there to hear them so that when I do need something, I explain my case and they give me the benefit of the doubt. That's really important.

So people rely on me to give them information. They want to know what I think. Do I think there is a stable time in the next year? Is it going to be unstable? Do I have any certainty about the budget? If so, what is it? So people are looking for me for answers but they also know that I may not have the answers but I have a sense of what may happen. So that analytical work of 'if this happens then we'll do this' or 'if that happens we'll do this' that's what they want to hear. They want to know that I'm thinking ahead and that I'm providing leadership for them. Not that I don't know what I'm going to do, I haven't thought about it. Even certain times, to talk about the 'what if's' is really constructive with them because at the end of the day they know that I will make the best decision that I can for the institution. But they want to know that I'm thinking about.

Bill chimed in as he discussed Maria's collaborative leadership style and how she has an interesting way of bringing all of the voices of her staff into the mix when making tough decisions for her university. In his view, Maria has a candid authenticity where she often relies on her staff to give her the correct information on situations that face their institution. He also stated that she uses this candid authenticity in order to have a stronger buy-in and collaboration with her staff.

She's a very collaborative person and a collaborative leader. We have vice president meetings on Tuesdays and she really, really emphasized on bringing people in. She is the one who will think of somebody to bring into the mix. For example, once she thought of asking the town manager's thoughts on a situation. She really believes it's better to get everyone's beliefs on the table before you enter into some decision, before you go down a path. That really came to light with the budget. As you know, we're in a budget

challenged environment and when this started to come to a reality that we were going to have struggles, she put together a budget advisory committee and it was representative of faculty, students, and staff at the university. Everything is shared; nothing is kept hidden regarding our budget.

According to Bill and Dave, Maria starts each collaborative process by placing the issue at hand on the table where all of the information on the issue is shared, nothing is ever hidden. They view this process as one of candid authenticity.

There is another strand of communication Marie values that encompasses her ability to relate to her faculty, staff, and students on a personal level, in what others see as a “familial” way of interaction. Dave commented that something as simple as calling the president by her first name is a reflection of how she interacts with her staff.

She wants you to call her by her first name. Her first day here, we took her to lunch. She said, “Folks, I have to ask you something. This is going to be easier if I do this right now.” We said, “Here we go.” She said, “I really want you to call me Maria. I don’t want you calling me President. I don’t want you calling me doctor. I’m going to call you by your first names, I want you to call me Maria.” It was funny because I had no problem with that but one person still can’t do it and he calls her doctor or president and it makes her crazy.

Bill commented on the president running her institution like a family business. In his view, this style has not only positively affected morale of the faculty and staff but it has also gained national recognition as an institution that values shared governance.

One thing that I love about Southern is that we have a very family-oriented style in terms of how we treat each other. I’ve worked in other schools and businesses and I’ve never worked in an environment where people cultivate the culture so rigorously, protecting each other, taking care of each other in a lot of ways. And when Maria started that was already there and I’m guessing it’s been there for a number of years but she embraced [this concept] and extended it. It is one thing to say that everyone takes care of each other, but she has made it a part of our governance plans. This is the second year in a row that we’ve won an award from the Chronicle of Higher Education. Only 97 of 5,800 schools got this award and we were in the top ten in the area of shared governance. So that’s her mantra.

Viewing Her Faculty and Staff as “Family”

Maria expanded on her familial style of leadership. Her personal connections with her faculty and staff have made her quite approachable and accessible, especially when difficult situations arise with them.

When I walk into the room or someone walks into this room, I always know something about them—whether they have a partner or they have adopted children, or they have grandchildren, or their husband has cancer or their daughter is having issues, I’ll start there and say, ‘so how’s your husband doing?’ or ‘how are the grandkids?’ I always start there. So I would say that I try to connect with people on a personal level and then we do business.

Today I had a call from a professor who another person wrote a very critical thing about him, very disparaging. He needed to talk to me on the phone. I’ve been busy all day but coming home from the restaurant just now, I said to my assistant to please get him on the phone right then because I know how important this is. He wouldn’t email me if he really felt this was important. And if I don’t talk to him today then the whole weekend would go by so I made sure that we talked.

So connecting with people I find is important. He will remember that I returned his call on the day that he called and that I didn’t keep him waiting. So I think it really is important in my style to connect with people on a personal level, to try to understand where they’re coming from in terms of whatever issues they are dealing with. And sometimes, people are very private; they only tell me certain things. That’s fine, too. I don’t probe.

In reflecting on this particular experience of hers, it is evident that she took time for this faculty member while she knows him well enough to realize that he wouldn’t contact her unless something was urgent. Therefore, Maria tended to his situation in a timely manner rather than

allowing him to wait until the weekend was over to speak to him. This particular event again exemplifies her authentic and accessible leadership style.

In relation to her staff, Maria recognizes that they have outside-of-the-job obligations that can interfere with their duties at the university. She respects these obligations, but, in her mind, family must always come first, for her and for everyone who works with her.

They [her staff] know that my priority is my family and they respect that. When they have things to do with their families, I respect that. When someone tells me 'my son's getting married' and they can't do a Thursday night thing because the wedding is the whole weekend thing, I say, 'fine.' Someone says I have to leave early because my son has a game. I say 'fine' It can't be every single time but I'm very open. They don't lie to me. They don't make up a story. They tell me the truth. I think that's really important that family comes first.

Bill agreed with the president's comments relating to the importance of family.

She knows a lot about many of our families. My daughter is a student and she is a theater major. I remember when Maria and I were driving to do a National Public Radio bit and all Maria wanted to talk about was my daughter's performance. She wanted me to know that she knew who my daughter was.

Dave chimed in as he noted that the president mentioned Bill's daughter's achievements to him.

She told me about your daughter! She's like that. She couldn't wait to tell me. She knows my daughter is a director of a J. Crew Store. My daughter and her daughter are almost the same age and we talk about which of them will become engaged first. She's like that. There isn't this wall of 'oh, she's the president and you can't go there.' It's not that way at all with her.

Yet the president is firm and fair with her staff when needed. Bill and Dave reported that when they make an error in judgment, they expect a reprimand from her. Dave said that her stature is so small but she has no problem reprimanding them while looking up at them with a

pointed finger. He also said that she never holds grudges, and usually, the next day, she will hug the once-wronged staff member and “move on.”

I get mad. I tell them, ‘what the hell is going on here?’ But I never make them feel bad. The next day I can have coffee with them and we can have a good evaluation. But they have to know when something goes wrong because otherwise it’s my presidency that suffers, and they are responsive, they’re always responsive.

I don’t want them to feel that doing something wrong they can’t tell me. It’s not the end of the world because I do things wrong. I just have to say that if it’s wrong then fix it and if happens again, let me know. Most people are reasonable. I fired two people while I’ve been here. I asked the provost to step down and the vice president of student affairs, whom I could not work with so she stepped down. But for the most part, everyone else is fine.

Going Above and Beyond for Her Students

It is not surprising that Maria thinks very highly of all of her students at Southern, and as Bill noted, she goes above and beyond to ensure that they are succeeding, both academically and personally.

If there is a problem with a student at Southern, she almost takes it personally. She is their best advocate. If students aren’t doing well, she helps them figure out a way to make it right. It’s almost her personal vendetta to make it right.

Dave offered his comments on this particular subject as well:

There were students who were misbehaving with liquor this year. They got arrested, and they met with her in her room. There were a bunch of them. Folks wanted her to be really hard on them; to suspend them. She said, ‘I’m not going to do that. I’m going to give them a chance. They’re kids. They made a mistake.’

One thing about her is that she’s tough. She said if they do it again, she’d be all over them. She said, ‘I will be fair with you, I will give you a chance but don’t mess with that chance.’ What people don’t understand is that when she does this, with 98% of the kids, things like this don’t happen again.

When the kids have financial problems, that makes her crazy. We spend a lot of time finding money to help kids stay in school, getting them jobs. Even if they take a semester off and then come back. That's ok. At least once a week, you can find her in our main dining room, sitting down with at least four kids. She has more fun with them. They are amazed that the president is there with them, right in the main dining room.

Maria, the Leader

When asked about her leadership skills, she proudly stated that she is a unique leader who possesses a style that has been proven effective for her presidency.

I'm collaborative. I'm process oriented. I have no problem creating a process which takes me three years to do something. Some people say, 'oh, my God, I want to do it tomorrow.' I would like to do it tomorrow but I have no problem focusing on process and focusing on collaborating with the faculty to get through that process. It comes easy to me.

I'm also very data driven and analytical so that I really do have a style that says 'that's a nice claim. That's the best thing since sliced bread now show me evidence that you're the best thing since sliced bread.'" I say it politely, of course, and people have now responded. So in my leadership if they feel like they want to make an argument they better have the data. So my leadership style has been one of evidence-based leadership, or decision-making.

Dave offered his comments on how the president is received within the university at large, especially in regards to her leadership style and skills.

Quite honestly, Maria is well liked here. She gets very high marks in regards to her leadership. If there is something that some don't agree with it usually has to do with money and it has to align with the strategic plan. That was a very, very collaborate experience with her and others on our campus. If they complain now, it's not because they didn't have their chance to stress their opinion. So we don't hear a lot of negative feedback on our end. She put the strategic plan into place after she was here for six months, which is amazing.

She has a lot of trust in us. The joy of having her here is that. I don't think we realize how well we get along. I've worked for two male supervisors and I worked for two females. I'm proud to work for her but I'm also proud of her. She's my boss and that makes it fun

to come to work each day. If I didn't like coming to work each day, then I wouldn't do it anymore. She makes it fun. She's an idea a minute. She's very human. She's real. She's not going to scold you for teasing her. Yes, we have days at work that are tough. We're not mad. We have these talks and we get over it. She's human and we know that about her. And that's half the fun.

A tactic she uses when working with her staff is encouraging them to state opposing views of situations they may be grappling with. She never looks for the majority opinion but still trusts and respects how her staff thinks.

I don't want them to confirm what I think. When you trust people they will tell you what they think, not because they're trying to do you in or diminish you. It's because they want you to succeed. And so what I've tried to establish with people is 'if I trust you and respect you, would you really tell me what you think so that I can be a better president? It doesn't help me if you tell me what I want to hear because what happens is I'm not thinking clearly because I've got twenty things on my mind and this is a complicated problem and I'm not seeing all of the perspectives. Because as good as I think I am, you're a person with another perspective.'

The second thing is that I always assume that there are more intelligent people in the room than me. So if they're intelligent, why not hear what they have to say because they might have a perspective that I don't have.

And the third thing I feel is that if you're vested in my presidency, because your jobs depend on my being successful, that they will be helpful to me. So I think that empowering people to help you figure it out also empowers them to do the work. It makes it more of a partnership. I like the people who work for me. And I get mad at them and I sometimes can bitch.

As the leader of her university, she carefully analyzes the talents of her staff and how she strategically uses these talents for the betterment of the institution.

When I could see an organization that has a good set of skills, I try to match those skills to what I need. So I'm able to put people in strategic places and even if I don't move them by title, I use them to influence them to whatever I want to get done because I see that they have that acumen or the ability to do that. So I think this weaving together they see is purposeful. I'll say I'm inviting someone to a meeting and they say, 'why is so in so invited?' or they will say 'why am I invited?' And I'll say 'it's because even though it's not your area, I think you have the kind of mind that will be effective, and sometimes they are objective because they are not in their area so people begin to work together.

Academic and student affairs work closely together. And I'll often say, 'John, did you check with Mary?' And he'll say, 'oh, yeah.' Or Bill will say to me 'I really don't know, I have to check with Julie first.' So, it's in the fabric that I actually cultivated this you have to work together and there's this weaving where she doesn't have to feel diminished by him or he doesn't have to feel diminished by her. There's always competition because they're human but I try to bring the temperature down on that.

Bill agreed by stating how the president's leadership skills have extended beyond the walls of her university and have gone into the small town where the university stands. She is known to not only be collaborative but accessible to all within the community.

When Maria came on board, she and I started collaborating on programs to get the merchants in the community involved, which involved communication and business plans. It all worked out well. All of a sudden, the town saw that she embraced them. On Thursdays, she'd be down at the bashes up the street, walking the street, shaking hands, hugging people, talking in their own language. They love her. She's in every one of their parades- the 4th of July parade- she's there with her whole family, on the truck, throwing candy, with her parents from Puerto Rico, her son, and daughter from Miami, who's a doctor. Maria has really embraced the community and has made it so much nicer for us.

Also because she's bilingual, I book her on Spanish-language radio stations, and mainstream television stations all the time. She's got quite a reputation for being accessible to all of our communities, especially our Spanish-speaking communities.

Her Thoughts Regarding Issues of Race and Ethnicity

Maria also takes great pride in her ethnicity, especially being the only Latina president in her region. She also realizes that she is an anomaly within her particular field. But there is also a sense of respect given to her at her institution by those who are of her same race or ethnicity.

Most presidents who are minority are at minority/Hispanic serving institutions. People are amazed that I am president at a predominately White institution. And I think it's because they assume that because I'm Hispanic I would be leading a Hispanic or a minority institution. So I think there's a real bias there.

I think in the presidency, people respect that I'm from a different ethnic background. There's a lot of respect here for that. It's not diminished at all. People know that I'm Hispanic and if they're Hispanic, they say hello to me in Spanish on campus and I say hello back in Spanish. In the community, they'll speak to me in Spanish. Like last night I went to a dinner with all of the maintenance workers and cleaners. I have a dinner for them every year. And the ladies who clean, some of them are Hispanic, but they speak to me in Spanish and I don't mind that. They say, 'senora, senora!' But I don't do that at the exclusion of others. I do it briefly and go on with the others in English.

Yet she realizes that race and ethnicity can play a part in the upward trajectory of other Latinas in higher education. She mentioned experiences of fellow Latina colleagues that validated this argument.

On the matter of ethnicity, it's very interesting. The woman I had lunch with today, Maria, once had an interview for a provostship and she called me crying. She said, 'I just got off the phone with the headhunter and I told him that I couldn't go to the interview on the day he offered me because I had a board meeting. When I told the search person that I couldn't make it

because of the board meeting, he said, 'ok, you're out of the search.' You know what, she deduced right away, and I knew, that she wasn't a serious candidate because they accommodate a serious candidate. Oh, my god, it's not like she said 'I'd like to have my nails done.' She said 'I have a board meeting.' They should have said, 'sure, let me work with the committee, let me get back to you,' and instead they said, 'she was the minority candidate in the pool.'

I just got a phone call from a headhunter, asking me to apply for the president of another East Coast university, and instantly, I said, 'no thank you, I am not interested,' because what she wants is to have a minority in the pool. So what has happened is that the search firms and the search committees are looking for a diverse pool. Even though they pick someone who is White, whether male or female, they can say to the community 'but we had a diverse pool' so that this whole issue of ethnicity is really important.

You can really fool yourself into thinking that people are seriously looking at you. I remember the best story that was told about this was a Chicano president, I won't say his name, who went to an interview for a presidency and the first thing they asked him was about diversity and after they asked the question, he said, 'I'm not a serious candidate so I'm leaving the interview' because you would never start asking a White candidate about diversity, you would start asking about budget, governance, the role of the faculty, and about fundraising.' And so that he knew instantly that he wasn't a serious candidate and he left the interview.

So you see, the issue of ethnicity is complicated because so many people think they stand a shot at the job but it's that the committees get desperate and say that they'll throw this person in even if we don't think that they are qualified, not qualified as much as other people. So I think that the issue of ethnicity has really been significant in my career.

She also believes that the issue of gender has affected her presidency a great deal as well.

I think that because of my age, I'm 62, I was in the part of the women's movement but its effect on presidencies took place a little bit later than I would have liked. In other words, today, if you would have checked the number of women presidents, it's better than it was when I was in college but it's still predominately a male office. And so, I think that on my way up, there were fewer opportunities for me in presidencies. For example, in research universities they always look for males in the sciences. So you have women scientists but its mostly male scientists. In the state college system, there was a real boy's network. You know people who were promoted were men who were in circles.

I think that in the community college sector, you had a lot of people who were wired politically in the local government who were men mostly. So I think that in different parts of the sector, women came into presidencies slowly and were present, but as you can see from the numbers, we're still not as many as we'd like.

Her Thoughts Regarding Issues of Gender Bias

As a woman, and as a Latina, Maria still contends that her abilities are always questioned, despite that she is a president of a major university.

Because I am a woman, the guys who work on my car [who are members of her university staff] think I'm an idiot. The previous president was a man and he was buddy-buddy with them all the time. So I have to be a little sharp edged with them because they'll talk down to me about the car. I'll say 'the light went on because this or this.' And they say, 'it's got to be that.' And I'll say, 'it's not that. I know.' I've driven cars before. These are working class guys, they're not well educated. But still, it doesn't excuse them from talking down to me. They do it all the time.

When I talk about the budget, people thought, 'well, she's an academic, what does she know about budgets?' It's taken me five years but they know now that I know more about budgets than a lot of people on campus and I can really keep up with my CFO and my VP for finance. So whatever they questioned at the beginning they see that I can do the analytical work and that financial analysis that the university needs.

I think that technology is another area where I don't know as much as I know about budget but I know enough to ask the right question. If you ask Joe in IVP what he tells me or to another audience, I can't say it as technically as he can but he knows that I understand it conceptually. In other words, I'm not making anything up. But I understand the concepts and how it hangs together even though I may not know the details.

And so I think being a woman has been a huge disadvantage in those areas but I think once I get into it and I show people that I don't show off, I just do my work, and eventually, I get it. And when I don't understand I tell people, I tell people I just don't understand. They do question your abilities. They question your abilities on a lot of things because they don't know—they don't know who you are.

I have not unearthed it to the point where I have said it has to do with ethnicity, it could be. I will say this. I am a very good writer and they associate Hispanics with not being good writers because so many of our people have difficulty with English and that surprises them that I'm a good writer. And so I think that you can connect with ethnicity. I think the other—the budget, the car stuff—is connected more to being a woman.

She has also been in a difficult predicament during her presidency. Her current boss is not only the chancellor of her university system but was also the former president of her institution. Working with this man has proved to be challenging to her on many levels given that he still sees

this university as being “his” and there is a great deal of micromanaging that takes place by him. She refers to him as a “shadow” where she often finds it difficult to manage his ego. Additionally, at times, she finds that his practices can be very sexist. Her experiences with him have allowed her become more self-aware as a professional and as a female leader.

He still wants to run this place even five years later, and people will still refer to him. So it's been hard that he doesn't go away. And now he's announced his retirement so I think that my next five years will be easier because he is very difficult to work with. He's very dug in; he's an older man who's set in his ways. So he wants to do it the way he wants to do it and that's been very problematic for me.

I've spent a lot of time arm wrestling with him about the university. I tell him, I want to do this and he wants me to do that. But yet, he's my boss so I can't just say, 'the hell with you.' I can't. I have to try to get him to either see my perspective or to modify what he wants me to do. But that's been a huge, huge challenge ever since day one. And my husband warned me and said that the most difficult thing of your presidency will be working for him.

He doesn't understand how it feels in my perspective. I'd like to use my husband as an example. He was a former president of his current university, Central State. My husband's office is so far away from the new president's office. My husband never sees the president. He never goes to functions where the president is speaking, unless he is invited to speak or it makes sense to him to be there. He doesn't try to overshadow or outdo the new president. But I think most presidents if they're good, they know that they have to fade away. My boss, the former president of my institution, hasn't faded away.

He brings out the worst in me. In fact, I am difficult with him. He thinks that I don't listen because he's not listening to me. So there's not a fair exchange where I listen to him and

he listens to me. What happens is that he attacks and I get on the defensive. So of course when I'm on the defensive, I'm more aggressive, I'm more dug in. All my negative qualities come into play.

Another thing is that he doesn't have issues with the men. There are two women presidents and two men presidents. He fired the other women president and I think if he would have had his druthers, he would have fired me too, but he couldn't. But with the two men, he has a great relationship with them. So I think there is a gender bias there.

So I think that in fairness to him, he's probably seen more of my negative characteristics than most people because of our relationship. If he would have never been president of Southern, he would probably have a different relationship. He'd still be the same person and we'd probably have issues but they wouldn't be as pronounced as they are.

Dave commented on the difficult predicament of having the former president of the university now serving as Maria's boss. He, too, notes her challenges with this employment arrangement, but he recognizes that Maria works with this predicament with the utmost grace.

I think it is harder for Maria because Southern was his baby. He took it from where it might not have been to keeping it vibrant. And then he got promoted to chancellor. So he looks at things with a critical eye. It's like a competition. It puts her in a tough position but she's gracious about it.

But she's been gracious in terms of recognizing his legacy; especially when we do big publicity events. For example, we have a building that was funded under his administration. She gives him credit for this. She's very differential to him in terms of relationships in the community that he has maintained. She's very differential to them. Always when he's here, and she's speaking about what we're doing now, she's always thanking him, in front of legislators and such.

She says when she came here, this place wasn't broken. 'I came to a very well run institution' she says that all the time. She's very smart at what she does and she definitely gives credit where credit is due.

Achieving Parity in Higher Education, Especially for Latinos and Latinas

Maria remains focused on the issue of parity in higher education, particularly as it relates to Latinos. She views this process as one that requires more work within the educational pipeline.

It'll take a change, a real significant change in the number of Latinos who go to graduate school. And the only way that can happen is if you get more people to finish the bachelor's degree. Eventually, if that happens, you go back having more high school graduates.

You can get more kids to be more focused on graduate school and then of course, resources. You have to advise them early on. But I think for the most part, sometimes the faculty see a brilliant student and say to them, 'you should go to graduate school.' But a student who is good but not great, they won't be advised to go to graduate school. And yet, why not? You may be great in graduate school. You may discover your passion for your discipline. So I think the advisement piece is weak.

Our kids don't think about graduate school. A couple of them think about law school and maybe medical school but Ph.D.'s in disciplines like ours, you have to sort of brainwash them. I always tell them, when they say, they like history and they want to be a history teacher. I say 'why don't you become a history professor? Why don't you get a Ph.D. so you can teach in higher ed?' They look at me like I'm crazy and say, 'oh, I need a job.' And I say, 'no you don't, put it off. But we don't have the counseling in place for that.

Then when reflecting on how to recruit more Latinos and Latinas into presidential positions in higher education and retain them, she once again talked of pipeline that can exist within the institutions themselves that can be effective in this process.

I think people of Hispanic descent tend to be in student affairs, so that they have that track and it is acceptable in community colleges for presidencies. Whereas that track in four year institutions is very hard to become a president. You have a few people who were vice presidents of student affairs and become a president but it's the rare case. You have a couple who have been lawyers or in development and have become presidents. For a while, everyone wanted someone from development to become president because they thought all you had to do was fundraise but that's not the case.

But most of us have to come from the faculty and because so few Hispanics have a Ph.D. and come from the faculty ranks, it narrows. That's when I said that the problem is that if you don't have enough faculty with Ph.D.s who are Hispanic. You'll never get a higher number of presidents in the four year sector. It's very hard. I talk to a lot of young people who are in student affairs, getting Ph.D.s in student affairs or Ed.D.s, and they're in student affairs and they want to be presidents of their institutions and I always counsel them to go teach. I always say, 'try to teach, even if it's part time because it will help your resume. If you don't teach, you won't be able to make that jump.'

I also think that the pool for faculty needs to increase. I think that if we had more Latina women in undergraduate colleges majoring in whatever discipline, but getting doctorates in academic disciplines you would definitely have a bigger pool for four year presidencies. What happens to our kids, men and women, is that they want to get a job. I'm constantly telling my minority students to please don't get a job, get in debt. It is so much worth it to get in debt to get a Ph.D. and they laugh at me. And they can't see it. Because once you leave, you're not going to come back. You're not going to come back at 40 to get a Ph.D. it's too late anyway.

So I think if there was a way to fund people's education so that it would be partially funded for their Ph.D. that would reduce the debt. And there was a campaign early on in their sophomore year to identify people who should go to graduate school. That to me is the answer. It's a long term solution because you are going to be producing the pool.

So if you have a funnel and if 4% of us are Ph.D. 's. But if you increase that to 10%, you will get more college presidents out of that just because it's a natural projection. But I would definitely put money and resources into increasing the number of Latina Ph.D. 's.

Merging the Many Sides of Maria

Maria talks of the idea of functioning in multiple environments such as the one in which she was raised and the current environment she lives and works as president. She finds that she has often had to merge these environments in order to be complete.

I think my whole life has been like that. There's been this persona that I've been very Anglo. That I do Anglo things, I like classical music, I like nice clothes, I like nice vacations, and I want my children to have the best. Those are the standard things about upper class. And I used to be embarrassed to say that and now I'm not. I think I realize that there's nothing wrong with wanting good things for your children or your family, or wanting a nice house. You work hard so they are material things that that somehow become rewards.

I think that because my parents are still alive and because I go back to Puerto Rico so much, I have always the opportunity to be around people that I grew up with that have very little education. So when I'm in that environment, you can see me revert to when I was a little girl, not in the sense of immaturity, but in the sense that I speak a little differently, I speak very simplistically because I have to in order to relate. I have to talk about mundane things because they want to talk about those things but I respect them and I love those people so I have to fit in.

There will always be those who say that I act White or that I think that I'm better than everyone. But you do come to grips with it. I see my children, the next generation, are very proud of me, not because I'm a president but because I came from a modest background and accomplished a lot. So I think that their appreciation to that is very important to me. If they didn't appreciate what I have done then I think it would have been more painful to me. Because you struggle so much to give them that so I always wanted them to know how their grandparents and great grandparents and how hard it was for them and I think that's what I've passed along, the stories because there was a lot of suffering.

So I do have the ability to fit in to a working class or modest background so I think that's why my family feels so good about me, not just my mother and father but my aunts and uncles and cousins. Because when I'm around them they don't feel that I'm the college president. The town paper made a big deal about my presidency. They had it in the front page, interviews, and stuff. So people know me in the community, but I go there, and I wear sandals, and I try to blend it.

So I think that my whole life I've gone from this upper class persona to this modest background persona and I go back and forth depending on where I am. I think I am an academic, and my adult life has been in academia. I am comfortable around intellectuals so that part of me is very strong. And then I struggle sometimes, now less than I used to with identity issues because now I've come to grips to who I am and I'm comfortable. I used to get upset when people used to call me "bourgeois." People used to say that I want to be White. And now I say, 'yeah, I do want my daughter to have beautiful clothes and nice pocketbooks, and I like nice houses, and I'm not embarrassed about it.' But I think it took me a long time to be comfortable in both identities.

Maria – The Real Deal

Bill and Dave commented on Maria's knack of being "real" in all that she does within the university. Rather than showing up to events and being viewed as strictly as a figurehead for the university, she jumps right in and becomes involved in the event at hand.

One of the things that were started under the last administration is right around exam time, we have a free pancake breakfast at 10 o'clock at night and it sometimes goes until midnight. Maria is not only there every time this is offered but she brings her husband. Some people do this because they feel they have to. Unless she's totally dishonest, which she's not, she actually has a ball with this event. Her husband is a riot. I mean for an Ivy League professor and a true intellectual, he loves letting his hair down. And she, herself, doesn't mind being silly. She has a childlike side to her but she can be as serious as the dickens but she can be so funny.

She's real. That's why we all like her because we knew within the first few months that she's the real thing. With her, it's what you get. That's just the way she is. If she's with the kids, they know. She's up there singing, and of course there's her husband who's saying "oh what else is new with her, she won't leave now" and he's a really nice guy. He gets a kick out of her. The kids just love her. She's genuine. She's real. I don't think you find places like we have here where everyone gets along.

Bill commented how Maria just does not show up to university events but she also includes her extended family in the process.

It's part of the whole picture, her family, and we're talking about four generations. With some presidents, they have a family and you never meet them. You don't ask to meet them. It's not something you expect. But with her, whenever it's possible, we see her parents, we see her husband.

For example, we had the Boom Box parade, which is the Fourth of July parade. The town high school didn't have a marching band and five years ago, the local radio guy figured that everyone would bring their boom boxes and they'd play Fourth of July music on the radio station. So everyone would carry their boom boxes or there would be boom boxes on the floats. We had ours on our float. There's Maria's mom and dad, her husband and her, her son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. She's up there yelling.

Dave had a similar story to share about Maria's recent participation in a school basketball game where her demeanor there was unlike any typical president.

When we had our first basketball game that was when I realized she is what she said she is. She knows nothing about athletics but gets a kick out of competing. She took off her shoes and she didn't know what to do. She slid across the floor and yelled "Go Warriors" and brought the place down! It was so funny. My mouth was on the floor. I was saying that I wished I could do that!

Bill and Dave continued discussing how Maria is "comfortable in her own skin" and how the sense of humility she brings to the job and to her everyday interactions is indeed reputable.

Maria walks around in her Armani suits as she teases the living crap out of herself. She talks about how she got that suit at the outlet store and they gave her \$200 off because there was a thread hanging out of this spot. That's her. She's just too funny.

She also has moments of dignity. She can be very powerful. We have seen both sides. We know when she deliberately lets her hair down. It's not a calculation. But she's allowing herself to be one of the boys and girls. We know it won't take a moment for her to be in a position or a situation where she is dignified. She knows that.

Dave talked about a particular situation where he witnessed the president's brilliance come into play, which has forever reaffirmed that she's "real." This particular instance was during her inauguration ceremony. The president was concerned about using a teleprompter given that this would be her first time in doing so. She also did not want to utilize her notes during her speech because she valued the importance of looking the audience in the eye. So, she had to be repeatedly reminded by her trustees and staff that nothing was going to go wrong with the Teleprompters. The staff assured her that the company they had used had been in business for 90 years and they tested them prior to her speech and they worked perfectly.

There were about 1,400 people there and about 400 of the best people in academia were there, too. So it was all over and we were marching out and she turned to me and said, "The damn teleprompter didn't work." The point was, we never knew it. It just stopped working. We don't know how she did it.

But that speech included some very personal anecdotes about mom and dad, a very intellectual section about what she wanted us to become as a liberal arts institution. And at the end, she has this wonderful way talking about how education is the foundation of American democracy and I didn't have to write that section for her because she just goes off and it's so amazing. But she just blew me away with that speech because she not only

nailed it but she appealed to every single emotion in every single type of person in the room. Representatives and provosts of the universities who were there, I know were impressed with the intellectual component of the speech. And her mom and dad were just beaming.

Dave also commented that Maria is very cognizant about how her institution, and higher education in general, continue to be under tough scrutiny in regards to balancing budgets and working through difficult economic situations like faculty or staff layoffs, for instance.

She lived in a housing project in New York. Her parents worked very hard in an air conditioning factory so when she talked about saving jobs on our campus, she knows the repercussions of what happens when jobs are lost. She talks about that all the time in a way that you know is really heartfelt.

Maria does not work for the money. On the same token, she can work for no money. Her family doesn't need money, they're extremely wealthy people. She really, really cares about people and knows how important it is that they have their job, and people on campus know that.

She'll also say, 'if I have to let people go, where are they going to get a job? They have a mortgage. Who's going to hire them? What are they going to do?' She'll get all worked up over it. That's the part we like about her.

These humanistic values that Maria has obviously came from her parents, according to Bill and Dave. They have had the pleasure of interacting with Maria's parents each time they visit from Puerto Rico. In fact, Dave commented that Maria's mother makes him her legendary coconut candy each time she visits. Additionally, her parents also have a scholarship in their name at Southern that Maria's entire family contributes to each holiday season rather than purchasing gifts for one another. According to Maria, this is her parent's way of supporting Latino students through college given that neither of them had the opportunity to attend higher education.

What it Takes to be a Successful President

When reflecting on her tenure as a university president, Maria noted many skills and traits one must have in order to be successful in this position.

I think you have to be extremely, extremely willing to work hard. And I'm not just talking hard, I worked hard in my life. I've been a waitress, a maid, I've worked hard. And those are physical things. If you saw my schedule, it's grueling. I cover a lot of ground and yet I get up at four in the morning. It's a physical job; you have to be willing to work hard. If you don't have that work ethic, you can't do this.

To get to the presidency, there's so much work that you must do as a faculty member; tenure promotion, as a dean you have to be successful, as an administrator you have to be at your desk and leave late. It's a lot of work so I think people have to have a very strong work ethic to want to be a president.

You have to be very well organized. That's genetic. People can't give you a course on organizational skills. It's got to come from within where you have a propensity to organize life, to organize yourself. Organize people, organize things because it is, from all the way up one of the best skills I've had.

The other skill I've had is working closely with people and being able to read people so that you are able to get the most out of them. Also so that you can understand what challenges they have with the work they're doing.

Then the fourth skill I would say would be you have to have a strong sense of who you are. You have to have that. If you have identity issues, self-confidence issues, we all have them but they can't be extreme because in this job, people want leaders who are confident. They don't want someone who's going to express ambivalence about everything. You can express some

ambivalence about some things because you don't have the answers to everything. But for the most part, so if you're not confident about your own self, your identity, and your own skills on the macro level, I think that comes through.

So I think that self confidence, the ability to organize, the ability to work hard, the ability to work closely with people in a respectful way, I think those are the four things that you have to understand you need or you need to work on in order to be a successful president.

Maria – The Role Model and Pioneer

Finally, Maria reflects on her position as the only Latina president in her region and the responsibilities that come with the title of being a role model.

I get embarrassed when they introduce me as the only one of this and the only one of that. They're always asking me to speak and I do it. I sometimes think, 'oh, my god, I'm nothing. I'm just a college president.' But there are 5,000 institutions in the country. Then I realize that for a lot of people, they just haven't seen successful Hispanics so they make such a big deal about it because they're so proud. Just like when I see a Hispanic Supreme Court Justice, I become so proud. So, you can't diminish the importance of being a role model and to accept that with humility is really important. And understand that yes, you're only one but there are people you can give inspiration to. And even if you give inspiration to five people in your life, its five more people that might get a Ph.D., might become a president.

Author's comments—Before we ended our meeting, she called in her student assistant and asked that he conduct an internet search of a specific Latina president for whom she was familiar, who was in the Midwest. Upon hearing that I was having difficulties attracting other Latina presidents to participate in my study, she promised that she would personally contact this president and ask

that she participate in my study. She saw the importance of telling their stories, she said, and she was saddened that the other Latina presidents did not agree to participate.

A few weeks later, long after I returned to Colorado, I surprisingly received a call from this east coast president on a weekend afternoon. After apologizing for bothering me on a weekend, she was happy to report that she had connected with the other Latina president from the Midwest. She informed me that this Midwest president would be thrilled to be interviewed for this study and she gave me all of her contact information right on the spot. The East Coast president recommended that I contact the Midwest president immediately because she was waiting for my call.

V – ROSA

65 years old, Chicana

Author's comments—Rosa was referred to me serendipitously. I was visiting with Elena, a fellow Chicana scholar/friend discussing my dissertation project. As I mentioned that I was having a difficult time recruiting Latina four-year college and university presidents to participate in my project, Elena immediately blurted out Rosa's name. She informed me that Rosa was recently appointed as president of a two-year college that also offers four-year degrees. Elena immediately made a phone call to Rosa on my behalf, asking if she would be interested in participating in my project. Soon thereafter, I received an email from Rosa stating that she would be happy to participate.

The resulting series of events were very humbling to me as a novice researcher. I was invited to spend a weekend with Rosa (along with Elena) as guests in her spacious, beautiful straw bale home, located in the middle of the southwestern desert. Rosa also arranged for me to be a special guest of her college where I was scheduled to speak with members of her faculty and staff.

We arrived via plane to the capital of her state. From there, we drove almost two hours to her tiny town, which has a population of about 10,000. After traveling most of the day, we arrived at her home in the middle of the night. Rosa shares her home with her 17-year-old dog. She welcomed us with open arms. I was amazed that she allowed me, a stranger, to stay in her home for an entire weekend.

Elena and I had our own wing of her home, which was filled with vibrant Chicano and Mexican art, icons, artifacts, and pottery. We slept in her “Virgin de Guadalupe Room” as Rosa called it, which housed dozens of paintings, drawings, and icons of the Virgin Mary.

The city that houses her college has not changed in decades and its residents seem to be fine with that. It has one of the highest drug abuse problems in the state and is surrounded by numerous Native American reservations, pueblos, and desert land that spans for miles and miles.

During my time there I interacted with many townspeople in small “mom and pop” shops and neighborhood cafes who were kind and gracious and welcomed me as if I were a long-lost relative. Despite the deserted “air” of this town, which has little to no commerce other than Rosa’s college, there was something truly supernatural about this place. I could just feel magic in the air. It was difficult to comprehend while being there, and now, it is even more difficult to explain.

On day two I visited Rosa’s college, which has been in existence for more than 100 years. The college was originally a Normal school and was opened a few years before its home state was granted statehood. Today, this institution offers two-year and four-year degrees to more than 2,500 students who are primarily Latino and Native American.

I met Rosa at her office on campus. Her modest presidential suite was housed in a new building named after a Latino politician who had apparently contributed financial resources to the college not long ago. It was then Rosa and I began our formal conversation about her life before and now

as president of this emerging institution. But first, she felt it was important to discuss her own personal identity formation.

Identity Formation – The Early Years

The first four years of my life my grandmother primarily raised me. In many ways I think she probably instilled in me this very strong sense of who I am. She was so proud of being a Mexicana. She was from Mexico and I used to go to the Mexican movies with her as a little girl. When I think of all these things, I think it was an important foundation for who I am.

Now the other thing that I think is really interesting are my parents. My father was a career airman, so I was raised in the military. I went to elementary school in France and then to high school in Panama. But wherever we traveled, whether it was San Antonio or Utah or California, my parents always had cultural representations in their house. My parents never wanted us to forget who we were. That was really important to them. At the same time they wanted to expose us to this broader world. We were poor, but we saw the world. What a privilege that was!

As a child, Rosa's mother also played a big part in reinforcing her cultural identity. Today, as an adult, Rosa appreciates the little gestures her mother did around their home that reinforced that their family was Mexican-American and very proud of their roots.

My mother, I don't know if she consciously was aware of this, but whenever we would move to a new house, which was often, by the time we came home from school, all of the pictures were almost in the same places as they were at our previous house—be it a copy of the bull fighter or some cultural piece of art. So there was a level of familiarity, but it was also about reinforcing part of our identity, as well as being "good Americans" because my dad was a good Airman.

Rosa also recalls that her career Airman father saw the importance of educating his children about the different cultures that they were exposed to during their travels.

When we lived in France and Panama, my dad did not want us to live on base. He wanted to expose us to the culture. I think that living there gave me an appreciation for difference given that the French are incredibly proud of who they are; I mean incredibly proud. The same goes for Panama. I had my first real introduction to African Latinos and Jamaicans as they built the Canal. It was really remarkable how they feel so strong about their culture and their identity. It was also the first time I lived in a Latino community, and it was clear that the Panamanians really liked being who they were. In some ways there was a connection for me being that I am a Latina, and so it was just inspiring.

I learned there were Jamaicans who had come in the 1800s to build the Canal and had become part of the Panamanian culture, and they brought their own traditions and culture. So then there were multiple cultures in Panama, and they were all living there in some way. That's not to say there weren't oppressions. I'm sure there were. But it was just good for me to see those cultures, and I wouldn't really appreciate it until after I left. Certainly at the time, I didn't realize the importance of how these cultures were living together. But as I got more and more into diversity work, it became more clear to me that I do the work that I do because of all the experiences I've had in my life.

So you're not always aware of those experiences impacting you, but clearly the Panamanian experience impacts me because there was a rebellion when I was there between the Panamanians and what we called the Canal Zone, which was considered U.S. territory, over the flying of flags. Quite frankly, I thought that the Panamanians should be allowed to fly their flags and the United States flag in the Canal Zone because it was their country. But the U.S. didn't see

it that way. The U.S. thought it was their territory since they were renting it or they had this agreement. So it was then that I was made aware of contradictions and colonization. I didn't understand it at the time, but when I look back on my life, it all begins to fit because back then, I questioned it.

As a child, Rosa's family moved back to the United States to Texas. She said this was a time when her own identity development had undergone a transformation. Rosa shared an experience that happened to her as a child that depicted her struggles with racial and ethnic identity in addition to being regarded as "different."

I was 12 years old and we came from France to San Antonio, Texas. There the city was going through a lot of racial tension. There were still signs saying "No Mexicans or dogs allowed here." I'd never experienced that before. It was really kind of chilling.

I remember the first day of school and I was in 7th grade. Evidently, the school had been desegregated, and they just started bringing the different [racial and ethnic] groups together. I remember specifically I had a tuna fish sandwich and I had a dime so I bought a Squirt soda pop. I had never seen a Squirt before, nor had I seen Coke machines. They didn't have them in Europe. I was the new kid in the school. I went to the gym that also served as a cafeteria. Everybody was seated; all the White kids were here, the black kids were there, and all the Mexican kids were there. I asked myself, 'well, where am I supposed sit?' So I started going around in circles eating my tuna fish sandwich and drinking this Squirt, which I didn't like. I was a friendly little girl and I was talking to people, you know as you do, and I never sat down. Well, that afternoon when I got on the school bus, I remember this 8th grader, Aurora, was her name. She came up to me and slapped me. And I thought, 'well, I'm the new kid in school, just sit down.' But every day, I was slapped by her. Every day.

Rosa then talked about a physical fight that happened between her and Aurora while at a football game. In her words, the fight was a result of Aurora's jealousy because Rosa was friendly to all students in their school, including the White students. During this fight Rosa said, she felt an extreme sense of rage that she had never felt before.

I think that fight with Aurora had a lot to do with me thinking about identity and what it meant, because clearly what Aurora was responding to was her own internalized oppression. And what I was responding to was internalized oppression as well. I didn't understand why that whole incident even took place, but I had been tested all week long if you recall, and it just came out. It was like when you're fighting something and you don't know what you're fighting. I understand it now—to be put down by my own people for talking to White people.

I had just come from France, and life was confusing anyway because I had been out of the U.S. for a good portion of my own school years. Then I come back to a place like Texas, which was very discriminatory and there was a caste system there that I was not accustomed to. It played out for me with this rage. I'm sure glad my brother was there.

I swore my brother to secrecy not to tell anybody about the fight with Aurora because there were enough problems with money and my parents didn't need to worry about this, too. The only people I talked to for a year were my family. I didn't talk in school. I didn't want to be in the United States. I'd had already spent almost four years in France, and went to elementary school there. But my parents knew that something was terribly wrong with me, but they didn't know what it was. So they worked pretty hard to find the money to send me back to Europe. Of course they were never able to get the money together.

This experience with Aurora inevitably taught Rosa more than she imagined. It taught her about internalized oppression, racism, and how members of marginalized communities are

affected by these issues. This experience also set the foundation for an older Rosa as she continued to notice how her personal beliefs and ideologies appeared to be different than those of others around her.

Being “Different” Within Her Family

Rosa was unlike others in her immediate family. She talked about how, as a child, she was always a loner who loved learning and building structures out of simple objects such as toothpicks, for instance. Rosa recalled a particular experience she had as a child when her father embraced Rosa as being different than his other children.

In France we lived in really cramped quarters. I used to make things out of toothpicks. I made a replica of the Eiffel Tower; it was my little hobby. One day I came home from school and I assumed that my younger siblings had destroyed them all. So rather than getting angry, I just cleaned up everything and threw it all away. I remember I curled up in the bed and fell asleep. I never said anything to my parents. I was just crushed.

There was a storeroom in our apartment and when I came home from school that next day I was walking by the storeroom. There was a sign on the door that said “Rosa’s Room.” I opened the door and discovered that my dad had placed my little table in there, and he had set up my little chemistry set that I had bought, and all my little books. It was like he valued who I was without saying it.

A Chicana, a Scholar, and a Lesbian

Rosa felt that growing up as a Mexican-American in Europe, travelling throughout the world with her family as an Air Force child, and finally moving to the United States was the beginning of her bi-cultural identity. She ultimately changed her political and cultural identity from Mexican-American to Chicana as she got older. The term Chicana is a name that many

Mexican-Americans call themselves that depicts their personal, political, and ethnic identity and pride. Since then, she also adopted two other significant identities: a lesbian and a scholar.

She recalled how early on in her life, her parents and grandmother recognized that Rosa's differences in regards to her racial and ethnic identity and her sexual orientation would shape her to be who she is today.

Even though I was a woman, my parents always recognized that I was different. When I was nine years old, my grandmother told me that men would never be important to me. I would say that she knew (that Rosa was a lesbian) before I did.

Unfortunately, Rosa's extended family has not always embraced her diverse identities. In fact, there were many times when some family members accused her of going against their cultural norms. Rosa discussed a story where her father intervened on her behalf as extended family members questioned her identities and her decision to go to college.

When I went to college, I was the first in my family to go and it was quite traumatic for all of the relatives, but it was more so when I decided to go to graduate school. I was at my sister's wedding in Sacramento, and I was getting ready to catch a bus to go to Iowa. We were at the Travis Air Force Base where my sister got married and my uncles surrounded me and asked me, 'why are you going to graduate school?' I'll never forget Uncle Joe, the eldest of the uncles, said to me, 'Rosa, if you go get another degree, no Mexican will ever marry you.' Then there was my dad, bless his heart, who pulled me aside and said, 'don't listen to him.' This was long before the feminist movement was up and running but I knew he valued who I was. And so in his own way, he encouraged me.

This subtle encouragement Rosa received from her father showed her that it was safe for her to venture outside of cultural norms and expectations and be the unique individual that she was and remains to this day.

The “Only One” in Her Academic Settings—Sharing Pride with Others

In the early 1970s, Rosa ventured on to graduate school, which began her days of being the first or “the only one” in all that she embarked. But she felt that this personal designation had many responsibilities associated with it. One responsibility she spoke of involved “fixing” the educational system in which she worked.

When I realized I was the first Chicana graduate student at the University of Iowa, and the first Chicana there in general, I felt a responsibility to fix it. I was immediately hired by the university to start recruiting [for other Chicanas and people of color to enroll in the institution]. So I’ve always said that I have a responsibility to my Chicano community.

After earning her master’s and doctorate degrees, respectively, Rosa’s professional journey took her from positions such as a faculty member—who focused her research on multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusiveness—to Acting Director of Affirmative Action to Assistant Provost. She then became an Associate Vice President, and a Vice President, all in major universities throughout the United States. After being appointed to these positions of increasing responsibility, Rosa quickly realized that she was often ‘the only one’ in these offices who looked like her or who came from a similar background. To this day, this phenomenon is still very difficult for her to comprehend.

When people always say that I’m the first, I know they say it with a great deal of excitement. But you know it really makes me sad. We’re well into the 21st century, and this

should not be the case. There shouldn't be any more firsts. This work should be about continuing a legacy.

A good friend of mine, another Chicana scholar, sat down with me once and we named Chicanas who had been in higher education for 30 years or more like us. We came up with 50 names, which is a tragedy. There are over 3,000 institutions of higher education and we could only come up with 50 names? I've talked to other Latina and Chicana women with Ph.D.s, and I've asked them why they haven't advanced on to administrative positions in higher education. Many have said because they fear losing their cultural and personal identities. Many feel that they have to sell out if they become part of administration. I don't necessarily think that's true.

In discussing the few Chicana and Latina administrators in higher education, Rosa and I segued to the topic of my study. I informed her that I had a very difficult time convincing the six targeted Latina presidents to participate in my study. I also noted that Rosa was one of the three who kindly agreed to participate, which shocked Rosa. She commented that she was humbled and proud to be a part of this study, but her decision to participate is another part of her commitment to advancing the educational status of Latinas.

I'm really honored that you selected me. That means somebody values what I'm doing. I would rather leave you with a positive sense that I am agreeable versus one that will always make you wonder had I said no [about participating]. I don't even think I thought of that as an option as much as I was just making sure we find the time to do it.

I'm still kind of in awe that somebody would think I have something to say. I think that we have to maintain a level of modesty, not false modesty. I just think it's a part of my responsibility; it's one way to give back. My friend and I talked about what do we want our legacy to be? What lessons do you want to leave behind? This is all part of it.

Additionally, while serving in each of the administrative positions in higher education, Rosa has always kept in mind that her duty was to improve the educational access for underrepresented students, primarily for Latino/Chicano students. This duty of hers remains current now as the president of her institution. She views this new job as a “calling” to her.

I have a responsibility to give back in fundamental ways. It's kind of like this new position as president. I could have stayed at my last university; it was a sweet job, and I did some incredible work. But in the end, I felt like being a president is an opportunity to work with the population that I had dedicated my life to, and quite frankly, I had not seen the kind of success I would liked to have seen in the past. I thought, maybe I should be a president of an institution that is considered Hispano, or indigenous, and work with those populations. Then maybe I can make more progress.

Being “Different” Reappears During Her Presidency Interviews

When Rosa was interviewing for her presidency job, she worried about how her identities as a Chicana and a lesbian would fit into this well-established, close-knit community and institution. After all, the town that houses her college is rooted in traditional Spanish/Hispanic/Native American values and traditions, which do not always welcome others who may seem “different,” especially in regards to their sexual orientation.

I thought there's no way they're going to pick me as president. So after the first interview, I pulled out because I know that this is a very special area and all the issues surrounding my multiple identities could play a role. But I am who I am. I pulled out because my first interview was a TV interview, and I couldn't see the people I was speaking with. I couldn't get a sense of them. I thought I had done a horrible job. But at the same time, I didn't hide anything in my vitae. It's all there.

If there was going to be an issue [with her multiple identities] then I wouldn't have pursued the presidency. So when they called me a back a week later to ask if I wanted to throw my hat back into the ring, I thought, 'well, what the heck, what do I got to lose?' I already had a great job, and if they offered me the presidency, I would have the best of all worlds, right?

When I was invited to the campus interview, I was among the people and I saw the possibilities. I knew I would be giving up a lot to come here, and I knew I'd be disappointed if they didn't offer me the job. And I thought, 'there's no way they're going to offer me this job because there was an internal candidate who appeared to be a very strong candidate. He was male, who had a different history than me. I just said 'why would I want to be at a place that wouldn't value all of my identities?'

So during that campus visit, the search committee asked if they were to Google me, would there be anything that I wouldn't be proud of. I immediately said was, 'well, I have no doubt you've already Googled me. But I will stand by anything that's there because whatever is there is who I am, and I won't apologize for that.' I can't control what people say about me on the Internet. But those things on the Internet where it says I'm a Chicana, and I'm a lesbian—I carry those identities with great pride. I have multiple identities, and I'm proud of all of them and they've all become a whole.' I said, 'so if that's an issue then I'm probably not the person you want. I am who I am.' But in the end, they valued me and offered me the job.

There were other reasons why they offered me the job, I'm certain, but I was very pleased that they did. I wanted to be in a place where my identities will be valued and not challenged. And in the end, I never felt any negativity from them. It all worked out in my favor.

As an 'out and proud Chicana,' as Rosa calls herself, she talked of how this politically-charged label often sparks conversation and debates with others in her life. But she carries this

label with great pride, and fortunately, she said that her new college community has embraced her “Chicana-ness.”

You’ve got to look at people who are successful, and who have overcome great odds to have a strong sense of self. A part of that self is about me being a Chicana. I think that’s what it represents for me. Sometimes people want to call themselves ‘Hispanic’ or another name, and that’s fine, just as long as they do it with a sense of pride and a sense of who they are.

But it pains me when I asked my niece, ‘why do you call yourself Hispanic?’ She looked at me and she said, ‘Aunt Rosa, who wants to be a Mexican?’ That pained me because she clearly had inculcated all the negative stereotypes that she’d grown up with from TV. So she distanced herself from that part of her identity and put herself in a generic context. And given the nature of my work all these years it is doubly painful for me. Here I am going out there, espousing stuff to the world, and my own relatives have this very unusual view of identity.

But Rosa confirmed that her “Chicana-ness” has gone through a sort of evolution over the years that she views as a process of positive growth for her, both personally and professionally.

Certainly I have changed over the years. I’m not the angry, young Chicana I used to be. At that time, I was calling everybody a racist. That was when I dealt with the contradictions and the racism that I saw versus trying to figure out how to work with and use what I know. I think it’s a process that we all go through. I didn’t feel like I was getting the kinds of results that I wanted, and to be angry and to stay angry takes a lot of energy. But I don’t know at what point I just sort of changed. After a while I realized that not everybody’s a racist, and in many ways, we’re all victims of a system that treats us in a particular way. But it doesn’t mean that you sell out. I don’t believe I sold out; I just to do my work differently. I take people from where they are,

and try to work with them. But today, you need to know that I very seldom call people racists. I might think it, but I don't call them that.

When I interviewed for this position, I came right out and said 'I'm a Chicana, and this is what it means to me.' You need to know that a number of people came up to me and thanked me for using that term.

Carrying a politically-charged and sometimes controversial identity as Chicana can bring power and strength to someone who may live in the margins of society. Rosa realizes how this identity has evolved over her lifetime but is now an anchor in all that she does, especially in her duties as president.

President Rosa Arrives

As Rosa reflected on her road to the presidency, she commented that she is humbled that she landed at her highly promising, yet highly male-dominated institution. She is especially modest given that she never expected to be a president of a higher education institution.

No one was more shocked than I was when they offered me the position. First of all, I never aspired to be a president. I never aspired to be a vice president. I was never on a trajectory, but things just happened. You have to know when to step in when you see a need, and women of color know how to do that. Women of color often feel a sense of responsibility in looking out for everybody.

I'm at the age where I thought, 'maybe I'm too old for this job,' you know, all those things play a factor. But I think it's really interesting that after my inauguration the chair of our Board of Regents said, 'you know, we were all unanimous of you, and we're very excited even more so now that you're on board.' I think that says a lot.

When Rosa arrived to her new city as the newly appointed president, she commented that its residents reacted quite favorably to her, which was very surprising to her.

When I went to go get a haircut, all three of the women working there had learned how to cut hair by attending our college. Then I went into Wal-Mart, and the cashier told me that she's taking classes at our college. So many people just come up to me and say they're so excited that I'm here.

When I had my signing ceremony people from all over the valley came. They're really proud that this was the first Normal school in the state, and it was geared to meet the Spanish needs. That incredible statement was indicated in the Constitution. So for me to be part of this legacy, as I'm leading the college through its next 100 years, makes me really proud. But when I go out to the town, and when the residents talk to me on the streets, whether I'm getting gas or whatever, they have such great hope and high expectations for me. My biggest fear is that I'll let them down.

Rosa knew that her new institution was a unique place with more than 100 years of rich history. But her charge as the new president is to take this institution to the next level. Her college will continue providing high quality vocational programs to those students who are searching for basic job skills training, while at the same time continuing to offer high quality bachelor's programs.

My students tell me that in order to do anything, they need to get a degree because they are place bound. Most of our students are single parents, and they can't go to our state university. Our college is their only option, and they recognize it. So I want us to continue to have this multi-purpose campus that offers GED certificates, certificates in automotive, among

others. It's about providing options for people who are really place bound. Eighty-two percent of our students are Hispanos, and approximately 10% are from the three pueblos that border us.

We also don't have residence halls. People travel great distances to come to school here every day or they take our online courses. So I think we're providing an incredible service. I don't think we've realized our full potential.

Already, Rosa recognizes that her students are unique, and their college community is indeed unlike any other college or university community she has been a part of.

I went to our graduation ceremony in May, and I was blown out of the water. There was as much pride in getting a GED as there was in getting an engineering degree. And all our student's families were there; crying children and kids running around everywhere. I was sitting there thinking that at any other graduation, if there had been crying children and kids running around, it would not have been acceptable. But here, it's the norm. And I felt very comfortable with it. It was wonderful!

Even though Rosa has been president of her college for over a year, she has many ambitious goals set for herself and her team.

Philosophically, I think we need to respect people for who they are; respect what they bring to the institution, whether they're faculty, staff, or students. Everybody brings something to the table, and how do we capitalize on that? Certainly, I want to keep the bar high. I think if we have the right kind of support mechanisms in place then people will succeed at their highest level.

Figuratively, I plan on putting together a team to analyze what we mean by 'success.' If they know it takes somebody ten years to earn a degree while they're taking one course at a time,

while they're working three jobs, going to school, and raising a family, then that is still considered successful.

I also plan on building residence halls, and I also envision building family housing down the road. These additions will enhance our retention and graduation rates of our students as well. Right now, many of our students go to class with their children. I have a hunch they'd like to be independent.

I also want to capitalize on the idea that our students come here because they have small classes, and they will be taught by faculty members, many of whom have Ph.D.s. I've talked to students who have gone to our state university or to the other two community colleges in the area, and they have returned to our college because they found their community here. I want us to capitalize on that idea of community.

We also have the responsibility to not only develop all the academic skills of our students, but to also develop all the parts of our students' identities. I strongly believe that if our students feel good about themselves and about who they are, then they will truly succeed at their highest level.

So I think we have something really special to offer. I really don't want us to grow to 15,000 students. I could see us topping out at 5,000. But if we grow, we grow. But the goal is always to keep that sense of community. I want our college to be a destination for our students.

When reflecting on her team thus far, Rosa is excited about the skills that they bring to the institution and also about their shared vision of where their college will be in the near future.

I'm not afraid to bring in people who are smarter or more talented than I am. I depend on them, and I give them my trust. But I also want to make sure that they share the values that I have. There are other presidents who don't embrace that concept.

For example, I asked the new faculty to sit down with me the first day of classes, and normally in that situation, a president hears from them all the things that they don't have. My faculty didn't go there. What they talked about is operating as one. We talked about how they could be better teachers. It was remarkable. I was just blown out of the water. It was then when I said to myself, 'that's why I came here.' These are folks who could get outstanding faculty jobs anywhere in the country, but they chose to come here. We are the lowest paid faculty possibly in the country. So I know that they come here not just for the money, trust me. And you talk about having a calling. These faculty members here have a calling. All in all, I think I have a really incredible team.

But there's no question I have a senior executive team; I call them an executive team and they are the leaders of the campus. Their job is to help carry out the vision that we're crafting here. I could say this is my vision, but I don't want it to be my vision. I want it to be our vision. So very seldom you will hear me say 'I' because it's really about us.

Staying Connected to Her Students

What remains a priority for Rosa is staying connected to the students of her institution, especially now that she does not have the time to work with them in the classroom as a professor. However, she has made it known within her institution that she is an academic first and holding the titles of a professor and president gains much credibility for her.

The hard part is that I can't teach right now, and I miss that. Students keep me grounded, and right now, I haven't had the kind of interaction with students that I would like to see. So I've asked my assistant to pick students randomly so I can have lunch with them.

This morning when I got out of my car, this young man came up to me. He said 'I'm supposed to take the placement test.' I didn't know anything about it, but I tried to be as helpful

to him as I could. So I said, 'First, I need to get you out of the cold, and next, we need to find someone who can really help you find this test.' He was really appreciative of that. But I see more students like that are just sort of like pushed aside by others. I want to be that president who remains connected to her student's needs.

Also, I was recently invited to a student poetry reading. I had just had a really hard day and I wasn't sure if I was going to go or not. I was tired and I just wanted to go home. But I remembered that the students had put so much time and energy into this project. One particular student had asked me if I would be there because he was performing, and I told him I would be there. So I went and I loved it. It re-energized me. Sometimes I forget that I'm the president and at this particular event, I had to remember how to act like a president, however a president is supposed to act! But I went because a student asked me to go, and I went because poetry is also something I love.

But I never say no to be a guest lecturer in a class. I try to meet student government as much as possible. It's easy to just become an executive and live in that executive world. But everyone recognized that I'm an academic first. In fact, after our last graduation ceremony, one of the faculty members came up to me and said 'at last time we have an academic president!' That is how I negotiated my contract when I came here. I stressed that I also come as a professor and that's on my business card. I'm not just the president.

Bridging the worlds of an administrator and academic is what fuels Rosa. Remaining connected to the needs of her students, whether it is speaking to them formally or informally, remains paramount to her.

Realizing the Importance of Reaching Out to Her College Community

It is important for Rosa to be visible within her college community. In her view, this is her duty as a person who honestly cares about her college community, and it is not necessarily her duty as a president.

I was invited to an annual fiesta of one of the pueblos that are nearby. The funny thing was that I didn't know about the traditions of these fiestas—which involve being invited into people's homes to have a meal. So that day, I had lunch three times in three different homes of our community members! It was so wonderful to be invited into their homes and into their little communities. They told me that I was the first president who had ever visited them in that manner, and it was known throughout the whole community that I was there.

This whole experience was so enriching. I learned a lot about the culture here, especially how the community values water. When I was at the fiesta, there was an incredible rainstorm that hit us. I felt so sorry for the vendors who were selling their goods because we all were drenched. But I noticed one particular vendor during this rainstorm who had her beautiful work displayed on a table. Next to the table was a little pot that had collected some rainwater inside of it. She humbly said to me, 'I will save this water for later.' Her comment just encapsulated their value for water. When other people would have just thrown out the water, she saved it because it is a precious resource to the people here. That moved me.

So one of the first things I've learned by being here is to respect everything that's around us, not just the Earth, but also the water. When it rains here, the community members say, 'bless to the Gods, it's raining.' These are the special things that I have discovered about this community.

Challenges for President Rosa

Even though Rosa has only been on the job for a little more than six months, she has already encountered a number of challenges. Many of her challenges are typical of those that any new president would face. Others are most significant. The most pressing challenge Rosa faces involves analyzing the effectiveness of all initiatives before continuing with additional plans for institutional growth.

There wasn't a strong infrastructure here, but the institution has been growing and the infrastructure has not kept up with the growth. This has occurred from HR department to the budget to the college technology. I literally had to stop all growth. I was hoping that I could hit the ground running but in order for us to move forward, I've got to take care of some of these internal things.

Also, it became really clear when I got here was that we didn't look like a college. We had one dean, a lot of directors, and the president had 22 or so people reporting. Many of the books that I had read about how to be a president said never to reorganize. That's the worst thing you do. Well, that's precisely the first thing I did. I pulled together faculty and folks from the provost's office and came out with a really effective reorganization. We now have five deans. Now we can start creating more transparency because that was a big frustration of the faculty. I also discovered that everyone was coming to me for problem-solving, and you know, just as much as I love to talk to everybody all day long, all that does is breed ill will among people because it looks like I'm favoring folks. So I thought we need to do a little bit more, you know, a sort of distribution of the wealth, if you will.

It's about tending to the needs of your faculty. And if the president is an external president, that's why you have the provost, who takes care of the daily academics issues. I need

to be out there raising money. I had hoped that I would be doing that already but I'm not. I knew that there were problems, but I didn't know the depth of them. But I will stay on the upside, and just knowing the hope and pride that my faculty and staff have for this school has been remarkable. It gives me a lot to work for.

It was during this time when Rosa informed me that she needed to break from our conversation to attend a meeting. She had arranged to have me meet with Andrew, a member of her executive team, who has been at the college for more than 30 years. Also meeting with us was Helen, a faculty member, who has been at the college for 18 years. We decided that the three of us could meet as a small group.

Andrew and Helen—Thoughts on their College's Transition

We began our conversation with their thoughts on the change of their college to a four-year degree granting institution. For two individuals who have a long history at their institution, both noted that this transition has not necessarily been an easy one for some faculty and staff, but they recognize that this change will benefit their struggling community. Andrew said,

We will see the university designation within a year or so, and I think it'll be to the benefit of our institution, both in terms of our policies and our processes internally but also that are viewed by our peers. Our institution was the first designated community college in our state, so, it's been a forerunner in terms of establishing precedents. But the need is here in this part of the state for us to address the deficiency that exists in our population and also to create high quality graduate programs. The challenge is that we don't want to give up what we've been doing so well for the last 30 to 40 years in terms of delivering vocational, career training for our people because that's what they need. This challenge is daunting, but it's also a very valuable thing, and I'm really happy to be part of this experience.

At first, Helen had a different reaction to the expansion plans of their institution. But she, too, sees the benefit that it will bring to their community. She said,

Well in the beginning, it was hard for me personally to adjust to the change. I was one of the reluctant ones, being pulled along. But now I'm a believer. I really love the

community college and the idea of having the word ‘community’ in there. However, I think it will be an enormous benefit to the students because many of them won’t have to move out of town to go to school. Many of our students have families and are working full time, and they wouldn’t be able to get to our state college or to [another university in the southern part of the state].

So the transition has been fast, starting with our president before Rosa who I think initiated the very first plan [to offer master’s degrees], and he pushed us into the puddle and we had to swim a lot. But, we’re getting there. Everybody is definitely willing to work hard to make this happen.

Andrew agreed with Helen’s sentiments regarding the resistance that many faculty and staff had regarding the change. But he had an interesting way of looking at this resistance and why he believes it occurred. He said,

Yes, there has been resistance because there was a sense that we’re going to forget about the programs that made the community college an essential part of this community. Plus, our school had a good reputation, and it continues to have a good reputation, and thousands of students have gone through here in the last 30 years so. They look at our school just a little bit differently because there was no real educational outlet for people here before the community college and a large population is place bound they don’t really go out, and they don’t see the potential that’s available to them. But this institution has given them that for 30 years. Now, we’re talking about being a university, offering graduate programs. Many people here may not have thought about getting a four-year or master’s degree. Their primary goal is getting a job from the skills they received from our college. Plus, there’s a lot of poverty, drugs, and alcoholism issues in our town. Just having this institution here provides an opportunity for these people to say ‘hey, this is my chance to do something.’

So, having that said, there is a distinction between a community college and a university. A university wants to make money for its own sake and community colleges have more of a focus to provide employment opportunities and economic development. I mean they both do that, right? But the focus is different. The universities have more of a learning focus and then you develop into these things. Community colleges are more targeted in developing the skills and training as needed. That’s where the resistance is coming from. Although we’ve hired many of the new faculty who are doctoral trained, we’ve gone from a handful five years ago to half of our faculty who are doctoral trained who have very good experiences in quality institutions. So people see that clash intrinsically between the people who were here and these Ph.D.s who are into neuro-chemistry, for example.

In discussing their transition from a two-year community college to a four-year institution that offers master’s degree programs, Helen did not believe that her institution has the

infrastructure for this change to occur. In fact, she believed that this transition is happening far too quickly. She said,

A part of our challenge is infrastructure. Our resources are beyond minimal, and yet folks believe that we are still able to pull it off. Since I've been here, we've never had an abundance of resources. So I think the challenge for us is to have a structure of how we get things done and how we plan expand in a fair manner. Let's see, how can I say this [she hesitated] we just run over here and run over there and say, 'let's have six bachelor's degrees yesterday and we can get all of this done today.' So there hasn't been really a lot of thought put into this. We are just moving and moving. I think one of the big challenges is that we have to stop and say, 'okay where do we want to go, and what do we want to be?' Building an infrastructure for that is a challenge; how to make that happen and how to work together. That is a real immediate challenge.

But in the midst of this institutional change, Andrew also noted that interestingly their institution continues to attract stellar faculty members regardless of whether or not they are designated as a community college or a four-year institution. He is surprised that many of their faculty members have not taken teaching jobs elsewhere because their academic credentials are quite impressive.

We have a Chicana faculty member, for example, who is formally trained in Chicano Studies, but here, she teaches writing across the curriculum. She was trained at UT San Antonio. She's a young, Ph.D. and she could go anywhere she wants but she chose to teach here. I can tell you many stories like that of our new people. They are highly competitive in their fields; many are Hispanic Ph.D.s in science, for instance, and they can go anywhere but they say, 'this is where I want to be.' I know it's a challenge for them because they have to develop all of their infrastructure for research, but I think (being at their college) is just something they feel like is good for them.

Change can be a difficult process for individuals who have had a long history with a particular institution. This sentiment rings true with Andrew and Helen. Given that their institution has been a pillar in their community for offering two-year, vocational programs, they raised concern about offering other advanced degree programs that would take them away from their original mission.

Andrew and Helen's Thoughts on President Rosa

Both Andrew and Helen believe that they have the right leader in Rosa, who not only brings a strong academic background to their college but also has a solid vision of how their upcoming change will benefit the college community and the city at large. Andrew said,

It's an interesting mix with Rosa. She brings the cultural aspects that I think that has been here with all of our presidents. But she understands the population; she understands how they've grown up, how they interact with other folks. The distinction is that she has formal academic, large university experience. She comes from very well structured, very academically driven institutions. Our prior presidents didn't have that experience. Many of them weren't previous faculty members who have formal professorships or teaching experience at universities. They were all community college folks from within or from our state. So I think that's the big difference that Rosa brings to this institution.

It's at the right time now that we're trying to transition to a university. We need that view. Most of the administrators in her cabinet at this point don't have that experience. Many have experience as instructors in universities. I don't think any of us have any administrative experience, but it doesn't discount the experience that we have here at this institution. But there's a different view of things when you have a university model, and that's what Rosa is helping guide us and channel us.

Helen agreed with Andrew's sentiment. She said,

Yes, all of the other presidents were home grown, so all of them came from the within the institution, and I believe all of them grew up here. So that's a major change for the institution; for us to have someone who comes from a different part of the country. Certainly she brings more of an academic background; not that the others didn't, but she seems to have a little bit more of the university tradition. She brings a real sense of strength of the academe, which I think is has been very effective and wonderful for us. And she brings a fresh perspective that somebody from the outside can bring. At least for me that's been a really nice change.

Given that Andrew works so closely with Rosa, he has already seen the many challenges she has faced in her new position. In his position as Provost, he said he has worked very hard to help mitigate some of the problems that Rosa has faced. But there definitely needs to be a shift in thought by the college community regarding how and to whom they address their pertinent issues.

Because we're a small institution, every issue goes to the president, every single issue. If this was a large university, presidents may not even be aware of issues that are happening in the different levels. Here, everything goes to the president and that's a big challenge for Rosa. But she faces each issue directly, but maybe it's not the best way to utilize her time. I think the president should have more time devoted to being a president; seeking external funds from external sources, and setting general directions. So, I try to help her with these issues but it hasn't happened as quickly as we had hoped. So, she's tackling a lot of things, and hopefully, they will attenuate over time so that she won't have the frequency of issues that she has to deal now. But that remains to be seen. She's only been here a short time but she's standing up pretty good to it. I think she loves the challenge; she wants to be here, she'd rather be here than at her last university any day, that's for sure.

A large part of Rosa's job is to connect with the small community in which she serves.

Andrew believes that she has been effective in her outreach with their close-knit community given that she relates very well to their culture and their life experiences.

Rosa came in with a lot of respect. She's made the right first steps in terms of meeting people, and visiting with communities. In fact, she's moved into the community. She doesn't live in [the larger city adjacent to their town] like some of our previous administrators had. It's important to live the experience, right? It's not just work and then go home at 5 or 6. I think the community looks at her as the next natural leader for this place who's going to move us over to this university designation as well.

Rosa also has a good feel for the whole system. When people recognized the potential in her she became an instant leader. She involves folks; that's the important thing. She listens and involves others.

Both Andrew and Helen recognize that Rosa brings a unique perspective to their institution, which includes her experiences as a graduate student, a professor and then an administrator in higher education. They feel that Rosa's empathetic personality toward their students has indeed won the respect from her faculty and staff. Andrew stated,

I think it's the best route for a professional president to take is to go through the levels; to be a graduate student, and then to be a professor, and then become an administrator. It is best to understand all of these different levels before they become a president because that makes them more empathetic to all of their constituent's needs. Rosa has been trained in all of these positions. This is one the distinctions I made earlier about how many of our presidents haven't been professors; they were either principals, high school

administrators, or community college administrators. Unlike Rosa, it was really hard for them to understand our folks here unless they've actually lived it.

Helen agreed with Andrew's comments and offered her own perspective.

I certainly think Rosa has the vision for this place. She calls it 'coming home' in some ways. She's been putting out lots of fires but she's an extraordinarily quick study. When she was up for candidacy, many of the faculty wrote letters in support of her. We wanted her to be hired. So, even before she was our president, she had a lot of support from the faculty.

Already, she has been very visible with our faculty. When she comes in to our meetings, which she has already done many times, she's actually there to listen. Then when we see her out in the community, we see her pounding the pavement for money, and meeting people. She represents the college in a way that we haven't been represented before. We have people are recognizing her locally and across the United States, which has been exciting to see.

Not only do Andrew and Helen view Rosa as someone who has the power and experience to take their institution to the next level, but according to them, there are also countless individuals at their college who believe that Rosa is the right president for them at this time. In their view, her experience as a professor and administrator will add much needed depth and breadth to their changing institution.

Reflections on their Students and Rosa's Impact on Them

When I spoke with a female student who was working in the President's Office, she commented that Helen is not only one of the more popular faculty members at the college but is also known as one of the faculty members who truly invests in the future of her students. Helen is also known as one who gives a simple hug to her students when she sees them around campus. These hugs, the student said, are sincere forms of encouragement. When asked about their students, Helen offered a touching perspective on them. She also believes that they are immersed in what she calls "a culture of possibility." Helen replied,

I think our students are just about the best people that I have ever encountered. These are individuals who work full time, go to school full time, and some of them have full time jobs. These are three full time things that they've had to juggle. I'd match them up against Harvard students any day of the week. I mean, how many Harvard students can say that that they go to school, work full time and raise a family full time? So, for them to be able to do this, they deserve all the credit that they get. So, that's how I can respond to them, by giving them hugs whenever I see them.

I tell my students that here that they are living in a culture of possibility. I tell them that they have a choice in which degree field they want to get into and every one of them has the ability to succeed in this field of choice. But sometimes I get students telling me that they don't have family support for a culture of education. Their families tell them, 'why are you in school?' That sort of response limits of possibilities for them. But my job is to open their minds to the endless possibilities they have first by being in school and then by getting a degree.

I saw how my talks with them about this 'culture of possibility' came to life after Rosa's inauguration. In class I asked several of my students what they thought of it all; the pomp and circumstance, and all of us in robes and such. One of my students said, 'I saw you guys up there in those robes, and I want to be like that!' Then we started talking about scholarship and one of my students asked 'what is a scholar?' And I said, 'a scholar looks at ideas and the way the world is, and then the scholar researches and provides good evidence about how this information relates to our world.' So, it was a great way of introducing them to the world of academia and how they, too, can be one of us who wears a fancy robe at an inauguration.

Helen continued by noting how many of their students have already been positively affected by Rosa. She specifically noted how Rosa has already made an impact on the Latina students at their college. She said,

It has made a huge difference having Rosa here, especially for our Latina students. They see her and then they realize that nothing can stop them in their educational pursuits. So they keep going. But it will take more people who are in the trenches who will carry this sentiment to our students. If Rosa will continue recruiting other Latina scholars who will come here and share her vision, and also show our students the advantages of a higher education then hopefully, this sentiment will become a part of their mindset, and something they have to work for.

Rosa and her faculty and staff embrace the concept of "culture of possibility" with their students. This powerful concept reinforces the notion that despite the many socio-economic and

educational barriers their students may face, they have the ability to attain a two or four-year degree from their institution. Additionally, Rosa's sheer presence as president of their college has a tremendous influence on all of their students, but in particular to other emerging Latinas. These young women see Rosa as a role model and a positive example of what their lives could be if they continue with their educational pursuits.

Thoughts on Rosa as their First Chicana President and Her Legacy

Andrew and I then talked about Rosa and how she is among the few Latina presidents of four-year colleges and universities today. In his view, he attributes the low numbers of Latina presidents to the bigger educational pipeline problem that exists for Latinas.

First of all Latinos, women, and others of color are underrepresented not only in universities, but in business fields, and even in principalships. If you look at high schools, there are fewer Latina principals than there are White women principals. So what I think is happening is that there haven't been enough Latina role models in these positions of influence. When younger Latinas start seeing more Rosas, for example, then they will have more aspirations to be like them.

We also need to develop more faculty women to become full-fledged professors. I think that's a big part of it. There are a lot of strong women in the faculty ranks, and they are very talented. I just think that there haven't been effective ways for them to advance to higher positions. They go through the systems and become deans and vice presidents and generally they're not considered for presidencies.

How's that going to change? I think it's going to be a gradual change. It's not going to happen overnight. It's a reflection of what I see in the STEM fields. We've been at it for 50-60 years now. The National Science Foundation is seeing the same issues. No matter how much you try to emphasize that something has to happen, that there's a need for more women and people of color in these positions, our young people in high schools don't see graduating and advancing on to faculty positions and then to higher, administrative positions as a potential for them.

Conversation with Rosa Resumes

It was at that time when Rosa peeked into our room, announcing that her meeting was over. She greeted Andrew and Helen with a warm hello, a subtle touch on their backs, while thanking them for helping me with my research project. When Andrew, Helen, and I decided that

our conversation was over, they respectfully excused themselves from the room. Rosa and I then resumed our conversation.

We continued discussing her journey to the presidency and her thoughts on her own trajectory. She noted that she had many important experiences in academia that prepared her for this very influential position.

I wish I had been a full dean because I would have known how to do some of the things around capital projects and get involved with capital plans. I had to learn that as I went along. It was fun but I can see the value in going a more traditional route—as a faculty member, then a dean and so on.

But at the same, I also know there are bankers who are named presidents of colleges and universities. Why does that work for them and they tell women and people of color to go the traditional route to the presidency? I think about all of these things all the time.

During my career in higher education, I was always the only one—the only Chicana—and I was asked to serve on every university committee there was, and I did. I didn't know half of the topics. For instance, they put me on a committee about some medical policy and I was way over my head. But, I learned a lot but it gave me a bigger view of the university. I got to meet people who remembered me later on in my career. I did what I was supposed to do and I realize now it prepared me in really fundamental ways. So now I tell people to serve on committees, within reason.

Rosa's Thoughts on Other Chicanas and the Chicana Educational Pipeline

When discussing strategies in promoting and retaining other Latinas and Chicanas in presidential positions, Rosa is not confident that this change will happen anytime soon. In fact, she criticizes the practices of faculty for not promoting their students of color to advance beyond

a bachelor's degree. She believes that faculty need to encourage undergraduates to earn master's and doctorate degrees, which will make them competitive in securing faculty positions.

The problem of recruiting and retaining other Chicanas in presidential positions is not even going to be fixed in the middle of this century because we are not in graduate schools. We're maybe five percent of graduate students now, and we aren't finishing at the same rate as other non-Chicana students. It's a huge problem and I'm very worried about it. In fact, I've already told my colleagues who have Ph.D.s. and who are professors to quit telling the younger students that the tenure process is awful. They're discouraging them. So I often talk to undergraduates and say, 'you know the faculty complain, but they still have their jobs. Why do you think that is? They like the idea that they don't have to work in the summer if they choose not to. They like the idea that they can focus on their discipline and do their research, and none of them are giving that up.' I said 'they have a life of privilege where they can work three hours a day in the classroom and then go do their other work someplace else. What other job in the country allows you that opportunity. That's all I ever talk about when I'm asked to speak at career days. I get really passionate about this topic. I would never ever leave higher education. For me this has opened up not only a life for me, but for my family.

As the new president of this emerging college, Rosa finds value in paying respect to those Chicana scholars who have come before her. Even though her Chicana experience does not resemble those experiences of other marginalized Chicanas, she still believes that the guidance and support she has received from other Chicana scholars has helped her become who she is today.

I would not be where I am had it not been for all the incredible Chicanas I've had in my life. Reading "This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color" [edited by

Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua] gave me the courage to step out because I was not raised in the barrios, I was not raised as a migrant. I was raised in military institutions and the work I'm doing is in an institution, and regardless, all organizations have the same principles.

So I don't try to be what I am not. I can't say words like 'chale' because it's not part of my identity because that word means something to the inner-city Chicana. That wasn't part of my experience and I want to respect that. But it's important to understand that I could never talk about my family and their migrant struggles because we didn't have those kinds of struggles. I cannot claim that as a badge of honor. But what I can do is to make sure that our kids go to school and that's what I've chosen to do.

Learning from the experiences of other Chicanas in academia, while also stressing the importance of Chicana mentorship, is not only a core belief of Rosa's but it is also what drives her personally and professionally. In her view, it is her responsibility to ensure that there are no more breaks in the educational pipeline for all Chicanos and Chicanas.

Embracing Humility as President Rosa

Rosa finds herself being humble while being president, and she also finds it important to connect with her college community to show them that she is “the real deal”—a president with vision who also believes in the history and mission of the college.

I try to walk around campus and meet the people here. When I went over to the cosmetology school, they said that I was the first president who had ever visited their school. They were so honored. I can't even explain to you what that meant to me. Then when I agreed to have my nails done by them, even though it took two hours, it was one of the most engaging moments I've had on this campus.

Then the faculty and students from cosmetology all came to my inauguration. It was so precious; they were all there as a group, in their uniforms, cheering me on. It was just one of the moments when I thought, 'this is what it's all about.'

I don't want to be that president who walks down a hallway and doesn't say a word to anyone. For example, I'll never forget my first week here. I went out to get a cup of coffee and the facilities staff was sitting around a table drinking coffee. I went up to them and introduced myself and we just chatted, they didn't know I could speak Spanish. After I walked away, I heard one of them say to another, 'when was the last time the president stopped and talked to us?' That isn't about being humble. It's just good manners and being respectable.

I've met with all the groups here; faculty, staff, and students. It's not just the faculty that matters. It's all of us. If the grounds look bad, it presents an image, if the food is bad, people will not come back here to eat. It's a part of our climate. An article was done about me on our website regarding my inauguration. One of the things they talked about was my acknowledging the important role that the facilities staff did in making it all happen. My colleague from Iowa said there would be no other school president who would say something so positive about their facilities staff. And so those are the things that are keeping me humble.

Once again, Rosa stresses two important concepts: the importance of remaining humble as president and also staying connected to all of her constituents in her institution. She recognizes that all members of her institution offer unique talents and perspectives and acknowledging them as frequently as possible is her goal as president.

Rosa's Thoughts on Leadership

When Rosa was asked about her views on leadership, she offered a different perspective on this topic; especially given that she is held in such high regard because of her own leadership she displays at her college.

I've always worry when people call themselves a leader, I've never called myself a leader; I let the masses decide whether I'm a leader or not. However, there is a paper I once wrote about my being a community servant, which states that I'm approachable and I like to build consensus. But I also recognize that there's a difference between being a leader and a manager. I'm not sure I'm a good manager, quite frankly, I don't think that's my forte. That's why I have people who do all of the managing. But people with whom I work say that I'm a visionary. I've heard them say that over and over again when they describe me. I know I have vision but I also know I have to staff myself with people who carry out the vision.

However, I recognize that people hold me up as a role model and I accept the responsibility that comes with that. But I just worry when I hear young people say, 'I'm a leader,' and I say, 'prove it, and on what basis, and just because you get degrees and such. Prove it.'

Being the leader and president of an emerging institution can take a physical, mental, and emotional toll. Rosa indicated that she has been very cognizant in taking care of herself in more ways than one.

This has been a very stressful time for me. People are apologizing because of the things that I've run into. It's been difficult but it doesn't keep me awake at night. I do sleep. I try to stay healthy; I try to exercise, play guitar. In fact, I take out all my frustrations on my guitar. My

blood pressure is low, and in fact, I've gone really easy on myself, with all of this wonderful food around me; that's not so say I don't eat a sopaipilla every once in a while (she laughed).

The Future of President Rosa

Finally, when asked about how long Rosa sees herself as president of her institution, she gives no definite answer, yet she remains optimistic about the time she will spend expanding her college.

I negotiated with the Board for a three year contract; although I will know by January of next year whether or not I should stay. I will know whether I am making progress. I don't want to be someplace where I'm just going to hang out and not make any kind of gains. There's a new governor coming in and she may want a different board. But I've worked with all kinds of political folks and if they share the same vision of education as I do then I want to work with them.

I do plan on retiring but I didn't come here to leave, either. If I wanted to retire I would have stayed in [her former state] where I have a house. I came here to start all over. People can call it what they want. Because of my age they'll always say that I came here to retire. I'm hoping I can stay a long time, if I can keep my health. I'm really healthy and my doctors all say that I'm 20 years healthier than people who are 20 years younger than me. So when I do finally step down as president I will be a professor here. So I'm looking forward to that but I don't see it happening any time soon.

Author's comments—I spent an entire day with Rosa. She gave me a tour of her campus and also invited me to speak with various members of her faculty and staff. She also took my colleague and me to lunch at a nearby Mexican restaurant that she frequents on a weekly basis. It was

interesting to see how the townspeople reacted to her while we were there. They treated her as if she had been a member of their community for decades. They treated us nicely as well.

Later that evening we decided to venture to the little town to dine at yet another Mexican restaurant for dinner. Again, as we walked through this crowded and busy establishment, heads were turning and folks were whispering because they recognized Rosa as the “new president of their college.” She had this almost celebrity persona with the townspeople, which was fascinating to observe.

When we sat down, our young, Latina waitress asked her, “aren’t you the new president of the college?” Rosa politely said, “Yes, I am. Do you attend our college?” The waitress said, “No. I dropped out of high school because I got pregnant and I’ve worked here ever since. I live with my parents until I get enough money to move out to live with my baby’s dad. But I want to get my GED, though. Maybe someday, I guess.” Rosa dug through her pocket, pulled out a business card and gave it to the young waitress and said, “Here’s my card. I want you to call me on Monday morning and I will get you connected to my staff who runs our GED program. I want to see you get that GED and then continue with your bachelor’s degree and beyond. You see these Chicanas here at my table? (pointing to Elena and me). They both came from backgrounds like yours; living in small towns, waiting tables, and now they are college professors with advanced degrees.” The waitress looked at us in amazement. She respectfully took Rosa’s business card and promised that she would call her on Monday morning to enroll in her GED classes. We spent the next hour or so at the restaurant talking about all of our career paths and family stories and other private and personal stories that each of us had in common while this young waitress gave

us the best customer service I ever had at a restaurant. Again, I sincerely believed that it was because Rosa was the new president in town and folks truly respected her.

When we arrived back at Rosa's house, we retreated to her living room. She asked us if we minded that she take out her guitar and sing. Of course, we obliged. We spent the next hour listening to Rosa play her guitar and sing in a Joan Baez/folk-like manner about personal issues she had as a Chicana, a lesbian, a daughter, and a scholar. All of these songs she had written herself and had recorded many of them as well. Before she sang each song, Rosa told us about events leading to her writing that particular song and why she felt the need to write it. It was at that moment that I realized I was experiencing something so profound and extraordinary as a novice researcher. I never expected her to share her home and her personal surroundings with me in the manner in which she did. I was simply moved.

It was also during that time when Rosa talked about the long, symbolic braid she wears, which lays nicely down the center of her back. She said that when her mother passed away, she told Rosa to grow her braid and touch it for strength and protection.

The next morning, as always, Rosa awoke early, exercised on her treadmill, and met us in the kitchen as she was about to leave for another day as president. Before she left, she showed us her typical grace by giving us a care package filled with food that is found only in her state.

VI - JUANA

51 years old, Puerto Rican

Author's comments—I received Juana's name from Maria, the first president I interviewed for my study. Maria knew of Juana but had never met her in person. Maria contacted Juana on my behalf and asked if she would be interested in participating in my study. Days later, when I contacted Juana to inquire about her participation in my study, she graciously said yes.

Arranging an in-person meeting time with Juana became very difficult. As a new president of a large Midwestern university, her time was very limited. I worked tirelessly with her assistant to arrange a time where I would fly to her state and meet with her in person, but we were unsuccessful given that Juana had conflicting obligations during my available times and vice versa. We compromised and decided that we would meet for a few hours via Skype. It was also arranged that I would have phone meetings with a member of her executive team and also a faculty member.

I realized that the great disadvantage I would have in featuring Juana in my study is that I would not be able to observe her physical settings, or her university, professional offices. However, after reviewing the data I received from her, I decided that her story was just as powerful as the stories of my other participating presidents.

We began our conversation talking about Juana's upbringing in her native Puerto Rico as she humbly talked about how she is the eldest of four children, all of whom are college educated but none have Ph.D.'s like Juana. She also grew up in a house shared by her parents, siblings, two

aunts, and her maternal grandmother. She talks of her family with great pride while also discussing her upbringing as a time when she was always “the first” in everything she did.

Lessons Learned From Her Elders

When I look back and I think, ‘so what’s difference between my parents and me?’ In that sentence, I have concluded it’s not that I’m more intelligent or more talented. If you were to meet my parents, and I hope one day you do, you will find they are very intelligent, very normal, and very skilled people. The only difference was that someone gave me an opportunity that they never received.

I’m the eldest of four, with all the complexities and complicities of being a first born (laughs). I attended an all-girl parochial school and I think that also was a very important factor in my life. I had a lot of attention given to me; in my home as the first daughter, the first niece, and then, at school. This takes me back to the realization that it’s all about engagement and community building and if you’re surrounded by a group of individuals who instill in you the love of learning. But it is also about having a sense of trust and confidence, and believing you can be anything you want. It sounds trite, but I think that’s at the root of what I have been.

Juana’s childhood was indeed unique, according to her comments. Growing up in Puerto Rico in “a house filled with mujeres,” she reflected on this time as one that was special given that she was schooled by these female relatives, particularly by her maternal grandmother, on the importance of being Puerto Rican.

When I look back as to what was a determining factor when I was growing up, these mujeres in my house would always be ready to play with me. But among all of them was one very, very special mujer, and that was my maternal grandmother. She was a special lady who

taught me how to play cards and dominoes. She taught me English; she taught me how to read and write. She had a lot of time to devote to me.

One of the best memories I hold is that sometimes at night, we would go to the porch and there were two rocking chairs, and we would sit there and rock back and forth. I was about five or six years-old at that time. She would tell me about how it was when she was growing up; how she met my grandfather, how strict her father was. She told me all of her stories of old days including not only the personal aspect, but also the historical components, which at the time, I was not able to appreciate as I do now. We talked of the change of the flags under the Puerto Rican regime, and how we moved from being under Spain to being under the U.S. There was a part of her that it was almost rebellious and certainly irreverent about the whole thing, and I think that what I percolated from that was her critical thinking attitude towards events surrounding her. Rather than just accepting things in a passive manner, she would question those changes.

Juana mentioned that her grandmother was also the first to expose her to the many educational inequities that she and other Puerto Rican students faced within their school system. Her grandmother's sentiments reflect how Juana's family rejected the notion that Puerto Rican children were underachievers in education.

She also talked about the tribulations of growing up Puerto Rican and how the children were required to speak in a foreign language, how they were being tested by standardized tests that were not for Spanish speaking people, much less for Puerto Ricans. My grandmother would always tell me that they gave this test where it was a drawing of an apple and they would say 'color the fruit.' Well, we do not have apples in Puerto Rico; we're a tropical island, right? We

have oranges, we have mangoes, so she painted it in orange and the teacher was very upset at her because she didn't know her colors.

These were foreign concepts that were being taught in our schools and we were evaluating and labeling Puerto Rican kids and saying that they were underachievers or less intelligent. It was because there was a cognitive dissonance there. So all of these stories come back to me and I gained a better appreciation of my grandmother and her struggles. And of course, my family still does not speak English in Puerto Rico, you can tell by my accent.

As you can tell, my grandmother was a very avant garde type of woman. But perhaps the most important thing is that she was such a gracious lady and she lived through many transitions in her life. She went through a divorce, which was something that was almost unheard of in her time. But when she noticed that the relationship was not what the children needed anymore, she mustered the necessary courage to move away even though she had no education, even though she had no means to support herself. She just did what was right by placing her children first.

So I think that those values that I learned from my grandmother and also the value of being a great storyteller have stayed with me. I learned from her that there's nothing like a great story to illustrate your point, to win over friends, and to influence decision makers.

There were many life lessons that were taught by "Las Mujeres" in Juana's household. In particular the lessons taught to Juana by her grandmother gave her not only a historical context of her family's origins but they also introduced her to the art of storytelling, which is art form she uses now in her everyday life.

The Early Years in Parochial School

Juana talked of experiences she had while attending a parochial, all girl high school. In particular she talked of one experience she had while being a senior, which introduced her to the concepts of leadership development and service learning.

I attended an all-girls, parochial school and they provided me with plenty of opportunities for leadership. That was a very important concept. I was also very active in student government where I participated in cultural, artistic and academic panels, and performances. I still remember this panel that was put together by the teacher of political science or social studies, as we used to call it then. It was about economic systems. We were supposed to defend a different political economic system—capitalism, socialism, or communism. Just the research that went into those opportunities expanded my horizons tremendously and therefore I knew that I loved learning and I wanted to learn even more. I wanted to pursue a college education because there was so much I needed to know and I wanted to know.

The other part that was important about my high school education was that since this was a Catholic school that was chaired by nuns who had a strong commitment to social service, they provided us with many outlets for community engagement and service. We would work with special education students, we would serve our elderly neighbors and we even went with the principal of our school on a mission to Haiti. We stayed there for a week and helped out in a health center. We helped pregnant women, sick children, and just simply fed people where we prepared this porridge and then we'd provide it to the individuals. So that experience put me directly in touch with the great needs in our society and it instilled in me the passion toward the concept of service and doing things that will have an impact in greater society.

My principal, imagine this, was leaving behind the comfort of chairing a girls-only school with about 500 children, to live in utmost misery in Haiti and she did that willingly. By taking that courageous step I think that she really modeled for us what it means to serve.

Juana commented that her Haitian adventure and other service-related experiences she had while in high school led to her incorporating service-learning into her life today. She stated that she practiced service learning even before that concept was made popular in our society.

Juana—The First Generation College Student

After excelling in parochial school, it was time for Juana to venture to college. She talked of being terrified of going to college as a first generation college student because there was no one in her family who would be able to prepare her for her college experience. She recalls her first college experiences being filled with much self-doubt and trepidation.

Until then, I had attended just one school, right? I was surrounded by the same circle of friends and teachers. I remember thinking about going to college as this dark tunnel and the door at the end was closed because I did not know what was behind that door.

I remember my first class was philosophy. I was so nervous that I had a stomach ache. I had to go to the drugstore to get some medicine because I was so scared. It was a large group of students and I looked around the room and asked myself, 'I hope I am not the dumbest one in the room, I hope I will be as intelligent as he is, or as she looks.' So there was a lot of self-doubt even then when I first started school.

I had this doubt because I didn't have anyone in my family telling me 'rest assured, there's nothing to fear.' It was difficult for me to explain these experiences to my mom. I would tell her, 'you cannot imagine what it's like. You are surrounded by these tall buildings and these very intelligent faculty members.' In a sense, people fear what they don't know, and that was me

at the time. Also it's such an important decision so early in your life and you just want to make sure that you're taking the appropriate steps. This was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life and I wanted to make sure at every step that I was making the right decision. I wanted to make sure that I was making progress towards completion as well. I also think that's what characterizes first generation students since they don't know what the next step will bring. They want to make sure that they complete [their college education] as soon as possible.

Setting foot on a university campus can be a terrifying experience for any first generation college student, especially because this student has no point of reference as to what to expect from this adventure. This sentiment rings true with Juana. She wanted a higher education so badly that conquering her fears about the university process was the most important goal for her at the time.

Juana's Family and Her Higher Education Experience

As a first generation college student, Juana spoke highly of her family's support of her own educational aspirations. She also commented that her family valued the concept of education and saw the many possibilities that their daughter could have as a result of having a college degree.

I think what my family valued the most was the possibility of having a better life, and that a college education would open doors for me, which were opportunities that were not available to them. Getting a college education also fulfilled the concept of social mobility and enhancing the opportunities through me to future generations. Research tells us that the probability of having a college related individual in a family increases the probability of having other college educated family members. So it was almost like opening that door for me would result not only in a better quality of life for myself, but also for the family, and for generations in the future.

But my family was always so supportive because no one in my family had done this before. They knew and understood the value of an education, which is something that unnerves me when some individuals say, 'oh, Hispanics do not appreciate education.' That really rattles my cage because that is absolutely not true. They do value education, but it's just as I told you before, it's a lack of opportunity and no point of reference that many have, including my parents.

When it came time for Juana to choose her undergraduate major, she found she was able to merge her family's expectations with her own desire to immerse herself in her study area.

There were many, many, moments in my career where I didn't make it easy for [her family]; where I did not choose a major that they could relate to. I could have been an engineer because they know what engineers do. I could have been a scientist because they know what scientists do. But then I go to college and I study something that is known as comparative literature. Imagine that...this literature is compared to what? (She laughed).

Juana chose this major for a number of reasons. She noted:

I chose comparative literature because I love books. Secondly, I love abandoning myself in what we call 'the willing suspension of disbelief,' right? That comes when you're reading a book and you are several pages into it and you are not in the living room of your home anymore. Now you are in 18th century Russia, or somewhere exotic like that. I love that.

I also love to learn because books enabled me to understand the world and relationships that surrounded me. Finally, I learned how to communicate what I had understood, and when you think about it, that's the life of an academician, right? We try to understand our surroundings, and then tell others what we have understood through a book, through an article, through a song.

Juana also reflected on a particular faculty member who introduced her to the world of literature who was responsible in influencing her to study comparative literature.

I need to pay homage to a certain faculty member; actually she was the mother of one of my peers when I went to college. She was an Italian faculty member in the comparative literature department. That woman was so knowledgeable. She was so articulate. She had read so much and had such an enigmatic personality. When she would lecture in the classroom she was so fascinating that I said to myself, 'I want to be like her. I want to emulate what she's doing.' So she really played a very important role in making the final decision [to study comparative literature.]

The Trials and Tribulations of a First Generation College Student

But Juana recalled, as a first generation college student, and someone who knew little about post-secondary degrees, she had to build relationships with individuals within her university who guided her in advancing beyond a bachelor's degree and on to a master's program. She also pointed out her naiveté when deciding on which graduate school offered the best program.

When you are the first one in your family to attend college, you know nothing. You don't know about rankings, you don't know about programs. I remember when I was in my second year in my undergraduate program, I was in the comparative literature program, and the department head of humanities called me and she said, 'have you considered graduate school?' I looked at her and I said, 'what's that?' After that, she would talk to me and try to familiarize me with the differences between undergraduate and graduate school. But when you don't have a point of reference, it's very difficult.

Well, time went by, and I was in my senior year of my undergraduate studies in Puerto Rico. I applied to a number of schools. Unfortunately this was before the time when schools wanted to have Latinos and Latinas in their classrooms. This is interesting because I had applied for a scholarship, at the time it was known as the CIC Scholarship, where the Big 10 gave ten scholarships and the recipients could choose to go to any of those schools. So in the Big 10 coalition, I had chosen University of Indiana and Purdue University.

Looking back, with the knowledge that I have now, I think that a person with an interest in comparative literature would have normally gravitated more to the curriculum that was being offered by University of Indiana, rather than by the land grant university, which was Purdue, right? But I mention that to you as a point of illustration of how little we know when we are first generation students.

What ended up being a decisive factor was that there was a conference in Puerto Rico where this faculty member from Purdue was participating in the conference, who was a total stranger to me until that moment. Well, this faculty member and I sat down, we drank a soda together, and just the fact that I knew that he had taken the time and that now I had one person in Purdue whom I knew, versus no one in another graduate school. I decided to go to his school.

So going to Purdue was my decision and looking back at it now, it's important to me because it illustrates how we really need to reach out and provide first generation students with as much information as we can [about college choices] because they don't know anything about rankings. We need to make a very deliberate attempt at sharing that information with them.

Returning to Her “Roots”

After receiving her undergraduate degree, Juana married and she and her family moved to Texas. This was in the mid 80s. She subsequently completed her master's degree in Spanish and

then her doctorate degree in Humanities, respectively. She discussed how she was approached to teach at her undergraduate institution back in Puerto Rico. In her view, this was a perfect opportunity for her to not only return to her alma mater that had such an important influence on her personal and professional development, but it would also allow her to reconnect with her family.

So when I finished my Ph.D., I received a phone call from my undergraduate university, back in Puerto Rico. They told me that they were going to be searching for a faculty member and that they would like to invite for me to apply. The answer in my mind it was very clear. First, by the time I already had my two kids, and I thought it would be great if I could go back to Puerto Rico and give my children an opportunity to grow up surrounded by the extended family members. That was something I remembered fondly, and that was very important to me; having an opportunity for my children to grow surrounded by cousins, to fall asleep on my mother's lap. I thought that was important.

Secondly, even then I was so grateful to that university because they prepared me so well. I was able to complete the education they provided me, which also enabled me to dispel all the fears and the self-doubt that I would normally have. I wanted to go back and pay it forward. I had very clear in my mind that I wanted to make a difference in my home town, in the place that had given me so much.

Moving Quickly up the Academic Ladder

Juana was in a tenure-track professor position at this university and much to her surprise she was approached to take on an administrative position. She made this professional decision without having the appropriate academic mentorship and guidance, she said. Also, being an administrator did not make her happy at the time. In hindsight, she wished that she would have

stayed a faculty member where she would have a flexible schedule and have the ability to publish. But the process moved too quickly for her.

I was a faculty member for three years and then I was called to the dean's office. Imagine that. I went to his office and he said that he needed help and he had been watching my trajectory. He wanted me to serve as assistant dean for academic affairs. I didn't know what that was. I said 'well, can I think about it until tomorrow?' And he said 'sure.'

So I went back to my office and I told my colleague that the dean had offered me this position. She said, 'are you going to be happy?' And that's something I have always remembered so well—am I going to be happy doing this? I did not have a mentor by my side. I did not have anyone who would have told me, as I have told some of my Latina women, 'Absolutely no! Go back to your office and you write and write and publish and publish!' I did not have that then. The only person I had was this colleague of mine, with whom I had this conversation. But I was not thinking about the decision itself or that it would bring additional prestige, or authority. It certainly did not bring a salary increase.

But when my colleague asked if I was going to be happy, that took me back to my formative years in high school, and the lessons I learned about serving others, and how can that be a source of profound satisfaction. It was based on the notion that this would allow me to serve, to facilitate processes for our students to be more successful, that ended up why I accepted the position. So in the end, I said, 'okay, I'll accept it.'

I did that job for a little while and then there was another election and another change in government, and I was very pleased and honored because the new administration asked me to stay, which meant in my eyes that they recognized that I was not partisan. But then I told them, 'listen, I have two small children, my son was 7 and my daughter was 4, so I really need to go

back to classroom.’ So, I went back to the classroom and shortly after that, I was elected to faculty senate and became an administrator’s worse nightmare (she laughed) because I was not versed in the code of administration. Actually, my most experience had been with faculty senate so I brought that perspective with me. Therefore I was challenging our assumptions. So, that’s why I said that I was the administrator’s nightmare because I didn’t have the language, I didn’t have the context, and all I had was this deep commitment to improve our educational system.

Juana’s Journey to the Presidency

In a very short time, Juana’s career skyrocketed. During her tenth year at her university, at the age of 43, she was appointed as the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Following that, she was appointed as provost, then as an interim president. Finally, at age 49, she was approached to be considered for the presidency at her current university. She told an interesting story about how this appointment occurred, which, to her, was totally by surprise.

I was serving as interim president [at her former university] and the phone rang and it was a search consultant. He wanted to let me know that the former president here had announced his resignation and he would like to have a conversation with me about the presidency. And my immediate answer was, ‘Well thank you very much. I know it’s a very fine institution; we have been using it for benchmarking purposes at our own university. But, I’m very happy in [her former state]. I hung up and looked at the telephone and said, ‘oh boy, that was a very interesting phone call,’ and I forgot about it.

Months later, they called me again, and this time, they said, ‘well you have been nominated for the position, and we would like to have a conversation with you.’ In my mind, when you said [the state where the new university is located] the image that came to mind was

horses, mountains, and lots of snow. So my answer was, 'do you know where I was born?' (She laughs).

I studied a little bit more about the institution and about the state, and I looked at the demographics and I learned that the Latino population is only two percent. We have a city in the state that has eight percent Latinos, and that's the highest. So I said to myself, 'this is a lost cause' and I called the search consultant again and I respectfully thanked them for the nomination but I declined the nomination.

Then the phone rang again, and it was that man again. He said that they needed me to reconsider my decision. And I remember lowering my head over the phone, and I asked, 'what is it you're seeing that I am not seeing? What do you see in me that I do not seeing?' This again goes back to the woman in me, the Latina in me, who always thinks that I'm not up to the challenge. Then we talked a little bit more about land grant universities, system universities, and my experience with minorities. Then they asked if I would accept an invitation to have a conversation with the commissioner of higher education in the state. How is a person supposed to answer that question? That was a very clever question. So, I agreed to do so. When we talked, I told her that my main concerns are about diversity issues in the state and so forth. We had a very productive discussion where I learned a lot about the state and the institution. I was feeling better about things by then.

Then my daughter was here visiting for the summer and I asked her, 'so what do you think?' She said, 'Mom, that's so cool! Go ahead and submit the letter.' So I did and mine was the last letter and the last nomination. So, you can imagine the commotion that accorded when my name was announced as a finalist. All of the sudden there were two male finalists, two

scientists by the way, there was me, the Puerto Rican woman (she laughs), five feet tall, who majored in comparative literature, she speaks with an accent, all minuses, minuses, minuses.

But then when I came for my interview, I connected with the people. Those interview days were very structured, very intense, back to back interviews that really test your stamina and focus. But the one interview that really stands out in my memory is my meeting with the students. I remember walking into that room and seeing all their beautiful blonde heads and I said to myself, 'what am I doing?' (She laughs) What am I doing?' And you know what? That was the most wonderful meeting of all. They asked very pointed questions, very intelligent questions, and at the end of two full days of having conversations with individuals I felt that I connected with them at a very basic level. Folks in our state are very authentic; what you see is that you get, and that's how I am, too.

Juana's sincere connection with the faculty, staff, and students during her presidential interviews confirmed to her that they shared similar values and beliefs regarding the mission of a land grant university. Having these firm connections to the individuals of her university is what solidified that this was the university for her.

We shared the value of aspiring for excellence and access for our students and the values of teaching, research, and service that are part of the land grant mission. I also think that I related very well with the 'can-do' attitude of the place, which is one of the many things that I admire about the people of our university is that they make things happen out of nothing. They also have that sense of endurance and resiliency in the face of challenges that I can relate to. Also, I believe I approached this opportunity with immense humility and therefore, they welcomed someone that was going to join the ranks of individuals who would roll up their sleeves and take this university to the next level of excellence. It was clear that I was not

someone who was going to tell them what to do; but I was more of a partner that was going to help in that effort.

President Juana Arrives

Soon thereafter, Juana was appointed as president of her reputable research university in the Midwest. Even though she was among some tough competitors, Juana believes that there were many reasons why they selected her for this position over the two male candidates. In her view, she brought a wealth of knowledge and experience in higher education that inevitably stood out to the search committee. But in the midst of all of her accomplishments, Juana was first to mention that she did not achieve them singlehandedly. She gave credit to others who stood beside her.

In my previous experience, I have grown student enrollment numbers. I have expanded new academic programs. I have facilitated interdisciplinary research initiatives. I have experience in dealing with multi-campus university systems. I have experience in advancing infrastructure projects such as procuring funds for new buildings or renovation of buildings. I have been successful in fundraising where I have been able to attract endowed chairs and professorships and significantly increased the number of scholarships that were available to students. I have experience dealing with legislators and elected officials. I have been able to lead an institution through a very successful accreditation process that ended up successful accreditation for ten years, which was something that was new for the university.

So I had a number of accomplishments that I was able to show. But perhaps the most important thing I was able to demonstrate was that I put teams together that would produce results. Please also note that none of those accomplishments that I listed I did on my own. It's important for me to give credit to the great number of people who helped me and believed in me

and that made things happen. So those were the things that I believe were instrumental in bringing me to this to this opportunity now.

Juana is known to have somewhat of a spiritual side of her, which she only shares with a small number of people, she said. While speaking of her transition to her new university she recalled a memorable spiritual experience that solidified that her decision to move to a large, Midwest university and serve as president was the right choice for her.

I cannot tell you that I was planning on this, and as I look back and I ask, 'how could I end up here, in the Midwest, as president of a research institution!' I'm a believer as well, so I think that there's something else that's driving this and there's something I need to do here.

Let me tell you this story. When I was waiting for the committee to make a choice, every day I would try to learn a little bit more about [the state that her university is located]. Well, one night I received an email from an extension agent at my last university and she said, 'I read this story and I thought about you.' I opened the attachment and this was a story of a group of women who liked to read books. On this special occasion they read from the scriptures a passage from Malachi, Chapter 3, verse 3, it says, 'He seeks as a polisher and refiner of silver' and they said, 'well, that's very confusing, what does that mean?' So, they decided to go as a group and visit a silversmith. They walked into his shop and the first thing they saw was what the scripture stated, the silversmith sitting in front of the flames. They approached him and started talking to him. They asked him, 'so what are you doing?' He said, 'well, I'm polishing this piece of silver.' Then they asked him, 'why are you sitting down?' He said, 'well, I want to be very balanced because no matter how hot the flames get, I will never allow this piece of silver to fall into the fire.' Then they looked at him and said, 'how do you know when it's done?' He lifted up his eyes and said, 'oh, it's easy. When I see my image reflected on it.'

So that night, I Googled information about the seal of the state [that her university is located in] and the picture came up. It is a round seal that has mountains, rivers, and then it has this line at the bottom that says, and this is not a translation...it says, 'oro y plata' (gold and silver). Then I said, 'ok, I get it!' It was this beautiful message telling me that I belonged here.

President Juana “Rolls up Her Sleeves” and Gets Working

After Juana arrived at her new university she immediately shared with her team the concepts of Servant Leadership because she believes that serving their university community in this manner is important to their progression.

When I arrived here, I asked the entire cabinet, 'let's read a book together.' I brought the book From Good to Great because I firmly believe in being a servant leader. That's what I strive to do; to be self-effacing, placing the institution at the forefront, but being very passionate about that institution. I have found that's what provides me with greatest satisfaction.

As a servant leader, Juana recognized that she must first focus on the needs of her students who attend her land grant institution. It was then when she reflected on her own experiences as a graduate of a land grant university and began envisioning what her university would look like under her leadership.

I have tried to move the spotlight from me as a person with what I can do for the university and with my own limitations to what can I accomplish for this institution. How can I move it forward?

I mentioned that I was born in the city that is the home to the land grant university. I always go back to that history...it was in 1862 when Congress approved the Morrill Act, which established one public school in each state and territory of the Union, right? It was in our darkest hour as a nation, during the Civil War, but still, a group of inspired leaders decided not

to pay attention to the limitations of the time, but rather to focus on the future and build in a better and brighter future by educating the sons and daughters of the working families. That's how I was able to go to school. My family would not have afforded sending me to the East Coast to a private college. So in my mind relaying this information to my students is the most important social experiment.

So, what I can do in my position is to advocate for that young man or woman who is as talented as my father or mother, who no one ever believed that they could achieve something. I ask, 'how can I open doors for opportunity, so that individual can progress in social mobility and strengthen American democracy?' That gives me hope, and that gives me strength, and therefore, I don't focus on if people are questioning me or my abilities, but rather, I focus on what we can build together.

Being a servant to her community while also reflecting on her own experiences with educational access is what ultimately guided Juana during her first few months as president of her university.

Instituting Listening and Learning Sessions

One of the more notable activities Juana has implemented at her university are what she calls her "Listening and Learning Sessions," where she travels to various departments within her university, her larger university system, and also to some of their agricultural centers and learns first hand from her constituents the issues that are occurring within their institution. She believes that this process of open communication and transparency gives her valuable information and knowledge to build upon as a president.

One of the things you learn while working in complex organizations is that communication is lacking; people don't know what's going on. And of course, there's the human

phenomenon where if you start a rumor or gossip, it will spread like fire. So I started these listening or learning sessions, not only in [the city where the university is located], but in the university system. I also went to the four campuses and to some of the agricultural centers. I literally sat down and listened to what people had to say. That gave me more information and a better insight into the system; more than all the brochures and charts that I had read up until then.

What I learned from people was that they wanted to have a more inclusive university; more participation in the decision making process. So that's how I started and every time we have a challenge, I confront the challenge then I consult amply with people. For example, in the face of budget cuts, rather than deciding which I could cut for the sake of expediency, I decided that I would consult with people who want to have their opinions heard.

These listening and learning sessions established a time which stated that my administration is one that was going to be open and transparent and based on constant communication. Also, these thirty-plus sessions taught me that people were ready to help, that people wanted to participate more, and that it was important for them to feel special and valued. These sessions also showed that each perspective from those units was going to be appreciated, and that they, too, have something to contribute. That's something I remind myself of every day when I come to the office—that people expect for me to be open and they are ready to help, and guide me.

That was also the time when Juana began implementing her “people first” philosophy with her faculty and staff of her university. She shared an interesting story that happened during her second day as president that shows how she did not make a knee-jerk decision about a pending issue, but rather considered how the people of her university would be impacted.

When I arrived last January, it was my second day on the job, and the governor announced budget cuts. What the university decided, before my arrival, was that we were going to proceed with furloughs and layoffs. I said ‘absolutely not’ but rather, I said ‘let’s talk about operations, where can we produce some efficiencies?’ Going back to that principle of people first, and you know what that did, it sent a strong message, which was an invitation for people to help me identify sources of efficiency and effectiveness and economies because they knew that I was trying to protect their jobs. Those are some of the basic principles that you can articulate for yourself and for the people who work with you so that they understand. You can outline where the boundaries are, where the fences are, and also note that you will never go beyond this line.

After it was all over, a funny thing happened that I still remember to this day. I overheard my secretary saying to someone about me, ‘yes, five percent cut, mmmm, yes, six inches of fresh snow has fallen, ah ha, yep, she’s still here!’ (She laughed).

When reflecting on those first few days on the job when Juana was asked to make difficult budgetary decisions, what resonated in Juana’s mind were the values, or “The Golden Rule” she learned from her elders. By reflecting on “The Golden Rule,” Juana was confident that she treated her constituents with dignity and respect despite having to cut funds from her university budget.

I practiced “The Golden Rule” during this process, which is treat people the way I want to be treated, which is with dignity and respect. But where do those sentiments come from? It comes from our Latino culture, right? You treat people with respect that’s why we use “usted” and that’s how we treat the elders, right? And in the end, it all worked out for the best.

Goals for Her University

As a new president in a large university, Juana has set out ambitious goals that she feels are attainable. Some of those goals include reaching out to students in the far corners of her large state and showing them that attaining a college degree is indeed possible.

We are a part of one university system where we have four campuses, seven agricultural stations, and fifty-five offices that serve every county in the state. If we realize that the entire state is our campus, then that sounds good, right? But it also means that we have a huge responsibility to our rural parts of the state and to our tribal communities. People expect certain things from our university. So if we can raise that sense of community engagement as a strong land grant university, I would feel very satisfied.

We have already accomplished great things in terms of research and in terms of scholarship, and our students do great things. My challenge will be to invite more students to feel that they, too, can be college material and they, too, can aspire to earn those distinctions. I'm very student centered.

Another goal of Juana's is to not only be student-centered but community-centered. She is taking the values and traditions she learned as a child, and those she learned as a student at a land grant institution—both of which stress the importance of community and staying close to family while being a university student.

We are not doing so bad in terms of the number of graduates who remain in the state—about 75 percent of all graduates from our university stay here. This is a very tight community. When I look at them, I see in them some of same things I did when I graduated from college. I had an opportunity to teach in another university in the U.S. but I wanted to go back home

because I wanted to give back. I wanted to make a difference and be close to family.

Interestingly, I find that in our students in our state as well.

But I also think that we have families who have strong agricultural connections. When I talk to some of our families, they often ask ‘why is a four-year degree important,’ when they have immediate needs on their ranch and on their farms. The message that I’d like us to send out is that by having a four-year degree your quality of life will be enhanced dramatically; not only in terms of earnings, but also in terms of all the elements of quality of life that are associated with it.

It is also important for Juana to keep a small town feeling in her large university, which she feels will attract more students from the nearby community colleges to transfer to attain a four-year degree. In her view, the students will have an easier time transitioning to her large university and their retention will be greater.

We have students here who come from towns with 200 people. Then in some of our first year classes, we have 300 students in there. So all of a sudden, you’re taking a young man from the remote part of our state and placing him in a large classroom where he sees more people there than he has seen in his entire life. That can be daunting for some students.

I had this student who came from a very small town in our state, and he told me that he’s never met anyone who I didn’t know. Isn’t that funny?! You grow up in this small community and all of a sudden you’re thrown into a university with 14,000 students. They can get lost.

One of the things that I did last semester is put together a proposal, and this is still in the making and it had not been approved by the Board of Regents, for students like me, who didn’t have anybody in their families who earned a degree, to consider a community college degree first then transfer to our university. I don’t think I’m overly realistic when I say sometimes you

attract that young man who thinks that the only thing he wants is automotive training, and you can chart an engineer out of him.

Communication—The Most Important Skill for a President

Juana and I continued our discussion about her presidency but focused more on the personal skills she brings to her position as well as those that she believes every president of a major university should possess. She finds that her unique process of communication, whether it is through her in-person contacts or through her weekly mass email blasts, have added great depth to her position as president. She also believes that all presidents should place communication at the top of their lists when noting the most important trait they should possess while being in this position.

There are three things that I believe all presidents should do in order to be successful—communicate, communicate, communicate. The more I'm in this business, the more I realize that you can be the most accomplished whatever area you're in. But if you're going to be a leader, if you're going to have people following you and buying in on your ideas, you need to let them in. So communication is indeed a two-way street.

When I say communicate, it's not that you do all the talking first. It involves listening as well. You need to sit down and listen. When I held my circuit visits with the Listening and Learning Sessions that was exactly what happened. I listened and I learned.

I started my presidency by sending an email to every faculty, student, and staff in each of our campuses, our agricultural centers, and extension offices every Monday morning, and I still do this. When I told the cabinet that I wanted to do this, all of the vice presidents looked at me and said, 'what?' Their ears fell and their eyes flopped. But there are two positive things that have come out of this weekly email. First, it has allowed me to brag about the university. The

second is that it is an intrusive email. It's not a web page. It's an email that goes into everybody's in-box, and people have an ability to hit the reply button. Do you know who's going to be reading their responses? Me. Sometimes they talk to me about the topic of the memo. Or sometimes it has nothing to do with my topic at large. But what it gives me is a pretext to engage in with my community and it's also an opportunity to show accessibility, that we are on the same page.

Juana said that these popular emails are now sent to alumni, legislators, and the local media each Monday morning. The topics that she covers range from the history of the land grant university to highlights of faculty members who are doing extraordinary research to general updates on projects that are occurring at her university. Juana said this platform “is almost like taking the best out of the social network concept.”

If You Build It, They Will Come

To date, one of Juana's most notable accomplishments was her impressive fund raising effort she led, which raised \$10 million to fund the expansion of their football stadium. When reflecting on this project, Juana humbly talked of this process that involved working collaboratively and very quickly with many of her university stakeholders.

That was quite an experience and a very powerful lesson—the lesson of bringing people together, which was the most important thing. This project was provoked by a group of athletics fans, mainly alums, but not all of them graduated from the institution. They were unhappy with the way in which the university was portraying itself; the lack of visibility in certain sectors. I remember listening to them and finally saying, ‘okay, that was the past and I’m going to honor and respect the past. But I’m here to tell you we’re turning the page, and I’m more interested in the future. So what about if we do certain things together?’

So, we were meeting at the stadium and we asked one another, 'have you taken a look at that end zone?' (She laughs.) I mean there were some rows of wooden bleachers that were horrific. Also the capacity of the stadium had been stagnant for decades and even though the student population had grown, only 3,000 students would be able to come to the games. I think that's one way in which we retain students at our university is by making students feel a connection; sometimes it could be a connection to a faculty member, or a connection to a program or a group. Certainly for some students, sporting events can mean that link back, or a sense of belonging, or a sense of identity. So I asked these athletic fans, 'instead of having an end zone, if you help me expand the end zone so that more students can come and participate in the games. What about if we were to add more concessions for the students, a new scoreboard, and sound system where you could really understand what they're saying?' What I didn't understand at the time was that I was painting a picture for them and I was asking them to join me in that landscape. Basically, I was asking them to do great things.

The other thing that happened was that I asked them 'what about if we have it ready for next year?' It was unbeknownst to me at the time that I was building a platform of urgency, and it was a very ambitious goal with an almost impossible time line. When the engineers sat down and said 'well, in order for us to have this ready for the next season, you have three months to raise this money.' (She laughs.). So we raised the money in 90 days, yes, 90 days. That was all that we had. And you know what? Not only did we meet the goal, we exceeded it.

When we opened the stadium, we had dedication ceremony and there were tears running down people's faces because this project was beyond the physical structure. It was that together we accomplished an impossible feat, and that that made everybody feel proud.

This stadium project became a signature accomplishment that highlighted Juana's collaborative skills. Juana stresses that she did not accomplish this goal alone. But rather, she carefully facilitated the process of raising \$10 million with her university community. This is a telling example of how Juana conducts herself everyday as president and as a servant leader.

Bridging Her Two Cultures—Latina and President

As the first and only Latina president of her research university, Juana talked of the importance of being authentic in all that she does. She accomplishes this authenticity by balancing what she calls her “two cultures”—her Puerto Rican and her academic/presidential culture—and also by reminding herself that each culture is just as important as the other.

Yes, there are two cultures within me; there are two languages in operation constantly. I'm very unconventional; I touch people's hearts. I sit down with people and we make jokes. I'm determined to be me and I think that people appreciate that authenticity; more than the position and the aura. I think in the long run, that really has a more profound impact on individuals than if I just going to say, 'well, I'm going to be an Anglo president today and leave my Latina-ness back home because it doesn't fit.' I dress in bright colors, I love music.

It's funny the other day I told my front office staff that I'm going to start Spanish lessons. So it was me saying 'papel...paper' (She laughed). They were like 'PAAA-pel, no, no, no Papel.' We just have a good time together, that's all.

But even when I was a faculty member, I learned a powerful lesson about being authentic. The first time I approached a classroom, I thought, 'well this is how a university professor looks like,' and I was very serious you know, very detached. I noticed after awhile that wasn't giving me any satisfaction at all, and I was not connecting with the students. And the day of my epiphany came when I told the story, a joke, and no one in the classroom laughed. I said

'this is very bad.' So that was the day when I said, 'forget about model, I'm going to be me.' And you know what? That changed my experience and I loved my students; we had fun in my classes, and it's the same way now as I'm president.

But now as president of a major university, one would think that Juana is treated with great esteem when she visits her homeland of Puerto Rico. According to Juana, that is not the case. She leaves her president persona behind while mixing with her family in her native town. She also expects that folks treat her as they did before she became president—as an ordinary woman without the presidential fan fair.

When I go back home I'm Juana, not president Juana, not Dr. Juana. When I'm there, I don't have that much time to spend with other people so I'm just with my family. We have food, we have a good time, but never in our lives have we allowed my Ph.D. or my so-called status stand in the way of being family. That's something very important to me.

I am who I am and the rest have been opportunities that have been provided to me. My family and my Puerto Rican community do not treat me with any kind of special deference. I am very honored, but you know what, I'm just Juana to them.

Remaining authentic remains very important to Juana. This authenticity shows others that Juana is real in all that she does and titles or professional status are not what define her.

Expanding the Latina Presidential Pipeline

Juana and I moved our discussion to the topic of how Latinas continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions in higher education. She acknowledges that this is a problem but she believes that there are adequate leadership programs in place to train emerging Latina leaders to be in presidential positions. But she also believes that the power lies with the

vision of the Boards of Regents who are ultimately responsible for hiring Latina leaders to represent their institutions.

In 2005, I participated in a program that was funded by the Kellogg Foundation. The idea was to build the next generation of academic leaders in minority populations. That year, we had ten representatives from Hispanic serving institutions, ten from historically Black colleges, and ten from tribal colleges and we would co-exist over the course of one year. That helped me in terms of networking, and in forging good relationships.

These programs are good for individual growth, but none addressed the real decision makers, which are the Board of Regents, right? If we do not educate our Boards of Regents about the need, and the importance of diversity, then all is for naught. Left to their own devices, and this is human nature and it happens in search committees every day, they tend to look for people [to serve in presidential positions] who look like them. People tend to clone. So if people want to find someone very different, especially in presidential searches, it has to be a very deliberate effort.

But in my case, I was moved and honored and humbled when I came in for my presidential interview. The reviews were positive and the people who evaluated me sent their feedback to the Board of Regents. It told me that the Board of Regents was willing to take that chance. Think about it, I don't look like and I don't sound like anybody here. They could have taken another path with very qualified individuals who were also in the pool. But they took their chances and gave me this opportunity to serve, and I know that in doing this, we're all involved in a very important experiment. I know that I have to do very well because there are many Latinas behind me, and if I don't do a good a job, then I'm ruining their chance to be successful.

So, I want to leave a good legacy so that in the future when another Latina steps up to the plate, they can say 'yes, they can do that job. Look what happened at that university in the Midwest.' So that's the part that's really transformative here and I give kudos to our Board of Regents because they said that yes to a very different option and they didn't have to do that. That's what opened that door of opportunity.

That's where we really need to work more in educating other Boards of Regents about the society that we all want to build. We need to show them that this is one of the values that we treasure.

Juana views her job as one that carries legacy and influence. It is important to her that other emerging Latina leaders view her as a role model and as someone whom they can be someday.

Her Most Important Role—Being a Mother

Juana always stresses to others that her role as the mother of a 26-year-old son and a 24-year-old daughter is the most important role she has. She told a story that involved her daughter sharing a presidential moment with her, which she still finds to be very touching.

My daughter was able to come to my presidential inauguration. The day before the ceremony, we were rehearsing and they told me that they use the Bible that was used during the inauguration of the second president of university. I'm the 12th president, by the way. I was with the Regents and they said, 'so who's going to hold the Bible?' and there was a silence. I said, 'can my daughter hold it?' You know, that was one of the most beautiful moments of the inauguration; to have her right there, by my side, you could tell in her eyes how proud she felt.

Now as a single parent, Juana involves her children in as many of her presidential activities as she can while showing them that she can bridge her worlds of being a Puerto Rican, a president, and a mother.

Making Sacrifices for the Betterment of Her University

When reflecting on her new life as a president, Juana commented that she has given up more than she imagined. But she also realizes that despite her newfound celebrity status, she relies on the simple lessons she learned from her elders that stressed the importance of human connectedness and community building.

I've given up my privacy and my freedom. My time is not my time anymore. I'm so heavily scheduled; seven days a week, my mornings, my afternoons, everything. I cannot go to the grocery store as a normal person. I need to always be in the presidential role because people recognize me wherever I go. When I've been asked about what part of this job that I don't like and my answer is the celebrity status, the Britney Spears effect is what I call it (she laughs).

So when the Britney Spears effect is taken away, what is left is that human connection; the ability to build a sense of community with my constituents. Again, that's where I think it goes back to my roots. That's why I can relate to individuals so well in my job.

Despite the personal sacrifices Juana has made by being president, she sees herself continuing in this role for an undetermined amount of time because, like the other presidents in this study, in an altruistic way of thinking, Juana feels this job is a calling.

Why do I do this work? You know, the answer is clear to me, and it goes back to my servant leadership role I play. I do this work because I think I can touch lives. I can transform the lives of individuals, and again, that's what keeps me going. That's why when I'm very tired I

get up every morning and come to work because I think that today might be the day in which I can make a difference in someone's life.

Reflections from Members of Juana's Faculty and Staff

Shortly after my conversation with Juana, I was afforded the opportunity to meet via phone with a faculty member named Bonnie and an administrator named Tim who offered their perspectives on Juana. They began by reflecting on their first interactions with Juana and commented on how well she was received by her university community. Bonnie, a faculty member at their institution for 15 years, said,

I do remember that people were hoping we would get her [as president] and were also certain that we wouldn't because she seemed so dynamic and so qualified and we also asked, 'why would she ever want to come to our state?' You know, she'd probably want to stay in her environment or in her cultural context.

But one of the things that I've noticed about her at first is that she's petite, and Latina, and she's from Puerto Rico, and in our state, those three things stand out. There were so much of those descriptors about her early on in the press. She was always characterized as this small, lucky, or plucky woman from Puerto Rico. I don't even know if folks from our state use the word Latina because I think that's still kind of foreign term for them.

So she was definitely characterized in certain language that certainly wouldn't be used for a White, male guy. I noticed that that it was almost as if every time they talked about the President, they had to describe her by her race and ethnicity because it was so foreign and exciting at the same time.

The flip side is that our state does not have a lot of Latinos and it's very welcoming in that respect. Our state just doesn't have a history with them so there's none of those preconceived stereotypes that you might encounter in Arizona or you know Southern California. So I think she's been well received and very warmly welcomed.

I remember that she said, and I had this experience as a Puerto Rican also, that it's strange how we can feel here. You feel a sense of community almost immediately; a warm community, and family. Even though our state is kind of off the map, it's very north, it's a huge state with less than a million people. But it's very White, and yet, many Puerto Ricans find it homey on some level. The president found her comfort zone here. So having that said, I think she was greeted with a lot of excitement.

Tim, the Vice President for Research, who also has a long history with their university, echoed Bonnie's sentiments about Juana. He views Juana as a president that has fit nicely into their university culture.

She's the best president this institution has ever had, I can start off by saying that, and I feel strongly about that. I've been at this university for 20 years and I've been in this position for 13 years and during that time, I've actually had three presidents: one who died very suddenly and then we had an interim for about a year and a half, and now Juana.

She is fantastic. She is very articulate, very charismatic, smart, incredibly intelligent, well-organized, works incredibly hard, and she just walks in a room and has a presence. She's a fantastic leader; she's certainly not just a manager or a person who is in a caretaker-type role or anything. She's a leader. And she does have a great vision. She wants our university to grow in variety of areas.

Their Thoughts on Juana's Vision and Goals

Bonnie and Tim talked of their institution as a land grant university and how Juana has aligned her vision to match the goals of this unique type of institution. Tim commented,

What she sees, and it's very accurate, is that our institution is relative to most land grant institutions. It is certainly relative if you look at the percentage of our enrollment, especially in regards to our master's and Ph.D. students. We're probably at the very bottom on a percentage basis relative to land grants in the United States. Juana has made a commitment that we are going to grow our graduate programs, in terms of the number of students, but also the quality of students. And that is going to happen over the next five years. She has guaranteed this. That will make us a better institution, I believe.

She's also trying to identify ways that will increase our multi investigator and interdisciplinary research. She's going to put some things in place that will incentivize this process. We've got a good group of faculty who are already engaged, but she's going to do some things that will incentivize those faculty members who are not engaged.

Another thing she's totally committed to is our low retention rate for freshmen and sophomores. That's going to change under her leadership. And one thing that's going to really grow as compared to most land grant institutions is that we're way behind in terms of our off-campus delivery of education programs. She is committed to growing those programs and I believe that she will succeed because she's puts out these as goals and expects us to identify metrics that can show we're making improvements and we'll be held accountable to doing so. That all I need is for her to tell me where we're going and I know we'll get there.

Bonnie agreed with Tim's comments regarding Juana's commitment to the land grant mission and how her forward-thinking leadership will add depth to the mission and goals of their university. She noted,

Juana brings a high sense of purpose and engagement in the original mission of the university, the land grant mission. She is incredibly dynamic, and incredibly receptive to ideas to students, to faculty. She has galvanized faculty to recommit to the mission of the land grant institution. I think that the faculty has been energized by our mission, by serving the working class, by serving the underrepresented, by having open access to so many disenfranchised communities.

Juana's Listening and Learning Sessions Revisited

Juana's Listening and Learning sessions were mentioned by Bonnie and Tim as milestones thus far in her presidency. They believed that this highly effective form of communication brought together the voices of a large state into a smaller, more condensed format. As Bonnie noted,

One of the first things Juana did was to listen. She had these listening sessions all over the state and that was unusual. She must have had, I don't know how many, with all different constituents of the state, and all the university's smaller campuses, and community members, and the people in agricultural, there were numerous sessions she conducted. You have to understand that our state is really isolated because it's very big and you can travel for hours before you get to another city. These are communities that are agricultural; there are farmers, ranchers, they're all different kinds of constituents. Juana made it a point to really publicize that she wanted to hear from all different kinds of communities.

What she accomplished with those listening sessions was having the state really listen to her because she's listened to her constituents. I think she gained a lot of traction with that; a lot of human capital. Then a lot of people were willing to go the extra mile for her because she had made it such a big point of getting in the car and driving all around the state. That was one of her most brilliant additions to our university.

Tim agreed with Bonnie's sentiments about Juana's Listening and Learning sessions. He believes that Juana succeeded in creating community while also encouraging people to add their input on the future of their university. He said,

They were true listening sessions; I mean they were real. It wasn't like some kind of formality. After that, she sat down and basically went over all the information that she received from her constituents and she came up with some things that she felt we needed to improve on. I think she is doing wonderful things and it comes from having people feel good. They may not like the decisions that get made but at least there's a feeling amongst the people on campus that they at have an opportunity to provide input.

Another milestone of Juana's that Bonnie commented on was her ability to raise a significant amount of money to fund the expansion of their football stadium. Both Tim and Bonnie believe it was Juana's keen ability to involve not just the university community but the alumni community as well in bringing this goal to fruition. Tim said,

Juana did something unprecedented in my view. We have this initiative called the Quarterback Club, where people pay a minimum of \$1,000 to join every year. They're a very vocal group who has been pushing for a football stadium expansion for probably five years. At the end of June, early July, she sat down with them, listened to them, and told them, 'Okay, here's my challenge. We'll build a stadium, but you've got to raise half the money and then we'll do the rest. Her challenge was to raise \$10 million in 90 days. For big institutions, raising ten million dollars might not be a lot of money, but at our university, it's a huge chunk of change. So, she went out and was very active in her fund raising plan, not only locally but nationally. In 90 days, she raised \$10 million.

So raising that kind of money it's totally unprecedented and just shows the kind of support that she has in the community, not only on campus but off campus.

In Bonnie's view, this was Juana's innovative way of persuading her alumni to invest in the future of their university. She commented:

There's always grumblings about athletics on university campuses. So when she quickly became engaged with graduates of our university who are sports fans, she was able to succeed in extending the size of our stadium. I'm not really a fundraiser or an alumn, but even I can recognize how important this was because those people who are Wildcat fans, they also are people who will give great donations because they've had such experiences at our university and they're able to relive those experiences over again in the football stadium. So that definitely was a milestone.

I don't know how she did it, but in a short span of time, she raised these millions of dollars. The faculty can criticize that and there's always this kind of gap between academics and athletics, but in terms of building faith with the community and alumni, I think she was successful there and in a lot of ways they sustain the university.

Bonnie then reflected on Juana's inauguration speech and how it outlined in detail her three key points that she plans to accomplish while being president. Much to Bonnie's surprise, Juana is already accomplishing these key points in the short time she has been president. In Bonnie's view, this action of Juana's shows the university community and the general public that she means business.

In her inauguration speech, she talked about three points or strategies which include creating more online opportunities, creating more interdisciplinary opportunities, and also restructuring our university's governance. I remember going to a previous president's speech and it was very standard. There was no meat in there. But there was meat in Juana's inaugural speech and I think it's a milestone that she's actually following through with the ideas that she's put forth in her vision for our university and doing it so quickly.

Juana had meetings over the summer and she invited faculty to be part of these working groups to redefine what committees we need to create in order to make the university run more smoothly. She created five committees and they all have to be in constant conversation with one another so that we are all on the same page in terms of accomplishing the goals we outlined in the mission. So, it's kind of circular in the sense that you can't have a strategic plan unless you know what the budget is and you can't have the faculty involved unless they know what the strategic plan is. It's like putting together pieces of a puzzle. So now we have these five committees that are working with each other and they're creating a new infrastructure which I think is a true milestone for our university.

She's truly done a lot in a short time and I'd like to highlight that she did most of this without having a provost in place. So, imagine how difficult it is to be the captain of the ship without your next in command.

Juana—The Celebrity and the Servant Leader

When discussing how Juana appears to people within her state and her university community, Bonnie agreed that Juana possesses a celebrity status of sorts, but how she does not let this attention draw away from her leadership style, which she believes resembles one of a servant leader.

Again, it's a small community within in a huge state but with very little people so everybody knows who she is. She is one of our state's rising stars. I remember when I organized a dinner with a group of women leaders in our area at a local restaurant, and

when I told them the president was coming they were like ‘Oh! We’re going to welcome her, we’re so happy that she’s coming!’ And the restaurant owners were just as happy that she was coming. It was really great to see their excitement for her. She’s definitely a star around here but I can also understand that she lives in a fishbowl, and everybody is watching her every move.

But when I think of her as a leader, I think she possesses a consultative and a participatory type of leadership. I like that she has the ability to make a decision and take the flack for it. I don’t think she’s scared of that at all.

I also think she truly believes in having other people stand in the limelight rather than herself, which are traits of a servant leader. I don’t even think she likes to be in the limelight, I think she likes other people to shine. I think the legacy she wants to leave is not hers, but the university’s. If she ever leaves our university, I think she wants to leave it in a new place and that speaks volumes about her.

Tim agreed with Bonnie’s sentiments about Juana’s leadership and influence and also offered his perspective on her style. He said,

She’s very much an information gatherer. She’s not the kind of person who makes snap decisions without information. She collects solid data. But she’s very decisive and is willing to make hard decisions. She doesn’t make spur of the moment or emotion-based decisions ever. Her decisions are based on the data and the facts that she has on hand.

When reflecting on the changes Juana has made thus far at her university and her style of leadership, both Tim and Bonnie agree that overall, their university community has responded very well to Juana. Tim said,

The university community of faculty, staff, and students, has responded to her extremely well. I think every campus is going to have their naysayers about anybody in a leadership role because some people just don’t like leaders. But overall, Juana is extremely well liked and also there’s a great deal of appreciation for the fact that she is capable of leading and making decisions.

Bonnie added her perspective on how their faculty members feel about Juana. She said,

The faculty has been receptive toward her. But, they’ve been impatient and they’ve been hankering for change and they wanted her to come in and immediately clean house. Juana told the faculty to be patient and she was right. It’s funny how faculty are kind of innocent in the sense that we think the new president is going to change the whole system in a day and we can’t wait. I think she will affect great changes and I think that she’s right to take it slow, because our school is a great institution and it can become even

greater. But I think whatever change she implements, she wants it to be sustainable and to have the right impact.

Juana's Impact on their Latino Community

As the first and only Latina president of their university, one would expect that a person like Juana would have a special impact on the Latino population at their university and with the Latinos within their state. Bonnie and Tim both had unique perspectives on how Juana is received by this particular population as well as with the Native American population. Bonnie replied,

As far as I know, we really don't have many Latino faculty here besides me; I'm from Puerto Rico but my parents moved there so that's my home. There is a small Latino community here in our city and they are mostly undocumented. But our small number of Latino students are very proud of Juana, and she is an inspiration to them.

But despite that, I think that everyone is aware of the power of the Hispanic/Latino communities in the United States. The Census is showing us that this is really a population that's going to be speaking loudly and changing the face of the United States. This population has already been doing that. But I think in terms of just higher education, Juana is a role model for a lot of Latina women, men, and just Latinos in general. And anybody who has been previously considered a minority or disenfranchised, by having her here at our university, is a very powerful statement. Her work really resonates with the Native American community as well, and that's been a priority for her. This is a wonderful goal because our mission is to recruit and have a higher retention rate for Native Americans and I don't think we've been very successful.

Tim added his perspectives on how Juana is perceived within diverse communities in their state. But he also stated that Juana has a positive impact on younger audiences in their state who also view her as a role model. He said,

We are a very Caucasian university, I mean, our largest minority group would be Native Americans, and even then, their population is probably about three percent. Hispanics and Blacks are probably around two percent. So, it's sad to say that we're pretty White. But I know that Juana is having a big impact though on not only the Hispanic but any anybody that would be considered underrepresented, including the women on our campus. Everybody looks up to her; everybody sees her as somebody, and in my view I think there's a lot of young people who see her as a person that when they grow up, they want to be like her.

Juana is very gracious in terms of reaching out to people of all ages. She often attends functions at area grade schools, middle schools, and high schools, and I think when she's out there in those populations she has a very positive impact on them.

Bonnie, Tim, and I expanded our conversation on the concepts of race and ethnicity and how they resonate with Juana, as their first Latina president. They had some interesting perspectives to add to this topic, which speaks to how they believe Juana navigates herself when dealing with racial and ethnic bias. Bonnie stated,

I remember once she came to speak at my class, and this is also why students love her because she's very accessible. One of my Latina students whose family came here from Alaska of all places and they own the only Mexican restaurant in town, asked her, 'what prejudices did you face during your career?' I think the president said something interesting that may seem simple, but actually, it's profound. She said that she comes into environments assuming that people don't have prejudices and she just carries on as if they don't. So it's almost as if she's saying, 'if you have a prejudice, you deal with it on your own because it's your problem. But it won't affect me or my leadership abilities. It's not going to stop me and I'm not going to address it.' I found that kind of interesting in a psychological way. I don't even know if she's consciously aware of that being her strategy.

Tim's perspectives on this topic were a bit different than Bonnie's. In his view people see Juana first as president and they don't view her race or ethnicity. He said,

Nobody looks at her as Hispanic; they don't see a Latino, they just see a leader and a dynamo that's a university president, in my view. The thing about race, gender, etc. in respect to Juana is completely gone; it's not even relevant, it's not even thought about. People just love her.

When we did this dedication a few weeks ago, the guy that's the president of our Quarterback Club gave her a big hug and says, 'you know, I really just love you,' and that's the kind of the sensitivity people have around here. It's just really fun to watch.

Bonnie and Tim then transitioned to how Juana is received in their state's legislative circles, given that it is highly authoritarian and male-dominated. In their thoughts, Juana has handled herself very well around this group of politicians. Tim commented,

We are in the middle of a legislative session, and they're constantly asking her to come down there, because they trust her, they like her, and they believe what she has to say.

They truly said that she's an incredibly charismatic person. You probably picked up on her warmth and her charm and everything else

Bonnie expanded on Tim's thoughts by stating how Juana uses a certain feminine finesse when working with her predominately male, Libertarian government. Bonnie believes that Juana is very effective in communicating their university's needs with these individuals. She said,

Our state is so unique in its political and gender roles. There's a lot of Libertarians here who don't believe in government. And our state and university has been very dominated by men, very dominated. But I like to think, given my background or cultural awareness being from Puerto Rico, that Juana knows how to handle men because these are different kind of men here. But Puerto Rican men can be worse, with their macho traditional views and all. So, the men in our state are nothing for her. She uses her Latino sense of style and feminism, and at the same time, she charms them to get them to see her point of view. But our governor is very (sigh) robust and he can be tough in not in the best way. He's like a bulldog but she stands up to him.

Their Thoughts on the Future of President Juana

Finally, in discussing Juana's future at their university, both Bonnie and Tim agree that their time with her may be limited given that she is often sought after by other reputable institutions to serve as their president. Tim said,

This is not the end of the road for her. She's definitely going to be moving up to a much larger university. I'm actually an alum of the University of Wisconsin and I could easily see her leading a place like that. But in the meantime, we will take advantage of her expertise to lead this place as long as she wants and then she'll move on to bigger and better things.

Bonnie agreed with Tim's sentiments. She said,

I can imagine people trying to snatch her away sooner than she might even want to leave. But the vision that she's laid out will take five or six years to accomplish, so I can't imagine her wanting to leave before she makes the changes that she really believes in. Now, whether you know that Harvard says 'we want a Latino woman president, and Juana is our person,' won't surprise me. Between you and me, I would love to see her be the president of Harvard or Yale or Princeton.

Author's comments—After each time I spoke with Juana, she made sure to ask about my study, my processes involved, and how I was personally holding up through it all. She offered me some

sound advice that spoke of persevering through the final dissertation stages and finding strength from imagining my name with a Ph.D. behind it. She said that process was what helped her finish her dissertation. Juana also invited me to visit her at her home when this process was completed. “Mi casa es su casa,” she said, which was a sentiment that was very honoring to hear from a woman who had just met me.

VII - ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to better understand the socio-cultural and leadership experiences of Latina four-year college and university presidents. Even though there are thousands of four-year colleges and universities in the United States, there are fewer than a dozen Latinas leading such institutions (de los Santos & Vega, 2008). It is projected that in 2016, one in every six undergraduate students in the United States will be Latino and these students would benefit greatly from the leadership and advocacy by Latinas in presidential positions, which is why the low numbers of Latina college or university presidents is an issue of concern (Carnevale & Fry, 1999).

While recognizing that there are a few Latina presidents who are leading our nation's four-year colleges and universities, it should also be noted that not only are these women "firsts" in their respective field, they also have unique stories and experiences to share with academia. The stories in this research can demonstrate how their socio-cultural and family experiences may have influenced their presidencies.

This chapter is presented in four parts for Maria, Rosa, and Juana. The first part focuses on socio-cultural and Latina leadership concepts. This is followed by the second section where the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Race Theories (LatCrit) are introduced with specific attention on race, class, and gender. In the third section the concept of intersectionality is discussed related to the stories of the three participants. Finally, the fourth section introduces the concept of counterstorytelling and provides an analysis of the counterstories of the three presidents as a conclusion.

Maria

Socio-cultural Experiences

There are three elements of socio-cultural experiences that emerged from Maria's data. These include gender role expectations, living the "American Dream," and displaying dignity and pride as taught to Maria by her family. I chose these specific elements because they appeared a number of times within Maria's narrative and they provided a foundation for how Maria carries herself as a Puerto Rican and a university president.

Gender Role Expectations

When reviewing Maria's interview transcript, the concept of "marianismo" appeared early on in her life within her family setting. Marianismo, which is viewed as a old-world, gender-bias practice that tends to occur within the Latino culture, states that a woman's duty is to tend to the needs of the men within the home while her own personal needs are secondary (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). As the only daughter in a family of sons, Maria ascribed to gender-specific and gender-biased roles, which originated in her father's patriarchal and marianismo-centered beliefs. Maria indicated that her father frowned upon the boys in the family if they did domestic chores such as vacuuming or cooking. If they did so, he would consider them "gay" or at the very least, they would be displaying feminine traits that went against her father's beliefs in how the male and female roles were to be portrayed. So it was Maria's responsibility to take on many of the culturally perceived feminine or maternal duties in her home while her parents were working at their factory jobs. These duties included tending to the cooking and cleaning when she was just eight years-old. In Maria's view, this was the traditional role of the girl in her traditional, marianismo-centered, Latino family. She believed that it would be disrespectful to challenge her father on his beliefs. So instead, she remained obedient and did as she was told.

As Maria progressed in her educational career, another assumed gender role was ascribed to her. As the only daughter, her parents expected her to go to school and study to become a teacher, and only a teacher. It was never expected that Maria would study disciplines that would lead her to “masculine positions” such as a college or university dean or president. Those were jobs that were to be occupied by men, according to her parents.

Maria also stated that it was her duty to translate and interpret for her parents and family members because for a long period of time, she was the only one in her family who knew English, albeit minimal. She stated that this duty was lifted as soon as her brothers starting learning English and they were able to help with the interpretation and translating duties. Again, the expectations set for her, as the only daughter in her highly patriarchal Latino family, were different than they were for her brothers. Maria’s experience translating for her family is reflected in research presented by Faulstich Orellana (2003) which states that bilingual children gain linguistic capital when they are asked to translate for their parents or other adults. Even if these responsibilities of Maria’s was considered a duty, Faulstich Orellana (2003) states that bilingual students gain vocabulary skills and “real-world” literacy skills while practicing civic and familial responsibility and maturity (p. 6).

When Maria decided against securing a university presidency position, instead opting to support her husband’s presidential appointment and tend to the needs of their family, she once again assumed the gender roles she knew growing up. Adhering to her matriarchal roles was much more important to her at that time in her life. Her actions are reflected in research by Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, and Talbot (2000) who state that Latina professionals tend to return to their traditional female expectations at different times in their lives. This process keeps Latinas connected to their family traditions and customs.

Yet when Maria finally decided to pursue her presidential aspirations, a few changes occurred within her immediate and extended family. Her parents changed their traditional matriarchal mindset and were proud that their only daughter was to become a university president. Maria's husband, who is not Latino, relinquished his own presidential duties and supported Maria's presidential application processes. He also promised that he would support her in tending to the needs of their family. This meant supporting their children's college aspirations—one of their children attended medical school and the other to a prestigious East Coast university—while also maintaining the typical household duties that would have been expected of Maria.

Even though there appeared to be tension between Maria's desire to advance in her profession and her obligation to maintain a connection to her family's traditions, she still pursued the presidency with support from her immediate and extended family, especially her husband. This experience of Maria's reflects data presented by Mendez-Morse (2000), which states that many Latina professionals depend on their husbands the most for their personal and professional support, especially as they are advancing in their careers.

Maria's story reflects the challenge of being a Latina, who was raised with specific gender roles, who later in life decides to pursue a university presidency while balancing her home and family priorities over her career. When Maria revisited these experiences she said she had no regrets. In her view, she was meant to be president at her university during this time in her career.

Living the “American Dream”

The concept of living the “American Dream” could be viewed as achieving greatness in social or economic capital or both. This concept appeared in various places throughout Maria’s data where it was not only a priority of hers but a priority of her father’s as well.

When Maria was a child living in then depressed Puerto Rico, it was her father’s goal to move his family to the United States for a better life. According to Maria it was important for her family to thrive in a society where her parents were able to earn a decent living while being able to financially support their children.

Living the American Dream was modeled early on in Maria’s life by her father. She saw how hard he and her mother worked in a factory, yet their salary only permitted them to live in low income, public housing projects. But as Maria grew older, her father emphasized that getting an education was her ticket out of the housing projects. Maria’s parents lacked the money to purchase books and other educational resources for their children. Still, Maria talked of her father’s determination that his children aligned academically with White children in the U.S. educational system. Every day, Maria’s father propped his children on his lap while he read the daily newspaper to them. Then he would ask that his children read the newspaper back to him. Maria’s father used newspapers to show his children the importance of reading comprehension while exposing them to the outside world. It was his goal that this exposure would result in his children thriving as U.S. citizens.

Maria’s father’s actions are reflected in Auerbach’s research (2006) that found that Latino immigrant parents use nontraditional methods to provide moral support for their children’s educational aspirations. Spanish-speaking parents provide “*apoyo*” (support) rather than involvement in the mainstream, which translates to the parents actually being visible within

their children's school (p. 276). Maria's father's moral support encouraged Maria to do well in school while valuing her educational opportunities and sharing *consejos* (narrative advice) with her about advancing on to college (Auerbach, 2006, p. 276).

Maria reflected how her own American Dream was realized as she successfully progressed through her primary, secondary, and higher education path, despite having racially-biased experiences with some of her teachers. She then successfully navigated her academic career, holding several leadership positions in higher education before finally becoming a university president leading more than 5,000 students and hundreds of faculty and staff. To her, she said, she is living the American Dream.

Today according to Maria, her substantial salary as a university president, and her husband's as a former university president and now professor, afford her the finer things in life, things such as designer clothes, luxury vacations, and expensive homes. She believes this to be living the American Dream. Maria is cognizant that her current economic and social status is vastly different from that of her parents when she was a child. But Maria lives this life in reflection and in tribute to the sacrifices her parents made. Even though she lives a life of wealth and privilege, she, much like her parents, has never forgotten their humble beginnings, she said. In fact, Maria stated that her parents have now retired to their original village in Puerto Rico because they wanted to reconnect to their roots. In their view, they have achieved the American Dream because they live in a bigger house with a swimming pool and beautiful gardens. This new home has become a place of retreat for Maria and her own family when they need to revisit their ancestry and the culture that has made them who they are today, Maria said.

Maria's family also "gives back" to the community. For example, Maria, her parents, and her siblings no longer give one another gifts during the holidays; instead they have invested their

money into a scholarship fund for other financially needy Latino students at Maria's university. Research speaks to the concept of social capital that many communities of color possess and is reflected in Maria's family's action (Yosso, 2005). Using the notion of "lifting as we climb," Maria's family utilized their own community resources—funds for a scholarship—to help other Latino students in financial predicaments similar to those Maria and her siblings faced. She and her siblings are "paying it forward" to the system that helped them achieve the American Dream.

Having Dignity and Pride

The concepts of dignity and pride were introduced to Maria early on in her life by her parents. She carries these traits with her today as a university president.

Maria learned about dignity and pride when she was in elementary school. She witnessed her parents sacrifice their livelihood and all that was familiar to them when they uprooted their family and moved to the United States. This move was out of necessity for their family's well being, Maria said. But their new apartment in New Jersey was very small and "harsh," and everything in the United States was frightening to Maria and her siblings because it was so different. Maria said that her parents remained noble and dignified while transitioning their children from a familiar culture to one that was new and intimidating.

Maria's father was her first role model who was also the first to display dignity and pride. She reflected on a story about her father paying a long-standing debt to a man in Puerto Rico. Her father took a lifetime to repay the debt, sending \$5 a month to Puerto Rico; but what was most important was that he paid it. Maria called this action of her father's very admirable and dignified. She often reflects on this story when speaking to others regarding the dignity she carries as president.

Maria shows dignity and pride every day. She is often found interacting with her Spanish-speaking Latino staff in their shared native language while recognizing the contributions that these staff brings to their campus builds community. This intentional practice of hers breaks down barriers; she views their work as groundskeepers or maintenance workers as important as the work of a professor.

Bill and Dave, staff members at Maria's university, talk of how she is regarded as one who carries herself with dignity, especially when budgetary cuts and employee layoffs are pending. In their view, Maria has been known to first consider the lives and futures of her constituents and their families before resorting to layoffs. They noted that she views her faculty and staff as family members and does whatever possible to enhance and protect their quality of life. Bill and Dave believe that this demonstrates Maria's dignity.

As a child Maria was taught by her family to be a proud Puerto Rican; to celebrate the contributions and traditions of her culture. Today, as president of her university, Maria shares her Puerto Rican pride with her university constituents by exposing them to many of the traditions she learned as a child. Bill and Dave said that when Maria's parents are in town from Puerto Rico, they spend much time on campus. Maria's mother is known to arrive with her traditional Puerto Rican coconut candy that she shares with members of Maria's staff. Maria's Puerto Rican pride extends beyond the university's walls as she talks of the importance of her exposing her children to the values, traditions, and struggles of her Puerto Rican culture. She feels it is important for her to teach her children the struggles and triumphs of her people.

When Maria revisits her native homeland, she finds pride in re-embracing the culture of the people by just being Maria and not being President or Doctor. "Blending in," as she calls it, keeps her connected to her original social class status while also acknowledging pride and

respect for her family. Maria stated that she accomplishes this by not speaking as an academic or by dressing in her typical designer suits, but rather by wearing sandals, speaking in her native Spanish language, and by “being normal.”

The specific socio-cultural experiences such as gender role expectations, living the American Dream, and displaying dignity and pride were exposed to Maria by her family as a child. Today, as president of a university, Maria reflects on these experiences and uses them as a foundation for how she projects herself as president of her university.

Understanding Latina Leadership

One of the purposes of my study was to discover what leadership skills and traits these Latina presidents used. What I found with Maria is that she valued open communication, being collaborative, and maintaining a compassionate family-like atmosphere. These themes have provided a framework for how Maria leads her constituents within her institution.

Open Communication

As president of a university, Maria stressed the importance of open communication with her constituents. She accomplishes this by having regularly-scheduled small group meetings with all of her academic and administrative departments. During these meetings, Maria keeps her constituents current on pending university matters while encouraging them to offer their opinions and perspectives on matters that concern them and the students they serve. Maria considers these meetings a time to reconnect with individuals with whom she already has a solid relationship, engaging in a two-way, give and take communication process. She also considers these meetings an important time to let her constituents know about her vision for her university.

Maria’s open communication is also present in her everyday work. Bill stated that Maria values the process of being honest and forthcoming with her faculty and staff. She shares

everything with her team; nothing is hidden. Bill believes that Maria's open communication increases the trust and confidence that her staff and faculty have in her.

Collaboration

Bill and Dave also talk of the collaborative, transparent nature Maria has with her faculty and staff. They stated that it is common practice for Maria to pair individuals from different areas of her university to problem solve on institutional matters. She also "weaves" community members into the fabric of her university, they said. Her structure is one of shared governance, where she believes that everyone has an equal voice and representation.

Within this collaborative setting, Maria is adamant that one practice in particular is followed; everyone must call her by her first name and not Doctor or President. She does this because she believes it increases collaboration, especially when working on difficult issues. She also believes it breaks down the hierarchal systems that tend to exist between a president and her constituents. Bill and Dave commented that calling Maria by her first name was difficult to get used to but this simple process reflected the "matriarchal" role she displays with her university team. Calling Maria by her first name shows Bill and Dave that power structures do not exist with her. She values teamwork and views her work as a partnership, they said.

Operating a "Family" Business

Maria runs her university much like a family business, stressing a relaxed, casual, and very personal way of interacting with her faculty and staff. She accomplishes this by making a concerted effort to know at least one important fact about each person she meets. By connecting with them on a personal level first, she finds that they are better able to collaboratively accomplish their task at hand. This style is indicative of other Latina leaders who are known to

use interpersonal skills to find the commonalities with their constituents, which then break down barriers that may exist (Bordas, 2007).

Bill also noted that Maria's leadership encompasses authenticity; many faculty and staff use terms such as "real" or "genuine" when describing her. She is also known to mix in her jovial sense of humor at the most opportune times. One of the most memorable times Maria's authentic leadership was demonstrated was during a school pep rally. She threw off her shoes and slid across the gymnasium floor in her socks announcing her school pride, which made the university crowd cheer at the top of their lungs, Bill said.

On a more serious note, Maria talked of making herself readily accessible to her faculty or staff members when they face crises. Being accessible and approachable shows her constituents that she cares about them as a family member would. Having these personal connections with her constituents is what makes her different than other university presidents, she believes. A personal connection she mentioned included outreaching to an upset faculty member during after-hours and offering him advice on how to work through a difficult student situation.

Both Bill and Dave believe that their university has transformed dramatically under Maria's tenure. Her light-hearted and authentic personality creates an atmosphere where everyone is valued and respected and they work as a team to move forward Maria's vision for their university.

Displaying Compassion

Bordas (2007) states that Latina leaders embrace concepts such as social justice, equality, and compassion in all that they do. Dave believes that Maria exhibits compassion, especially when it relates to issues facing students. He noted that Maria steps out of her presidential role

and into a mother-like role, taking students' issues and crises personally. He said that Maria often goes the extra mile to ensure that all of her students are cared for, treated equitably, and provided the best education possible. He also said that Maria is known to advocate for students, using her influence to "make what is wrong, right."

Maria identified other traits she attributes to her successful presidency. They include having a strong work ethic, staying organized, being able to "read" people's behavior, and having strong self-confidence. Bill and Dave noted that Maria also remains graceful in her presidential position, especially when it comes to dealing with difficult people such as her boss, who is her predecessor, and is known to micromanage her every decision.

While reviewing the data on Maria's leadership skills, research by Bordas (2007) resonates stating that Latina leaders like Maria exhibit traits that make them unique. Whether it is expressing open communication, working collaboratively, leading in a family-like atmosphere, or being compassionate with her constituents, Maria said that her faculty and staff have responded favorably to her unique leadership style, which in turn makes her successful in her job.

Rosa

Socio-cultural Experiences

There were many socio-cultural themes that emerged from Rosa's data. They include honoring and appreciating her culture and other cultures of the world, expressing compassion for those who are in marginalized communities, and possessing modesty and humility as a Chicana and a college president.

Cultural Appreciation and Honor

As a military child who lived most of her youth outside of the United States, Rosa was taught by her parents to honor and appreciate not only her Mexican-American culture but also the cultures of the countries where her family lived. Rosa's parents taught their children the history of France and Panama and how the Panama Canal was built by African Latinos and Jamaicans, who were proud people, she said. Even though Rosa's parents lacked the resources to provide academic opportunities for their children, her father was able to travel abroad with his family where each of their stops provided important history lessons. These lessons were unlike the academic lessons she would receive while in primary school, she said. Rosa also believes that her travels abroad set the foundation for the career she was to have as an adult, which revolved around cultural diversity and multiculturalism.

Also during Rosa's youth, her mother and grandmother were influential in teaching her the traditions and customs of her Mexican-American culture. Rosa said that regardless of where her family resided due to their military orders, they always honored their Mexican-American culture by displaying icons or other cultural images throughout their home, whether a wall hanging of a bullfighter or an iconic image of the Virgin de Guadalupe. They were subtle reminders that her family possessed pride in their Mexican-American heritage, she said. Today

as a college president, Rosa carries on this pride in her heritage as she displays many cultural icons throughout her home and presidential offices.

As Rosa grew older she began honoring her Mexican-American, Spanish, and indigenous roots by calling herself “Chicana.” Identifying herself by this sometimes controversial and politically-charged label showed that she had a strong racial and cultural identity. Rosa commented that she learned about this strength in her race and culture from her father, mother, and grandmother. Now, as a Chicana who was not born and raised in a barrio but rather in a military environment, Rosa feels that her Chicana experiences were different from those Chicanas who were raised in urban neighborhoods. But her principles and beliefs surrounding the issues of educational equity, parity, and social justice are the same as most Chicanas. Throughout her lifetime Rosa has drawn on her family’s strength in their cultural identity to improve the racial, classist, and sexist inequities that face people of marginalized backgrounds, especially Chicanos and Chicanas.

To honor the teachings and legacy of her mother, Rosa wears a long braid down her back, which she has grown for many years. Her mother advised her to not only grow her braid, but also when life becomes difficult, she must hold her braid and reflect on the strength and wisdom she learned from her mother. Today Rosa proudly wears her braid and freely tells others its cultural and spiritual significance.

Rosa’s experiences are reflected in Mendez-Morse (2000) and (“Practical Wisdom: Where Leadership Is Really Learned,” 2005) which note that Latina leaders reflect on the teachings of other Latinas in their lives, usually their mothers, who show them that the power and resilience they possess as leaders comes from her cultural pride. In Rosa’s case, she is not just a president but a Chicana president who honors her cultural pride in all she does.

Expressing Compassion

Rosa stated that throughout her life, her father modeled the act of being compassionate, which she now believes resonates in her personal and professional experiences. During Rosa's childhood she considered herself a loner; she kept busy by working on homemade science projects such as building the Eiffel Tower out of toothpicks. When her father realized that his daughter needed her own space to work on her projects, he showed compassion by providing her with a small storeroom within their apartment where she would thrive in her solitude. She said that instance was when she first learned the importance of being compassionate to other people, especially to those who seem to be on the margins of society as she was as a child.

These compassionate traits of Rosa's continued as she grew older and became a higher education professional. She worked in executive positions that focused on increasing the student diversity on her respective campuses. She felt it was "her responsibility" to work on behalf of those students who were marginalized and underrepresented in higher education, as she was herself. Working in these positions was also her way to "serve her people," she said, where her ultimate goal was to improve the educational status and access for underrepresented individuals.

Rosa's sentiments reflect Yosso's (2005) research, which states that some Chicanas/os possess aspiration capital, which is another form of cultural wealth. Aspiration capital states that even though "Chicana/os experience the lowest educational outcomes compared to every other group in the United States, but they maintain high aspirations for the next generation of Chicanas/os" (p. 78). It is Rosa's goal to advocate for Chicanas/os and other students of underrepresented backgrounds so that they can break the pattern of low educational outcomes that has plagued them for generations.

Rosa's also experienced compassion in her childhood. Rosa's parents and grandmother were compassionate in recognizing early on in her life that Rosa would not be adhering to the traditional cultural and gender-specific norms typically placed on Latinas. These norms state that Latinas should coexist with Latino men only and are reflected in literature by Gil and Vasquez (1996) who discuss the concept of "marianismo" within the Latino culture. Early on in her life Rosa's parents and grandmother honored that she was a lesbian and often defended her lifestyle against extended family members who believed that she would have no value unless she was married to a Mexican man. The compassion Rosa's parents shared with her showed that they accepted her being "different," which she believes helped her become more secure and proud as an adult Chicana lesbian.

As president of her college, Rosa displays compassion when she acknowledges and honors the blue-collar workers who are responsible for making her college operate on a day to day basis. She is often seen interacting with these employees in an informal setting while they speak to one another in their native Spanish. Rosa said she recognizes these individual's work as a way of paying tribute to her own family's blue-collar roots where she learned from her parents that all work, whether it is blue or white collar, is important.

Expressing Modesty and Humility

Other socio-cultural values Rosa learned from her upbringing are the concepts of modesty and humility. As a child, Rosa recognized that money was hard to come by in her family so she was humbled by all that was given to her. Now as an adult, Rosa still carries this humbled mindset. When I visited with her in her home, she was modest about living in such lavish conditions—the quarters that were assigned to her as president—which to her were more luxurious than she was used to. She states that she is humbled to earn a substantial salary as

president of her college, yet she reaffirms that she does not do this work for the monetary gain, or for the personal or professional accolades. She works in higher education to improve the educational status of all students who are underrepresented in academia. That is her mission, she said.

Rosa was also humbled and honored that I considered her as a participant for this research project. She carries herself with a low profile, never expecting to be featured in a doctoral dissertation where she would gain recognition or attention, she said. Even though she is a president of a college where her public role often attracts much attention, Rosa still finds it humbling when people recognize her in her town and ask to speak to her. I saw this many times when Rosa and I were out in public. At first she was embarrassed when people reacted to her almost as if she were a celebrity. But when their thrill of meeting a college president subsided, Rosa interacted with townspeople as if she had known them for years. Their conversations revolved around education and if that person was interested in the programs that her school had to offer. Rosa reaffirms that her job is to be an advocate and a voice for those who are voiceless in higher education.

Understanding Latina Leadership

Rosa has demonstrated leadership skills throughout her life from assisting in the recruitment and retention of Latino graduate students, to leading her college as a open and proud Chicana lesbian, to serving as a role model to other emerging Latina students at her college. But most importantly, Rosa is known by members of her faculty and staff as a leader who shows commitment and compassion, especially when it relates to her students achieving academic parity.

Recruiting and Retaining Latino Graduate Students

In graduate school Rosa realized that she was one of very few Latina graduate students; she also recognized that many colleges and universities were not recruiting or retaining enough Chicanas and Latinas into graduate programs in general. In particular, her own graduate school was negligent in this recruitment process, she said. Rosa saw their recruitment processes as being racially and culturally biased, which limited accessibility for students of marginalized backgrounds. It was then she accepted a student leadership position where she was assigned to assist with the recruitment of other Latino students. She viewed this position as “her calling”; as a leader she could help fix her institution’s recruitment processes so that they were more equitable for Latinos and other students of color.

This early higher education experience set the framework for Rosa’s future work as a president, she said. Rosa believes her role is to continue being a champion for improved educational access for Chicanas and Latinas and other students of underrepresented backgrounds.

The “Out and Proud” Chicana Lesbian Leader

Rosa’s leadership traits emerged again when she became president of her college. She said her leadership abilities were brought to the forefront when she acknowledged openly to her constituents that she was not only a Chicana but also a lesbian. Without a strong sense of self as a leader, or leadership skills such as courage and valor, Rosa said that she would have never been able to be open and forthcoming about her multiple identities. She was pleased that her college constituents were not only receptive but welcoming. It was then she realized she was president at the right institution.

Serving as a Role Model

Bonnie, a faculty member at Rosa's college, noted that Rosa is a role model to her Latina students. Many have already noted that they, too, can achieve academic excellence despite the socio-cultural and educational barriers placed upon them by society. Rosa's experience as a role model are reflected in research conducted by de los Santos and Vega, (2008), who state that one way to improve the educational pipeline for Latino students is to expose them to role models who can show them that attaining a higher education degree is indeed an achievable goal. Many students at Rosa's college have similar socioeconomic barriers as Rosa had as a child. Bonnie said that these young women view Rosa as an inspiration and as someone they can aspire to be as they progress through their higher education and on to their respective careers.

As a role model to her community, Rosa is often called upon to attend after-hour student events or weekend cultural gatherings. She views these events as an opportunity to connect with her constituents in an informal manner, where they can learn more about the personal side of President Rosa. Andrew, a staff member of Rosa's, said the community views Rosa as a natural leader whose experience as a graduate student leader, a professor, and now an administrator will move their college to the university designation in the near future.

Leading with Commitment and Compassion

Andrew stated that Rosa is known to lead her college with commitment and compassion. She displays commitment, he said, by recognizing that their institution has developed a legacy in their community for more than 100 years and her vision as president will build from that legacy to make it more accessible to their student population. He also said that Rosa displays compassion by always placing the needs of their students first, especially as they talk of expanding their college to offer more bachelor's and new master's degree programs. Andrew

believes that under Rosa's leadership, their college will make it possible for the many low-income, impoverished individuals in their community to earn post-baccalaureate degrees that will make them more competitive in the job market. Finally, Rosa displays compassion by recognizing and respecting the talents her faculty and staff bring to the table.

As a leader with commitment, Rosa stated that she values the act of employing individuals who may know more than she does in certain areas of higher education. This is how she shows trust with her team and depends on them to move forward her mission. By simply using the term "we" instead of "I" when working with her team, Rosa said she works collectively and collaboratively. Rosa believes that the work that they accomplish together provides the foundation that will take their college to their next 100 years of operation.

Juana

Socio-cultural Experiences

When considering the theme of socio-cultural experiences, the topic of family emerged numerous times in Juana's data. Within the topic of family were subthemes such as receiving informal education from women family members, being community centered, valuing education, and possessing humility and modesty.

Informal Education from "Las Mujeres"

Juana reflected on growing up in her "house filled with mujeres" where she was informally educated by her mother, grandmother, and aunts on the importance of being a Puerto Rican female in their patriarchal, male-dominated society. In particular, Juana's grandmother shared her own struggles with her then husband, who was Juana's grandfather, and noted how she decided to leave their marriage and start over as a single woman. Early on, Juana learned how the women in her life possessed a unique sense of strength. She said that strength has been passed down to her as she now carries it with her, especially as president of her university.

Juana also learned Puerto Rican history from her grandmother, about Puerto Ricans moving from the Spanish regime to a commonwealth of the United States. Juana said that her grandmother showed a bit of rebellion and stepped out of the traditional Puerto Rican female role by asking questions and being vocal about what was to happen to Puerto Ricans as they were to be affiliated with the United States. Once again Juana looks at her grandmother as someone who possessed a unique sense of courage, which Juana reflects upon on, especially now that she is a university president.

The lessons Juana learned from her female family members reflect research by Yosso (2005), which states that many Latino children gain linguistic capital from their family members.

Linguistic capital is another type of cultural wealth, which states that Latino children engage in a storytelling tradition with their elders. These exchanges could be *cuentos* (stories) or *dichos* (proverbs) that provide the children with both cross-cultural awareness and civic and familial responsibility (p. 79).

Being Community-Centered

Juana learned the concept of community during her childhood as she grew up with immediate and extended family. She was thankful that her family “community” instilled in her the love of learning, while building her sense of trust and confidence, so that she was able to achieve academic excellence later in life. Her family “community” concept continued early on in her career as she was offered a professor position in her native Puerto Rico. She did not hesitate in taking it because she wanted her children to be raised with their cousins and she wanted to reconnect with “Las Mujeres” again, especially with her mother whom she was excited to once again “fall asleep in her lap.”

Juana’s family possessed familial capital, as discussed in Yosso (2005), is the process of maintaining a connection to community and its resources through kinship ties with extended relatives and other people who are considered to be a part of their “familia” (p.79).

Today as president of her university, Juana continues to value the concept of building community within her university constituents. She said she is focused on what she and her team can build together for the benefit of their students. An example of this concept was when she embarked on the expansion of their university’s football stadium. She brought alumni and other people together from across her university community to fundraise for this expansion, and they did so in record time. Even though Juana was the person who initiated this plan, she still calls it a

community effort where many people's voices and talents were utilized to help it come to fruition.

Juana is also cognizant of how the concept of building community resonates with her students. She reflects on her own experiences as a student of attending a land grant university, how staying near family in a tight-knit community, and relying on their encouragement and advice while attending school is a very important concept. Juana recognizes that many of her students are in the same predicament as she was while in her undergraduate program. Her experience is reflected in Auerbach (2006) who notes that many immigrant children rely on the "*consejos*" (nurturing advice) they receive from their parents regarding their educational decisions, which reinforces their sense of mutual obligation toward them (p. 278).

In an effort to support her student's connection to their families and their university community, Juana is embarking on an initiative that allows her students to start their education at a community college with the option to transfer to her university. She feels that this effort will help her students feel more of a community connection to their educational processes and also will make their transition to her large university less daunting.

Valuing Education

Even when she was a young girl, Juana remembered how her family stressed the importance of having a college education. They stressed that being educated would not only help with Juana's social mobility, but would open doors for the rest of her family. Her views reflected Auerbach's (2006) research that states how many Latino immigrant parents provide their children with moral support in their college aspirations as a way of expanding the knowledge and resources within their family. Juana and her family knew that as soon as she earned a higher education degree, others in her family would follow.

Juana progressed through her higher education degrees because she had the support from her immediate family members who believed in her, she said. They stood behind her through her bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees because she was the first in her family to achieve these accomplishments. Her family also expressed pride for Juana, she said. When speaking to this pride that her family had for her, Juana states that her family does not fall into the stereotype that Latino parents do not value education. In fact, her family does value education, she said. They just never had the educational opportunities that Juana has had in her life. Juana's family sentiments are reflected in Yosso (2005), who notes that Latino parents do value education but they do not always support their children in ways that are traditionally recognized by the White middle class. Her family, as stated in Yosso (2005) counters the deficit view of Latino parental support for education.

Possessing Humility and Modesty

Juana first spoke of being humble when she was applying for the presidency position at her university. She viewed this process as one where she was honored and humbled that she would be chosen for such an esteemed position, especially when there were other candidates who seemed to be groomed in a more traditional manner than she. Yet, she relied on her authentic leadership style to shine, she said, and she viewed this opportunity as one where she would be able to take their university to a new level.

Because of her high profile presidential job, Juana said she is given little to no privacy around her town; she is constantly stopped and recognized by townspeople. Even though she calls this celebrity status "the Britney Spears effect," she said she is humbled and modest that people think so highly of her, especially as the first Latina president of her university. But Juana

stated that she gained humility and modesty from her family who had little financial or educational resources or cultural capital but still were proud and humble.

Now as a university president, who receives public recognition for her personal and professional accomplishments, and who also makes a substantial income, Juana said she practices humility and modesty when she returns home to her native Puerto Rico. Whether at home in Puerto Rico or in her adopted state, it is very important that she is referred to simply as Juana and not Doctor or President. This practice, she said, keeps her grounded and connected to her blue-collar, working class roots.

Understanding Latina Leadership

Juana talked of displaying leadership traits throughout her life. She discussed the act of being a servant leader and utilizing her communication skills to reach her constituents. She also mentioned how she is a role model where her goal is to build a legacy for other Latina leaders.

Being a Servant Leader

Juana learned at an early age the concepts of servant leadership and soon discovered how her work could have a greater impact on her society. According to Spears and Lawrence (2004), servant leaders involve a community or a team of individuals in decision-making processes, while operating in an ethical and caring manner, to ensure that other people's highest needs are being served (p. 10). Juana first demonstrated servant leadership as a parochial student when she worked with special education students or elderly community members. She took the concepts of servant leadership and applied them to the work she and her classmates did in a service learning trip to Haiti. It was then Juana realized that she had the influence to serve, even if it was abroad. She helped serve the needs of pregnant women and also by feeding sick children and adults. She viewed this opportunity as one where she practiced the concepts of service learning long before

it was made popular in our society. Juana still carries this sentiment of service in all that she does as an adult today.

Throughout her higher education career Juana talks of taking positions, such as an assistant dean, so that she would be able to “serve her students” and her work would enable them to be successful. As a servant leader, Juana maintained the philosophy that she would always have to “roll up her sleeves” and work with her constituents in a partnership. Juana’s actions are reflected as traits of servant leaders, according to Spears and Lawrence (2004), who state simply, these leaders’ “primary motivation is a deep desire to help others” (p. 11).

When Juana first set foot on her campus as president of her university, she introduced and modeled the concepts of servant leadership to her team. By using her “people first” philosophy, Juana showed her university constituents that everyone must be treated with dignity and respect. This is a trait she learned from her culture, she said, which she calls “the golden rule” or “treat others as I want to be treated.”

It was shortly into her first year of her presidency when Juana mobilized various groups within her university to engage in a significant project that demonstrated her servant leadership style. This was the expansion of their school’s football stadium. Juana had the idea for the expansion but the work that was needed to bring the project to fruition would not have happened without the help of alumni and university community members with whom she coordinated.

According to Bonnie and Tim, who are faculty and staff members at Juana’s university, they used attributes such as “charisma,” “visionary,” “consultative,” and “participatory” when describing Juana. They also believe that Juana, who is a product of a land grant university, understands how to rally her faculty and staff at her current land grant university so that they are providing the best education to their underrepresented students.

As a servant leader, Bonnie stated that Juana prides herself in not taking the limelight or recognition for her accomplishments, but rather gives the accolades to others who worked alongside her, which also corresponds to Juana's possessing humility and modesty.

Displaying Effective Communication Skills

When Juana began her presidency, she initiated listening and learning sessions; she traveled across her state and talked to her constituents about how her university could meet their needs. Bonnie stated that this showed the entire state that she was willing to literally go the extra mile for the betterment of her university community. Bonnie also stated that the visibility Juana gained during these listening and learning sessions gave her and their university much capital that they are still benefitting from.

Another communication method Juana engages in with her university constituents is an email she sends to her faculty, staff, and students each Monday morning. Juana said she uses this communication method as a way to keep her constituents informed of developments, while highlighting the accomplishments of varying university members as a way of showing recognition. Juana also commented that she learned how to be an effective storyteller from the many stories she heard from her grandmother and that she often uses this talent as president, which has been effective in conveying messages to her university constituents.

Finally, Bonnie commented that Juana is an effective communicator when she works with her predominately male government officials. While Juana is firm when advocating for the needs of her university, Bonnie said that she has an uncanny charm that allows them to see her point of view. Juana also communicates well with their governor who can be a bully with her at times, Bonnie said.

Building a Legacy as a Role Model

There were many instances in the data where Juana talked of being a role model. When she was approached to teach at her undergraduate university she immediately said yes because she knew that she would use her influence as a graduate of her institution and as a role model to help others attain their undergraduate degree. Serving in a faculty capacity would allow her to show others who came from similar backgrounds that attaining a four-year degree could change their lives dramatically, as it had for her. Juana also felt it was necessary to “pay it forward” to those individuals at her alma mater who provided her with so much guidance during her undergraduate career.

Bonnie, Juana’s faculty member, indicated that Juana is an inspiration to many of their students at their university but specifically to their Latina students. Just her presence as a president of a major university shows other Latinos and Latinas that they, too, can strive to be in her position someday, Bonnie said.

Tim, a staff member of Juana’s, said that the impact Juana has had with people of underrepresented backgrounds within their state has been tremendous. Her outreach to people of all ages, races and ethnicities has not only made her accessible but has also established her as a role model.

While Juana humbly considers herself a role model, she said that she views each day as one where she may make a difference in someone’s life. She believes that as a Latina leader, she must be authentic, be student and community-centered, and finally, be responsible in leaving a legacy for other Latina leaders who also aspire to be higher education executives. It is important to her to be viewed as one who transformed the lives of many in her position as president, she said.

Introduction to Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and Intersectionality

According to Yosso (2006), Critical Race Theory (CRT) was developed in the late 1980s in numerous law schools where scholars were focused on analyzing how race and racism appeared in the United States legal system and within society in general. These legal scholars “sought both a critical space which race and racism was foregrounded and a race space where critical themes were central” (p. 6). Solorzano (1997, 1998) identified five major tenets to CRT that are often used to inform research and theory. They are:

1. *The intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination.* CRT originates with the concept that race and racism are a permanent part of explaining how U.S. society functions, while also noting how racialized subordination is based on gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993; Russell, 1992; Valdes, McCristal Culp, & Harris, 2002; Yosso, 2005).
2. *The challenge to dominant ideology.* CRT challenges the concept of White privilege while noting how academic researchers present research about diverse populations that at first claims to be “objective” but appears to be deficit-informed whereby silences or distorts their stories. CRT claims that this silencing promotes power and privilege of dominant groups in US society (Bell, 1987; Calmore, 1992; Solorzano, 1997; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2000, Yosso, 2005).
3. *The commitment to social justice.* CRT provides commitment to social justice while offering a transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression (Matsuda, 1991; Yosso, 2005). This particular social justice research agenda focuses on empowering diverse populations while working toward eliminating racism, sexism and poverty.
4. *The centrality of experiential knowledge.* CRT states that the experiential knowledge of diverse populations is valid and critical to understanding and teaching about racial subordination (Delgado Bernal, 2002). In particular, those experiences of diverse populations that are included in storytelling, cuentos, testimonios, narratives, and scenarios are important in CRT (Bell, 1987, 1992, 1996; Carrasco, 1996; Delgado, 1989, 1993, 1996, 1996; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Espinoza, 1990; Montoya, 1994; Olivas, 1990; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000, 2001, 2002a; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Villalpando, 2003; Yosso, 2005).
5. *The utilization of transdisciplinary approaches.* CRT views race and racism by drawing on research in contemporary and historical contexts from ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, history, law, psychology, film, theatre, and other fields (Delgado, 1984, 1992;

Garcia, 1995; Gotanda, 1991; Gutierrez-Jones, 2001; Harris, 1994; Olivas, 1990; Yosso, 2005).

Delgado Bernal (2002) note that LatCrit “is a theory that elucidates Latinas/Latinos’ multidimensional identities and can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression” (p. 108). According to Valdes (1996)

Lat Crit is not incompatible or competitive with CRT ... instead, Lat Crit is supplementary, complementary to CRT. LatCrit ... at its best, should operate as a close cousin and is related to CRT in real and lasting ways but not necessarily living under the same roof. (p. 26-27)

Additionally, as Solorzano and Yosso (2001) state,

CRT and LatCrit criticize the traditional paradigms, both in content and format, so we can use the life histories of our participants as valid narratives. This experiential knowledge in the curriculum opens the possibilities of drawing on the strengths of our communities and incorporating silenced voices in multiple methods. (p. 486)

While the CRT and LatCrit lenses were not the lens through which this study developed, it would be irresponsible not to acknowledge the various acts of racism that appeared within the stories of the presidential participants. Therefore I used a few of the most obvious tenets of CRT and LatCrit, which include race, class, gender and intersectionality.

Experiences as Young Women

As evidenced by the data, each of the participants experienced racial, gender, and social class biases when they were young women. Maria, Rosa, and Juana reflected on these experiences as those that provided them with a foundation of who they would become as Latina professionals.

Maria’s entire life has had signs of systemic racism. First, racism in the United States placed her family in poverty; her parents had to work long hours in blue-collar jobs and her family was forced to reside in a public housing unit. Also, given that they lived in an

impoverished, low income neighborhood, Maria and her siblings were forced to attend low performing schools where their teachers displayed racial, ethnic, and gender bias.

Specifically, as an elementary school student, Maria was isolated within her classroom alongside a developmentally disabled student named Darryl because she did not speak English. Her teacher considered Maria's inability to speak English to be a disability, but Maria was determined to move away from the stigma of being disabled. Maria taught herself some English by listening to her classmates speak. The words "jump" and "rope" were two of the first words she learned as a child as she observed her classmates engaging in this activity on the playground. She remembered feeling "ostracized" and "lonely" at this time in her life. Maria also said that as a result of these experiences in elementary school, she bought into the notion that she was not equal to her fellow classmates due to the differences in her race and ethnicity; however, she did not feel that she had a voice to speak up regarding this inequity. Her parents did not have the language skills to advocate for her either, which only intensified the inequitable treatment she was experiencing in school.

Maria's educational experiences are reflected in research by Segura (2003) and Gonzalez (1996) who state that many Latinas fall victim to institutional racism within their school systems. Maria was like many Latinas, segregated in racially-biased schools with little attention paid to them or to their parents, which results in an unequal educational experience for them.

The issue of gender, which is frequently reflected in CRT/LatCrit, also emerged in Maria's data. Maria's early educational experiences documented that not only did she experience racism within her U.S. school system, but many of her teacher's actions toward Maria reflected gender bias as well. When her teachers placed her in a corner, not recognizing that she had talents as a female and a Puerto Rican, Maria commented that they denied her the ability to

positively contribute to their classroom environment. Maria also believed that her teachers denied her educational access and opportunity because of their gender and racial bias toward her. But it must be stated that Maria succeeded in her elementary and primary schools despite that her educational system was against her from a racial and gender standpoint.

Rosa's experiences in elementary school mirrored Maria's in many ways. When Rosa was a young girl her family moved from France to San Antonio, Texas. This was a period of heightened racial tensions. Rosa got her "first taste" of how White culture viewed her people when she saw signs stating "No Mexicans or dogs allowed here."

Rosa's racial and cultural identity continued to be challenged during this time as she found herself in a physical altercation with a childhood bully named Aurora. The two girls acted out their own internalized oppression, which signified the long-standing racial bias that existed between Whites and Chicanos during the 50s and 60s. This was Rosa's first experience with identity transformation and awareness, she said, given that she mustered enough courage to confront Aurora. Rosa considered herself to be an acculturated Mexican-American who had to physically fight the non-assimilated Mexican-American (Aurora). Rosa said that her rage existed because generations of Mexicanas were told that they should not "act White" in society and they needed to be true to their culture.

In Juana's case, even though she did not personally experience cultural or racial bias as a child, she learned how her grandmother and other Puerto Rican students experienced these biases while in school. Juana learned how their school systems would require the Puerto Rican students to speak in English, which was a foreign language to them. Their schools would also use racially and culturally biased standardized tests, which resulted in inaccurate evaluation and labels for Puerto Ricans as underachievers or less intelligent. From these stories Juana gained a better

appreciation of the struggles her grandmother and other family members faced. But she was quick to point out that her immediate family did not adhere to the racially biased practices that were demanded by their school systems given that they still considered Spanish to be their first and only language.

Experiences as Working Professionals

As working professionals, similar experiences surrounding bias in race, gender, and social class continued. Each president reflected on these experiences as shaping them personally and professionally.

As Maria progressed through her professional career, she continued to experience racial and gender bias. In her view it has been a surprise to many that she would not be leading a Hispanic or minority-serving institution. But instead, she is leading a predominately White institution. She calls this assumption of others to be racially biased because even though she is proud of her racial and ethnic background, she does not want to be pigeon-holed into advocating strictly for people of her similar racial and ethnic background. Her role as a university president is to value and acknowledge inclusivity, regardless of race or ethnicity, she said.

Additionally, as a higher education executive, Maria commented how search firms often call upon her to submit her name in other executive employment searches just so that they could show that their pool was “diverse.” Maria believes these practices are racist. Practices like this, she said, overlook the talent and experience applicants of color bring to the table and focus only on using them to fulfill a quota.

When Maria became the president of her university, she knew that she would battle additional forms of gender bias, but she never imagined that it would be with her supervisor, who also happens to be her predecessor. It is obvious to her that this man, an African-American who

is now the chancellor of their university system, treats her differently than he treats his White male direct reports, who are also university presidents. He also questions her abilities and her decision-making processes and hovers over her in a micromanaging fashion.

Maria, like many Latina leaders, as stated in Catalyst (2003) experienced a difficult time “fitting in” with this male supervisor; her communication and leadership styles were often compromised in order for her to carry out her job as president of her university. Maria challenged this male supervisor’s views of her, which also meant that she was faced with “standing out” versus “blending in” among the other presidents in her university system.

Maria also talks of how she must carry herself differently as an older woman and a Latina in an environment comprised of mainly White men. She frequently confronts forms of gender bias by males in her university who often assume that she is not well versed in “masculine” duties, such as managing university budgets and understanding university technology. She counters them by reiterating that despite the stereotypes which state that Latinas lag behind in knowledge and acquisition of mathematical and scientific concepts, Maria does not fall into those stereotypes. She often has to overstate her experience in managing multi-million dollar budgets and her knowledge in technology in order to be taken seriously as president, she said.

In Rosa’s case, as she progressed through her career in higher education she witnessed racial and cultural bias in recruiting and retaining Chicanas in graduate schools. This is a problem that contributes to the lack of Latina presidents in our nation’s colleges and universities, she said. One way she combats this problem is by advising her faculty to refrain from telling their Latina students that the tenure process is a difficult one because their words are dissuading them from pursuing the professoriate. She notes that the tenure process can be racially and

culturally biased, but she believes that Latinas must persevere through it in order for the numbers of Latina higher education executives, particularly presidents, to improve.

Juana has an interesting way of combating racial and cultural bias, according to Bonnie, a faculty member at Juana's university. She said that Juana goes about her everyday life as president assuming that people do not have prejudices against her as a Latina. But when she discovers that they do, Juana redirects the bias to be their problem and not hers while completely removing herself from the situation. It is unclear if this method is completely effective for Juana, but Bonnie indicated that Juana practices it with grace and conviction.

In another instance, Tim, a staff member at Juana's university, took a very different view in regards to the racial and cultural diversity Juana brings to their institution. He noted that individuals at their institution do not see her as "Hispanic." They just see Juana as their leader, which can be viewed positively, or as a color-blind and racially biased indicator that Juana's racial and cultural diversity is not respected and acknowledged but rather ignored.

Cross-Presidential Analysis on Intersectionality

The tenets of race, class, and gender intersected across the lives of Maria, Rosa, and Juana. All three women grew up in lower class, blue-collar environments where their families had minimal financial resources. Then when they became working professionals, Maria and Juana each were married and moved upward into a life of financial and social class privilege. Rosa remained single but still earned a substantial living while serving in her various higher education executive positions.

Intersectionality appeared again where each participant successfully merged her life of an executive with the life she led as a daughter of parents who stressed the importance of education. Each of their parents also raised their daughters to strive for the American Dream. Maria, Rosa,

and Juana value their role as community members within their respective cities. They often blend in as “normal” citizens and are often known to interact with the community members in their native languages or to be seen at neighborhood events engaging in the event at large. These practices not only honoring their blue-collar upbringings, but also keep them grounded in their mission of serving the needs of their community members.

Maria, Rosa, and Juana also spoke of having to carry themselves differently as Latinas or Chicanas in environments comprised of mainly White men. They talked of how they often have to bridge their academic personas with that of a Latina or Chicana who speaks Spanish and comes from a working class background. For Maria and Juana, they always have one foot in their academic world and one foot in their Puerto Rican world, which creates juxtaposition for their own identity development. Now, while living in an upper-class university presidential lifestyle, Maria and Juana pride themselves in holding true to their lower socio-economic class values and traditions that they learned as Puerto Ricans, which again is another intersection.

The stories of all three presidents reflect what many Latina leaders face which is the idea that they live in two different lands; that they have to merge two different lifestyles divided by one border (Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983). These women strive to be respected on both sides of the border, which can cause them distress (Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983).

All of their experiences with intersectionality are also reflected in research presented by Hansen (1997), which states that many Latina college and university presidents survive in their presidential positions while experiencing dualism and negotiation. In each of the cases presented in my study, dualism is present as they merge their Puerto Rican or Chicana cultural beliefs and values with their practices as a university president. These women also negotiate their socio-

cultural and leadership experiences with their role as president, where their goal is to transform their institutions to become more inclusive and progressive than they have been in the past.

The only difference among the women that emerged from the data is that Rosa considers herself lesbian and her experiences with this identity are different than those had by Maria and Juana. Rosa discussed how when she was a child, her grandmother recognized that men would never be important to her while her parents also knew that she was “different.” In her words, her family knew that she was lesbian before she did. Now, as an “out and proud,” Spanish-speaking, Chicana lesbian in academia, Rosa believes she is very much an anomaly. But she also believes that if her many identities were an issue to her presidential search committee, then she would not have pursued the position. Rosa said that her multiple identities have “now become a whole” within her and she carries them with pride. She also wanted to be in an institution where her multiple identities would be valued and not challenged. She believes that she has found the right institution, one that embraces her values and identities.

Conclusion

Introduction to Counterstorytelling for this Study

For this study, I used the concept of counterstorytelling, which is “...a method based on the narratives, *testimonios*, or life stories of people of color, a story can be told from a nonmajoritarian perspective—a story that White educators usually do not hear or tell (Delgado, 1989, 1993).” These stories are important because:

- (1) they can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice; (2) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems; (3) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrate that they are not alone in their position; and (4) they can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality,

one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone. (Delgado, 1989; Lawson, 1995).

Delgado (1989) also notes that counterstories show us that “oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation” (p. 2436). In essence, counterstories and the theories of LatCrit and CRT are positioned to go against those of the grand narratives; they challenge the majoritarian way of thinking and operating.

There cannot be a counterstory told about these three Latina presidents unless the grand narrative is first understood. Grand narratives are described as “theories of the world that could be applied universally, regardless of particular circumstances” and the “careful study and accumulation of facts from which laws are determined” (Clandinin, 2007, p. 22). In the case of my study, the grand narrative is as follows. Feinberg (2011) notes that in a 2011 report from the Chronicle of Higher Education’s *Almanac of Higher Education*, 74% of our nation’s colleges and university presidents are White males (p.8). Most of these men have traveled the ranks to their presidencies allowing their White, male, privilege to provide them with social, cultural, and/or economic capital, which in turn assisted in the securing of their presidency. Cultural capital involves having access to a quality education and language, while social capital is having access to social networks and connections. Finally, economic capital is having access to money and other material possessions (Yosso, p.76). It is assumed that many of these White male presidents possessed the abovementioned capital, while also having White privilege, which McIntosh (1989) defined as having “an invisible, weightless knapsack of special provisions and codebooks” (p. 10). These men were able to vertically travel the academic ladder where they were “groomed” for their presidency. Many of these White male presidents’ experiences could also be reflected in the “Great Man” theory of leadership, which states that not only were they

born leaders but they were “gifted” with traits such as self-confidence and intelligence that enhanced their leadership (Daft, 1999; Northouse, 2007).

These White male presidents are also benefactors of the college and university search committees and boards that claim to be ethnically and culturally inclusive when searching for their new school leaders, but still chose a White male to lead their institution. Finally, these White male presidents’ experiences and narratives are often known in public form, particularly in academic research, where their stories become part of the dominant ideology in academia.

The stories of Maria, Rosa, and Juana in this study counter the typical White male president narrative given that they have encountered vastly different educational, economic, and socio-cultural experiences, yet they still advanced on to presidential positions. According to Delgado (1989, 1993), all three presidential stories in this research project are told from a nonmajoritarian perspective where their experiences may not reflect those of an Anglo, male, university president or even an Anglo, female university president.

Maria, Rosa, and Juana come from lower socio-economic backgrounds where they had limited educational opportunities or social mobility. Maria’s, Rosa’s, and Juana’s educational experiences may not always reflect those of White men or women presidents. Their counterstories originate in their primary school settings, which failed to promote and acknowledge their language development and their racial and ethnic diversity, but rather stifled it, which negatively affected their overall educational experiences. After they successfully completed primary school and were ready to advance on to higher education, as first-generation college students, they had to maneuver these processes alone because no other family members had gone through these same experiences. Juana, for instance, commented that she would have made a different choice for her graduate program had she been better versed in the importance of

college rankings. But being a first-generation student who knew little about the importance of rankings, she chose a school that did not offer her the quality of education that she could have had.

Also, there were instances during their trajectory to their presidencies, and during their actual presidencies, where their race, ethnicity, and gender were challenged, which again sets them apart from White male presidents. Maria's counterstory is that she is the only Latina university president in her region, and she is within a university system where she is the only female president among White male presidents. So her experiences everyday as an older Puerto Rican female who runs a mid-sized university will counter those of White males in similar positions.

Rosa's entire professional career could be considered a counterstory to the traditional White male president. She uses the politically-charged term "Chicana" to describe herself while also being an out lesbian in her personal and professional circles. She recognizes that she took a fairly traditional route to her presidency; she transitioned from the faculty ranks to administrative ranks where she served mainly in positions that focused on diversity and multiculturalism. Then she advanced to her presidency. Yet she realizes that many White men who become presidents have not gone the traditional academic route to their presidency and have advanced by utilizing networks that are a result of White privilege and higher social class status. Rosa believes that Chicanas lack this privilege and capital which has resulted in their lack of advancement into presidential positions.

Juana's trajectory to the presidency was traditional as well; she quickly advanced from a faculty position to numerous executive positions in higher education. Yet when she was approached to apply for the presidential position, she knew that everything about her would

counter the other White male finalists. She was small in stature, a Latina, she had majored in comparative literature, and she spoke with an accent. But she felt that her board of regents acknowledged her diversity along with her expansive list of professional accomplishments and decided that she was the right person for the presidency when they could have easily chosen one of the White male candidates.

Maria, Rosa, and Juana's socio-cultural and leadership experiences were unique and distinct. Their experiences carried them through their academic trajectory to their positions as presidents of their institutions. It would be remiss to ignore that each of these women experienced racial, gender, and social class biases throughout their trajectories, yet these biases have proven to create an exceptional amount of strength and resilience that continues to carry them through their personal and professional lives.

VIII – DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to discuss the socio-cultural and leadership experiences of three Latina four-year college and university presidents. I also wanted to note if intersectional issues such as race, gender, and social class influenced how they lead their institutions. I compared my literature review in Chapter Two with the analysis of my data on the three presidents featured in this study. I will discuss the similarities and differences that were present in my literature review and in my analysis. I will also provide my views on implications for further research and practice. Finally, I will suggest further recommendations to consider when reflecting on this research.

Many themes emerged from Maria, Rosa, and Juana's narratives that were supported by literature featured in Chapter Two. When Rodriguez et al. (2000) talked of cultural capital in reference to Latinas in education, their views corresponded with all three of my presidents. Each of my presidents had high intellectual abilities, but school officials failed to value the cultural capital they brought to their classrooms. The school officials' failure perpetuated social and educational inequality for Maria, Rosa, and Juana. Yet they, like many high-achieving Latinas, still managed to persevere through their primary and secondary schools and on to higher education (Segura, 2003).

When noting the prevalence of "marianismo" in the lives of many Latinas, as stated by Gil and Vasquez (1996), two of my presidents experienced varying forms of "marianismo" within their families. The assumed and culturally acknowledged gender roles of Maria and Rosa, which were imposed on them by their fathers, brothers, and uncles, often called for the women to be submissive to men; their role was to be a wife and a mother, not an independent-minded professional (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). These marianismo experiences appeared as the expectation

for Maria to cook and clean for her brothers because her father said so. The boys in Maria's family were to never to engage in any domestic chores because they would be considered "gay." This concept of *marianismo* also appeared in Rosa's life when her uncle devalued her educational aspirations and placed a higher emphasis on her "marrying a nice Mexican man" instead. Luckily, Rosa's father had different expectations for her as he valued that she was destined to be an academic; he also valued early on that she was a lesbian.

Rodriguez et al. (2000), and Mendez-Morse (2004) discussed how "high achieving" Latinas tend to have parents who are not only non-authoritarian, but also emphasize that their daughters be self-reliant and highly educated. Avery (1982) and Mendez-Morse (2000) also state that these parents provided their Latina daughters with the moral support and encouragement to be college-educated, even when their own was minimal. The parents mentioned in Avery (1982) and Mendez-Morse (2000) championed their daughters' professional aspirations and wanted them to secure white collar jobs that would not be as physically demanding as their own laborer jobs. This research reflects the data of the narratives from Maria, Rosa, and Juana who each mentioned that their blue-collar, working class parents stressed to them the importance of education and viewed it as a way to move away from their economically stressed barrios into a life that had more economic and social capital. All three presidents also indicated that by their achieving a higher education it would encourage other members of their families to follow suit, which in turn would dramatically enhance the quality of life for their entire families.

The concept of role modeling appeared in my Chapter two as well as in Maria, Rosa, and Juana's narratives. Mendez-Morse (2004) talked of how many Latina leaders consider their mother or another female relative to be their first role models or mentors, These women provided them with guidance as they advanced through their education stressing to their Latina daughters

that they “could do anything” and to “never use the excuse of being a woman to prevent you from achieving greatness.” All three of my presidents indicated that they considered their mothers or grandmothers to be influential in their educational advancement. The elder women in their lives would often reflect on their own personal experiences as women in oppressed environments while stressing to Maria, Rosa, and Juana that they did not have to live their lives in that manner. Rather, they had the power to achieve higher education degrees and become influential Latinas in society. Additionally, it should be noted that Maria indicated that her father was also her role model, providing her with nontraditional and unconventional forms of education while at home so that she would be competitive within her U.S. school system.

Maria and Juana also talked about how their husbands gave them emotional support throughout their careers. Maria’s husband assumed the duties of tending to the needs of their children who were in college while maintaining their household as she advanced towards the presidency. These findings reflect Mendez-Morse’s (2000) research that found that many Latina leaders have husbands who provide them with emotional, financial, and moral support and flexibility so that they are able to further their educational and professional careers. This notion supports the concept that “marianismo” is starting to fade out of the lives of modern Latinas as women like Maria and Juana; that husbands are sharing the domestic and child-rearing responsibilities.

Even though my three presidential participants did not speak directly to the concept of spirituality and religion, I found that Rosa and Juana still carried spiritual beliefs that guide their lives. Many Latinas retrieve and integrate their traditional Catholic beliefs with their newly-founded spirituality by “reclaiming the Spanish language, strengthening and reinterpreting key religious symbols such Our Lady of Guadalupe, providing and introducing ancient rituals, and

transferring communal and inclusive ritual practices into their organizational leadership” (Rodriguez, 1999, p. 144). In Rosa’s case, she surrounds herself with icons and images of Our Lady of Guadalupe and other religious symbols as reflections of her childhood as a Mexican-American. Now as a Chicana, she draws strength from these icons and images, which have now become representations of her Chicana identity.

When Juana was considering her offer of the presidency, she reflected on a spiritual experience she had while reading a biblical passage from Malachi, which she believed was a sign that she was to take the presidency at her university. It was clear from my findings that Rosa and Juana have a firm connection to their spiritual and religious beliefs and that they draw on these beliefs to guide them through their presidencies and their personal experiences.

Many Latina leaders have to negotiate their beliefs, working styles, appearances, or even parts of their cultural identities—such as displaying their accents—in order to “fit into” their work environments (Catalyst, 2003). In my research, Maria stated how she had to “adjust” her personal and professional demeanor in order to handle her aggressive male supervisor. She often has to stand up to this domineering, micromanaging man as he questions many of her presidential decisions. She felt the assertiveness she expressed toward her supervisor made her stand out, or be somewhat of a target for him. She felt she never had the ability to blend in to the fabric of her university and conduct her duties as a president the way her counterparts had done.

Yet I must mention that all three of my presidents never compromised their ethnic and cultural identities in order to fit into their work environments, a finding not supported in research conducted by Catalyst (2003). Maria, Rosa, and Juana were proud of their ethnic and cultural identities and proudly displayed their Spanish-speaking skills and pride of their respective cultures in all that they did as presidents. In Rosa’s case, not only was she proud of her ethnic

and cultural identities, she proudly expressed her sexual orientation in all of her personal and professional circles.

It should also be noted that none of my presidents has completely assimilated into the mainstream American culture, which is reflected in their constant expression and pride of their cultural and ethnic identities. It would be safe to say that they have gone through a minor acculturation process of sorts, where they have adapted to the American culture by having social and economic capital, such as having access to influential social networks and living in expensive homes. Yet they all stay true to their Puerto Rican and Mexican-American/Chicana roots, which provide them with strength while carrying them through their presidencies.

This notion of honoring ethnic and cultural identities corresponds to research presented by Gonzalez-Figueroa and Young (2005). The authors state that even though Latinas experience assimilation and acculturation in various phases and stages in their lives, those who are bilingual (Spanish/English) tend to retain and utilize their Spanish language skills as a means of demonstrating their solid ethnic identity.

Latinas lead with the Four C's—character, competence, compassion, and community servanthood (Mendez-Morse, 2000; Ramirez, 2006). They also respected the role modeling they received from other Latinas in their lives, which they now “pay forward” as role models to younger Latinas. All three of my presidents indicated that they lead their institutions with the traits of character, competence, and compassion while also being a community servant. Maria, Rosa, and Juana also indicated that it was their job to serve as a role model to other emerging Latina academics because it is their way of “paying it forward” to those who have come after them. Each view emerging Latinas as their legacy who will carry on their mission for serving the underserved in higher education.

The concept of academic trajectory appeared across the data. Segura (2003) indicated that race, class, and gender play a significant role in the stages of advancement, or lack thereof, for Latinas in academia. Segura (2003) argues that not only are affirmative action programs unsuccessful in recruiting women of color in academia but if they are recruited and retained in our nation's colleges and universities, they are heavily populated in departments such as ethnic and women's studies, which are not regarded as academically credible as traditional departments. Also, those Latinas who gravitate toward traditional academic departments are normally surrounded by majority White male colleagues, who tend to express racial, class, and gender bias toward them.

Maria, Rosa, and Juana agreed with the research presented by Segura (2003) and offered their own perspectives regarding how the issues of race, class, and gender affected the academic trajectory of Latinas. All three presidents were in agreement that the reason why there are so few Latina four-year college and university presidents is because during their undergraduate programs they are overlooked and undervalued because of their race and social class status. They are not provided with the appropriate encouragement and mentorship to advance on to graduate school and there are no recommendations for them to pursue the professoriate, which they believe can lead to their upward trajectory toward the presidency. Without encouragement and mentorship, issues of race, class, and gender will continue to play a part in securing more Latina presidents, they said.

Finally the research participants shared their views on those skills and traits they believe makes a president successful; their comments reflected the findings of Viernes Turner (2007), Knowlton (1993), and Rodriguez (2006). Skills and traits included having interpersonal connections with their constituents; having a nontraditional leadership style, which focuses on

community-building; acknowledging that they are the first in their field and they are often looked upon as role models to other emerging Latinas; and acknowledging that their family ties and cultural identities positively affect their presidencies.

Recommendations for Further Research

The reason why I undertook this particular research study was because I discovered that there is a substantial amount of literature featuring Latinas and Latinos who are presidents of community colleges, but there is little research regarding Latina presidents in four-year colleges and universities. I understand that the number of Latinas in these positions are minimal, but it is unclear why academic researchers neglect mentioning their experiences and the contributions they are making to academia. This notion became even more prominent to me after spending time with Maria, Rosa, and Juana and discovering that they lead their institutions with such strong yet diverse socio-cultural and leadership traditions and practices that they had learned from their vast family and cultural experiences. In my opinion, these experiences need to be shared in academic research so that other presidents can learn from their skills and model their behaviors.

While researching this selective group in academia a number of topics came to mind that could be explored in future studies. One follow-up study would be to compare Latina presidents with other women presidents from diverse groups and note if they also rely on their socio-cultural and leadership experiences to carry them through as presidents. Another study of interest would be to explore the socio-cultural and leadership experiences of Latino male college and university presidents, while comparing their data to the Latina women that I used for this research project to note if gender-related experiences and expectations play a part in how they run their institutions.

I would also like to continue exploring Latina college and university presidents while exploring if those who are first generation college students lead their constituents differently than those who are not first generation students. Such a study would expand on the theme of socio-cultural experiences that I used for this research project, while also noting if socio-economic or cultural capital influences how Latina presidents run their institutions.

Maria and Juana both talked about the concept of living the “American Dream” and what it meant to them and their family. This concept could correspond to their achieving cultural, social, and economic capital, which became more important to them as they grew older and into their professional positions. This concept of living the “American Dream” could be explored further in the lives of other presidents of diverse backgrounds, while noting if this particular premise guided them and their families during their childhoods and also during their trajectories toward their presidencies.

Maria, Rosa and Juana pride themselves on having open communication and collaboration. They also value a non-hierarchal form of leadership where they tend to use the term “we” instead of “I” when working with their constituents. They display compassion and commitment and they often operate their institutions as family businesses while also being modest and humble. All three presidents thought it was their responsibility to better their community through their various positions in academia. Having that said, Maria, Rosa, and Juana lead their institutions as servant leaders. In their view, this type of leadership fuels them and keeps them motivated despite experiencing the typical day-to-day frustrations that a higher education president experiences. It would be worthwhile to note if other presidents of diverse backgrounds use the concepts of servant leadership to guide their practices as presidents in academia.

Finally, there were three other Latina presidents whom I originally wanted to feature in this research who decided not to participate. Two of these women are now former university presidents and I would still like to tell their stories as well as those of other Latina presidents who are no longer active, especially those who left their posts under controversial circumstances. It would be interesting to note if they experienced gender, racial, ethnic, or cultural bias and if these themes were the reason why they left their presidential positions.

Recommendations for Practice

It was evident that the three presidents draw on their socio-cultural and leadership experiences to lead their institutions while maintaining their cultural identity. Their experiences could be a rich resource and referenced when implementing programs and initiatives in higher education institutions.

As mentioned by Maria, Rosa, and Juana, in order for the numbers of Latina presidents to increase, there needs to be a concerted effort in tracking Latinas in their academic progress beginning as early as their middle and high school years. There are countless precollege programs in operation throughout the United States, yet the majority focus on serving all students of diverse backgrounds. There are very few precollege programs that focus strictly on the advancement of Latinas into higher education. Such programs could be of major interest to many colleges and universities given that the Latina college population is expected to grow exponentially over the next 40 years. In the near future, Latinas will comprise one-quarter of women of all ages in the United States (Gilroy, 2006), and the likelihood they will attend our nation's colleges and universities is high.

The precollege program I envision resembles a national program conducted by Girls Incorporated called "Mi Avenida." Mi Avenida targets urban middle and high schools that have

large populations of first generation Latina students. However, the program I envision would provide Latina girls with an academically intensive, year-round college-preparatory curriculum that complements and enhances their current public school curriculum. When the Latinas are in their senior year of high school, they would be given access to the college admissions and financial aid application processes while older Latinas would serve as “mujers mentors” to shepherd them through these processes.

When young Latinas become involved in programs such as this, they are provided with what Yosso (2005) refers to as *aspiration capital*, which is the ability to “maintain hopes and dreams for their future, even in the face of real perceived barriers” (p. 77). Their involvement in such programs would introduce to them a culture of possibility that allows them to have access to a college education, unlike the opportunities presented to their parents. They would also be provided with *social capital* and *navigational capital* early on where they would draw on the networks and community resources the programs offer to assist in their college application and retention processes (Yosso, p.79)

What will make an initiative like this different than that of “Mi Avenida” is that these young Latinas will continue to be followed throughout their undergraduate and graduate programs by their “mujeres mentors.” When these emerging Latinas are in graduate programs, as Rosa and Maria indicated, they should be encouraged to earn their Ph.D.s, which can translate to their joining the professoriate. As with most academic trajectories, there may be more of an opportunity for these emerging Latina academics to become deans, vice presidents, and eventually presidents, if they should they desire.

But there is still a need for outside forces to be involved in the recruitment and retention of Latina college and university presidents. When a talented Latina is in an administrative hiring

pool, there needs to be more progressive retention processes in place to not only support her application but to advance her trajectory to upper administrative positions.

It must be noted that the academy should not only encourage Latinas to become professors, but also value other paths to the presidency that Latinas may take. Rosa, for example, served in leadership positions that focused on diversity and multiculturalism in higher education prior to becoming a college president. Academia must note that Latinas and other people of color are recruited for executive diversity positions that hold a tremendous amount of importance equal to other executive positions in higher education. However, one must question, why can't these positions be on the path to the presidency? What will it take for academia to consider these positions to be worthy of advancement?

All three of my presidents have been participants in one or more higher education leadership programs such as the ACE Fellows Program, the HERS Institute, or AMI during their career in academia. Yet one must question if programs such as these are adequately assisting in recruiting and retaining Latinas in executive positions in higher education. Martinez (1999) states that these programs, albeit reputable, do not produce the large numbers of Latina leaders needed to impact the overall number of Latinas leading our nation's colleges and universities. Instead, Martinez notes, many of these programs should be consolidated in order to achieve higher levels of influence for Latinas in general. Martinez also recommends that an intergenerational mentoring pipeline should be created where seasoned Latina leaders could groom future Latina administrators. Additionally, Viernes Turner (2007) notes that higher education institutions should develop the talents of their Latina faculty by providing them with leadership opportunities, which may eventually increase their recruitment into senior administrative roles. Unfortunately, the trade-off will be that Latina leaders will have limited

Latino student contact due to their demanding administrative duties, but the sheer visibility in a higher administrative position can serve as positive reinforcement for Latino students.

There are many national programs designed for Latinas who hold leadership positions in various occupations. Programs such as the National Hispana Leadership Institute, the Circle of Latina Leadership, the HOPE Leadership Institute, and MANA – A National Latina Organization provide Latinas with training to navigate their upward trajectory in their respective occupations. They also provide Latinas with the skills needed to be at the board room table of our nation's Fortune 500 companies and other reputable businesses and organizations. Yet there remains a need for programs that are specifically designed to train Latina leaders in higher education; programs to assist emerging Latinas in our nation's colleges and universities break from the "Hispanic Box" of student affairs (Martinez, 1999) and support their transition to the academic side of higher educational institutions. I would envision current Latina leaders who are in positions of dean, vice president, and also president serving as facilitators and/or guest lecturers at leadership training sessions. They could present their experiences and recommendations to the program participants on how to successfully navigate through graduate school, to the professoriate, and beyond.

The program could also facilitate emerging Latina leaders shadowing seasoned Latina leaders a few days a month. The emerging Latina leader would see first-hand the issues and events Latina leaders encounter at their institutions. Mendez-Morse (2004) notes the best way to recruit, retain, and support the advancement of Latina professors is to seek Latina role models or mentors in academia. These role models and mentors would teach others how to effectively navigate their careers while showing them effective ways to publicize their scholarly work. They

could also show their mentees how to effectively balance the demands of the White male-dominated academy while maintaining the traditions and customs of her Latina culture (p. 586).

Following the completion of the program, I envision this mentor relationship continuing with the emerging Latina leaders and seasoned Latina leader. I envision the seasoned Latina leader serving as a resource where she could be call upon for moral, personal, and professional support as the emerging Latina leader travels toward her leadership position.

Attention must also be given to the search committees. One must question if they really are racially and gender inclusive, or if they operate in the manner Maria identified, recruiting “diverse” applicants for their pool just to show their community that they “value” diversity while still selecting a White male applicant.

Finally, when recognizing that our nation’s colleges and universities are becoming more diverse in terms of race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, there needs to be a concerted effort to appoint boards of regents who reflect the diversity of their institutions. These policy makers need to not only come from the same backgrounds as their student constituents, they should also be trained annually on the importance of multiculturalism and diversity in higher education. College and university leaders must value the diverse perspectives and utilize the talents of all who are affiliated with them, and this includes students, faculty, staff, and boards of regents.

Although there are few Latina college and university presidents in our nation’s higher education institutions, their narratives are unique and profound. These women honor their many cultural and ethnic identities and draw strength from these identities as they advance their mission and vision of their institutions. They have also developed their altruistic mentality from

their families who believed in the process of “giving back” as they now practice this concept with other emerging Latina leaders.

Epilogue

Update on President Rosa

It should be noted that when I was recruiting my research participants, I asked Rosa to participate because she was a community college president who was preparing to transition her college to a four-year institution offering additional bachelor degrees and a new master’s degree program. Therefore, at the time, Rosa fit my criteria as stated in Chapter Three.

Since my last interview with President Rosa, there have been many significant changes at her college. First, she reported that after evaluating their infrastructure, she and her board, faculty, and staff have decided to postpone their expansion plans. However, their college will continue offering a small number of bachelor’s degree programs in addition to their existing two-year programs. Rosa believes that within the next five years will achieve university status, offering master’s degree programs. Therefore, as of press time, Rosa is still a community college president at an institution that offers four-year degrees and not a full-fledged four-year college or university president.

I have received criticism that my research pool was too small given that I only had three presidential participants. I have also been asked why I did not open my participant pool to include more community college presidents. My rationale is that I was only focused on four-year college and university presidents because their stories are not told as frequently as those who are community college presidents, as stated in Chapter One. I also intended to feature more than three four-year colleges and university presidents but, as stated in Chapter 3, those whom I

targeted chose not to participate for reasons unknown. Thus, my research pool remained small—three participants.

Reflections from the Researcher

I began this doctorate program while I was a mid-level administrator at a Colorado state college. It was during that time through my professional experiences and academic research, that I realized Latinas were underrepresented in mid and higher level positions in higher education. Because this notion intrigued me, I wanted to explore it further in my dissertation. Ironically, during this time my own professional life as an administrator in higher education was falling apart. I quickly discovered that I was not fit for this type of job during this time in my life, so I resigned. I became one of those Latinas no longer an administrator in higher education. I became a part of the national statistics about Latinas in higher education. But I still stayed in the field by working as a graduate research assistant, teaching part-time at our state's research university, and studying as a full-time doctoral student.

I mention this because it is one of the many personal and professional transformations and epiphanies that occurred during my doctoral program that I would like to share. To begin, I did not expect to see so much of myself in the three women presidents I featured in my study. I had always carried the label of “the Only One” in almost everything I did in my life, and as I conducted my research, it was humbling to discover how each of these presidents also felt that they were “the Only Ones” in their families and respective communities to have achieved academic and/or professional excellence.

During this process, my experiences in academia related to Espinoza's research (1990), which states that people who are marginalized in academia often struggle with a sense of self-doubt or the “imposter's syndrome” (Yosso, 2006). These feelings are a result of a legacy of

internalized racism and sexism in the academy that causes some people of color to internalize feelings of their not belonging or that their research is not credible. These feelings also reinforce that people of color need a different sense of “cultural capital” in order to not only be competitive but also survive in academia. As Yosso (2006) states,

[People of color] may be able to intellectualize about racial formations in the United States and examine the multiple forms of racism, but we rarely examine the psychophysiological effects these racial formations and multiple forms of racism have on our bodies, minds and spirits. (p. 146)

I discovered that all three of my participants have experienced feelings of self-doubt or have experienced the imposter syndrome at one time or another in their professional careers. Although I do not wish these feelings upon anyone, it was reassuring to know that I was not alone in having these feelings. I greatly admire these women and perhaps I was meant to share their stories to learn more about my own story.

It was also during this transformational time when my “survivor’s guilt” (Piorkowski, 1983) re-emerged stronger than ever. “Survivor’s guilt” is often experienced by underrepresented persons in education because others in her racial or ethnic background have been victims of a “leak” or a “break” in their own educational pipeline. Although I should feel a tremendous sense of accomplishment completing this arduous task, I cannot help but feel guilty because of the hundreds of Chicanas who came from my Barrios of the East side of Pueblo, Colorado, who never made it past high school. Despite living in a family who struggled with poverty, alcoholism, and mental illness, I “survived” because I had a small set of individuals in my K-12 schools who set high expectations for me that I met each and every time. Like Maria, Rosa, and Juana, I did not attend the most progressive and advanced public schools. In fact, I can still remember those teachers I had who would fall asleep in class, or those who employed the most non-stimulating and rote pedagogical methods, completely steering us away from the subject

matter. But somehow, like Maria, Rosa, and Juana, I knew that an education was my “ticket” out of the Barrio.

Like Maria, Rosa, and Juana, I was one of those “odd” Latinas who was always told that I “acted White” because I loved to learn and excelled in school. And like my three presidential participants, I ignored the repeated prejudicial comments I received about being “the Only One” or being nerdy or “White” and persevered through my substandard educational system.

I also must mention the stark similarities I shared with my three presidents in regards to their relationships with their parents. It was touching to discover that Maria, Rosa, Juana and I all had parents who were scared to death of the unknown within our educational systems, but they still pushed us to achieve greatness as students. I fondly remember my freshman year in college, calling my father in tears in the middle of the night as I locked myself in my dorm room closet. I repeatedly asked him to come get me and take me home because this first generation college student stuff was too foreign and scary to me. There was my father who told me, “Hija, I don’t quite understand why you are doing that college thing and I don’t quite understand what all of those degrees mean, but just know that I support you and I want you to go for it because I never had the opportunity to do what you are doing. And no, I’m not going to pick you up and bring you home, either.” I still reflect on that night as the time when my father’s words and actions (or lack thereof) changed my life forever.

Maria, Rosa, and Juana and I had parents who were like many first generation Latino parents, they wanted us to have a better life than they had, and somehow they knew it would be accomplished by achieving a higher education. Our parents had what Yosso (2005) refers to as *aspirational capital* where they encouraged us to dream for a better life outside of our Barrios where having an education would allow us to have a culture of possibility, unlike any

possibilities they ever had. Our parents also taught us the concept of *resistant capital*, where we as Latina daughters were taught to be self-reliant while also challenging the status quo of mainstream society who often stated that we were not supposed to do well in school or advance to higher education because we were Latina and economically poor. Maria, Rosa, Juana and I countered this notion by leaving the Barrio and getting an education and living the American Dream without forgetting our roots and the lessons we were taught by our elders, which continue to ground us today.

Also much like Maria, Rosa, and Juana, I have persevered through my bachelor, master's, and now doctorate program because I believe in the power of mirroring and role modeling as mentioned in Mendez-Morse (2004). I believe that my influence as Dr. Maes or Professora Maes will have a huge impact on future Chicanas and Latinas who come after me. Already, I know that my work as an academic and teacher inspired other young and emerging Latinas and Chicanas every day at my university. I am thrilled to hear from other *chicas* with whom I used to work some fifteen years ago in non-profit educational programs and discover that they, too, have earned degrees and/or have contributed wonderful things to the world in which we live, despite being "the Only Ones" in their respective professional circles. They look up to me with great admiration as I do to the three presidents who participated in this study. Perhaps this act of attaining a Ph.D. is my small gesture of what Solorzano and Yosso (2001) refer to as "I'm holding on to the escalera (ladder) with one hand, pero con la otra mano (but with the other hand), I'm trying to reach down and lift others with me as we climb" (p. 485).

Maria, Rosa, and Juana metaphorically held the ladder while holding my hand during this process. When I, a novice, stranger researcher first met them, each went beyond her obligatory manner and embraced me as their successor in this world of higher education. The first time I

met Maria rather than shaking my hand as one colleague would do with another, she embraced me with open arms, almost as if we had known each other for decades. Rosa repeated this welcoming behavior by opening her home and her heart to me, feeding me and singing to me beautiful *corridos* (songs) as an elder relative would. Finally, Juana's warmth resonated across the Skype wires as she made sure to check in on my dissertation process each time we met, as a big sister would, and welcomed me to not only visit her, but stay in her home when I came.

I cannot help but attribute these welcoming behaviors to *carino*, where Latinas often view others with love and treat one another as *hermanas*, or sisters. I am now a member of their *comunidad* (community) or their circle of *hermanas*. I am certain that I can rely on all three presidents for help, support, and guidance in my personal or professional life. I do not believe that this magical connection always happens with researchers and participants.

Looking Forward

During this dissertation journey, I have kept an eye on the professional events surrounding my Latina presidential participants and also on those who decided to not participate in my study. One president who was not featured in my study has decided to retire from her position, which leaves another gap in a position of influence in higher education, especially as it relates to Latino students.

It should be recognized that the overall numbers of Latina presidents of four-year colleges and universities is still stagnant. I cannot help but wonder that it is because many Latina higher education professionals believe that they may have a greater impact on our future generations of Latinas through direct service and advocacy positions in higher education. Perhaps they continue to fear that they will "sell out" to their cultural traditions and norms by advancing on to higher positions of influence. Or perhaps they may feel that they cannot compete

in this highly White male-dominated field, which at times devalues much of what they stand for as women and as Latinas.

Regardless, it is my hope that my research shows that Latinas belong at the presidential policy-making table in higher education. Their socio-cultural and leadership styles, their perspectives on the Latino community, and their influence and advocacy for all students of underrepresented backgrounds have an opportunity to make a tremendous impact on the culture of academia in general.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Name of participant:

Place of conversation:

Time of interview:

DESCRIPTIVE OBSERVATIONS

Physical setting:

Synopsis of conversation:

REFLECTIVE OBSERVATIONS

Personal thoughts:

Body language:

Tone:

Emotion:

Hunches:

Follow up to be done:

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: The Socio-cultural and Leadership Experiences of Latina Four-Year College and University Presidents: A Través de sus Voces (Through their Voices)

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Timothy Gray Davies, Professor, School of Education,
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CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Johanna B. Maes, School of Education, Doctoral Candidate,
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WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? This study is targeting Latinas who are currently a president of a four-year college or university.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? This research is being conducted by Johanna B. Maes, doctoral candidate, at Colorado State University School of Education. She is supervised by Dr. Timothy Gray Davies, Professor, at Colorado State University School of Education.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The purpose of this study is to better understand the socio-cultural and leadership experiences of selected Latinas who are presidents of four-year colleges or universities. The goal of telling these stories is so that the academy can learn more from this underrepresented population. Also, these stories will provide hope and inspiration to other Latinas who are coming through the educational pipeline. Finally, this research will add important and credible narratives about the experiences of Latina presidents in academia, which is not often told in academic research.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? This study will begin during the fall semester of 2010 and conclude mid-spring semester, 2011.

I will spend one full day or two half days at your respective institution where i will conduct a minimum of a two-hour, in-person interview you. I will also tour your respective institutions and observe your work environments and interactions with faculty, staff, and students, if they are available.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? You will be asked to answer a series of 20 questions during an in-person interview, which will take approximately two hours. This interview will be digitally audio-taped. You will also allow me to observe your work environment and interactions with faculty, staff, and students, if applicable.

Following the in-person interviews, i will have two follow-up phone conversations with you which may be as long as 90 minutes each. During these times, i will continue with our in-person conversations and also clarify any previously-mentioned information that was shared at the in-person interviews. These phone interviews are strictly voluntary on your part.

All of your responses will be digitally audio recorded with your permission.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? There are no known reasons not to participate in this study.

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Latina Presidents

1. Tell me about your family background—where were you born/raised, how many siblings, parents background, etc.
2. Tell me about your family values and traditions that you lived by as a child and still hold true now.
3. Tell me about your own educational journey.
4. How did your educational journey fit into your professional goals? Elaborate on how this fit into your jobs you held.
5. How did your professional goals lead to your presidency?
6. How long were you the president of XXX?
7. What type of leadership did you practice while being the president—why?
8. Did things like gender, ethnic background, age, and education level affect your nomination into presidency?
9. Were your capabilities ever questioned?
10. If you experienced any biases, how did you overcome them?
11. How did your background prepare you for your presidency? Or did it?
12. Where did you learn your leadership skills?
13. What were your first challenges as president and how did you overcome them?
14. Describe your leadership philosophy—give an example of how you used this during your presidency.
15. What are your core values and how did you practice them as president?
16. What was your vision for the college or university as president?
17. What was the most difficult thing you had to survive as president?
18. Do you feel as if you had to function in two different cultural environments—one being that in which you were raised in and the other being the academic environment? Were you ever able to merge the two environments?
19. What do you think are the greatest skills one needs to have to become a higher education president?
20. What do you think needs to be done in higher education to promote and retain more Latina four-year college and university presidents?