Community College Students’ Perspectives on Student-faculty Relationships and the Development of Competence and Purpose

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON STUDENT-FACULTY RELATIONSHIPS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCE AND PURPOSE

By

Michaela M. Tomova

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the University of Miami in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON STUDENT-FACULTY RELATIONSHIPS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCE AND PURPOSE

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This phenomenological study explored community college students’ perspectives on the impact of student-faculty interactions on their development of competence and of purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The study was conducted at one mid-size campus of a large, predominantly Hispanic-serving community college in Southeastern Florida. A total of eight student volunteers engaged in one-on-one interviews designed to understand how community college students experienced the influence and effects of student-faculty relationships on the development of (1) their competence and (2) their purpose. Through a combination of coding methods, 13 meaningful categories describing the phenomenon were derived. Four themes emerged from deeper analysis and consolidation of the categories, to include: (1) the impact of faculty availability coupled with genuine care on students’ development of competence and of purpose; (2) the value of academic rigor combined with faculty teaching excellence in the development of students’ competence and improved confidence; (3) the motivational effect of faculty success stories and student involvement in faculty initiatives on the development of students’ purpose and self-esteem; and (4) the role of faculty in student development through transitions and in overcoming fear. Possible implications of the study findings for community college faculty and administration are discussed.
To my daughters – Lina and Lidia
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Chapter 1: Introduction

For more than a century, community colleges in the United States have focused on providing broader access to higher education and on offering “opportunities to individuals who have otherwise been unable to attend four-year colleges and universities” (Malcom, 2013, p. 31). As a unique American contribution worldwide, and “the largest, most accessible, and fastest growing sector in higher education” (Boggs, 2011, p. 2), community colleges provide benefits to individuals and the society that would not occur in the absence of those institutions (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). Today, the 1,108 community colleges in the nation enroll nearly half of all U.S. undergraduates and attract an increasingly diverse student population among ethnicities other than White (51%), first-generation college students (36%), single parents (17%), non-US citizens (7%), veterans (4%), and students with disabilities (12%) (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016). According to the AACC (2016) factsheet, a total of 7.3 million students were enrolled in U.S. community colleges in the fall semester of 2014. Thus, two words can be used to sum up those students: “number and variety” (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 45).

The same two words, number and variety, apply to recent developments in program offerings at community colleges and define their vertical expansion (Cohen et al., 2013) with a focus on student learning and success. While retaining their original mission of open-door admissions and access for all, and in addition to the traditional comprehensive program offerings (Townsend & Twombly, 2007), such as college readiness, vocational, continuing education, associates, and certificate programs, these colleges now offer a host of new opportunities at an affordable cost and convenient
location to the surrounding community. These new opportunities include: honors colleges, transfer and articulation agreements with universities, study abroad courses, distance learning, and dual enrollment courses for high school students. In the last ten years, a limited number of baccalaureate degrees were developed at community colleges in partnerships and in response to local industry needs for a trained workforce. These four-year degrees provide increased access and an affordable entry to students of lower economic status who aspire to a baccalaureate degree or higher (Wang, 2013).

Compared to four-year institutions, community colleges enroll a larger portion of ethnic and racial minorities, who are most likely of lower economic status (Cohen et al., 2013). The representation of community college students among U.S. undergraduates in the fall semester of 2014 included: 57% Hispanic, 62% Native American, 52% Black, and 43% Asian/Pacific Islander students (AACC, 2016). The student demographics at community colleges reflect the ethnic composition of the geographical area of their specific location, as well as the 21st century higher education general trends towards enhanced inclusivity, heterogeneity, increased participation and diversity in the undergraduate student population (Altbach, Gumport, & Berdahl, 2011).

“Community college students range in academic ability and preparation from high school dropouts to high school valedictorians” (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). However, the majority of community college goers are part-time students (62%), working adults returning to college, and include a growing number of immigrants and non-native speakers of English. Hirt and Frank (2013) call attention to two particularly large participant groups that merit attention in studies of student development in community colleges: (1) returning adults in search of new vocational skills, and (2) immigrants, who
represent the fastest growing segment in U.S. population and who are likely to pursue an educational degree in a community college. While student representatives from the first group may face academic and non-academic challenges in college due to their long or short term separation from the educational and the learning environment, the second type of student may be lacking the English language skills needed for a college degree and knowledge of the higher education system in the United States. Both groups are likely to be less prepared for the rigors of college-level coursework (Renn & Reason, 2013) compared to their counterparts at four-year institutions. Overall, the diversity and the number of students accepted into U.S. colleges and universities who need remediation courses is constantly on the rise (Cohen et al., 2013). Much of the under-preparation involves academic skills that are foundational to learning, such as those used in mathematics, reading, and writing (Levin & Calcango, 2008). Cohen at al. (2013) painted a dismal picture of undergraduate students’ college readiness and traced the general decline in pre-college literacy skills in the last few decades on a national scale. In a 2007 study, faculty respondents indicated they “feel incoming freshman classes include significant numbers of students who are insufficiently prepared for college-level academics (Michael, Dickson, Ryan, & Koefer, 2010). Cohen et al. (2013) state that, “of all postsecondary educational structures in America, the public community colleges bore the brunt of the poor preparation of students in the twentieth century” (p. 243) and that nationwide, 44% of community college students take between one to three developmental courses. The authors contend that, unfortunately, the more remedial courses community college students take, the less likely they are to persist and complete a college degree. In addition to their effectiveness not being “uniformly positive” (Perin, 2013, p. 88),
developmental education courses do not accumulate college credits. Therefore, creating a supportive institutional environment (Tinto, 2012) and understanding the factors contributing to student academic preparation, retention, and transition to college-level coursework, is crucial for student development, their persistence towards a degree, and completion at the community college.

In studying college completion rates, Tinto (2012) placed a strong focus on the institutional responsibility and factors for college completion, and on the need to “shed light on the role played by the academic and social environment of an institution on the success of its students” (p. viii). Retention and persistence are associated terms, the former representing the institutional efforts to retain students through graduation and the latter, the student’s view and intent to persist and progress to completion (Tinto, 2012). Both are critical issues higher education institutions are currently facing. Students persist in college and commit to learning and completion when they integrate successfully in the institutional social and academic systems (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Although the relationship between retention and social integration is less clearly defined for community college students, researchers have identified a more pronounced relationship between academic integration and retention at two-year institutions (Mertes, 2015). Academic integration occurs mostly through academically-meaningful activities (Kuh, 2011) and students’ commitment to the intellectual life of the college through frequent, quality interactions with faculty, staff, and peers (Tinto, 1993). According to Astin (1999), students who interact frequently with faculty members are more likely than other students to express satisfaction with all aspects of their institutional experience, including student friendships, variety of courses, intellectual environment, and even the administration of
the institution. In addition, interactions with faculty inside and outside the classroom are positively related to student development in college (Astin, 1993).

Although nowadays 26% of the community colleges offer on-campus housing (AACC, 2016), the majority remain commuter colleges, where it is more difficult to promote student involvement (Astin, 1985). Students live off-campus and their primary involvement with college is academic, classroom-based, and occurs mostly through interactions with faculty (Barnett, 2011). In seeking to understand student-faculty interactions at community colleges, Wirt and Jaeger (2014) stated that the phenomenon has been examined mostly at four year institutions with traditional students and that an in-depth examination of community college students’ lived experiences and perspectives of their gains through interactions with faculty on campus is a viable approach in support of their educational endeavors. In fact, in their theory of college student development, Chickering and Reisser (1993) identified the role of student-faculty interactions as one of seven and a powerful institutional environmental factor in fostering the student development along the vectors of competence, purpose, autonomy, and integrity.

Significance of the Problem

Chickering and Reisser (1993) argued for “nothing less than human development, in all its complexity and orneriness, as the unifying purpose for higher education” (p. xv). The outcomes for students attending community colleges are far more complex than a mere completion of a degree (Cohen et. al., 2013). In studying experiences and educational outcomes of students in community colleges, Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, & Terenzini (2003) stated that little was known about their cognitive and psychosocial development in spite of the considerable knowledge accumulated with respect to their
academic preparation, retention, persistence, and transition to four-year institutions. According to Ortiz (1995), community college professionals need to examine their unique populations through the lens of student development theories in order to inform practices and to enhance psychosocial student development. Extant empirical research exists on student retention, persistence, departure, completion, and transfer rates at community colleges, while little is known about their developmental gains.

Understanding the role of faculty in students’ decisions to persist and succeed in college is a largely unstudied area (Barnett, 2011). Asking community college students to share their perspectives on the faculty role will render a deeper insight into their unique educational experiences and the institutional environmental factors affecting their development. This information, in turn, may have implications for community college students’ retention, persistence, and completion. This approach will help illuminate how college affects students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) and shed light on their gains and development while in college.

Throughout their history, enrollment numbers at community colleges have been steadily rising - spectacular growth has been their most impressive feature (Cohen et al., 2013). The parallel vertical expansion of programs and degree offerings has changed the nature of the educational experience and has resulted in the comprehensive colleges of today (Stumpf, 2013), taking “center stage as engines of economic renewal” (Boggs, 2011, p. 2). However, retention and completion rates remain low and students are at a high risk of non-persistence in college (Barnett, 2011). Open access and admissions, part-time student attendance, family obligations, difficult transitions to college, and sometimes, insufficient college readiness skills and related lack of clarity in educational
goals and purpose may lead to higher drop-out rates for community college students compared to their counterparts at four-year universities. Only 60% of students, who had enrolled in a community college in fall 2009 and had declared their intent to pursue a degree, returned for fall 2010 (Cohen et al., 2013). The authors state that low retention rates tell only part of the story and that the questions that need answers relate to the how, why, and which students tend to persist, who drops out and why, and who completes programs or transfers successfully to four year institutions. Another important aspect of this issue is hearing students’ voices and studying their perspectives on institutional factors contributing to their persistence, their acquisition of intellectual skills needed to succeed in college, and their clarity of purpose in the accomplishment of educational goals.

As commuter students with multiple family and job responsibilities (Cohen et al., 2013), their involvement with college is mostly based on interactions with faculty and peers in the classroom (Barnett, 2011). Therefore, it is important to study the existing reality at community colleges and to identify potent environmental factors, such as student-faculty interactions, affecting student development in the crucial areas of competence and intellectual skills needed to persist in college and to attain their educational and life goals, the latter defined by a clear purpose. In this qualitative study, I explored students’ lived experiences and perceptions of the developmental effects of student-faculty interactions on their competence and purpose within the context of a community college. Chickering’s classic *Education and identity* (1969) and Chickering and Reisser’s revised theory (1993) define the theoretical framework of my study. These prominent theories have withstood the test of time (Higbee, 2002). They define students’
psychosocial gains in college through seven, non-linear and non-sequential vectors of development, each with its own direction and magnitude. Chickering’s original theory included seven vectors: (1) achieving competence, (2) managing emotions, (3) becoming autonomous, (4) establishing identity, (5) freeing interpersonal relationships, (6) clarifying purposes, and (7) developing integrity (Chickering, 1969). Among the institutional conditions impacting student development, Chickering asserted that “when student-faculty interaction is frequent and friendly and when it occurs in diverse situations calling for varied roles, development of intellectual competence, sense of competence, autonomy, and purpose are fostered (1969, p. 153). My qualitative study specifically explored the link between and the impact of student-faculty interactions on gains in two vectors, intellectual competence and purpose, within the context of a community college. It utilizes the framework of Chickering and Reiser’s revised theory of 1993, where the seven vectors of development were refined and where a growing diversity in higher education, including among community college students, was considered. The authors of the revised theory also focused on findings of how student development along the seven vectors is enhanced through college environmental factors. My study explored student experiences and the perceived impact of one such factor, student-faculty relationships, on their development along the vectors of competence and of purpose.

A limited number of qualitative studies on student development in community colleges have been published during the last two decades. My intent was to contribute to understanding the role and value of student-faculty interactions in community colleges and to highlight their impact through exploration of students’ voices, stories of their lived
experiences, and perceptions of intellectual gains in competence and in clarity of purpose. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), when faculty are committed to student success, willing to create quality learning experiences, and consistent in showing respect, caring, and authenticity in their interactions with students, they contribute, among other outcomes, to student development in competence and in purpose.

A decade after the revised theory emerged, Rogers (2004) conducted a qualitative study using focus groups and interviews at three campuses of a metropolitan community college system. Fourteen major and 12 minor themes emerged related to patterns of psychosocial development with community college students. The results confirmed that the theory was “a meaningful paradigm for describing the psychosocial development experienced by students” (p. 217) at the community college. While findings indicated development along some dimensions of the other vectors, it was markedly present along all dimensions of the first and sixth vectors - competence and purpose. Additionally, the theme of faculty influence emerged as the only major theme in the section on influential people while in college (Rogers, 2004). Ten years later, I proposed a closer and focused investigation of the connection and understanding of the link between Rogers’s major findings - faculty influence on student development and the resulting gains in competence and in purpose in a community college of a similar setting, size, and structure.

In addition, my study originated as a response to a dearth of research on student development in community colleges. Findings should enrich theory and applicable practices in working with students at community colleges, in understanding their developmental and educational needs, in raising awareness of the role of faculty not only in student gains in subject matter knowledge, but also in their overall development along
the vectors of competence and of purpose while in college. The majority of studies on community colleges focus on numerical data related to priorities such as expansion in program offerings, enrollment growth, legislative changes, accountability (Cohen et al., 2013), as well as low retention, persistence, and completion rates of students (Renn & Reason, 2013). The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) publishes an annual fact sheet listing the increase in number of institutions, the headcount enrollment, the diversity in student demographics, the lower tuition rates compared to four-year institutions, the employment status of the students, financial aid received, and other numeric indications of student accessibility. Little has been done in studying the impact of the college environment on student development in the community college and through the qualitative lens of students’ voices and lived experiences. Such findings should help inform practitioners and faculty of students’ perceptions of their potential and impact on student development. They highlight good practices in working toward students’ growth in competence and development of purpose – two areas of need in the community college.

On the other hand, studies have identified student-faculty interactions as a significant factor for community college students, whose involvement in college (Astin, 1999, Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) is mostly academic and classroom based (Barnett, 2011, Wirt & Jaeger, 2014). Studies reviewed in chapter 2 of the literature section assert that interactions with faculty have a positive effect on student retention and persistence, validation, transfer opportunities, transition to college, etc. The findings of these studies provided the springboard of my research and affirmed the need to enrich the limited
literature on community college students’ psychosocial development and the impact of the college environment.

According to Chickering (1969), psychosocial development in college implies complex qualitative changes. I have adopted a qualitative approach and a phenomenological design to explore and capture the complexity of the phenomenon through insight of students’ perspectives on their interactions with faculty and their development of competence and of purpose in the context of a 21st century community college. The target institution for this study was a large, multi-campus, urban and suburban community college in Southeastern Florida and a designated Hispanic serving institution, where 73% of enrolled students at all campuses are Hispanic. The percentage of Hispanics at the one location where this research was conducted was even higher—85% in 2015. The multiple college campuses of this institution span a large county in the state of Florida and, similar to Texas and California, have a high density of Hispanic population and a large two-year state college system. The predominantly Hispanic student body at the college reflects the demographics in the immediate community where, according to the United States Census Bureau (2016), the percentage of Hispanic/Latino population in July 2015 was 66, 8% and though slightly lower, it resembled the average at the college – 73%. The ethno-cultural group at the institution far exceeded the national average of 17.2% at the time of the study and the Florida average of 21.8% of Hispanic students in higher education (NCES, 2014). In this respect, the college had “already reached the majority-minority status” (Malcom, 2013, p. 20). In addition, chapter 2 of this study offers a closer look at Hispanic student characteristics and at their “ancestral heritage and cultural self-identification” features (Nagata et al., 2013, p. 4).
Due to the specific geographical location, the percentages of students bearing non-traditional characteristics—first generation, students of lower socio-economic status, refugees and immigrants, speakers of other languages, underprepared students, and adult students—are also higher at the research site compared to the national averages. As the percentage of students with enhanced non-traditional characteristics is increasing at a national level and among all undergraduates (Renn & Reason, 2013), an exploration of their college experiences is important in understanding the perceived impact of institutional factors affecting their development and the value of the community college experience for students.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore students’ perceptions of the effects of student-faculty interactions on their college experience and developmental outcomes. More specifically, the aim was to provide an understanding of the complexity and influence of student-faculty relationships on students’ psychosocial development along the vectors of competence and of purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) in a community college setting.

Consistent with the purpose, the study was guided by two questions:

1. How do students perceive the influence and effects of student-faculty relationships on their development of competence at the community college?
2. How do students perceive the influence and effects of student-faculty relationships on their development of purpose at the community college?
Theoretical Framework

Psychosocial human development occurs throughout the life cycle and happens across a series of tasks or stages where changes in thinking, feeling, behaving, valuing, and relating to others and oneself occur (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). It is equally concerned with emotional, interpersonal, ethical, and intellectual development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The framework for my study was largely based on Chickering and Reisser’s 1993 revised theory of student development in college.

The theory was first outlined in the landmark book, *Education and Identity* (1969), while Chickering was working at Goddard College on evaluating the impact of innovative curricular practices on student development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Initially, the theory evolved from studies conducted with predominantly White students at residential, liberal arts colleges. Two decades later, Chickering worked with Reisser on revisions and additions of new research findings to reflect a growing diversity of the student population, a crucial step for the inclusion of community college students in higher education research and development theories. Chickering’s original (1969) and the revised Chickering and Reisser’s theory (1993), present a comprehensive review of psychosocial college students’ development through seven vectors: (1) developing competence; (2) managing emotions; (3) moving through autonomy toward independence; (4) developing mature interpersonal relationships; (5) establishing identity; (6) developing purpose; and (7) developing integrity.

For the purposes of this study and considering the specific setting and student demographics, the focus was on the first and sixth vector, namely, developing competence and developing purpose in community college students. Practice shows that,
to their advantage, community college students are goal-oriented and motivated to achieve their educational goals. Academic departments and faculty are crucial for their success. According to Astin (1999), the three most potent forms of involvement in college are student academic involvement, involvement with faculty, and involvement with student peer groups. The importance of improving the educational environment factors, the key influences, as defined by Chickering and Reisser, in the context of the community college is evident. In addition, while studying college completion rates, Tinto (2012) placed a strong focus on the institutional conditions and responsibility for college completion and offered a college completion framework consists of four conditions for student success, all linked to institutional action. Those include (a) clear and high expectations; (b) academic and social support; (c) frequent assessment and feedback on students’ academic performance; and (d) active involvement in the classroom (Tinto, 2012). The leadership role, responsibility, and impact of faculty in all four factors in Tinto’s framework for success are crucial. It is through interactions with faculty that these conditions are created, applied, and sustained, especially in community colleges where student involvement with faculty is more pronounced than their involvement with peers.

The effect of student-faculty interactions, as identified by Chickering and Reisser (1993) and applied to the community college setting, is supported by Astin’s (1984, 1999) Developmental theory of student involvement, where, among other, he identified one potent form of student involvement—involvement with faculty. However, only a handful of recent, mostly quantitative studies focused on student-faculty interactions, specifically at community colleges, and related to students of a certain race, gender, or
typology (Wirt & Jaeger, 2014), have been published. Additional research is necessary to reveal how this environmental factor influences student development of intellectual skills and of purpose and how the impact of interactions with faculty is perceived by students and described through their lived and shared experiences.

**Student-faculty Relationships**

Student-faculty relationships is a key influence and a strong environmental factor for student development in college; a clear focus and intentionality in faculty approach as scholars, teachers, role models, mentors, and skilled listeners can strengthen student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and result in improved outcomes and student success. Faculty members serve multiple roles in their relations with students and are perceived as instructors and sources of support and guidance by students (Chang, 2005). Tinto’s (2012) study on college completion rates confirmed previous findings by Astin (1999), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) that the impact of academic involvement arises “primarily from classroom involvement and student-faculty contact” (Tinto, 2012, p. 65) and that students who reported more contact with faculty inside and beyond the classroom reported better educational outcomes.

Among the handful of studies on student-faculty interactions in community colleges is Chang’s (2005) study on students of color, confirming the integral effect on student development and achievement at the community college and solidifying the key influence of this environmental factor. The author adopted a quantitative approach to examine the level of faculty-student interaction at two-year colleges and to identify differences between racial groups. Results indicated that, consistent with the limited literature on the topic, the levels of student engagement with faculty at the community
college were low, and “regardless of racial subgroups, students most frequently interact
with faculty by speaking up and engaging during class discussion” (Chang, 2005, p. 783)
and on topics specific to the course. I proposed to study the effects and focus on the value
and outcomes of these interactions, when they do occur, through student testimonials of
their experiences. Although Latino/Hispanic students showed lower levels of interaction
with their faculty compared to their African American and White counterparts (Chang,
2005), Hurtado and Carter (1997) identified student-faculty engagement as the best
predictor of Latino students’ persistence in college. The value of these interactions was
the focus of a qualitative study conducted by Cejda and Hoover (2010) on effective
strategies community college faculty reported on employing to engage Latino students in
the classroom and in creating “an educational context that facilitated the success of
Latino students” (p.137). Their concluding comments stated the importance of faculty
leadership, an understanding of diverse cultures, a need to develop a personal relationship
with students and to create a culture of caring and support on campus, as well as to offer
quality educational environments (Cejda & Hoover, 2010). Considering the
predominantly Hispanic population at the research site, my qualitative study offers a
different perspective - students’ testimonials and related findings on the impact and
developmental outcomes of those interactions and strategies employed by faculty at the
community college. Bensimon (2007) studied community college transfer students to
private universities and found they identified faculty and staff as the primary reason for
their successful honing of academic skills and for boosting their confidence needed to
transition to a four-year institution. The role of faculty in the fulfillment of a defined
purpose – successful transfer to a four-year institution– emerged in the study findings.
One intended outcome of this research was to contribute to the understanding of the role and value of faculty in community college students’ growth and development along the vectors of competence and of purpose. Ultimately, faculty should gain insight in how to improve students’ development of intellectual skills and how to support students in clarifying their educational and life goals while in college. This is an area mostly unstudied through qualitative lens and students’ voices. Findings will enrich theory and inform practices through students’ perceptions and perspectives of their psychosocial development leading to cognitive (development of competence) and non-cognitive (development of purpose) outcomes affected by quality interactions with their teaching faculty, specifically in the setting of a 21st century community college.

**Developing Purpose and Developing Competence**

Development of competence and development of purpose are the first and the sixth of the seven vectors in Chickering’s theory (1969) and Chickering and Reisser’s revised theory (1993) of college student development. In their discussion of the seven environmental factors and student-faculty relationships in particular, Chickering and Reisser (1993) list competence and creating a sense of competence, as well as purpose as the first two outcomes of quality faculty interactions with students, followed by gains in autonomy and integrity. The first vector, developing competence, describes three kinds of competence and a sense of competence developed by college students – intellectual, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Intellectual competence involves the acquisition of knowledge and skills, related to particular subject matter, and affects the intellectual maturity (Baxter Magolda, 1992) of students. As a top priority of postsecondary education, it has been studied more than any other aspects of
college student development through the areas of: (1) gains in subject matter knowledge and academic skills, (2) intellectual sophistication and expanded cultural, aesthetic, and academic interests, and (3) the development of general cognitive skills (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Considering the background characteristics of community college students described in this section, the three areas of intellectual competence are critical to their development in college. The intent of my study was to probe, examine, and reveal students’ perceptions of the faculty role in their gains in the three areas – subject matter knowledge, improved cultural and intellectual values, and an increase in academic writing, oral communication, critical thinking and reasoning skills.

Along the lines of goals development, the sixth vector of developing purpose “entails an increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests and options, to clarify goals, to make plans, and to persist despite obstacles” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 209). The authors state that developing purpose requires the integration of three elements – vocational plans and aspirations, personal interests, and interpersonal and family commitments. In the context of the community college, a clarity the first of the three elements, vocational plans and aspirations, may be of paramount importance considering the high drop-out and low completion rates of students at those institutions.

My study aims to explore the role of faculty in clarifying students’ goals and in their support of students’ choice of life vocation, a college major, and their persistence to degree completion. It should also highlight how faculty can help students understand their vocation to denote a life calling and a concept broader than a career (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In addition, the study explores how interactions with faculty affect community college students in the goal-setting and the development of a purpose. The
final report includes the voices of participants, my reflexivity, a description of the phenomenon, and contributions to the literature (Creswell, 2013).

**Qualitative Inquiry**

I assumed a naturalistic inquiry paradigm (Guba, 1981) and a qualitative approach would be suited for the phenomenon under investigation. The choice is deliberate and adheres to the exploratory nature, purpose, and the study research focus on the impact of student-faculty interactions on community college students’ development of competence and of purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In an extended definition of the then emerging naturalistic research versus the more traditional rationalistic approach, Guba (1981) highlighted some characteristics of the former which are also essential to my study – the focus on relevance of the inquiry, the acceptance of ambiguity, the assumption of multiple realities, the interrelatedness between parts of the realities, and the discovery of assumptions in the process of investigation, “which offer the best fit to the phenomenon under study” (p. 77).

Creswell’s (2013) definition of qualitative research provided the framework for the study design, process, and outcome: “qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes” (p. 44). Finally, the choice of a phenomenological design enabled the focus on the lived, human experiences (van Manen, 1990) of participants, the process of identification of categories, patterns, and themes of the essence, the use of student voices to tell the story, and the interpretations relevant to and enriching literature and theory.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study employs a qualitative approach and a phenomenological design in the exploration of community college students’ perspectives on the developmental effects of one factor of the campus environment - student-faculty relationships. In particular, it aims to provide insight into individual students’ perceptions of their gains along the vectors of competence and purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and draws on their descriptions of lived and shared experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Developing competence is the first and developing purpose is the sixth of the seven vectors in Chickering (1969) and Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) theory of college students’ psychosocial development. This study utilizes the framework of the 1993 revised theory and builds on previous student development-centered research findings, specifically focused on community colleges and further discussed in this section.

In comparison with other institutions, community colleges are the leaders in opening the U.S. higher education system to a larger portion of ethnic and racial minorities of lower economic status (Cohen et al., 2013). The open access policy, lower tuition rates, and workforce related programming of community colleges attract a vast majority of non-traditional students (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Sixty-two percent of students attend college part-time and are working adults, who may be less prepared for the rigors of college-level coursework (Renn & Reason, 2013) due to their status of adult or returning students, recent immigrants, and non-native speakers of English. They are commuters and their primary involvement with college is academic, occurring mostly through interactions with faculty in the classroom (Barnett, 2011), which may be the
place where community college students mostly experience academic and social integration (Tinto, 1997).

Examining the reality of community college students’ involvement with college faculty is a viable approach in understanding and supporting their educational endeavors since “a positive relationship exists between FSI (faculty-student interactions) and student development and satisfaction” (Wirt, 2010, p. 982). Understanding the role of faculty interactions with students and the impact on their development of competence and purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) should highlight the importance of this reality and of these relationships, thus contributing to existing practices at community colleges. One broad intent of my study was to enrich educational practices and to shed light on the applicability of college student development theories in the specific setting of a large, comprehensive community college of the 21st century. More specifically, I intended to explore students’ perceptions and perspectives on the links between and the impact of student-faculty relationships on their development along two vectors at opposite ends of Chickering’s spectrum — the vector of competence and the vector of purpose.

This literature review chapter sets the background, provides the context, reviews related research, and defines the need and purpose for this qualitative, phenomenological study through the following sub-sections:

1. Historical Background and Current Characteristics of Community Colleges
2. Characteristics of the Student Population at Community Colleges
3. Psychosocial Development of College Students
4. Vectors of Developing Competence and of Developing Purpose
5. Psychosocial Development at Community Colleges
(6) Student-faculty Relationships and Student Development

(7) This Current Study

(8) Phenomenology

(9) Research Site

(10) Previous Qualitative Research with Hispanic College Students

The literature review is revisited in the discussion chapter of this study as the data analysis, identification of significant categories, description of emerging themes, and pertinent findings related to the phenomenon and the purpose of this study are discussed and integrated. Possible implications for improved practices, an elaboration on existing theories and the current literature, and implications for faculty and administration are also offered in the final chapter.

**Historical Background and Current Characteristics of Community Colleges**

Community colleges have been part of the higher education landscape in the United States for more than eleven decades. In 1901, Joliet Junior College in Illinois was founded as a result of the addition of a fifth and sixth year of courses to the high school curriculum (Jurgens, 2010). It became the nation's first junior college (AACC, 2016). The establishment of Joliet Junior College was just the beginning of a proliferation of junior colleges in local communities everywhere in the United States (Cohen & Kisker, 2010), but “especially in the Midwest and Far West, where junior colleges responded to the desire for education beyond the high school, less expensive and more convenient than that provided by the great universities” (Rudolph, 1962, p. 463). In addition to an affordable start to a degree and convenience of location in the community, other early characteristics of community colleges included their popularity among women preparing
to be teachers, the opportunity to accumulate transfer credits, and the availability of vocational program offerings (Jurgens, 2010). Within the first decade of the life of community colleges, their number was increased by 2,500% (Stumpf, 2013). In later years, community colleges would continue to experience unprecedented growth in access, geographical expansion, and program offerings. However, the defining early characteristics are retained in their vision, mission, and purpose to this day. Some prominent, recent characteristics of community colleges include rapid expansion in program options in response to the constant growth and diversification of the student population (Bragg, 2001, Cohen et al., 2013), paralleling national trends, industry needs, and workforce demands.

During the Era of Consolidation, as stated by Cohen and Kisker (2010), in 1976, community colleges enrolled 34% of all students and by 1993, enrollment of undergraduates had risen to 37% and they had “become a permanent component of American higher education” (p. 329). Today, according to the AACC (2016) factsheet, 982 public, 90 independent, and 36 tribal institutions make up a total of 1,108 community colleges in the nation which have awarded 795,235 associate degrees and 494,995 certificates in the 2013-2014 academic year. A growing number of workforce related Bachelor’s degrees are now awarded by 88 public and 58 independent colleges (AACC, 2016), which recently led to the change in the name from community colleges to state colleges, defined by their primarily Associate’s offerings and a limited number of Bachelor’s degrees.

Other strategic initiatives at community colleges relate to striving to provide a high quality education at an affordable cost and within the reality of reduced state
funding (Kuh, 2011), as well as to increase retention and completion rates, as well as to reduce time to graduation, all in a new age of accountability requiring the documentation and definition of student advancement and institutional learning outcomes (Cohen et al., 2013). Large data sets are accumulated and shared annually by agencies, national organizations, university centers, and community colleges Institutional Research (IR) units to meet outcomes assessment and state funding requirements. With a definite focus on numerical data, today, “the higher education research community is considerably less likely to use psychological measures and theories of the developing adolescent than it was a couple of generations ago” (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 372-371).

As community colleges are spread across the nation, the need to study student development and contributing environmental factors, to highlight college experiences affecting students’ success at those institutions, to inform and improve existing practices at those institutions, is apparent. A snapshot of the characteristics of the growing and diverse student population at community colleges is provided in the section below.

**Characteristics of the Student Population at Community Colleges**

The majority of community college students differ from their counterparts at four-year institutions (Wirt & Jaeger, 2014). Although a broader participation of racial minorities and an overall increase in age of the undergraduate student population are now characteristics of all students in the United States (NCES, 2012; Cohen et al., 2013), compared to their counterparts at four-year universities, community college students tend to be of lower socio-economic status and to represent larger proportions of ethno-cultural and racial minorities, as well as first-generation students (Renn & Reason, 2013).
The AACC (2016) factsheet reveals that in the fall of 2012, 58% of the students received financial aid in spite of the average annual tuition and fees at community colleges being relatively low—$3,430 compared to the $9,410 average at public, four year institutions (AACC, 2016). In terms of demographics and numbers, 45% of all US undergraduate students, 51% of ethnic minorities, and 36% of first-generation college students attended community colleges in the fall semester of 2014 (AACC, 2016).

Considering the growth in numbers and the diversification through participation of racial/ethnic minority students, it is imperative to examine the environmental factors and students’ perceptions of the impact and significance of those factors on their development. Studying the links between potent influences, student-faculty relationships, in particular, and student psychosocial development should inform and improve practices at those institutions. Other defining characteristics that have resulted in continued concerns, and even criticism of community colleges, are the lower level of academic preparedness and performance of students compared to their counterparts at four-year institutions (Renn & Reason, 2013). Within the context of recent tendencies in undergraduate higher education to include a “severe decline in the scholastic abilities of high school graduates” on a national scale, a drop in the age of entering college students, and an increased competition among universities for academically well-prepared students, community colleges were “dealt a multiple blow” and are now receiving the majority of underprepared college students (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 243). These students take advantage of the open door policy of community colleges and the available remedial programs.
Although state legislature has limited the developmental education courses offerings at community colleges in the last few years, in some states, more than 50% of students need remediation (Tinto, 2011) in one or more of the basic skills areas—Reading, Writing, or Math. These students may not only lack the academic preparation needed for college level coursework but have yet to develop a clearly defined purpose and the intellectual competence needed to achieve their educational and life goals. The reasons for lack of college readiness skills of a higher percentage of community college students are varied and may include delayed entry in college, part-time attendance combined with a full-time job and family responsibilities, first-generation college students of lower socio-economic status and underrepresented minorities, students from foreign countries – immigrant, international, and undocumented students in need of English language skills, and overall, the intentional recruitment of students “who might not otherwise have participated in education beyond high school” (Cohen at al., 2013, p. 52). Parallel to providing opportunities for all and sustaining their open door policies, community colleges are now reaching out to better prepared high school graduates through financial incentives, tuition waivers, and honors programs for high achievers, with the intention of diversifying their population and boosting enrollment numbers.

Renn and Reason (2013) contend that “although students must do their part to be successful” (p. 231), open access and non-selective institutions have a commitment to create educational environments conducive to student success and to support students in meeting their educational goals through completion of a certificate or degree program. In essence, the socio-economic and academic challenges community college students face are the existing reality and institutions should devote energy, time, and resources to
support student success. However, “as long as the door remains open to all who desire higher learning, community colleges will be challenged to provide education and services into ways that better fit into their students’ lives” (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 54).

Chickering, Perry, and Astin are three theorists whose work has guided developmental education and college readiness of students since the 1960s (Higbee et al., 2005). Through the lens of Chickering’s theory, the need for these students to develop a strong educational and life purpose as well as to build the intellectual competence necessary to persist and achieve their purpose, is apparent. Thus, the need of faculty at community colleges to understand and support the developmental needs of students, especially along the vectors of competence and purpose, is crucial to the college experience and success of those students.

Other major concerns in undergraduate higher education in the United States are the lower retention, graduation and transfer rates of community college students, especially among ethno-cultural minority groups (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2012) and compared to their counterparts at four-year institutions. Among first-time degree seeking community college students enrolled in 2009, 60% percent returned to college in the following fall semester compared to 80% at public four-year institutions (Cohen et al., 2013). In addition, studies indicate that community college students’ engagement in campus life is less pronounced and mostly limited to classroom and academic activities. These trends underscore the need to study existing realities, to consider numbers and statistics, but also to seek and to listen to students’ voices in order to understand and to highlight factors contributing to their development, as well as to identify barriers hindering their development of purpose, academic aspirations and
vocational goals, all crucial to student success and college completion (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

**Psychosocial Development of College Students**

Chickering’s theory (1969) presented a structured framework and a comprehensive picture of psychosocial development of students during their college years (Evans et al., 2010). Two predecessors and psychosocial theorists, Erik Erikson and Nevitt Sanford, influenced Chickering’s theory of psychosocial student development. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), the starting point for Chickering’s theory was Erikson’s (1968) concepts of identity development in young adults and his eight sequential stages of personality development, starting in year one and throughout the human life cycle, where each stage is distinguished by a psychosocial crisis resolved through balance of the internal self and the external environment (Evans et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Erickson’s theory of identity development helped formulate Chickering’s theory of the seven vectors contributing to the formation of identity particularly in students during their college years. However, unlike Erickson’s theory, Chickering’s vectors are not stages – they are non-sequential and not necessarily linear. The vectors build on each other - students may experience parallel development in more than one vector resulting in complexity and stability. The direction of the seven vectors represents a spiral and is likened to “major highways for journeying toward individuation (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 35). Lastly, the seven vectors do not span a lifetime but focus on identity development during the college years of students and influenced by the institutional environment. In addition, Nevitt Sanford’s concepts of the necessity of education to emphasize not only cognitive and intellectual, but emotional
growth, as well as the postulation that development can occur when a person has reached a state of readiness and internal and external stimuli are present, have influenced Chickering’s work (Rogers, 2004).

Since 1969, Chickering’s theory of college student development has powerfully influenced both research (Evans et al., 2010) and administrative efforts to promote development in college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The validity of Chickering’s theory has been continuously tested in the last few decades and is widely used as a meaningful paradigm for describing the psychosocial development of college students (Rogers, 2004). Chickering and Riesser worked on revisions of the theory in 1993 and reordered the vectors in response to criticism and considerations of an increasingly diverse college student population, as well as in light of the changing realities in higher education and volumes of research conducted since 1969 (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This marked a crucial step for the inclusion of community college students who, at that time, already represented over 30% of the undergraduate student population (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Chickering’s original (1969) and the revised theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) “take into account emotional, interpersonal, ethical, and intellectual aspects of development” (Evans et al., 2010) and present a comprehensive review of the psychosocial college students’ development through seven vectors, each containing several sub-components. The vectors in the revised theory are: (1) developing competence; (2) managing emotions; (3) moving through autonomy toward independence; (4) developing mature interpersonal relationships; (5) establishing identity; (6) developing purpose; and (7) developing integrity.
Considering the characteristics of the student population in community colleges and the related research findings on student psychosocial development, learning and growth at those institutions, the focus of my research is on the first and sixth vectors, namely, developing competence and developing purpose in community college students. As stated by the authors, though intellectual development (competence) remains a central purpose, higher education impacts a broader range of cognitive and affective outcomes, the latter associated with characteristics of educationally powerful environments (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The first and the sixth of the vectors relate to both cognitive and affective outcomes and are of particular significance to students at community colleges who may lack competence, i.e. the intellectual skills and academic readiness needed for success in college level coursework. Also, they may be adult, returning, or immigrant students with unclear vocational goals and undefined purpose beyond a degree attainment and finding a job to support their families.

As commuter students who work full or part time, community college students’ academic involvement is classroom based and may be limited to interactions with the teaching faculty. Learning experiences outside the classroom are scarce considering the multiple roles that many community college students manage—student, parent, full-time worker (Cohen et al., 2013). Thus, studying how students interact with faculty and the perceived effects and influence on both cognitive and non-cognitive developmental outcomes of students at two-year colleges, is of paramount importance.
Vectors of Developing Competence and Developing Purpose

Developing competence is the first vector in Chickering’s theory; it describes three kinds of competence developed by college students: (1) intellectual, (2) physical and manual skills, and (3) interpersonal relations and competence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). According to the authors, intellectual competence involves the acquisition of knowledge and skills related to a particular subject matter, and the development of intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic sophistication. In view of the college readiness deficiencies usually associated with community college students, this study looks specifically at the development of intellectual competence – mastery of course content, acquisition of quantitative, academic writing and oral communication skills, critical thinking and reasoning skills, and for new immigrants and non-native speakers – the learning of English as the language of instruction in U.S. community colleges.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) likened the developmental components of competence – intellectual, physical, and interpersonal - to a three-tined pitchfork, with the handle representing the development of a sense of competence and the confidence to “cope with what comes and achieve goals successfully” (p. 53). The latter links to the development of the vector of purpose and confidence in their ability to meet educational and life goals while in college. Furthermore, according to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), the development of higher order cognitive skills and increased intellectual competence enables development along the other vectors, including the development of purpose.

Institutions and practitioners play a decisive role in providing flexibility and encouragement for students to pursue their interests and stay motivated (Chickering &
Reisser, 1993). According to the authors, the creation of a clear action plan and the integration of three major elements constitute the development along the sixth vector, that of purpose: (1) vocational plans and aspirations, (2) personal interests, and (3) interpersonal and family commitments. The authors use the term “vocation” to denote a life calling and concept broader than a career. In this vector, the established lifestyles of students and the influence of family and educational settings is strong in the goal-setting and development of purpose. A sense of direction and purpose, as well as continuous growth, require increased intentionality in developing plans, priorities, vocational goals and aspirations (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

As far as community college students are concerned, the first of the three elements, vocational goals and aspirations, may well be of utmost significance, especially with adult and returning students whose reason to go back to college may stem from a new understanding of personal interests, strong family commitments and in pursuit of related vocational plans and aspirations. Working adults return to college “to upgrade jobs skills, change careers, or survive unemployment” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 215). They may have a clearly defined purpose but lack the intellectual competence and the confidence to persist in the achievement of these goals. The present study takes into consideration the first and the sixth vectors as they relate to the psychosocial development of community college students and supported by recent research on the development of competence and purpose through the key influences of an important environmental factor—student-faculty relationships in the community college.
**Student Development at Community Colleges**

Chickering and Reisser (1993) assert that educational environments exert powerful influence on student development in college. Among the seven key influences introduced in the revised theory, student-faculty interactions are identified through the following components with positive impact on student development— faculty accessibility, authenticity, knowledge about students, and the ability to communicate with students (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The recognition and respect for diversity and individual differences are especially valid for community college students and further emphasized as one of the three admonitions of the authors where they state that educators must recognize the various backgrounds and educational needs of students and to adjust their interactions with students to address these differences.

During the last four decades, researchers have examined Chickering’s theory of college student development in various and very different institutional contexts. Rogers (2004) explored the psychosocial development of community college students and found that “the competence and purpose vectors were the most relevant in describing development among this student population” (Evans et. al., 2010, p. 73). More than a decade before this study, Rogers (2004) aimed to fill an existing gap in the research of the complexity in the development of community college students by adopting a qualitative design and utilizing focus groups and interviews to reveal students’ self-reported changes in behaviors and attitudes in the community college educational environment. Major findings included the following: (1) Chickering’s theory is a meaningful paradigm for understanding the development of community college students; (2) community college students were experiencing development along a number of
dimensions as a result of attending college; (3) out of the seven vectors, the results most clearly indicated community college student development along two vectors – competence and purpose (Rogers, 2004). The extensive literature review of the same study included the Transition to College Project studies and listed differences in the transition process for traditional students (smooth transition) and non-traditional community college students (more difficult transition), thus reconfirming the necessity for institutions to assume a more active approach and responsibility (Tinto, 2012) to accommodate the needs of non-traditional students.

Studies on student development in community colleges are scarce compared to those conducted at four-year colleges serving more homogeneous populations. Overall, with the exception of Rogers’s study in 2004, very few qualitative investigations have been conducted in this area during the last few decades. Those include a study on how undergraduate students perceive their own self-development changes before and after participation in a community college study abroad program (Drexler, 2006). In a study on enhancing student development in community colleges, Ortiz (1995) pointed out that while individual insight based on experience of community college professionals is crucial, it is a challenge to ensure institutional consistency in the various student services and academic areas. Ortiz’s (1995) study offered insight into student development theories applied in community colleges and guided by practice, as well as awareness and understanding of the developmental needs of student populations in community colleges. The following challenges in their psychosocial development were identified, alongside recommendations for practices: (1) underrepresented students, or minority students, face challenges in developing social and intellectual competence due to various external
factors such as long employment hours, family commitments, and reluctance to distance themselves from a socioeconomic group, culture, and friends; (2) transfer-bound students—those who fail to transfer may lack clear purpose and need to be integrated academically through intentional and well-structured interventions; (3) nontraditional aged students, who are trying to find meaning and purpose to their lives, may have a deeply shaken identity when they assume the role of a student and may feel disconnected from the college culture and environment; (4) vocational education students’ academic needs are best addressed through a career development lens (Ortiz, 1995). Within the context of student development and learning support programs at community colleges, identifying, understanding, and supporting these students in their educational endeavors are responsibilities community college professionals should embrace.

**Student-faculty Relationships and Student Development**

In their revised theory of college student development, Chickering and Reisser (1993) proposed the following seven key environmental factors contributing to students’ psychosocial development: (1) institutional objectives, (2) size of institution, (3) student-faculty relationships, (4) curriculum, (5) teaching, (6) student communities, and (7) student development programs. According to the authors, the positive impact of student-faculty relationships affects student development and relates to faculty authenticity in their interactions with students. In addition, faculty availability to help students inside and beyond the classroom, their ability to communicate and understand student development, as well as their readiness to listen to and see the unique characteristics of college students contribute to student development. When interaction occurs along the
characteristics outlined above, student development along the vectors of intellectual competence and purpose, among others, is accomplished (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Tinto (2012) lists institutional expectations, institutional support, faculty assessment and feedback, and student involvement as four major conditions for students’ success, retention, and completion. He also highlights the importance of institutional action centered in the college classroom and related to the four conditions. Student-faculty interactions are crucial components in all four of Tinto’s environmental conditions and institutional interventions. According to Tinto (2012), faculty should establish clear and high expectations of their students. Community college students need in and out-of-the-classroom support in order to meet these expectations; faculty relate and interact with students and provide the much needed academic and social support, especially to students who are underprepared. Faculty provide assessment and frequent feedback to students in and outside the classroom and serve as both teachers and mentors, thus helping students adjust to the rigors of college expectations and the environment (Tinto, 2012). The fourth and most important condition for college success and completion is involvement in college; the higher the level of student engagement with faculty, academic programs, and peers, the higher the likelihood of their success in college (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 2012). Tinto concluded that students are successful when all four conditions are met. Thus, within Tinto’s framework, the role of student-faculty interactions in these four conditions for completing college is of paramount importance.

Cox and Orehovec (2007) defined interactions between students and faculty as “an essential component of the collegiate experience” (p. 343). The authors call for a deeper understanding of the process and a critical need for institutional efforts fostering
educationally productive interactions which, in turn, lead to positive and more effective outcomes for students. A qualitative study of a complex set of experiences for both faculty and students resulted in a typology of five out-of-classroom faculty-student interactions, defined by the institutional context, as well as by the content and the meaning to students (Cox & Orehovec, 2007). Unlike the more frequently occurring interaction types of (1) disengagement, i.e. lack of interaction, and (2) incidental contact, i.e. unintentional contact, the authors outline the value of the remaining three, albeit less frequent types of interactions. Functional interactions usually relate to a specific, academically meaningful contact between students and faculty; a personal interaction is purposeful and “revolves around the personal interest(s) of a faculty member and/or student (p. 354). The most effective and least frequent type of interaction, mentoring, relates to Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) understanding of faculty as role models and the impact of faculty understanding and support on student development. Lundberg (2014) tested the extent of student interaction with various environmental factors - faculty, student-peer teaching situations, involvement in campus organizations, discussions with diverse others – contributing to self-reported learning for community college students. Self-reported learning occurred in the following domains: general education, intellectual skills, science and technology, personal development and career preparation. The author concluded that “for each of the five outcomes, frequent interaction with faculty was the strongest predictor in the model” (Lundberg, 2014, p. 79). Although the study was not conducted within the framework of psychosocial student development, the domains of intellectual skills and personal development are reflective of students’ self-reported increase in competence, sense of competence, confidence, and
purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) through the strongest predictor in the model – interactions with community college faculty. It justifies further research into the reported benefits not only to learning but also to the overall development of competence of students at community colleges through a qualitative lens.

Chang (2005) focused on the level of faculty interactions with students of color at two-year colleges. She concluded that students at community colleges, overall, show lower levels of interactions with faculty and engage mostly during class discussions and to a lesser extent, during their office hours. Among attitudinal characteristics, student perceptions of faculty encouragement and a welcoming climate positively correlated with frequency of contacts (Chang, 2005). As far as the different racial groups of students were concerned, she observed the highest frequency of interactions with faculty among African American students and regardless of their preparation and achievement levels. Although current research points to evidence of student gains in learning, intellectual skills, and overall development through interactions with their faculty, no studies so far have looked into how community college students perceive their experienced growth along the vectors of competence and purpose and how their development is influenced by the campus environment, specifically by their interactions with faculty on campus.

Undeniably, student-faculty interactions result in improved academic experiences and success in the community college (Wirt & Jaeger, 2014); they are the best predictor of Latino students persistence and degree aspirations (Cejda & Hoover, 2011). Community college students’ persistence rates and integration increase when they feel validated, known and mentored by faculty (Barnett, 2011), and when they perceive faculty as committed to their success (Braxton et al., 2004). Additional outcomes of this
study, gained through community college students’ perspectives and insights into their developmental growth, should be (a) to raise awareness of the role of faculty as agents of student development at the community colleges; (b) to validate faculty dedication and highlight successful efforts and practices in their interactions with students; and (c) to help administrators design a more helpful campus environment, which powerfully affects student educational experiences and growth (Murrell & Glover, 1996).

This Current Study

In addition to intellectual development and occupational preparation, college attendance is associated with changes in students’ psychosocial development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). My study employed a qualitative strategy and a phenomenological research design to explore how individual students experienced the complex changes in competence and in purpose as a result of their interactions with faculty in the setting of a community college. Considering the extant literature on the significance of student-faculty relationships in general, this study focused on student voices, their lived experiences, and on their perceptions of the impact of those interactions. The study aims to provide deeper insight into the role of faculty in student development in the setting of a community college and specifically along the vectors of competence and of purpose. Semi-structured interviews with two open-ended questions, supporting prompts, and one additional question, were used to engage students in reflection, elicit their perceptions, and tell the story of their experiences with the phenomenon. The study offers insight on how community college students perceived the influence of interaction with faculty on the first and sixth of Chickering’s vectors of student development in college - competence and purpose.
A qualitative approach in the inquiry was a deliberate choice for the phenomenon of interest. Students’ voices, their stories and perspectives on the impact of interactions with faculty allowed for a deeper understanding of the significance of the environmental factor, its link to and perceived effect on student development in the community college. Thus far, the majority of research on the influence of the college environment on student development and gains has been conducted mainly through quantitative studies (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) and students’ voices in community colleges were almost never heard. In addition to shedding light on the significance of student-faculty interactions in the community college and informing existing educational practices, my study complements quantitative research findings on current issues at community colleges. In particular, my hope is to contribute to the literature on supporting students’ success in community colleges by exploring relevant processes such as: barriers to a smooth transition to college, learning English as an immigrant, acculturation, acquisition of academic skills needed for college-level coursework, choice of major, persistence, program completion, and transition to four-year institutions (Cohen et al., 2013)

Finally, with a focus on students’ voices, the study provides an in-depth exploration of student’s perspectives of the processes involved in the viable links among student-faculty relationships, students’ lived experiences, and the perceived effects of these interactions on the students’ development of competence and of purpose. Possible applications and elaborations on Chickering and Reisser’s, as well as other student developmental theories and research finding related to the enhancement of intellectual growth and purpose of students while enrolled in a community college, are also discussed in this study.
Phenomenology

Phenomenological studies focus “on the essence and structure of an experience” and the task of a phenomenologist is “to get at the…basic underlying structure of the meaning of an experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). Phenomenological research seeks to describe the common meaning shared by several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The term phenomenology was used in philosophy texts as early as the 18th century though, as a philosophy, phenomenology arose in Germany before World War I (Dowling, 2007).

Phenomenological research has strong philosophical links and components, and draws heavily on the writings of Edmund Husserl (Creswell, 2013), credited as the founder of the method who declared the aim of phenomenology to be “the rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear in order to arrive at an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience” (Valle et al., 1989), as quoted by Dowling (2007, p. 132). In spite of debates over the viability of the “new” phenomenology as a research method (Dowling, 2007), common grounds exist in the assumptions to define phenomenology as the study of conscious, lived experiences (van Manen, 1990), the “what” and “how” of experiences guiding the research focus, data collection, analysis, and description of the essence of the shared experience (Patton, 1990) and the phenomenon of interest. In his work on researching lived experiences, van Manen (1990) points to the following components of phenomenological research – identification of the nature of the phenomenon of interest, investigation of the lived experience, reflection on the themes and essence of the phenomenon, description of the phenomenon, presence of a strong pedagogical relation, and balancing the research context between part and the
whole. My choice of research topic and investigation activities considered the components and logical steps identified by van Manen (1990) and are suited to the purpose of the study – revealing students’ perspectives of the essence of the impact of interactions with faculty on student’ gains in competence and purpose in the setting of a community college.

**Research Site**

The study was conducted at one location of a large community college operating with six campuses and two instructional sites strategically dispersed throughout a county in Southeastern Florida and serving the educational needs of the surrounding community for over fifty-five years. The college offers over 300 programs of study, including vocational certificates, associate in science, and some baccalaureate degrees developed during the last decade in response to workforce demands.

Traditionally, community colleges across the nation enroll minority student populations – the campuses and the selected research site are no exception. What makes the college unique is its geographical location in an area defined by a high density of Hispanic immigrant populations, resulting in a predominantly high rate of Hispanic students—73% of students enrolled in credit courses in Fall 2015 were Hispanic, compared to 15% Black non-Hispanic and 7% White non-Hispanic students. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of students were female and 42% were male, 62% were enrolled part-time and 38% were enrolled as full-time students in Fall 2015. Fifty-four percent (54%) identified English and 38% identified Spanish as their native language. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of the students were between the ages of 18 and 25, 31% were 26 or older; the mean age of all students in fall semester of 2015 was 25.29. During that same academic
year, students enrolled in credit courses took an average load of 9 credits per semester (College IR, 2016).

Data collection activities were conducted at one of the college campuses - a mid-size, urban campus, with over 8,000 students enrolled in credit courses, where 85% of the students are Hispanic, 58% declared Spanish as their native language, 84% were academically underprepared when entering college, 56% were first generation college students, 67% were low-income, 81% worked while attending college, and the mean age of students was 27.6 (College IR, 2016). Compared to the other campuses of the same college, the research site enrolls the highest proportion of students who are immigrants or of immigrant families, whose native language is not English and who are not U.S. citizens- 37%. Lastly, compared to larger campuses of the same college, a mid-sized campus allows for more frequent and closer interactions between students and their teaching faculty, an observation and assumption of mine later confirmed by students during the interviews and in support of the phenomenon of interest.

**Previous Qualitative Research with Hispanic College Students**

Qualitative studies capturing students’ voices and perspectives of their lived experiences are scarce and far between. Storlie, Moreno, and Portman (2014) used the constant comparative method to conduct a content analysis of qualitative research on the experiences of Hispanic Students as a cultural group, conducted during the period 1979 to 2011, and within *The Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*. The authors applied three inclusion criteria – Hispanic college students as participants, the use of qualitative methodology, and a focus on their experiences using Hispanic students’ voices. “Astonishingly” (Storlie et al., 2014, p. 68), only six of the 1,060 studies, one in
phenomenology, three in grounded theory, and two orientational, met the criteria. Only one of the six studies was conducted in a community college setting. The authors concluded that “the road to success for these Hispanic college students cannot be fully understood by empirical studies alone” (Storlie et al., 2014, p. 36) and that academic institutions need to provide the cultural, social, and academic support for these students. The need to study this student population through qualitative lens is evident—the research site of my study is characterized by predominantly Hispanic students—85% enrolled in the academic year 2014-2015. Lastly, in support of the intent and design of my study, the authors concluded that the experiences of Hispanic students are complex and “can be appreciated through qualitative research methods in which expression of these life accounts are conducted through students using their own voices” (p. 75).

Cejda and Hoover (2011) described community colleges as the pipeline for Hispanics in higher education. Cultural factors also play a role in students’ selection of community colleges given their preference to stay close to family, the accessibility, and the availability of English language programs for recent immigrants and non-native speakers (Saenz, Bukoski, Lu, & Rodriguez, 2013). In addition, Hispanic students’ engagement on campus increases their sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), and has a positive influence on their academic success and degree aspirations - the last two outcomes closely relate to the development of competence and the development of purpose, respectively.

Cejda and Hoover (2011) conducted a qualitative investigation through interviews with faculty at three community colleges on effective strategies and ways to facilitate the academic success of Hispanic/Latino students. In addition to emergent themes related to
awareness and appreciation of cultural characteristics, such as the importance of family and community, creating classroom learning communities and an environment cognizant of their learning preferences, the authors cautioned against prompt generalizations of Hispanic/Latino cultures and emphasized a point made by faculty that “there was not a single Latino culture in existence” (Cejda & Hoover, 2011, p. 14). Thus, my qualitative study does not aim to focus on Hispanic/Latino student pre-defined and sometimes limiting cultural characteristics, but to provide a broader and more nuanced understanding of student perceptions of the influence of the college environment on their development and to elicit findings through students’ voices and stories on the phenomenon.

My study findings should inform practices and enhance existing extant empirical research on the impact of individual and ethno-cultural characteristics of community college students on their educational outcomes and development in college. Students’ stories of their lived experiences will shed light on the role of environmental factors, student-faculty interactions in particular, and the related responsibility of the institutions committed to the recruitment, enrollment, success, and completion of their students (Tinto, 2012).
Chapter 3: Methods

Sampling Procedures

For the purposes of this qualitative study and the phenomenological design, I adopted purposeful sampling in the selection of information-rich cases (Patton, 1990). An in-depth exploration, analysis, and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 2009) focused on individual students’ lived experiences through interactions with their faculty at a community college. The essence of the study reveals the perceived effects of those interactions, as experienced by students, on their development along the vectors of competence and of purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

A combination of one dominant and two additional sampling strategies were applied in the selection of study participants. Snowball or chain sampling identified “cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” (Creswell, 2013, p. 158). I solicited information-rich cases at the research site and through faculty and administrators who knew of students willing to share their stories and experiences of the phenomenon. Their knowledge of information-rich cases had resulted from interactions with students in and beyond the classroom, from a mentorship, or other forms of engagement on campus. True to Patton (1990), the chain of recommended participants initially diverged and subsequently converged into a “small number of core cases nominated by a number of different informants” (p. 176). These core cases formed the database of selected participants for data collection through interviews.

Following the consecutive IRB approvals at both the degree granting institution and the community college, I contacted the campus president at the research site and solicited a meeting where I shared my approved proposal of the study, discussed
recruitment procedures of student participants, and the logistics of the interviews. We identified administrators and faculty at the campus to assist with the snowball or chain sampling and in targeting potential student participants in the study. Subsequently, I contacted the campus director of the Honors College at the campus, the director of advisement, and five individual faculty members teaching college courses at a level that would imply sufficient prior exposure of students to the campus environment and interactions with faculty, namely, professors in Psychology, Speech, Chemistry, and Literature. I requested the administrators and faculty share the study summary and the demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) with groups or individual students appropriate to the study selection criteria. The questionnaire collected initial demographic and qualifying data and served to also express student interest to participate in the study. The demographic survey (Appendix C) consisted of 13 questions and was housed in Qualtrix through a college subscription to the software. Students who completed the questionnaire and met the selection criteria were contacted in the sequence of their submission of the survey. This initial contact served the following purposes: (a) to confirm their readiness to participate, (b) to answer any questions they had, and (c) to schedule the date and time of a face-to-face, individual interview.

To contribute to the trustworthiness of the study (Guba, 1981) and to diversify the sampling through “the use of a wide range of informants” in order “to create a rich picture of the attitudes, needs or behavior of those under scrutiny” (Shenton, 2004, p. 66), I employed extreme or deviant case sampling targeting highly unusual or special cases, that may be “particularly troublesome or especially enlightening, such as outstanding successes or notable failures” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Thus, a recent GED completer, a
non-traditional aged female student, and a mother of two grown-up children, was contacted upon the recommendation of a faculty member. She contributed to the study through her unique perspective of both a returning adult student and recent immigrant. She was significantly older than the other student participants, held a full-time job, and aspired to a degree and new career. In spite of her family, work, and school obligations, she shared she had found the time to seek interactions with her faculty and enthusiastically shared her perceived outcomes. The student readily agreed to an interview and in turn recommended another unusual case - a back-transfer student who had returned to his family home and enrolled at the research site of the community college after spending an academic year at a private, four-year art college in a Northern state. Yet another faculty member recommended the eighth study participant - a student worker-tutor who expressed an interest in the research study and offered a unique perspective of interacting with faculty both as a student on campus and as a colleague working in the academic support center of the research site. Thus, the sample of interviewed students evolved and the data included diverse perspectives not only in terms of students’ age, gender, choice of major and academic interests, but also in diverse facets related to the study focus – student-faculty interactions and resulting developmental outcomes in competence and in purpose at one community college.

Finally, in light of the theoretical framework of the study, I considered theory-based or operational construct sampling (Patton, 1990) in studying the interactions between students and faculty based on “theoretical premises to study examples that represent the phenomenon of interest” (p. 177), in this case the constructs being student-faculty interactions, the vector of competence, and the vector of purpose, as defined by
Chickering and Reisser (1993). The theoretical constructs formed the essence and starting point of the semi-structured interview questions designed to elicits students’ perceptions of their lived experiences related to the developmental effects of interactions with faculty at the community college.

The demographic survey link remained active for four months. Respondents meeting the selection criteria were contacted solely by the order of their responses to the survey and using the contact information shared through the survey. An initial sample of six students was identified based on the selection criteria and confirmation of their desire to participate in the study. Following the initial data analysis, an additional two students were interviewed to ensure saturation. The process of recruitment, contact, identification of participants, and interviews conducted spanned a period of four months. Throughout the recruitment and interview process, I evaluated the representation, size of the sample, and data accumulation. Considerations for the sample size included specific criteria, research scope, and saturation of the developing ideas and themes. For the sample and purposes of the study, 100% of the students were over the age of 18, 100% had completed at least 12 credits and attested to sufficient exposure and contact with their teaching faculty at the research site and the college. All of them indicated an interest and readiness to participate in the study. The survey link was deactivated following completion of the eight interviews and all information, entered by a total of 26 entries by potential participants who had initially responded to the survey, was deleted from the server.

The voluntary nature of participation was of paramount importance during the selection and interview process. Through the approved study consent form and dialogue
prior to the interview, participants were made aware of the study focus, the confidentiality of the research project, and were reassured of the anonymity of their participation. Their names were coded initially by the order and sequence of the interviews – student 1 through student 8. After I concluded the transcription of the interviews, I assigned pseudonyms to each student, in alphabetical order and observing the sequence of the conducted interviews: student 1 - Alex, student 2 – Blanca, student 3 – Chris, student 4 – Donna, student 5 – Enrique, student 6 – Faith, student 7 – Gio, student 8 – Hugo. These conventional pseudonyms allowed for quick reference in the sequence of interviews and also noted the gender of participants.

The voluntary nature of the interviews was emphasized prior to the recorded interview, when participants were told they could choose to leave the site at any point of the process. This statement was further reinforced through the IRB approved consent form (Appendix D) participants were asked to read, discuss with the researcher if they had questions, and sign prior to the beginning of their interview. All data accumulated during the research was stored in password protected electronic computer files. Online demographic survey entries of the participants were downloaded, deactivated, and deleted from the server following completion of the data collection and data saturation.

**Research Design**

Seeking to explore students’ perceptions of the complexity and the impact of student-faculty interactions on the development of intellectual competence and purpose in a community college setting, my study employed a qualitative, holistic approach (Jones & Kottler, 2006), a phenomenological research design, and an interview approach (Bevan, 2014) to enter the inner world of participants and to “understand how people
experience a phenomenon from the person’s own perspectives” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 48). This phenomenological study focused on the interpretation and analysis of the perspectives of student participants in order to gain insight into a specific phenomenon. The phenomenon under investigation was students’ perceptions of growth, defined by development in intellectual competence and purpose, within the context of a community college and influenced by interactions with their faculty. The study adhered to the defining features of phenomenology and employed the interview as a sole data collection method. A sample of six students was initially identified for individual, face-to-face interviews. To achieve saturation, an additional two students were interviewed at a later phase of the study. The selection of the eight participants was based on their willingness to participate and the specific study criteria. All interviews were conducted in a comfortable and relaxed setting where participants engaged in reflections of their subjective, varied, and personal experiences of the phenomenon and shared their stories with the researcher. Subsequently, during the extensive immersion in the data and the analysis process, I derived categories and themes to describe, understand, and portray the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

**Process**

This study utilized individual interviews with the intent of gaining insight on community college students’ perceptions of the effects of an environmental factor on their psychosocial development along two vectors, intellectual competence and purpose. Among the advantages of interviews are the first-hand experience with participants, the recording of information as it occurs, and the exploration of topics that may be otherwise uncomfortable for participants to discuss (Creswell, 2009). The data was used to provide
in-depth information about a participant’s thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings about the phenomenon of inquiry (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Open-ended interview questions focused on understanding the central phenomena and processes of this study—student perceptions of development in competence and in purpose, linked to their interactions with faculty in the community college.

Johnson and Christensen’s (2012) key principles of devising an interview were observed. Those included a particular emphasis on understanding the research participants, the use of natural, familiar to the participant language and vocabulary (Benner, 1994), and the preparation of question items that are clear and precise. Creswell’s recommendations on the use of Moustakas’s systematic approach in psychological phenomenology and a research data collection with a stronger focus on eliciting the description of the experiences rather than on their interpretations, The process included asking two broad, major questions, i.e., on students’ perceptions of their development in the community college (phenomenon experienced) and how interactions with faculty have influenced their growth in competence and in purpose, i.e., the contexts or situations influencing the experience of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Supporting prompts for each of the two questions and one additional question completed the interview protocol (Appendix E).

Bevan (2014) argued that although interviews are by far the most dominant methods of data collection in phenomenological research, apart from the recommendations for questions that are generally broad and open-ended (Giorgi, 1997) and Benner’s (1994) practical advice on using the vocabulary and language of the respondents, there is little overall guidance on developing these interviews. Bevan (2014)
advocates a phenomenological researcher structure the interview in a way to enable thorough investigation and that phenomenological interviewing should be kept practical while remaining faithful to the method. The interview questions for this study were developed and approved with the considerations above and the logic and sequence of related prompts was loosely based on Bevan’s suggested structure of developing a phenomenological interview consisting of three domains: (1) contextualization—to provide the context and highlight further areas of investigation; (2) apprehending the phenomenon—to elicit clarity, i.e., descriptive questions are supplemented with structured prompts; (3) clarifying the phenomenon—“undertaken with the use of imaginative variation” also used in the analysis of the phenomenon (Bevan, 2014, p. 141). Lastly, the interview questions directly reflected the research focus on the impact of college environmental factors, student-faculty interactions in particular, as well as provided participants with an understanding of theoretical constructs of the development of competence and the development of purpose, as defined by Chickering and Reisser (1993).

Data Collection

The study targeted students with sufficient exposure to the community college experience and, more specifically, to interactions with their teaching faculty in order to capture the effects of this environmental factor on their development along the vectors of competence and purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) identified potential participants’ ethnicity, gender, primary language spoken at home, number of credits completed, GPA, and working status. Lastly, it gave potential participants the option of submitting questions about the study in the final,
open-ended section of the questionnaire. The survey served initially as a recruitment tool and subsequently, to identify the attribute codes of the participants, the descriptors of the data set of participants (Saldana, 2013).

The selected students from the pool of respondents were invited to individual, one-on-one interviews conducted at a convenient time for the student and in a quiet conference room in the student life area of the campus. Reservations were made by me through the administration of the campus for each individual interview. The room was a deliberate choice – the small conference room in the student life area was a familiar and non-threatening location for students. Each interview lasted from 45 minutes to an hour. The protocol consisted of two open-ended questions supported by prompts and a supplemental question, as featured in Appendix E. Each session was recorded with the permission of the participant and subsequently transcribed by me following each interview session. Prior to the beginning of the interview, each participant verified their entries from a printed copy of the demographic questionnaire. They read and signed the informed consent form (Appendix D) for the study. Participants’ names were not stated at any point of the recording; their names were initially coded based on the sequence of interviews (student 1 through student 8) and then assigned pseudonyms. Students were informed verbally and through the informed consent form that their identity will not be revealed at any and all phases of the study. Following completion of all interviews, the student participants, administrators, and faculty who had helped recruit participants were blind copied on thank you emails. Students who helped in recruiting other students and those not selected for interviews, were also sent a note of gratitude through email.
Data Analysis

The steps in the data analysis of this study were loosely based on Creswell’s (2013) spiral of movement through analytical circles and adhered to his belief that the collection, analysis, and report writing are not “distinct steps in the process - they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project” (p. 182). The initial phase of the data management included the accumulation and organization of the data from the six interviews (and an additional two interviews at a later phase) into computer files. I made a deliberate choice of transcribing the data verbatim myself after each individual interview with students in order to capture and reflect on the essence of their experiences through the nuances of meaning, the individuality of each participant, their attitudes, emotional clues, and values associated with the phenomenon.

The second step in the analysis was my immersion in the transcripts—reading, re-reading, analytic note-taking, thinking, exploration of ideas, identification and connection between insights and emerging strong patterns, discovery of hidden meaning, and finally, the selection and application of a group of coding methods. An initial analytic review and a combination of techniques were applied in the text analysis to identify shared meaning, through word repetitions, key concepts, comparisons, use of metaphors and other figures of speech, as well as through searching for hidden or missing information (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

The next step in the analysis was comprised of determining meaningful units (Giorgi, 1994), the interpretation of the data, the organization into codes, then categories and subcategories, and subsequently, into themes as outcomes of coding (Saldana, 2013), related to the two major research questions of the study and the theoretical framework.
The approach was complex and reflected “the constructs, concepts, language, models and theories that structured the study in the first place” (Merriam, 2009, p. 70). However, a heightened awareness was needed of not to “overfit the data” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) and to consider Chickering and Reisser’s theory of student development as a background of “existing knowledge with an eye to demonstrating how the present study has contributed to expanding the knowledge base” (Merriam, 2009, p. 70), particularly in the setting of the community college. Finally, the clusters of meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994), or categories were identified through the analysis, represented information related to constructs inherent to the study, as well as conceptually interesting and providing new information (Creswell, 2013).

Saldana’s *Coding manual for qualitative researchers*, Merriam’s *Qualitative research*, and Miles and Huberman’s *Qualitative data analysis* served as resources in the approach, design, and the selection of coding methods. Overall, the data was examined through first cycle coding and recoded through second cycle coding (Saldana, 2013) using methods deemed appropriate to the specific study. Following a thought process and analysis of appropriate choices, the following combination of methods was applied to the data generated from the six initial and additional two interviews: attribute, descriptive, provisional, simultaneous, values, and narrative coding in the first cycle of coding resulting in clusters of meaning around 13 defined categories. Pattern and elaborative coding were applied as second cycle coding methods resulting in the four themes of the study. Brief descriptions based on Saldana’s *Manual* (2013) and justifications of the appropriateness of each method follow.
Attribute coding introduced the research site and provided the summary and context of the eight participants (table 1, chapter 4). Six essential descriptors applied to each participant and were gathered through the demographic survey – gender, ethnicity, country of origin, college GPA, accumulated credits, and working status. Second, segments of qualitative data from the interviews were summarized to create an inventory of topics (Miles & Huberman, 1994), i.e. descriptive coding was applied parallel to provisional coding, the latter related to pre-determined codes and the “study’s conceptual framework and research questions,” (Saldana, 2013, p. 144). Subsequently, the nuances of meaning were identified, captured, and clustered in the derived categories and topics resulting from descriptive coding. Simultaneous coding was used to apply two or more categories or nuanced sub-categories to meaningful data segments, thus facilitating the identification of patterns of proximity, interrelations, and interdependence between the categories – all essential to the research questions, focus, and the subsequently derived themes of my study. Participants’ narratives and sharing of values revealed their perceptions, assigned meanings, personal values, attitudes and beliefs (Saldana, 2013). In addition, students’ stories related their experiences with the phenomenon, their aspirations, inspirations, and recommendations related to the research questions and study focus. Those gave rise and were coded in their entirety in a category of “stories” and a category of “values”, and further analyzed in the emerging themes and discussion sections of the study.

Four major themes, each comprised of two categories which emerged as interrelated through the data analysis, resulted from the second cycle of coding -through repetitive, consistent patterns within and between the categories and through elaborative
coding, the latter “appropriate for qualitative studies that build on or corroborate previous research and investigations” (Saldana, 2013, p. 229). Using an existing, established theory and related research findings, my study investigated and elaborated on the impact of a specific college environmental factor, student-faculty interactions, on the development of students’ competence and purpose through voices and perspectives of representatives of a specific population in the setting of a 21st century community college.

The interpretive analysis of the data, the “where,” “what,” and “how” of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990) of student growth and development in the setting of a community college and as defined by the theory and research questions, was developed into a passage devoted to the essence and context of the experience. The study culminated into a representation and narrative of the findings on students’ perceptions of their development in competence and in purpose at the community college and in the context of interactions with their faculty. The data analysis procedures and structure of the representation were continuously revisited – they evolved and were refined throughout the duration of the study.

**Data Saturation**

Each individual interview offered data-rich, subjective views and experiences of the phenomenon captured by me in the student narratives (Appendix A) where participants shed light on their perceptions of developing students’ competence and purpose in the community college and on the impact of interactions with faculty. The narratives reveal the individuality of participants’ experiences, their value and perspectives of the phenomenon. Analytic writing and data analysis were systematically applied – the movement started from “the narrow units of analysis (e.g. significant
statements), and on to the broader units (e.g. meaning units), and on to detailed descriptions” (Creswell, 2013, p. 79).

Each consecutive interview enriched the data and revealed plausible, shared experiences of the phenomenon which provided the fundamentals in the thought process and tactics for generating meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through first and second cycle coding methods described above, the following overlapping and sometimes non-sequential steps contributed to the generation of meaning and included (1) identifying significant statements to the phenomenon, (2) finding and counting key words and phrases, (3) clustering 1 & 2 into units of meaning (4) defining the categories and nuances of the units within, (5) noting and counting statements related to categories, (6) describing categories, (7) identifying proximity and relations between categories, (8) integrating the categories and revealing emerging themes, (9) analyzing the themes based on the provisional constructs of the development of competence and of purpose, (10) re-examining the themes and describing the phenomenon, (11) deriving the essence of the shared student experiences, and (12) writing final thoughts on the role of community college faculty as a way of highlighting the significance of the phenomenon, connecting to the literature, and enriching theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Initially, six participants were recruited from the pool of student volunteers. Data saturation for the purpose and scope of the study was continuously evaluated through re-examination of the interview transcripts and subsequently, through re-visiting the derived categories and their related complexity and nuances of meaning, the emerging patterns, and the derived themes describing the phenomenon through the perspectives of the six participants. Following a prolonged immersion into the data and a thought process of
identifying categories and study themes, an additional two participants, representing extreme, unusual cases were recruited with the intent to achieve a more heterogeneous group of individuals (Creswell, 2013). The additional participants included (1) a back-transfer student, who had spent a year at a private, four-year art college in a Northern state and had returned to enroll in a new program offered at the community college and (2) a student-worker tutor employed at the learning center of the research site and a continuing student at the college. Subsequent in-depth study of the interview data from the seventh and eighth participants did not render new categories or themes. Instead, the analysis strengthened and contributed to the in-depth descriptions, categories, themes, study findings, discussion, and implications addressed in the two final chapters.

**Trustworthiness**

In terms of choice of methods of inquiry, Guba has asserted that “Rationalistic practitioners have preferred quantitative methods while naturalistic practitioners have preferred qualitative methods” (Guba, 1981, p. 78). Within the paradigm of naturalistic inquiry and related qualitative study methods, there are methods of assessing and ensuring study quality, or “trustworthiness”, that are distinct from, but parallel rationalistic inquiry (Guba, 1981). The author defined four aspects of trustworthiness: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability, which parallel rationalistic principles of internal validity, external validity/ generalizability, objectivity, and reliability, respectively. Credibility refers to the researcher’s attempt to present a true picture of the phenomenon. Transferability refers to the researcher delineating justifiable application of findings to another setting, and is closely tied to the researcher’s ability to present sufficient detail to evoke familiarity with the environment. Dependability is the likelihood that researchers would procure similar findings with repetition of the study.
Lastly, confirmability refers to the extent to which the researcher is able to demonstrate that the findings are resulting from participants’ voices, as opposed to reflecting the researcher’s traits, preferences, or biases (Shenton, 2004). Shenton asserted that Guba’s constructs related to trustworthiness have gained favor through the years and built upon these constructs by suggesting a framework for trustworthiness in qualitative research for these four factors. Efforts related to trustworthiness of my study are briefly addressed within Shenton’s framework.

**Credibility.** Creswell and Miller (2010) affirmed a general consensus on the need to demonstrate credibility of qualitative studies through common procedures and stated that, “the lens researchers choose to validate their studies and the researcher’s paradigm assumptions” (p. 124) govern their choice of procedures. I used the following procedures to ensure credibility and authenticity of the qualitative inquiry: (1) well-established methods in qualitative investigation which have been successful in previous comparable projects (Shenton, 2004), (2) familiarity with the culture of the organization (Shenton, 2004), prolonged engagement, and a degree of participation by the researcher in the participants’ world (Nagata et al., 2012), also described in the researcher’s role section, (3) a combination of sampling procedures with elements of random sampling, i.e. participants who met the general criteria were selected only by order of their responses; (4) “tactics to help ensure honesty in informants”, where potential “participants were genuinely willing to take part and prepared to offer data freely” (Shenton, 2004, p. 66) and were given opportunities to ask questions prior to their commitment or to withdraw at any time; (5) iterative questioning through re-phrased probes and prompts, integrated throughout the interview and summarized in the third and final question; (6) peer scrutiny
through presentations of the study in progress at a national conference as well as input from academics at both institutions and dissertation committee members, (7) reflective commentaries and self-disclosed experiences, beliefs and values that may potentially influence the research process and shared “personal motivations regarding the topic, community of study, and benefit to self or to community….and overt stance in the process” (Nagata et al., 2012, p. 15), and finally, (8) thick, detailed descriptions of the testimonials, stories, and themes of the lived experiences of participants (Creswell & Miller, 2010) in the phenomenological study of student-faculty interactions in the community college and their influence on student development along the vectors of competence and of purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

**Transferability.** The claims for transferability, or external validity, are often questioned in qualitative research as the findings, especially in phenomenology, are usually based on smaller samples of participants (Guba, 1981), particular to a specific environment and setting (Shenton, 2004). Special efforts were made in this study to provide thick descriptions of the setting and participants through the narratives featured in the appendices section. Extensive background information on the characteristics of the geographical area, the student population, the organizational structure of the institution, and the specific context of the study were provided. Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) well-established theory of college students’ identity development was utilized as a broad framework of this qualitative study and the results should be understood within the context of the institution and the geographical area (Shenton, 2004).

**Dependability.** A strive for credibility lays the foundations for ensuring dependability of a qualitative study (Shenton, 2004). The research design, operational
detail, the in-depth analysis of the study data deliberately focused on meeting the dependability criteria. Dependability of the study was addressed through an audit trail making it possible to examine the process of data collection, analysis, and the creation of study documentation (Guba, 1981). These processes, procedures, and the methodological approach were clearly identified and described, and sufficient detail for a future researcher to “repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results” (Shenton, 2004, p. 710) was provided. The reader is taken on journey to include the need for the study, the research design, planning and execution of the study, the data gathering, in-depth analysis, and a description of the research findings.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability refers to the researcher’s ability to provide evidence that study findings are resulting from the participant’s voices. Several methods may contribute to the confirmability of the study. Ongoing reflection and a focus on the experiences and voices of participants rather than on the researcher were a conscious effort throughout the study. As mentioned previously, an audit trail was used that documented data collection, analysis, and interpretation. A data-oriented diagrams and tables were created, illustrating and tracing how the data eventually led to decisions, results, and the formation of a mid-level theory. Finally, true to Miles and Huberman (1994), the key criterion for confirmability, i.e. the predispositions of the researcher, are discussed in the section below.

**Role of the Researcher**

This section adheres to Creswell and Miller’s (2010) recommendations for a prolonged engagement in the field and at the research site as one validity procedure in qualitative inquiry. For the past 15 years, I have worked in diverse roles at five of the
campuses of the community college and, prior to the data collection phase of the study, at the specific research site for five-and-a-half years as an academic department chair and supervisor of 13 full-time and 20+ adjunct faculty teaching in five different disciplines. During formal classroom observations, I had personally witnessed the effects of students’ interactions with faculty and the resulting gains in intellectual competence—for their motivation to learn, persist, and succeed in college. I had also observed students’ improved sense of competence, confidence, communication skills, and purpose as a result of their relationships with faculty, as well as students’ expectations and perceptions of faculty as educators, role models, mentors, and caring, reliable individuals. I had also been the recipient of unsolicited letters of gratitude from students expressing high appreciation of their teachers and crediting them as the most important influence on their learning in the community college, on their life purpose and accomplishments. In my capacity as department chair, I was also the person students would go to first when they had a complaint about a faculty member, a classroom experience, or a grade. Through the years, I was also intrigued by what I do not know and have not observed, namely, the meaning of students’ experiences, how they perceive the impact of their interactions with faculty, how they interpret the lasting effects on their psychosocial development, and what stories they could tell if asked and willing to do so. The latter interest guided the choice of a qualitative research design and a phenomenological approach of my study.

Finally, my years of experience in working with students and faculty in higher education and the theoretical background acquired through graduate work facilitated my choice of research and design. I dare say I possess the seven “necessary personal attributes” (Saldana, 2013, p. 36) needed for successful interpretation of qualitative data -
organizational and disciplined skills cultivated as habits, concentration and perseverance, comfort with ambiguity, flexibility, creativity, high ethical standards, and extensive vocabulary. Ethical standards and principles, a heightened awareness of social justice coupled with intended beneficence of the qualitative study (Nagata et al., 2012) are of paramount importance in this study, especially considering the ethno-cultural (Mertens, 2012) populations prevalent in community colleges in general, and the Hispanic majority at the particular research site. The latter concepts will be further addressed in the discussion chapter.

Phenomenological researchers should make efforts to put aside their knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, and experiences in order to accurately describe participants’ experiences with a phenomenon (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). Five months prior to conducting the interviews and data collection for the study, I moved from the research site to another campus of the same college, to serve in a different administrative role, thus distancing myself from the potential participants and their teaching faculty. However, I retained my rapport with and trust by the “gatekeepers to allow access to people and sites” (Creswell & Miller, 2010), namely faculty and administrators at the research site. For the same purpose I devised open-ended, semi-structured interview questions and adopted an attitude of curiosity combined with a spirit of collaboration with participants in order to elicit their stories and experiences with the phenomenon.

Students were not offered incentives to participate in the study. All interviews were scheduled at a convenient time and day chosen by each student and at a location they were well-familiar with - the Student Life center at the research site. For each
interview I brought refreshments – cold water and chocolates – which the students and I shared while preparing for the interview.

Assumptions

This section adheres to Creswell and Miller’s (2010) recommendations for researcher reflexivity based on reports of self-disclosed “assumptions, beliefs, and biases” (p. 17). The initial, primary assumptions in the study relate to the understanding of psychosocial development as a positive outcome of students’ attendance at a community college and as a phenomenon enhanced by key environmental factors. First, I assumed that, of the seven environmental factors described by Chickering and Reisser (1993), student-faculty relationships exert a major and positive influence on student development along the vectors of competence and of purpose. This assumption was supported by the theoretical framework adopted for the study, by data based on predominantly quantitative and fewer qualitative research findings in the last two decades on the positive impact of interactions with faculty on students, and by my personal experiences and observations as a faculty and administrator at multiple campuses of a community college, including at the research site.

Additionally, I assumed that a qualitative design and exploratory nature of the study will render pertinent findings through the lens of students’ experiences and perspectives on the phenomenon of interactions with community college faculty resulting in development in competence and in purpose. A final assumption was that students’ perceptions and recollections of their interactions were substantively similar to their true lived experiences at the community college. While it may be common for students to share statements that may shed a positive light on their experiences with faculty,
regardless of the actual experiences the student may or may not have had within the institutional context, I intended to ensure that stories reflect their true experiences by requesting students restate their statements and re-tell their stories through the conversational, face-to-face interviews. Lastly, a prolonged immersion, careful analysis, distancing, re-visiting of the data, the application of a variety of coding methods, thoughtful definitions of meaningful categories, and search of patterns of shared experiences of all participants constituted the emerging themes and study findings.
Chapter 4: Results

This study employed a qualitative, phenomenological research design to explore how individual students experienced the complex, qualitative changes in competence and in purpose, and how they perceived the influence of community college faculty on their development along the first and sixth vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Building on the well-established significance of student-faculty interactions, as discussed in the literature review of this study, my research focused on the lived and shared experiences of participants (Creswell, 2013) and provides insight into the role of faculty on student development in a setting of one community college. In-depth interviews with two open-ended questions, supporting prompts, and one additional question were used to elicit students’ stories and perceptions of their experiences related to the phenomenon. Consistent with the purpose, this phenomenological qualitative study was guided by two research questions:

1. How do students perceive the influence and effects of student-faculty relationships on their development of competence at the community college?
2. How do students perceive the influence and effects of student-faculty relationships on their development of purpose at the community college?

This chapter presents the study findings analyzed and derived from the collection of data through interviews conducted within a time span of four months and with a total of eight students from a mid-size campus of a large community college in Southeastern Florida. Students’ meaningful statements were identified and analyzed, common categories were defined, and emerging themes were described, discussed, and linked to understanding of the meaning and impact of student interactions with faculty, thus offering insight on how
individual students perceive the influence of this environmental factor on the first and sixth of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) vectors of college student development—competence and purpose.

**Summary of Participants**

A total of eight student volunteers participated in the interviews for the study as a result of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). They were identified through their submissions to the electronic demographic questionnaire (Appendix C), which was distributed by campus administrators and faculty and targeted information-rich cases (Creswell, 2013). The first six participants were contacted by phone for an interview based only on the sequence of their submissions and careful review of them meeting the selection criteria as identified in survey questions: 5 (age), 9 (home campus), and 12 (credits accumulated). The last two of the eight participants were subsequently recommended by faculty as deviant, unusual, or special cases (Patton, 1990), identified from the pool of survey submissions and contacted for an interview. The selection criteria for all participants required they were over the age of 18 at the time of the interview and that they had some depth of experience with the phenomenon as well as the ability to describe their experiences (Hill, Thompson, Williams, & Nutt, 1997). The selection criteria targeted participants with sufficient exposure to the college environmental factor of student faculty interactions in the specific context of the community college and included: (1) completion of least one semester, (2) 12+ accumulated college credits, and (3) identification of the research site as their home campus or one of the campuses where they were currently enrolled. A readiness to participate in an interview and a willingness to share their experiences in interacting with community college faculty was confirmed.
with each participant following completion of the demographic questionnaire and prior to the recorded interviews, also acknowledged through the IRB approved informed consent form (Appendix D).

One unintended outcome from the sampling procedures was that the eight participants had selected a college major unique within the sample, as identified by them during the interviews. This fact enhanced the diversity of interests, provided for a variety in participants’ responses on purpose, aspirations, educational goals, and career focus, and strengthened the validity of findings based on patterns of shared experiences within the group. During the interviews, all participants attested to their involvement with faculty, told stories of their experiences with the phenomenon, and shared their perspectives on those interactions, thus defining the study findings and enriching the outcomes.

Attribute coding was adopted to denote essential participants’ information used for reference throughout the study (Saldana, 2013). Table 1 below provides a snapshot of the participants’ attributes, as self-identified in the online demographic questionnaire they completed prior to the selection for interviews and also confirming eligibility criteria. The names of students are assigned pseudonyms, unknown to participants and selected by me after all interviews were completed and transcribed. The pseudonyms code the sequence of interviews in alphabetical order and also denote the gender of participants. These pseudonyms are used throughout the study solely for management purposes and for ease of reference: 1=A (Alex); 2=B (Blanca); 3=C (Chris); 4=D (Donna); 5=E (Enrique); 6=F (Faith); 7=G (Gio); 8=H (Hugo).
Table 1. Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Participants</th>
<th>1 Alex</th>
<th>2 Blanca</th>
<th>3 Chris</th>
<th>4 Donna</th>
<th>5 Enrique</th>
<th>6 Faith</th>
<th>7 Gio</th>
<th>8 Hugo</th>
<th>Percent, range, average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5 male 3 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19-41 23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.71-4.0 3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credits</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>24-88 43.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working hrs per week</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50% 20-25 hrs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final sample of eight study participants included five male and three female students. All students self-identified as Hispanic, who came to the country as immigrants or were born into immigrant families, an outcome, though not surprising, considering the location and population of the research site, was merely circumstantial. At the time of the study, the GPA’s of participants ranged from 2.71 to 4.0, and all had sufficient number of college credits, ranging from 24 (Faith) to 88 credits (Enrique). Fifty percent of participants, three male students and one female student, declared working 20 or 25 hours per week, specifically at the time of the interview. Two of the three male students who worked held part-time jobs on campus, one as a student assistant to an academic department and the second as a student worker-tutor. Both jobs were indicative of higher engagement with faculty on campus and the research site.
Participant Narratives

Following each interview, I listened carefully to the recordings in their entirety, made notes, and then transcribed them verbatim myself. This pre-analysis activity helped me reflect on the data and capture not only the significant statements but also the emotions and value participants ascribed to the phenomenon. Participants’ transcripts were then summarized and condensed into individual narratives for each student, a process parallel to the continued data collection which also marked the first step in the data analysis. Immersion in the transcripts, analytic notes, and continued reflection resulted in my intentional capture of the unique voice of each participant, their perspectives of the study phenomenon, and their level and value of interactions with community college faculty. This initial phase of the data analysis was essential in generating clusters of meaning and the subsequent identification of categories capturing shared experiences and attitudes later to evolve into research study themes. A summary representation and narrative of each participant’s unique voice is offered in Appendix A.

Categories and Topics

The first cycle coding of the data collected through the participants’ interviews progressed in a non-linear, continuous, repetitive manner, and culminated in 13 clusters of meaning – descriptive categories or topics - shared by all participants through their perspectives and stories of the perceived developmental effects of interactions with faculty at the community college. These categories, derived through coding of meaningful statements and defined by clusters of related subcategories, were continuously revisited and revised following each coding method. This phase of the
analysis resulted in initial salient topics, denoting shared experiences of the phenomenon, nuances of meaning within each, repeated patterns and relationships of proximity and interdependence between the categories. Following attribute coding, initial clusters of shared meaning emerged through the identification of significant key words, phrases, figures of speech, and statements. Descriptive coding was essential and provided the groundwork of the study through assigned basic labels, i.e. nouns summarizing the topic and leading to an inventory of categories (Saldana, 2013) and related, nuanced subcategories, enriching each topic with facets of meaning (Appendix B). Thus, the following eight distinct categories emerged, listed in their continuously repetitive patterns of proximity of usage and relatedness identified by participants: (1) availability and (2) care, (3) fear and (4) transition, (5) academics and (6) teaching, (7) involvement and (8) stories. Narrative coding and analysis identified the category of stories, which each participant shared to relate their experiences and the impact of their relationships with faculty on their development of purpose and of competence. Narrative analysis helps in understanding the human condition through story and is suitable for inquiries such as identity development (Saldana, 2013). Parallel to descriptive and narrative coding and analysis, elements of provisional coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were applied as related to the conceptual framework of the study. These provisional categories were central to the study, comprised three of the 13 categories – Competence, Confidence, and Purpose – and denoted the constructs in the research questions later aligned with the remaining categories and resulting in study themes. The richness of the category of Value denotes students’ voices, feelings and perspectives of the phenomenon under study and is later utilized as a data reducing device and to create a summary (Miles & Huberman,
1994) of the community college faculty. The category of Other captured student experiences and stories beyond the scope and focus of this study; they relate to student interactions with college personnel other than faculty which may be used as a starting point and have implications in future research.

Through careful and continuous analysis, and as a result of combined coding methods, including simultaneous coding at this phase, I counted a total of 554 coded statements from the six initial study participants and an additional 166 coded statements from two more participants. The final analysis was based on a total sum of 720 statements related to one or more of the 13 categories, the latter defined by specific nuances of meaning through the subcategories. The latter approach allowed for a deeper understanding and improved description of the participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon. The response frequency for the eight student participants in each of the 13 categories and the totals are reflected in table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Alex</th>
<th>Blanca</th>
<th>Chris</th>
<th>Donna</th>
<th>Enrique</th>
<th>Faith</th>
<th>Gio</th>
<th>Hugo</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>94</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>720</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Response Frequency in the Categories
As a result of continuous review of the data, each of the 13 categories was refined and further defined through subcategories capturing the nuances of meaningful statements (Appendix B) shared by participants. These subcategories were used as sub-labels of the 13 categories - they coded the data and further facilitating a more precise representation and understanding of the “what” and “how” of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013) of the perceived developmental effects of students’ interactions with their community college faculty. Derived from students’ statements, these subcategories define each of the 13 categories of the study; they capture the various perspectives of the phenomenon, and help identify the patterns and the emerging themes.

**Description of Categories**

All eight study participants described their perception of student-faculty relationships as an impactful and potent environmental factor on their development of competence and of purpose while attending a community college. The 13 categories resulted from a combination of first cycle coding methods and were further consolidated into four themes through second cycle coding (Saldana, 2013). A short description of each of the 13 categories is offered in this section. It summarizes the subcategories and denotes the particular aspect of faculty influence participants assign to their development in college, as well as their perspectives on experiences with the phenomenon.

**Availability.** Through a total of 53 statements, all student participants related their expectations of faculty availability for help and support inside and outside the classroom. A friendly approach and ease of interaction with faculty help students overcome academic and non-academic issues. Students are grateful for the time faculty dedicate to
student support outside the classroom and in spite of the noted heavy teaching load and large number of students at the community college. Participants observed that not all faculty make an effort to be approachable. Those are occurrences students notice and report they believe remained hidden to other colleagues and the campus leadership.

Care. Through 63 statements, all students asserted their appreciation and expectations of faculty genuine care for their overall well-being and development in college. Students cherish faculty compassion and understanding and they feel motivated by faculty encouragement and awards. Remembering students’ names was noted as important by participants. Students noted that knowing and understanding students help faculty define and adjust academic standards and expectations which, in turn, lead to improved learning and competence.

Fear. Through 34 statements all students shared stories of fear and of overcoming their fears in college with the help of faculty. They attested to alleviation of their fears through honest and trusting interactions with faculty. They shared stories of academic and life challenges, acculturation as immigrants, language deficiencies, fear of public speaking or sharing opinions, and fear of an unfamiliar educational system. Participants noted with gratitude the role faculty had played in their development in college and in overcoming their fears.

Transitions. Through 40 statements, all students shared experiences of faculty influence on their transitions from high school to college, from the workforce to college, in their acculturation to a new language, a different culture, and an unknown educational system as immigrant students. They also acknowledged the role and help of faculty in
their choice of major and transition to four-year institutions in order to continue their education beyond the community college.

**Academics.** Students credited their faculty for their efforts in creating a learning environment beneficial to students’ advancement and growth in college through a total of 65 statements. The combination of faculty high expectations and rigorous academic standards, clarity of guidelines, constructive feedback, a combination of academic challenge on one hand, and students’ effort, on the other hand, were described by participants as leading to gains in academic skills and competence.

**Teaching.** Students expressed their value and defined good teaching as fundamental in the development of students’ competence at the community college through 63 statements. Participants shared their high appreciation of faculty knowledge and expertise in their academic areas but also noted that expertise alone did not impact student learning and development in college. They argued that a dedication to the teaching profession, the ability to engage students in active learning, a talent and genuine, contagious joy of teaching brought about gains in students’ development in college.

**Competence.** Through a total of 96 statements, all student participants reported on specific gains in competence resulting from their interactions with faculty. Those included improved academic and writing skills in English, public speaking, sharing an opinion, critical thinking, application of learning in real life situations, persistence in college, the joy of learning, and motivation for career advancement.

**Confidence.** Through 79 statements, participants attested to an increased sense of confidence as integral and a noted, shared experience in all their stories of interactions
with faculty. Student testimonials related to increased knowledge of oneself and self-esteem, maturity and growth, choices in life and college, and the ability to accept failure as part of the developmental process.

**Purpose.** All participants in the study had selected a college major and had a defined career focus, aspirations, and goals in life. They exhibited a genuine interest and admiration of their faculty personal accomplishments and readily shared faculty success stories which had inspired them in decisions to persist in college and in their choices and sometimes changes in their life vocation. A total of 60 statements related to a development of an improved and stronger purpose as a result of interactions with their college faculty.

**Involvement.** Through 25 statements, students related positive, shared experiences and the developmental effects of their involvement in course activities and service learning opportunities led by their teaching faculty. All students who participated in faculty-led initiatives shared feelings and stories of gratification resulting from giving back to the society, of developing a broader worldview and global outlook, and an improved self-esteem as a result of their involvement.

**Stories.** All student participants had stories to tell when relating their experiences of interactions with their faculty. Through 31 narratives they shared the inspirational impact of faculty success stories on their purpose while in college. They also shared their stories of hardship as new immigrants and the encouraging or discouraging role of faculty. Participants described how they related to faculty with similar backgrounds and the impact of those interactions towards advancement and accomplishments in college.
**Values.** Through 77 statements all students shared their emotional responses, feelings, and perceptions of the impact of faculty on their development in college. They expressed appreciation of the person-to-person interactions with their faculty and openly stated their expectations of those interactions leading to positive gains and success in college. Student participants made analogies between family support and their relationships with faculty on campus leading to positive developmental outcomes.

**Other.** While describing their interactions with faculty, students also shared their perspectives on their interactions with other college employees who have had a significant impact on their development, such as tutors at the academic support center, mentors, and administrators on campus. Students expressed their expectations and perceptions of college employees, other than faculty, through 34 statements grouped under the category of “other”. These observations may serve as guidance and recommendations for future research. The category is briefly addressed in the discussion chapter of the study.

**Themes**

This section is devoted to the definition and descriptions of the four emerging themes of my study. The themes draw from students’ descriptions of the essence and various facets of the phenomenon, from the value of students assign to their experiences of the developmental effects of their relationships with faculty at the community college. Students’ responses and comments on the research questions shed light on their perspectives of the importance and impact of those interactions, as well as on the “what” and the “how” of those experiences. Their reported and shared experiences, clustered
around the categories, were thoughtfully and continuously re-examined in order to identify patterns, interrelatedness, and connections leading to the overarching themes of my study.

Second cycle coding was applied to “develop a metasynthesis of the data corpus” (Saldana, 2013, p. 207). The combination of first cycle descriptive and simultaneous coding, and second cycle pattern coding resulted in the development of the four major themes emerging through the grouping, assembly, and reduction of the categories into constructs and patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994) related to the phenomenon. Patterns of relationships between the first cycle categories were grouped and analyzed around the central, provisional categories of competence, purpose, and confidence. The patterns and grouping defined the perceived impact of the phenomenon on students’ development in the community college and the essence of their shared experiences through four themes. Table 3 illustrates how each of the four themes represents a consolidation of two categories, identified through student voices and stories as interdependent constructs defining patterns of human relationships (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and linked to the development of competence, purpose, or both. The four themes which emerged following this second cycle pattern coding (Saldana, 2013) are as follows: (1) the impact of faculty availability coupled with genuine care on students’ development of competence and of purpose; (2) the value of academic rigor combined with teaching excellence in the development of students’ competence and confidence; (3) the motivational effect of faculty success stories and student involvement in faculty initiatives on the development of students’ purpose and self-esteem; and (4) the role of faculty in overcoming fear and on student development through transitions.
Table 3 Consolidation of Eight Categories into Four Themes

The category of “values” applied to all four of the emerging themes and was dispersed within each theme to describe the participants’ perspectives on the impact of the phenomenon. The category of “other” was eliminated as it related to findings outside the scope of this study and is addressed briefly in the final chapter.

The four themes were based in their entirety on my understanding of the perspectives and voices of the eight students interviewed and were further applied in understanding the phenomenon and focused findings of my research. Although the findings resulted from research conducted at a specific site of a large community college and generalizations should be made with caution, they reflect students’ unique experiences, needs, values, expectations, and developmental outcomes when positive
interactions with faculty do occur. In addition, and as evident through their testimonials, findings in this study relate to students who were exposed to and deliberate in seeking interactions with their faculty, and who had experienced the development effects and impact on their competence and purpose in the community college. Therefore, the study highlights the potent role of faculty influence on student development in the community college when positive interactions do take place.

**Theme 1. Availability and Care**

Participants’ voices emphasized the value of interactions with faculty who are not only available but who also exhibit genuine care and consideration for students. Through their stories and testimonials, all interviewed students shared they had experienced gains in competence, purpose, and confidence resulting from interactions with faculty who were approachable and who invested time to support and motivate student development in college. In connection and proximity to statements on faculty availability, students’ comments highlighted the impact of faculty care and compassion, understanding and encouragement, as integral to students’ intellectual growth, self-esteem, and purpose while in college. A combined total of 116 statements on faculty availability and care made by the eight students defined the significance of the two categories, their interrelatedness and nuances of meaning assigned by participants, as well as the emerging theme.

All interviewed students stated their expectations of faculty availability to support students and emphasized the perceived developmental effects of these interactions. As a very first reflection during the interview, Alex summarized:
Well, first of all, they are here for us. They like what they do and that’s why they are here. And second, they want to see us develop through college. So, definitely, they have impacted me inside and outside the classroom…. They are always there to help you out in pretty much anything you need.

Donna further elaborated on the benefits of ease of access to faculty and added value to understanding the impact of interactions with caring faculty in a smaller campus environment by saying, “And what I like most about the professors at this campus is that I can go to their office and they are right there. They don’t have like a horrible line waiting.” She laughingly highlighted the campus culture by saying the faculty were approachable “because they are, like, Hispanic” and they speak “half Spanish, half English, that also is very good.”

Students’ comments placed significance on their development through relationships with faculty, who are not only available, but who care to know, understand, and relate to their students. Three of the participants shared observations and commented on the opposite, discouraging effects of a faculty’s initial inability to understand them due to lack of language proficiency on behalf of the student. Chris, in answer to a probe as to whether all faculty members had been helpful so far, shared his account and emotional response to an experience:

Well, yeah. There have been some professors that have not…have not been very helpful. But, I mean, almost all of them have been very supportive, yeah, they have been very supportive. I had a situation with one professor once, at the beginning, in the first semester. I wasn’t able to explain my idea. I was trying to explain an idea in class and I wasn’t able to do so…and she was…I mean she didn’t encourage me to do it in the best way. She was like…reluctant…because she didn’t understand me and she was like, ‘I don’t understand you.’ And she didn’t encourage me to try and explain in the best way so at that moment I was mad at her because of that, because I was afraid to talk.

The student further related that he had been determined to succeed and enrolled in two consecutive English classes with the same faculty member, where “most of the class got
really bad grades.” He shared it took a lot of hard work before the same faculty told him he had made progress and that she was proud of him. Witnessing his improved competence, the student concluded that she was very supportive at the end, that she showed care, that he could “see his development with her” and finally, that, “she is a very good professor.” Enrique shared a similar experience of his initial frustration with a faculty member who he had perceived as being indifferent to his college success. This first impression prompted him to seek communication with her outside the classroom, during her office hours, and he gave her credit for being available and “constantly there, constantly.” He concluded that because he had made an effort to develop a relationship with this faculty member, he had experienced her care for students and, like Chris, directly stated the developmental effects resulting from those interactions, “People have an idea of her as very tough, but they don’t realize that she’s tough because she wants you to grow. And I learned that through going to her office hours and talking to her.”

Students’ stories revealed their perceptions of the benefits of a campus environment where ease of interaction with faculty and their availability and care lead to student development. The value of just talking to the professors outside the classroom was described by five of the students as having a stimulating effect on their development in college, or as stated by Chris, “My (Science) professor, that I talked to you about, he always talks to me in his office like a father.” Knowing students and remembering a student’s name was also noted as a motivational effect on students. In answer to the question as to how faculty have influenced his decision to stay in college and his aspirations, Enrique described the transformational impact of his relationships with faculty and how he felt about these interactions in the following way:
I have a name! I have a name (laughs). I can’t put it…it’s just, it’s as simple as that, I have a name. Everywhere I go, they say, ‘Enrique, how are you?’ They don’t say, ‘student so and so…’ So, I matter to them and because I matter to them, that has changed me. It’s actually because of them, of me making them feel proud of the person they have cultivated. It’s incredible, it’s a nice feeling to know that you matter. It’s nice to know that here, because it’s such a nice campus, you can go outside and see a professor and that person would be like, ‘Good morning, Enrique! Are you ready for class?’ That’s exciting, it motivates you to do better.

Participants also gave meaning and value to faculty availability during office hours on campus. Donna placed significance on informal interactions with them by saying, “I can go to their office and they are right there.” Alex made a similar observation with a note of gratification, “Whenever you needed help, you could go to her office and she would help you out. That was really satisfying to see how she helped you out.” Furthermore, Gio stated he made a conscious effort to see his faculty outside the classroom at least once per semester in spite of them being “so busy.” He also shared his perception of faculty as, “honestly working to the best of their abilities to help” and emphasized that “if you go to them, they will help you.” Gio shared a similar observation of a heavy faculty load at the community college and therefore, his appreciation of their time and effort to see students outside the classroom. He stated, “Sometimes it’s hard for them, they have to do so many things at the same time – so many classes, papers to grade, everything… but they still take a couple of minutes to help you out.”

All student participants shared their account of the impact of faculty care, encouragement, and compassion on their development in college, or as emphasized by Alex, “definitely, every teacher has something to give you, every semester. It could be a lot or it could be just a little bit. But they always give you something, to make you think about.” Faculty empathy, care, and support resulting in student development in
competence while in college were further elaborated on by the same student in the following way:

So, I want that kind of teacher, the teacher that once was in my seat but now is there teaching and knows the struggles that I may be going through. It could be work, home, even school, activities at school so they can understand what I’m going through. So, whenever something happens, I can call him and he says, ‘I’m here to help you out.’ So, that’s what I want. So, to get the best knowledge, to have the best materials, and to make the best out of the class.

Making the best out of their classroom learning, advancement in their intellectual skills, resilience, persistence, and a well-defined purpose in college are developmental outcomes all interviewed students commented on when describing faculty availability coupled with care for students on campus. Chris shared a vivid and emotional description of an informal interaction with his faculty in Economics, who one day caught up with him at the bus stop because being new to the country, “I didn’t have a car back then.” He told the story of how the professor sat by his side, asked him what was going on, listened with care, and expressed his surprise in finding out that the student had been in the country for only two years and trying hard to do well in class while still struggling with learning English. From that day on, the faculty took extra care, “after that conversation, I mean every time that he approached me, he was like, for example, if I didn’t understand the question he would say it again and slower.” In relation to the story above and his description of continuous gains in competence while in college, the student referred with pride to his participation in the interview for this study as a milestone in his development:

Well, I can see a big difference from where I started and what I’m doing now. Well, I’m here (laughs), yeah, I’m here to do this (laughs). Believe me, two years ago, I couldn’t think that I could be able to do this. And I’m here now.

Faith gave an emotional account of how she felt about faculty approachability and care, and how she had gained confidence to address them, ask questions, and feel comfortable
in a college environment in spite of her perceived disadvantage of being an adult, returning student. She stated emphatically, “That is my style of learning, I think. I felt comfortable and I like that I can approach the teacher,” and consequently, “they opened a whole new world in front of me and now it’s like, I’m not going back.”

Five of the interviewed students added value to understanding the phenomenon of the impact of student-faculty relationships and faculty approachability and care through identifying a need for mutual efforts. Gio’s perspective thus added meaning to the developmental process of defining a purpose in college through the following reflection:

I guess my goals in life, certain things that what I wanted to be...they came from myself rather than from my instructors. But my instructors advised and helped me get through the process and being able to realize what I wanted to be and then to move on from there…. Although what I wanted to be is something I chose. They helped guide me to be able to stay on track so I can move forward instead of being stuck anywhere.

Similarly, interviewed students readily shared observations and comments on faculty who they perceived had failed to encourage their development and did not openly exhibit care for the students. Blanca stated firmly, “I can tell you that if you have a bad professor, you can fail the class.” She further contended that she had felt discouraged even in classes she liked because of losing that “person to person interaction that sometimes is really important to you”. She shared that she had had experiences where she believed she had been wasting her time and would drop out of the class because the professor was, in her words, “unapproachable” and telling students “to read the book” if they had questions, all of which led to her feeling “like I’m not going nowhere.” She shared her feelings for those professors, although she emphasized her overall experiences had been positive, so far:
Because you see that the person in front of you doesn’t want to teach you and you kind of feel bad at the same time, So, there are good and bad professors and I have had this good experience that I know a lot of friends that they haven’t and that’s bad.

Then, to support her expectations that interactions with her professors may differ but, overall, lead to developmental outcomes, and that their care “inspires you to do better” in competence: “puts you to the challenge,” and in purpose: “to keep going in your career,” she pondered on her varying experiences, perceptions, feelings, and outcomes from interactions with faculty who exhibit care for students and with those who do not:

And then, you go to the next class and you think...umm, I think this could work out. I think I could make it. Because, like I said before, you go to a class and you see a professor that gets there late, doesn’t have any interest to teach you, grades your tests unfairly and you’re like, ‘I don’t think I can make it.’ And then you go to another professor and he inspires you to keep going in your career and inspires you to be better every day and puts you to the challenge to be better every day that makes you go to class. It makes you stay.

Her final comment, “it makes you stay” attested to her perception of the paramount importance of faculty care in student development and to the role of faculty in her decisions to persist and to be successful in the community college. Enrique also described the genuine care his faculty in English Composition had shown him by sitting next to him and explaining his mistakes “kindly” and by saying, “I’m not telling you you’re bad, you have the potential, everyone has it. But let me help you out....” He shared he learned about her caring nature by “going to her office hours and talking to her” and finally, summarized the impact of such faculty in the following way, “their support and their constant mentorship pushed me to believe in myself, to believe that I can make a difference, that I am the difference.”
Theme 2: Academic Rigor and Teaching Excellence

All study participants attested to gains in intellectual competence and in confidence experienced through a combination of academic rigor and teaching excellence exhibited by faculty in the community college classroom. Through 65 and 63 statements, related to both categories respectively, students described their perceptions of academic rigor and teaching excellence as interconnected, motivational factors for their improved academic performance and acquisition of intellectual skills. Their descriptions focused on gains in writing, speaking, interpersonal communication, critical thinking, and real-life application of learning. All participants shared various aspects of their interactions with faculty in the classroom and their observations of the impact of faculty expertise in the subject matter coupled with a gift of teaching and love of the profession. They echoed the motivational effects of faculty dedication and the de-motivational effects of a lack of dedication to teaching in a community college and how one or the other affected their development and learning. Alex offered a detailed account of how he perceived classroom teaching impacted and made college “a great experience for him”:

The professor would just teach you, he would not have a book with him, he would do it pretty much by memory. So, every time we are inside the classroom he would motivate you. He would repeat the same material over and over until you understand it… And it becomes fun, it seems less like a class, it seems like a game that you are learning at the same time.

Blanca shared a similar observation on the benefits of a balance between academic rigor reinforced by faculty, and students’ efforts to advance and learn. She also emphasized the importance of the “fun” of learning by stating that her professor in Chemistry, “made the class fun but at the same time he was strict,” and that “the test was hard; you had to study a lot, a lot… which was something good.” Faith also attributed her
gains in competence and confidence to academic rigor and teaching excellence and affirmed learning in the classroom could be challenging but also, fun. She proudly shared her GPA was a 4.0, “I got an A, A, A, A,” and that she was “keeping her fingers crossed” to “keep it like that” and to continue to be successful while enjoying learning in college, even in a Science course, where:

I have one teacher now…he’s Ukrainian…and I thought I wasn’t going to understand his class because it’s science but he makes it so funny (laughs). Oh my God, I wish that back when I was a teenager I had teachers like this…that they teach but they look for a way of not to make it…how to say…boring. They make it like it’s something good and pleasant.

Throughout his interview Hugo offered the unique perspective of a student and a tutor on campus. He reinforced the other students’ observations of the importance of faculty teaching expertise and the gift of making subject matter interesting while interacting with students in the classroom. He stated the following:

Listen, let’s not kid ourselves, English is not an interesting subject. Not a lot of people want to sit and talk about Hamlet. But there are a few people that love it. But finding new and interesting ways to engage the students so that they can fall in love with English, as much as we are in love with English, then we’re doing our job.

In addition to creating a “fun” classroom environment, all participants echoed the perceptions of academic rigor and challenge imposed by faculty as a decisive factor in students’ gains in academic skills. Blanca summarized that, “you have to put challenge to a student”, defined challenge as, “one that can help students”, and credited her professor in Chemistry for “pushing her to the limits.” Other participants related academic challenge to gains and improvement in fundamental academic writing, speaking, and critical thinking skills. This is how Hugo connected academic challenge to development
of critical thinking skills, to real-life application of learning, to gains in competence, and through interactions with faculty:

I like when my professors have challenged me and made me think, ‘yes…why, explain your answer.’ So, I think that that would be the most important way that teachers can help because it helps us form arguments. And that’s something important in interaction. So, to keep doing that here, to have teachers challenge you in that way, to help you use your critical thinking skills, I think that is the most important thing.

While also giving credit to faculty who promoted critical thinking skills, Enrique offered his own definition and practice of the skill by saying that it was, “actually, thinking outside the picture by actually seeing a problem in class, going home and researching that problem, and thinking of all ways to solve it.” In addition to critical thinking, study participants ascribed value to faculty expertise in teaching academic writing and, especially, public speaking skills. Interactions with faculty in English Composition and Speech Communication courses were valued highly by students when faculty provided consistent feedback and clear guidelines, a learning process explained by Donna in the following way, “a format of how to do it and… a step-by-step guide on how to do it, so you had the knowledge on how to do it.” She shared that clear guidelines and feedback boosted students’ confidence and self-esteem, the latter resulting from improved competence and development, evident “from semester to semester:”

Whenever I had to write a paper I felt more confident, like, I would sit down and my ideas would flow better. My writing would be more complete…everything like, came together and it was easier for me to see my improvement. So when I had to write something, I felt more confident about it. I knew I could do it.

Perceptions of faculty impact on improved students’ academic writing skills were also described by participants as essential in their performance in courses related to their major. Gio was pursuing an associate’s degree in Computer Animation and spoke of
character development as an “organic process.” He credited his faculty for inspiring him to write in a way that made characters seem “natural” in spite of their “flaws and their own strengths.” He also related how he engaged in conversations with his faculty where, “we would just talk about character development in books and in movies and how it’s all the writing that makes this piece good, whether it’s a game, or a movie, or a book.”

As a recent immigrant and non-native speaker of English, Faith shared she felt confident in her gains not only in writing, but also in her public speaking skills in college level courses: “Now I have classes where I have to do presentations and I’m not afraid, because it was something that was built from the beginning, with good teaching.” Chris also attested to improved speaking, language, and critical thinking skills as a result of academic challenge and high expectations imposed by his faculty. He enthusiastically shared his gratitude to his professor in Economics who encouraged students “to speak and explain situations”, or as he described his status as a recent immigrant from a Central American country:

I come from a different system. So, I didn’t know anything about the system, the Capitalism, and I learned a lot from that class. And I was able to explain it even if my English was not really good. I was able to explain those topics, those specific topics. So I would encourage all professors to develop methods so that students can participate in class.

At the same time and as a counterargument, Chris did not hesitate to share his “opinion” that not all professors encouraged such interactions in the classroom and was openly critical about his experiences with some classes where “you are not encouraged to talk in class, you know, and for me, that’s very important.” He further clarified the disadvantages to student development resulting from lack of teaching skills in the following way:
In order to become a good professional you have to be able to explain it, you know, talking about the topic. You have to be able to write about it, you have to be able to do all these competencies. And some classes that I have taken, they don’t, they don’t make you speak.

All interviewed students attested to improved competence, confidence, and a heightened motivation to learn and succeed in college acquired through interactions with faculty who possessed both the expertise and the gift of teaching. Students described gains in intellectual skills and in confidence through active learning and engagement in the classroom, through clear guidelines and constructive feedback from faculty, as well as a general satisfaction with their tangible development when they interacted with faculty who were gifted teachers and imposed academic rigor in the community college classroom. Alex summarized the connection between the two categories and the impact on students’ development of intellectual competence in the following way:

Because there is a big difference, and I say this to all my colleagues, you can be a great individual but you cannot be a great teacher. These are two different things. You can have all the knowledge in the world but if you don’t know how to communicate it, you are out of the game. So, definitely we need individuals with even half the knowledge but to know how to communicate it to their students…So I want that kind of teacher, the teacher that once was in my seat but now is there teaching and knows the struggles that I may be going through.

**Theme 3: Involvement with Faculty Initiatives and Stories**

All eight participants reported developing a stronger purpose while in college through closer interactions with faculty, learning from their life stories, and engagement in faculty-led initiatives, clubs, and events. A total of 25 significant statements evolved around student participation in faculty-led projects. Students shared feelings of personal fulfillment and gratification for opportunities to give back to the community and for developing a broader global outlook, or as stated by Blanca, thinking “outside of the
bubble.” In addition, they attested to heightened self-esteem, direction, and goals in life through newly-found social engagement and responsibility.

The participants shared their perspectives through a total of 31 statements on perceived gains in purpose through the impact of faculty personal life stories. All interviewed students reported on feeling motivated by hearing stories of the unique pathway to their perceived success as college faculty, and working in an environment described by Hugo as, “it doesn’t get more professional than that.” Students retold stories they had heard through their interactions with faculty and shared how, as a result, they had defined or re-defined their choice of major, career focus in college, or their aspirations and goals in life.

Each student had a unique story to tell. Alex related the life story of one of his faculty who grew up in the South during the Civil Rights movement and had shared her story with students in an English composition course. Alex offered an emotional account of his thoughts on hearing the story, as well as the motivational effect of her hardships and life story on him. He was visibly moved while retelling the story and made a broader analogy with his generation and the Hispanic minority population in the United States. He stated her story had made him think and that he had gained a sense of direction and purpose for himself, as a member of the Hispanic community:

She grew up during the 60’s, during the big advance in the United States and she always talked about this and many things, all these troubles and the hard things and difficulties that she went through in her childhood, especially in Atlanta, Georgia, in the South, to grow up, to go to school. To have a purpose in life. So…but at the same time it was a motivation to see Martin Luther King, Junior and all the movements for the Civil Rights. So I think that when she saw that she got inspired as many African Americans or any American should to move on and make a better country for everyone. And, you see, now in the Hispanic
community we have to do the same. Maybe, like in the South, speak about the rights in our community. So, definitely this is a great motivational factor for her.

With a touch of pride of knowing this faculty member, an allusion to a derived purpose as a result of the interaction, and with emphatic inspiration, Alex concluded, “Now, look at her today! She is one of the best English professors at the campus and a great individual.”

Following a similar pattern of thought, Donna started off her interview with a story of the recent personal accomplishment of her “amazing” Math professor who had been named a recipient of a national teaching award. Donna shared she drew inspiration from her faculty “awesome” accomplishments and had decided to follow the same professional pathway of majoring in Computer Science and Math in spite of her parents’ wishes, as she jokingly quoted them as saying, “you have to be a doctor or a lawyer.” She then laughingly added, “you know parents.” Donna described how she had reached her decision for a career change based on the inspiration drawn from interactions with her Math professor:

But I have to say that the way she talks about teaching and the way she talks about her job was the thing that actually made the most impact on me. And surely, after I was over with her class I decided to change my major. Yeah, and I know she graduated with a major in Computer Science, with a minor in Mathematics, but she loved Math so much she decided to teach Math. So, I really like Math but I just don’t think that’s my thing. And I was a little bit intrigued about Computer Science and I said ‘let me give it a try’, and I really like computers and it’s a fascinating world. And I know that they actually have jobs available when you’re done with that, so now I am a computer science major, so, yeah.

Later on in the interview, while reflecting on the development of purpose, Donna shared that in addition to faculty, she appreciated the support of family on her educational and life goals. She credited her mother as her role model “well, one of them”, the main reason for her being in college and studying “to get things right”, as well as her award-winning Math professor for her choice of major, for “not being lost” and being “really
grateful to her.” She added value to her perceptions of experienced gains in purpose by using a powerful metaphor and sharing the following statement on the developmental impact of her interactions with faculty:

So, I guess professors are like that lighthouse, they kind of give you their experiences and why they did the things that they just give you those toys and you’re like, ‘wait, let me just check that out, maybe I’ll like it’; so… It’s not just that they teach in the classroom. They are also open up and they tell you about their lives, their daughters, their sons, their friends. So, that really touches you as a person, yeah.

On a lighter note but reaching similar conclusions on the impact of interactions with faculty on his development of purpose, Alex shared his perception of the accomplishments of his faculty in Sociology, overtly stating the developmental outcomes of those interactions, i.e. his faculty was “just another case and example of what we can do”, and on how “he can motivate you to do better” and “to keep moving.” He spoke with admiration of his faculty’s profound knowledge and approach to academic and non-academic subject matter and good-humoredly shared an example of how this faculty had described the origin and “whole background about how coffee started and where it came from.” Alex added that, however, “if you want to talk about any field that is challenging, he’ll be there to talk with you and he won’t fail.” Similar to Alex, Blanca gave an account of how she drew inspiration from her Chemistry professor who had attended an Ivy League university, and also from her “awesome” faculty in Biology who had “discovered something.” She concluded that those, deliberate on her behalf, closer interactions with faculty and the stories they told had value and impact on her work and focus on her career and goals:

I love science and he discovered something and it’s really interesting and…he would tell me about other things that he made. He would tell me about the
conference and all that and share his knowledge. My Biology teacher…she is actually doing her studies right now and I’ve always wanted to do that. Like, discover something. And, in my personal part, I think I have been friends with a lot of my teachers because I have taken the time to go to them and see them. So, it’s always better like that. And they have given me great advice, like being in college, all the opportunities there are, right there in front of me, for me to take.

In essence, all interviewed students stated the developmental outcomes and value of closer interaction with their faculty – through motivation gained from their personal stories of success or through outcomes gained in engagement in faculty-led initiatives.

Chris credited his faculty for not only encouraging him to find a job on campus but also provided examples of related opportunities to be “more involved with the school” and student life organizations that would later help him in the transfer to a four-year institution. He focused on the obvious personal benefits but also related the gratification he experienced by getting to know his faculty better and giving back to the community and the college through his active involvement in those faculty-led organizations. Enrique defined the value and developmental changes gained from his participation in a faculty-led human rights campaign as “an honor” and described it as, “this is serious, this is not just a college project; it’s something that will affect people.” The importance of giving back to the community and civic responsibility was also emphasized by Faith who described her global sustainability and earth ethics-themed writing course in the following way:

In my mind, of course, I was thinking…a writing class… like, back in the days when it was like a boring thing, sitting in the chair and writing, writing, writing, nothing else. So, that was what I was thinking. And I was surprised because it was like, a very dynamic, active class. Everybody was learning, sharing their point of view and he (the faculty) encouraged us to write about those experiences and those things. So, it wasn’t like a burden (laughs). It was like a nice thing and that kind of class also has a civic engagement service that you have to complete. And I never had done that before and I really like it. Because it’s like a way of giving
back to the community and getting involved in what was going on around the school, preserving the planet, things like that I think are very important.

As a student worker-tutor at the time of the interview, Hugo shared his perceptions acquired through closer interactions with faculty, especially those he named as his role models and who had helped him define his professional aspirations. He described he felt like a member of “a family with a lot of different personalities, a lot of different teaching styles, a lot of different characters” who had shown him what “was expected from a teacher.” In addition to an improved professional competence, he also shared his thoughts on commitment to a faculty-led project benefiting school children in a Central American country. He attested to a heightened sense of responsibility and purpose through his commitment in the following way:

I did a lot of fundraising and it was really cool to do that…. So we were helping out 32 kids who… the non-profit has adopted in a way and they are funding them all the way up to college. It was the very first time I had done something like that and it was very nice to be able to be a part of that, you know. It helped me branch out and say, well, there’s maybe more to life, there are ways that I can help other people. Not only academically, here but there are other things that I can do outside academics, for people who don’t live here in the United States.

At the very end of her interview, Blanca summarized the developmental effects of closer interactions and engagement with faculty as being “good” because she now loved what she was studying and that she had learned “a lot, not just in subjects, but also in life” and finally added she might even consider the teaching profession in the future.

Enrique expressed a similar sentiment, a sense of direction, and a stronger purpose as a result of getting to know faculty through their stories and participation in faculty-led activities:

My faculty, my professors have passed on to me and me talking to them made me realize that, yes, I am a student, and one day I will have the potential to be hopefully, as great as they are. And, if I’m fortunate, bigger than they are. So, it’s
pretty incredible how talking to a professor at an outside table can change your mind (laughs). I don’t know how to explain it.

**Theme 4: Overcoming Fear and Transitions**

When sharing their experiences with the phenomenon and their comments on the effects of interactions with faculty at the community college, all students reported on the integral role of faculty in times of transitions and in overcoming fear while in the community college. A total of 40 statements on transitions and 34 related statements on fear and overcoming fear were made by the eight students interviewed. Their stories evolved around the influence of faculty on the outcomes of transitions from high school to college, of faculty support in students’ engagement and persistence in the community college, the latter a contributing factor for a successful transfer to a four-year university (Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013). Participants described the hardships of immigrant students transitioning to a new country, language, culture, and educational system, and for returning adult students - the challenges of transitioning from the workforce to college. All eight students highly credited those faculty who showed understanding and made efforts to listen, support, and help students succeed in the face of challenges in transitions while in colleges, changes in life circumstances, and the associated fears. Two of the students, who worked on campus at the time of the interviews, shared their unique experiences of transitioning from a student to a campus employee and credited their faculty for facilitating and inspiring those transitions.

All eight students reported on experiencing apprehension and fear during life-changing transitions and shared their appreciation of faculty support, as well as their value of the resulting developmental effects of transitions and through overcoming fears
and gaining improved competence and confidence. They shared their fears of a new start in a new country, learning a new language, speaking in public and voicing an opinion, and even their fear of college faculty in an unfamiliar educational system in the United States.

Three of the students interviewed shared they enrolled at the community college immediately following their arrival in the USA as immigrants. Chris started the interview by saying, “First, let me tell you more about my story. I came from (a Central American country) two years ago. I look young, but I’m 22.” He then stated his being “afraid of college” at first because he did not “know any English.” When prompted to give an example, he clarified that he could not understand what the professor was saying in class and that, “I didn’t like to talk in classes and I was very afraid of all the classes. I was afraid of participating in activities and all that stuff.” This is how Chris described his transition to college in the U.S. and to a new language:

Well, as I was saying, when I started here, I barely spoke in classes. And, my Economics professor for example, that was the very first class I took here, and I was very afraid of that class, because it was at seven in the morning and it was the first class I took and I was very afraid. I barely understood him because I had problems with, you know, my listening skills. And he always encouraged me to participate in class, to speak in classes. At the beginning I was very afraid. When asked how interactions with faculty had affected his learning and academic skills, he reiterated the impact of faculty encouragement by saying that one of his professors was, “convinced I was a very good student because of my grades but the problem was that I was afraid to speak in front of other people.” The same professor had challenged Chris “to talk in class” because, according to the professor, getting A’s on tests was not enough and he needed to express himself verbally and in public in order to be successful.
Chris also shared another example of his faculty in Chemistry who had encouraged him to “speak up” in his classes and concluded that, “actually, all the faculty have been very, very helpful” in his transition to college, in overcoming the language barrier and the fear of speaking in public, thus leading to the development of improved competence and gains in confidence:

And the Chemistry professor as well. He always asked me to do the exercises on the board and explain it and… for me that was a challenge. But I found myself, at the end of that class, I was more open to speaking in classes. Well, I can see a big difference from where I started and what I’m doing now.

The other participants shared similar stories of transitions as immigrants, starting college, initial lack of proficiency in the English language, overcoming the fear of speaking in public, and the impact of their interactions with faculty on subsequent gains in competence, interpersonal and communication skills, confidence and purpose. This is how Donna described her experiences with transitions:

I actually think that I had a problem with communication because English is not my first language, it’s my second. Actually, I moved here three years ago and so when I got here, my English wasn’t like this. I was very, very shy. Some people were like, ‘say three words.’ And then I always thought I was saying it wrong. I just got here from a Central American Country) and it was very bad. So I was just not speaking at all and it wasn’t making it better because every time I spoke I got like, ‘uhhh, uhh, uhhh,’ and people would look at me, and I was like, ‘this is bad, this is horrible.’

Donna further elaborated on the value of learning through challenging transitions, growth and development in college, and more specifically, on her appreciation of the faculty who she perceived had helped her overcome her fears and develop competence in speaking, critical thinking, and writing skills. She told the story of her faculty in English composition who “was very hard” and had challenged her to analyze her work and her mistakes, “what she did wrong”, and gave her a grade of B. Donna ambitiously stated that
the grade of B was “not too good for my GPA.” She added meaning to the interaction with this particular faculty member in a time of acculturation and transition to college by saying, “It was the fact that she showed me that I don’t know everything and that even that I actually have to put more effort than I think I should. So, in that sense, I am very grateful to her.”

Enrique related similar experiences of development through challenging transitions and his faculty in English and Chemistry serving as a “helping hand.” He concluded that overcoming fear with their support resulted in gains in competence, “They’ve taken away that fear of opening myself up to who I am; they have honed me into becoming a better writer and a better speaker, a better student.” Blanca also chose to open the interview with her account of arriving in the U.S. as an immigrant five years before and shared a vivid memory of the language barrier, “I came here five years ago from (A Central American country). I came here without knowing English, everything was in Spanish for me.” She shared her high school experiences in learning English and the role of her teachers in high school. Throughout the interview, she made comparisons between her high school and college experiences, and offered her emotional perspective on the challenges of her transition from high school to college by saying that high school had been “pretty easy” for her and that when, “I came here, I crashed a wall and almost killed myself with the wall”, the latter expression referring to the challenge and rigor in college. She gave a generous account and credited her professors for the learning and developmental outcomes of the transition:

Yes, it’s (college) much different; it’s different in the sense that in high school you used to…or you talk to a professor and they’ll give you a grade, you know. But here it’s, “no, you have to learn”, and it’s so much harder material and that’s
when my Chemistry professor came. He made the class fun but at the same time he was strict. So, the test was hard, you had to study a lot, a lot… which was something good because at the end of the day, you know…you know what you need.

She further reflected on her college experiences and development, her acquired skills and competence through interactions with faculty, by saying that in college, she “had to study a lot more than in high school” and that faculty, “would teach me how to study.”

Prompted to give an example of how college faculty had affected her development in other ways, she reflected on the following gains in interpersonal skills and in confidence:

I had a project, a lab project where I had to present a poster, at the end of year, at the end of the semester, and that was for everybody. So, I had to create a poster and then, everybody, the director of my program was also there, and you want them to like it. You have to impress, and that was something really good, you have to, like, prepare yourself, you have to read, you have to know how to carry yourself, how to dress for a presentation, which is something they don’t teach you in high school. They teach you here. And there are things that if you look through a perspective it’s going to help you throughout your life. Because how you carry yourself has an impact on everyone you talk to.

Some of the interviewed students also shared their perceptions of the impact of their relationships with their faculty on their career choice, purpose, and aspirations to attain those through transfer from the community college to a university. With a strong sense of loyalty, belonging, and a touch of pride, Alex related that, “Although we are an important college in South Florida” and “all these professors giving their best and teaching you”, there was “more to life.” He voiced his appreciation of “one great professor, here on campus”, who had “motivated” him from “day one” to “move on and to go on”, who had helped him fill out university applications, had wrote reference letters, had sent him a list of the best schools for his selected major, and had helped him gain confidence in his choice and persist in his decision to transfer. Finally, with a
humorous touch, he dispersed his own personal fear of the transition by highlighting the benefits of his immigrant background:

He is always motivating you to move on, he says, “the further you go, the more valuable you are”. So, I’ll never forget that quote. Now that the fall semester is around the corner I need to plan to transfer out and definitely I will keep that quote in my mind. It could be Syracuse, NYU, whatever it takes me, but I know I am going to be valuable up there because here everyone speaks Spanish but there, you don’t know who speaks Spanish (laughs). So, that is something in my favor. Chris shared a similar sentiment on his plans to transfer to an out-of-state university. He had recently acquired a job on campus and reflected on the benefits of being more closely involved with faculty and in campus activities. He credited his faculty for not only encouraging him to work on campus but also in overcoming the fear of a future transfer and on focusing on the priority of a career and purpose, in spite of, as he humorously referred to being, “a Cuban guy that had been here for only two years.”

Faith, on the other hand, offered a different perspective and shared her experiences as a first-time-in-college, mother of two, adult learner, who had made the transition first as an immigrant to the country and then as an English language learner and college student who was “scared at the beginning because I am 41 years old and being out of school for a very long time. I was thinking I was too old to come back to school.” She admitted she “had good teachers” and was particularly grateful to her faculty in Speech who had, “advised (her) how to take the right path for my career.” Faith shared that by overcoming her initial fear and with the help of her faculty she had gained competence, confidence, a sense of purpose and, “also learned to communicate with people from other cultures…. So, I was learning, I was also learning things that would be good for my career in the future… I like it, I felt really comfortable.” Faith also
summarized how she felt about overcoming her fears and the outcomes of her successful transition to college in the following way:

I went home and I was happy. I was telling my kids, “don’t give me excuses about school (laughs). I’m doing this and you have to do it”. And I never thought that I was going to be able to do it”. With the Speech (class) it was the same thing, I practiced and I practiced with the tutor and with the teacher. She gave me the tips and I ended up doing everything how they told me and both speeches that I gave for this class were really good. And she also asked my permission to use my videos for the future classes.

The four themes described in this section result from the perspectives and stories shared by eight students on the impact of one environmental factor, student-faculty relationships, within the setting of one campus of a large community college in Southeastern Florida. Findings related to the four themes describing the essence of the participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon and their perceived gains along the vectors of competence and purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) are outlined in the next, final chapter of this study.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings of this phenomenological study were derived from the exploration of eight student participants’ stories and an in-depth analysis of their related, shared experiences, illuminating the essence of the phenomenon of interest (van Manen, 1990). The qualitative study focused on what and how students perceive, feel, and describe the effects of their relationships with faculty in a community college setting. I was interested in students’ perceived developmental gains, particularly along the vectors of competence and of purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The data for this study was provided by eight recorded, individual interviews with student volunteers and was guided by the two study questions consistent with the purpose:

1. How do students perceive the influence and effects of student-faculty relationships on their development of competence at the community college?
2. How do students perceive the influence and effects of student-faculty relationships on their development of purpose at the community college?

My intent was to contribute to the limited literature on student development in community colleges and to offer insight for academic professionals seeking to understand the impact of a strong environmental factor, student-faculty relationships, (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) on community college student development. This chapter re-connects with the theoretical framework and literature addressed in chapter 2 of this study and delineates the findings resulting from the qualitative, phenomenological analysis. The findings draw from the unique perspectives and stories shared by each of the eight students interviewed. The 13 meaningful categories were derived through a combination of first cycle coding methods, described and ascribed to the essence of the phenomenon.
Consequently, second cycle coding resulted in consolidation of the categories into four themes illuminating the study focus and purpose as well as resulting in elaborations on student development theories and literature, specifically in the community college. Finally, this chapter offers a discussion of the findings in the four themes, delineates the conclusions and implications for practices and professionals at community colleges, and also highlights the limitations of the study as it was conducted at a single campus of a community college in Southeastern Florida and through a student sample appropriate to the research design. Finally, a summary of students’ perspectives of the phenomenon is offered, as final thoughts in the study.

The phenomenological study focused on students’ development related to interactions with faculty, the latter a significant college environmental factor (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and linked to the role and responsibility of an institutional environment facilitating student success and completion (Tinto, 2012). The study focus and provisional categories were not initially defined and confined within the framework of pre-determining community college student characteristics, such as their belonging to a minority group, age group, or first generation college students. Students’ lived experiences rather than statistical attributes and deficiency models (Torres, 2004) were considered as the starting point and formed the essence of the study. The categories and themes were derived from students’ shared experiences with the phenomenon in the context of one campus of a community college. As the study was conducted at a research site where the majority of students and inhabitants of the surrounding community are Hispanic, shared experiences of challenges in developing competence due to a need to distance oneself from their socio-economic group (Ortiz, 1995), adapt to a new culture, or
even give up one’s identity in order to assimilate with the dominant culture (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), were not identified. Biculturalism, shared characteristics between family and college cultures (Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000), and comfort with the community college environment in this particular setting were apparent in students’ stories. A need to separate from their culture in order to build supportive relationships (Renn & Reason, 2013) with their college faculty did not emerge as a finding. Other implications of ethnocultural belonging are reflected in further discussions contained in this chapter.

Professionals engaged in designing high impact (Kuh, 2008), innovative practices for enhanced student development in effective teaching and learning environments, and with a focus on improved student-faculty relationships in a community college setting, may find useful implications and derive ideas for practical applications and future, related research.

A model (figure 1) below summarizes the related, significant categories grouped into the four emerging study themes. The themes capture the research findings and define the impact of student-faculty interactions on the development of competence and of purpose, as well as an improved confidence, as shared and experienced by the eight student study participants.
Figure 1. Themes

- **Theme 1**: Faculty availability and genuine care for students
- **Theme 2**: Academic rigor and teaching excellence
- **Theme 3**: Faculty success stories and faculty initiatives
- **Theme 4**: Overcoming fear and development through transitions

**Competence**
- Writing, speaking, critical thinking, real-life application of learning, improvement, motivation

**Confidence**
- Development, self-esteem, maturity, choice, failure

**Purpose**
- Choice of major, aspirations, goals, career focus, commitments
Findings through Theme 1:
Development of Competence and Purpose through Faculty Availability and Care

Student interactions with community college faculty, who are available for support and exhibit genuine care for students, result in development in both intellectual skills and in purpose. Students also assigned value to the higher level of confidence, self-esteem and maturity, as apparent outcomes of such interactions. This finding supports Chickering and Reisser’s statement that “when faculty are consistent in showing respect, caring, and authenticity, and when they are willing to interact with students in a variety of settings” (1993, p. 316), gains in competence and purpose are evident.

A shared experience by interviewed students revealed that mutual efforts, deliberation, and student persistence in seeking continuous, quality relationships with one or more community college faculty on campus is essential, or as stated by Gio, “the squeaky wheel gets the grease.” Students, who persisted in seeking faculty attention and care, reported gains from those interactions through a period of time – Chris took two consecutive courses with a faculty who he initially thought did not encourage or even understand him. Then, he shared she was “proud” of his success and he could “see his development with her.” Enrique realized his faculty genuinely cared because he was persistent in “going to her office hours and talking to her” and learned she was “tough” because “she wants you to grow.” In tune with research findings summarized by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), students’ perceived notions of faculty care positively impact their development of cognitive skills and intellectual growth. Chris reported positive outcomes in competence due to developing a close relationship with a faculty member after “talking to him at the bus stop” and remarked on the difference he perceived between where he had started and what he had consequently gained. Blanca
was given great advice about college and career opportunities because she “had been friends with a lot of my teachers and I have taken the time to go and see them.”

Study participants defined a positive impact on their development of purpose — aspirations, goals, and career focus — through faculty support and approachability in a smaller campus where the faculty, as Donna stated, speak “half-Spanish and half-English”; they remember students’ names and talk to them “like a father”, which motivated Enrique “to do better.” Those faculty make returning adult students like Faith feel comfortable in that she “can approach the teacher”, and help guide Gio “to stay on track so I can move forward instead of being stuck anywhere.” Through their statements, participants added value to the literature findings in general and, in particular, to the paramount importance of faculty care, in addition to availability, for the development of community college, minority, and immigrant student populations. As stated by Tinto (2012), academic and social support in college increases students’ self-esteem, persistence, and academic performance, and is especially evident with minority students.

The proportion of Hispanic students at community colleges is high, 57% (AACC, 2016), and they are more likely than students from other racial groups to start their higher education at those institutions, one definite factor being the proximity of those institutions to home and family (Kurleander, 2006). Hispanic students develop self-esteem, derive motivation, and draw analogies between the care and close family relations, defining the culture at home, and faculty availability and care in the community college. Enrique confirms the motivational effect of knowing “he matters” to faculty and asserts that “has changed him.” Through consistent comparisons of faculty care and compassion with those of family members, participants highlighted the importance of
cultural understanding of Hispanic students, their local contexts and applications in the fabric of the institution (Tierney, 2000), as well as the complexity of familial influences (Torres, 2003) on their perspectives of a college environment positively impacting their development.

Hispanic community college students relate to and perceive bilingual faculty as approachable and understanding. On a national scale, the proportion of Hispanic faculty had increased from 15% in the 1990’s to 22% in 2006 (Cohen et al., 2013). However, the authors assert that, regardless of belonging to a specific ethnicity and possession of degree titles, one persistent recommendation for hiring community college faculty is their sensitivity and concern for their students.

True to my previously defined finding of mutual efforts needed for quality student-faculty interactions, Levin’s (2013) recount of faculty statements related to their professional choice, complete the picture from a faculty perspective and echo students’ value of faculty care, compassion, and encouragement resulting in student developmental gains in both competence and in purpose. The authors state that, in spite of their diverse backgrounds, community college faculty almost unanimously shared, “the desire to influence and support the lives of others through direct, interpersonal contact” and described their impact on student development of purpose and educational goals as, “It’s like I want to help people. I want to guide people through life. I don’t want to just watch them wander around in oblivion not knowing what they’re gonna do.” (p. 237) In unison and echoing these findings from a community college student’s perspective, Alex states, “they (faculty) like what they do and that’s why they are here”, then adds, “they want to see us develop through college.”
On the other hand, student participants were quick to point out a perceived lack of interest and indifference to students on behalf of some of their faculty. Consequently, they expressed feelings of frustration and of being “mad.” Blanca was especially vocal in sharing her thoughts of departure and non-persistence (Tinto, 1987) resulting from a certain faculty member’s lack of care, support, and a person-to-person interaction. However, she indicated her experiences with various faculty were diverse and mostly positive, although she had “a lot of” friends whose experiences were negative. Her perspective supports findings that student-faculty relationships, where faculty are accessible and approachable, positively influence student persistence and retention in colleges (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005).

Student participants value faculty availability and care but are also cognizant of their heavy teaching load at the community college, the latter described in the literature (Cohen et al., 2013). Gio shared his observation of faculty being busy and difficult to get in touch with unless a student makes special efforts. They teach a high volume of students and they have “many papers to grade”, especially in English Composition courses.

Faculty availability and faculty care are distinct categories and each carries its own nuanced set of meanings, as summarized for the purposes of this study and defined through study participants’ narratives. However, students’ stories and an in-depth analysis revealed their interdependence, interconnectedness, proximity in the linguistic context, and the perceived, combined impact on students’ development of both competence and of purpose in the community college setting. This finding on their interdependence is an elaboration on the phenomenon and an addition to the existing
literature. In their theory, Chickering and Reisser (1993) acknowledge the significance of students’ perceptions of faculty care and concern on their cognitive development and is also present within Pascarella and Terenzini’s (1991) summary of findings on how college affects students. My study adds to these findings, specifically within the context of the community college. Student expectations of faculty availability combined with genuine care and concern positively impact students’ gains in intellectual skills and in purpose, and result from student and faculty mutual efforts for continuous, quality interactions. These findings were best summarized by Enrique:

If you open up to your students, your students will open up to you. It’s not a one way ticket, it goes both ways and throughout the years. And I know this will happen. I will find professors that are gonna be open and I will be open because it’s so amazing to share that common trust.

**Findings through Theme 2: Development of Competence and Confidence through Academic Rigor and Teaching Excellence**

My study findings within theme 2 indicate that community college students’ increased competence and confidence, their gains in subject matter knowledge, cultural and intellectual sophistication, and general cognitive skills (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), are positively impacted by functional, academically-related interaction (Cox & Orehovec, 2007) with their faculty. Students reported improved communication, academic writing, public speaking, problem solving, and critical thinking skills as a result of interactions with dedicated faculty, who are experts in their field and who impose challenge, high expectations and academic rigor coupled with teaching excellence. When faculty provide a balance between clear guidelines and constructive feedback, and between challenge and support (Tinto, 2012), cognitive development is recognized and described as an outcome by study participants. In addition to gains in intellectual skills and subject-matter
knowledge, students also acknowledged a motivation to continue their education with an improved confidence, competence, and sense of competence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), as a result of both faculty imposed academic rigor and of demonstrated teaching excellence. Similar to findings in theme 1, the two categories of academic rigor and teaching excellence are distinct in nature, each identified by specific nuances in meaning, but interconnected and related through the common experiences and perspectives shared by students on the essential nature of their combined impact. These findings are supported by Astin’s (1984) theory of student development through involvement with faculty and in academically purposeful activities.

Another similarity with theme 1 is the finding on the need for mutual efforts resulting in students’ developmental gains which become evident after continuous, quality interactions with faculty at the community college. Student development in competence is fostered by the combined impact of academic rigor and good teaching when conscious efforts on behalf of both students and faculty are apparent and occur through a continuous span of time. Among other student testimonials, Blanca illustrates this finding by sharing that her test in science “was hard; you had to study a lot, a lot…which was something good.” Alex improved his writing skills “from semester to semester” and he felt more confident about his writing which, after some time, was, “more complete…everything like, came together.”

As described in more detail in the introductory and literature chapters of this study, the majority of community colleges are commuter students whose primary involvement with college is academic and through interactions with faculty (Barnett, 2011) in the classroom. Teaching excellence and a focus on student learning has been a
defining characteristic feature of community colleges since their inception and full attention has been given to instructional processes at those institutions throughout their history (Cohen et al., 2013). A commitment to teaching, the authors contend, is also defined by the organizational structures and supported by the leadership at community colleges. Given the reputation and promise of the institutional commitment, students have high expectations of faculty expertise in their academic areas and even more so of their pedagogical expertise. Alex wants a teacher who is “passionate and motivated about what they do” and reinforces the importance of both expertise and teaching excellence by saying that if a faculty does not know how to communicate the knowledge they have, they are “out of the game.”

The combination of academic rigor and good teaching results in ease of student learning through the classroom activities consistently described by participants as “fun”, “less like a class, it seems more like a game but you are learning at the same time”, and “it’s science but he makes it so funny.” In addition to the latter quotes from Blanca, she adds a layer of meaning to this finding by summarizing that if “you don’t put challenge to a student, they get bored.”

According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), “Fostering intellectual competence in students is the top priority of most postsecondary institutions” (p. 54). Competence is the most studied aspect of student development with three broad research areas – acquisition of subject matter knowledge, gains in cultural and intellectual sophistication, and the development of general cognitive skills which are applicable in all content areas (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Through a combination of academic rigor - faculty high expectations, clear guidelines, constructive feedback, challenge, and support - on one
hand, and teaching expertise, on the other hand, participants attested to gains in all three aspects of intellectual competence. In his pursuit of a degree in Computer Animation, Hugo describes character development as an “organic” process and credits his faculty for teaching him to create “natural” characters; Alex is grateful to his Journalism professor not only for his expertise, “the experience is really valuable for us”, but for teaching him “to write bites, introductions, and captions for newspapers, which is pretty good.” Blanca reinforces the impact of good teaching and subject matter learning through an example of her faculty in Trigonometry stating she “really like him in the sense that you would go to class and you would see the interest in him to teach you…and understand the material.” Chris illustrates gains in cultural and intellectual sophistication through the efforts of his professor in Economics who engaged students to participate in classroom dialogues and “asked for solutions” to situations while encouraging students to “speak and explain.” As a recent immigrant, Chris shared he learned about the culture and the U.S. economic system, and was able to “explain those specific topics”. Development of general intellectual, or cognitive skills, is the area where community college students reported the most gains – in communication, academic writing, public speaking, critical thinking, and real-life application of learning. Students improve their writing skills through clear guidelines, “she gave you a format…and a step-by-step guide”, through constructive feedback, “whenever I turned in something, the feedback from my professor would help me a lot, too”, through continuous practice, “she really pushed that we constantly revise our essays.” Donna describes writing essays as “the hardest thing I have ever done” and “very frustrating”; the high expectations and academic rigor imposed by a specific faculty member boost her motivation to improve her writing skills and she states, “I’m going to
have to get ready for that.” In addition to writing, community college students reported gains in oral communication and especially public speaking skills resulting from interactions with faculty who balance academic challenge with support in the classroom, who give constructive feedback on classroom presentations, and who encourage debates as, “a really good manner to learn…and express yourself.”

Findings through this theme are also valid within the framework of institutional action for student success (Tinto, 2012) where changes in conditions are encouraged to help students succeed and the institutional obligation is defined as, “to do what it can to help students stay and graduate” (p. 6). Although applied in a much broader context of concepts and the higher educational institutions at large, the four conditions suggested by Tinto’s model - expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement- may also be viewed from the perspective of quality student-faculty interactions resulting in improved student learning and development. Students’ voices in my study confirm that high expectations are a condition for student development, support is needed to meet these expectations, constructive feedback is appreciated, and involvement with faculty who balance academic rigor with support, teaching excellence and constructive feedback, positively impact student development of intellectual competence and confidence in the community college.

Community college students appreciate a diverse campus environment and attest to improved learning when they can relate culturally to their faculty, “the teachers speak half Spanish, half English”, or when faculty are of an immigrant background similar to their experiences, e.g. the Ukrainian teacher makes the “science class fun.” Literature on the benefits of student and faculty diversity in the community college is abundant and
points to related positive learning outcomes and student development (Cohen et al., 2013).

**Findings through Theme 3: Development of Purpose and Confidence through Involvement in Faculty-led Initiatives and Life Stories**

The two categories of involvement with faculty and exposure to faculty stories are bound by the more personal nature of the experience and by the impact on student development resulting in “high levels of motivation and considerable resilience” (Levin, 2013, p. 254). Students who seek closer, personal interaction (Cox & Orehovec, 2007) with community college faculty attest to qualitative gains along the vector of purpose through newly-found aspirations, clearer educational and career goals, and stronger interpersonal commitments (Chickening & Reisser, 1993). Through interactions with their faculty, participants revealed an improved sense of confidence and a stronger determination to follow their personal interests, define and achieve their career and life goals.

The prevalent dismal statistics on low graduation and transfer rates of community college (Renn & Reason, 2013), and Hispanic students in particular, emphasize the need “to shed light on factors contributing to- or barriers hindering – their educational and career aspirations” (Fiebig, 2010, p. 849). Vocational plans and aspirations comprise one of the three major elements in the development of purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Hispanic students’ generational status - first or second generation immigrants - impacts their academic and vocational aspirations, their unique challenges related to integration, acculturation and adjustment, and underscores the importance of college campuses fostering an environment encouraging a sense of belonging and success (Fiebig, 2010).
Lastly, students’ involvement with faculty is one of four major conditions for retention and success in college (Tinto, 2012).

One consistent study finding relates to students’ conscious and deliberate efforts in seeking personal interaction with their community college faculty. Exposure to faculty life experiences and success stories positively impacts students’ development of a stronger purpose, clarity and intentionality in the pursuit of goals, comfort with their heritage, and improved confidence in setting priorities while in college. Blanca defines those deliberate efforts in seeking interactions with her faculty in the following way, “I have taken the time to go to them and see them. So, it’s always better like that.”

A shared finding supported by all interviewed students was a new sense of purpose derived from closer interactions with faculty who they relate to and consider their role models, i.e. with at least one faculty member who they reported on developing an influential relationship (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Students are keen observers of faculty – they are influenced by listening carefully, ascribing significance, and drawing conclusions from the stories faculty tell. They inspire and influence students’ values, choice of vocation and professional aspirations through sharing their life stories of struggle, personal victories, and success.

Similarly, Cejda and Rhodes (2004) found that, in addition to organized and formal mentoring programs as effective means of educational attainment of Hispanics at community colleges, students indicated “specific faculty members were the primary influence in their educational decisions” (p. 258). In my study, faculty sharing of personal stories of struggle and success emerge as a powerful, albeit an informal and, most likely,
unintentional on behalf of the faculty mentoring strategy resulting in students’ increased sense of purpose and confidence or, as stated by Blanca, “they have given me great advice…for me to take.”

Through analogies with a life story a faculty shared in the classroom, Alex stated he found “purpose in life” and a social responsibility as a Hispanic student and community member. He felt inspired by “one of the best English professors at the campus” and her account of the Civil Rights movement in the sixties, “as any American should, to move on and make a better country for everyone.” Donna found inspiration and decided to follow the professional pathway of her “amazing” Math professor, a national teaching award recipient. She noted that “the way she talks about teaching…made the most impact on me.” Blanca devoured her “awesome” Biology faculty’s stories of professional success, his knowledge sharing, and also stated she wanted “to discover something”, and similar to her faculty in Chemistry, also an immigrant, “to be a teacher at a good university here, in the United States….I could do it, I could.”

In conclusion, closer interactions with faculty at the community college result in gains in purpose and in confidence, and inspire students to persist in college and to be successful in life. Students relate to faculty they choose to know well and desire to emulate their pathways shared through stories of life struggles, accomplishments, and success. Alex summarized this finding through the following statement, “And Dr. D, look at him, just another case and example of what we can do.”
Students’ closer interactions with faculty at the community college also result in their broader participation in curriculum-enhancing classroom projects and faculty-led organizations or, as stated by Chris, they become “more involved with the school.” Compared to four-year “involving colleges” where students interact with faculty and discuss personal or career concerns outside class (Kuh et al., 1991), community college students are less engaged in extracurricular activities. However, in spite of the fact that students’ involvement is mostly classroom-based (Barnett, 2011; Chang, 2005), my study findings point to students’ interest and engagement in campus-based organizations and projects if they are led by their faculty and directly relate to course content and enhanced classroom learning. Students reported an improved purpose and sense of confidence, including a clear and defined career focus, a global outlook, improved social awareness, a commitment to college success, and gains in maturity, evident through their descriptions of such projects.

Based on students’ testimonials, one particular outcome of such creative forms of engagement, led and authored by faculty, is that students find a new purpose, experience personal fulfillment and a sense of gratification through projects with a focus on giving back to the community. Chris’s contributions as a volunteer to an organization benefitting new student immigrants and learners of English that had once helped him in his transition to a new educational system. Hugo’s enthusiastic fundraising efforts to help schoolchildren in a developing Central American country also support this finding. Enrique described his participation in the semester-long, course-themed, faculty-led campaign on human trafficking awareness and prevention as an “honor” and “not just a college project, but one that will affect people” and further attested to the development of
a higher purpose, aspirations, and commitments beyond mastery of the course content in college or, as experienced and stated by Blanca, she “learned a lot, not just in subjects, but in life.”

Through classroom-based, faculty-led themed projects, community college students increase their understanding, tolerance, and value of diversity and develop a global outlook resulting in gains in purpose and a sense of purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Faith attested to these developmental outcomes through her description of a “dynamic”, “active” English composition course, with a “civic engagement service” piece and “a way of giving back to the community...preserving the planet, things like that I think are very important.” Finally, closer interactions with faculty result in stronger analogies made by students along the lines of integration, development and support similar to the support expected and experienced through interactions within the family. The proximity, presence, and support of family is well-defined in the literature as an important factor for Hispanic students (Kurleander, 2006; Torres, 2004).

Students shared analogies they draw between family members and their faculty – Donna compared the care and expectations from her mother with that of her Math professor; Gio came back to enroll in the community college after a year spent at a private college in the Northern part of the United States; Chris shared that in difficult times, his professor “talks to me as a father to a son”; Hugo stated he is a student at the campus but also works at the learning center where, “it’s a family with a lot of different personalities...all of them have contributed to the way I guess I see myself as a teacher.”
Findings through Theme 4: Development of Competence and Purpose through Transitions and Overcoming Fear

Community college students’ interactions with faculty positively impact their psychosocial development resulting from transitions. They also develop a stronger sense of confidence, competence, and purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) through overcoming obstacles and fears. Faculty are powerful agents in easing the effects of the varied transitions and related fears, the associated lack of confidence in one’s abilities, which may be experienced by community college students, Hispanic students and newly-arrived immigrants, in particular. Students reported development along the vectors of both competence and purpose, as well as in confidence, resulting from closer interactions with one or more of their faculty who witnessed, understood, and engaged in helping immigrant students transition to a new educational system, acquire the English language and intellectual skills needed for college-level coursework, and overcome academic challenges and fears associated with major life changes.

As far as transitions from high school to college and from the community college to a four-year university are concerned, institutional efforts and programming are well-documented in the literature. Community colleges offer support services for easier transitions through active links with the surrounding high schools, articulation agreements with four-year institutions, transition bridge programs, first year experience programs, and counseling and advising (Cohen & Brawer, 2013), which are also particularly helpful to first-generation students (Renn & Reason, 2013). Bugarin, Nuñez, and Warburton (2001) demonstrated that community college attendance actually increased the persistence rates of first-generation Latino (Hispanic) students compared to their counterparts who enrolled directly in four-year institutions.
However, my study findings indicate that students of Hispanic heritage and immigrant students, who enroll in community colleges shortly after their arrival in the United States or after high school graduation, develop competence, purpose, and confidence through a broader, subtler, and more varied range of transition-related experiences compared to traditional students at four-year universities and to community college students familiar with the educational system in the United States. All interviewed students attested to the integral role of their faculty in times of transition, in overcoming barriers, and in their overall development in college.

A consistent finding in my study is that community college students develop competence, an improved confidence in their abilities (Chickering & Reisser, 1991), and overcome communication barriers, such as the fear of speaking in public and voicing an opinion, through interactions and with the help and encouragement of faculty. Students gain confidence, self-esteem, and pride in their cultural and linguistic heritage, the latter an essential component of developing purpose (Cickering & Reisser, 1993), through relationships with faculty who are supportive and understanding. They play a key role in helping immigrant students transition to a new language of instruction in college and a new culture, as well as in understanding a different education system which Hispanic immigrant students may find difficult to navigate.

Some examples highlighting the findings listed above include Chris’s fear of college when he came to the U.S. two years before and barely understood his professor, his initial refusal to speak in class and subsequent fear of transfer to a university because he was “a Cuban guy…here for only two years.” Donna’s “horrible” shyness, her always thinking she was saying things wrong and her refusal to speak in class, Enrique’s initial
fear of “opening myself up to who I am” and voicing an opinion, Faith’s thoughts on being “scared at the beginning” because she “was too old to come back to school”, Gio’s observation of his fear of navigating a new education system of many choices and options, unlike his native country where, “everything is the same”, all attest to students’ initial lack of confidence and fears.

Development through transitions and overcoming fear emerged as interrelated categories in my study. All interviewed students credited their faculty and provided specific examples illustrating the importance of both functional and personal interaction (Cox & Orehovec, 2007) with community college faculty to their development of language, communication, and interpersonal skills, as well as in their purpose, self esteem, and confidence during times of transitions. Students attested to their development in the following ways: among others, a Chemistry professor was convinced Chris was “a good student” in spite of his limited English skills, and challenged him to speak up in class so he could see “a big difference from where I started and what I’m doing now.” Donna shared she “was grateful” to her English professor for being “very hard” and for helping her improve her writing skills and interpersonal competence. Enrique stated his faculty had made him realize that “I matter” and “honored me into becoming a better writer, a better speaker, a better student.” Blanca “crashed a wall” when she first came to college - interactions with her faculty taught her skills “to help you throughout your life.” Alex gave voice to his improved self-esteem and confidence by highlighting faculty influence on his career choice and purpose of a higher degree attainment through a future transfer to a four-year university, relying for this transition on his personal efforts and hard work, but also on the recommendation letters from his faculty, and highlighted the
value of his heritage and unique abilities of speaking Spanish and “being valuable” up there, i.e. “something that is in my favor.” Finally, as a mother of two, a recent immigrant, and a non-native speaker of English, Faith credited her “good teachers” for “learning things that would be good for my career” for feeling “comfortable” in a college environment, and for going home “happy.”

The role of student faculty interactions in the development of intellectual skills, career goals, and confidence through transitions and overcoming fears in the community college is a prominent finding in my study. Students highlighted the role of faculty in their acquisition of a new language of instruction at the community college, in overcoming the fear of public speaking, in expressing an opinion, and in understanding and navigating a new educational system in order to acquire the competence and confidence needed to achieve their educational and life goals, the latter being essential components in the broader notion of purpose.

Conclusions

The findings of my study support Chickering and Reisser’s theory (1993) of student development in college and highlight the powerful links and the influence of educational environmental factors, specifically the role of student-faculty interactions on students’ gains along the vectors of competence and of purpose. They underscore the institutional responsibility and efforts of community colleges for student success and development, the significant role of academic and social environments in college (Tinto, 2012), and the importance of what students do (Kuh et al., 2005) and how they engage (Astin, 1993), rather than what students bring to college, i.e. as demographic
characteristics often perceived as deficiencies due to their non-traditional student backgrounds, specifically in the setting of community colleges.

Student involvement with faculty is a key influence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) on student development and one of the three most potent forms of involvement in college (Astin, 1999). These interactions are especially relevant with community college students as their activities in college are mostly academic and classroom based (Barnett, 2011). Through participants’ stories and shared experiences, community college faculty emerged as influential figures and role models impacting student development. Community college students attest to marked increase along the vectors of competence and of purpose (Rogers, 2004) when quality interactions with faculty occur on campus. In conclusion, community college faculty are powerful agents in promoting student development, especially along the first and sixth vectors of college student identity development, i.e. of competence and of purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Rogers, 2004). Students, who are intentional, persistent, and deliberate in seeking closer interactions and support from their faculty in the community college, with time, also gain confidence in their intellectual abilities, a stronger determination in the pursuit of their vocational and life goals, and maturity in their development through overcoming transitions, academic and life challenges.

Students seeking relationships with community college faculty, who exhibit a combination of availability and a genuine care for students, attested to development in both intellectual skills and in purpose. A higher level of confidence, self-esteem and maturity, are apparent outcomes of such interactions. Community college students increase their intellectual competence and confidence through gains in subject matter
knowledge, cultural and intellectual sophistication, and general cognitive skills (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), and as a result of interactions with their faculty, mainly in the classroom. Students reported improved communication, academic writing, public speaking, problem solving, and critical thinking skills through interactions with dedicated faculty, who are not only experts in their field but who also impose challenge, communicate high expectations (Tinto, 2012), and maintain academic rigor coupled with teaching excellence and support in the classroom.

Students who develop a personal interaction (Cox & Oreovec, 2007) with faculty at the community college are positively affected through exposure to stories of their life experiences and through participation in classroom enrichment projects and organizations initiated and led by faculty. They attested to improved clarity and strength of purpose, as well as intentionality in the pursuit of life goals (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Participants shared comfort with their cultural and linguistic heritage, and confidence in setting educational and life priorities while enrolled in the community college and as a result of such interactions.

Community college students of Hispanic heritage and immigrant status, who enroll in community colleges shortly after their arrival in the U.S., develop competence and purpose with time, through a multitude of transitions and through overcoming their fears and lack of confidence in their ability to succeed. Students attested to the key role of closer interactions with and understanding of faculty in times of varied transitions and in overcoming barriers and obstacles in college and in life.
Finally, students who seek and have positive experiences in interactions with their faculty, readily acknowledge the value of those interactions and describe the impact on their development, specifically focusing on gains in intellectual skills, improved confidence, and a stronger purpose while enrolled in the community college. The developmental effects are evident when quality interactions between students and faculty occur and find expression through faculty availability and care, academic rigor and teaching excellence, student involvement in faculty-led projects and exposure to their life experiences, and finally, through faculty support in overcoming fear and student development through transitions.

Limitations

Limitations of the study relate to the research design, the participants’ experiences, and the setting of the study. The phenomenological study utilized an exploration “with a group of individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 78). An initial six and an additional two interviews were conducted with students who met the study criteria, expressed an interest in sharing their experiences of interactions with their faculty on campus, and volunteered to participate in the study. The study sample represented the population of a single, mid-size campus in a large, multi-campus community college located in a geographical area defined by high density and dominance of one ethno-cultural group (Nagata et al., 2012) -Hispanic students. Therefore, broader generalizations should be made with caution.

The findings and conclusions of the phenomenological study are based on interviews with student volunteers and focused on their individual perspectives of the
phenomenon of the impact of student-faculty interactions and their perceived gains in competence and in purpose. The student sample was appropriate to the scope, focus, and nature of the study. Students, who were deliberate in seeking interactions with their faculty, described mostly positive experiences and their related perspectives on the developmental outcomes of those interactions.

Rather than deliberating on the limitations of the study, the findings and conclusions should be used to illuminate good practices at community colleges, to promote broader applications at similar institutions, and to provide examples of quality, meaningful interactions between students and faculty resulting in students’ developmental in competence and in purpose. Students’ voices and narratives of their experiences with the phenomenon may be used to contribute to the understanding of the educational and developmental needs of community college students, to highlight the important role of faculty, and to provide guidelines for improved practices designed to positively impact student development at community colleges.

Implications

Implications of the study findings are broad and varied and may be useful to both faculty and the administrative leadership at community colleges. Arguably, findings through the four themes, (1) the impact of faculty availability coupled with genuine care on students’ development of competence and of purpose; (2) the value of academic rigor combined with faculty teaching excellence in the development of students’ competence and improved confidence; (3) the motivational effect of faculty success stories and student involvement in faculty initiatives on the development of students’ purpose and
self-esteem; and (4) the role of faculty in student development through transitions and in overcoming fear, may find meaningful applications at community colleges in similar geographical areas and characteristics of the student population.

**Implications for Community College Faculty**

One of two categories in each of the four themes - the positive impact of faculty availability to support students, the high expectations and academic rigor, faculty engagement with students, and their helping students through transitions may well be valid and applicable at all higher education institutions. However, it is the additional and related category within each of the four themes of this study that make the findings unique for the community college – derived from participants’ stories and perspectives of gains in competence and in purpose as a result of interactions with their faculty.

Students from the community college attested that, in addition to faculty availability, the genuine care for students was both an expectation and an integral component to the development of both competence and purpose. Faculty expertise and academic rigor influences the development of competence. However, the additional and related category in theme 2, i.e. excellence in teaching, was emphasized by all participants as an inherent component to students’ gains in intellectual competence, learning, persistence in college, and success. Student engagement in faculty-led projects helps clarify their educational goals and strengthens the development of purpose. However, closer relationships with faculty through those projects and life stories shared of struggle, success, and opportunity motivate community college students in achieving their purpose and in developing confidence in the future. Finally, community college
students attested to experiencing development in competence and in purpose through transitions and highlighted their experiences of overcoming various fears through encouragement by their faculty. In conclusion, community college faculty should be made aware of their central role, the importance of their efforts, and the power of their impact on student development. They should be encouraged to “use their positions “with a clear focus and intentionality” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 316).

How can faculty be encouraged to contribute to community college student development? In addition to class size and work load, a shared complaint among faculty at community colleges is the institutional “drive to recruit and retain apathetic students” (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 81). However, none of the participants who volunteered for the study and attested to the developmental effects of quality relationships with their faculty, exhibited apathy. On the contrary, they were driven to persist and succeed while attributing their gains in competence and in purpose to the community college faculty, among other factors. Thus, faculty are perceived as powerful agents of change, student development and success at the community college. The impact of informal faculty mentoring though classroom enrichment projects and through faculty stories of hardship and success, was evidenced through the memorable testimonials of all participants.

Current research on the impact of faculty mentoring has focused mostly on students attending four-year institutions rather than on those in community colleges (Crisp, 2010). Therefore, intentionality and formal training of faculty to serve as mentors to students at community colleges should be part of the professional development and advancement plan of faculty. A number of community colleges, the research site including, have established comprehensive requirements, contractual obligations, and
reimbursement programs for faculty advancement. However, few of those professional development requirements focus on faculty mentoring and on the impact of the institutional environmental factors on student persistence, success, and overall development at the community college.

A simple broadening of the scope of faculty responsibilities and assigning a mentorship role to a group of students, in addition to the existing, heavy teaching load, will not bring the desired commitment and results. Sensitivity to students’ developmental and educational needs, awareness of the transitions they are going through, exposure to high academic standards balanced with the appropriate support (Tinto, 2012), are some of my findings that point to a need of a coordinated and well thought-out approach to community college faculty influence on student development. Several study participants attested to developmental outcomes through engagement in faculty-led, curriculum-enrichment projects and the gratification of giving back to the community as shared experiences. In addition, during the interview, Blanca alluded to the effects of a fairly new kind of student-faculty relationship at the community college, i.e. of faculty mentoring through undergraduate team research projects carried out in partnership with four-year institutions. The projects described by study participants (a) ensure community college student early exposure to a university environment, (b) strengthen interactions with their faculty through a classroom-based project in a different and more challenging setting, and (c) based on student testimonials, foster learning and result in developmental gains in competence and in purpose.

Finally, it is worth noting, within the context of a much broader conversation, that the focus on institutional multiple measures of accountability and most recently, on
performance funding imposed on community colleges, has shifted the attention and priorities from student development and success to the economic survival of the institutions. The latter bears implications mostly for administrative leadership and state legislature and is beyond the scope of the current study.

**Implications for Administrative Leadership**

Astin (1985), stated that the purpose of colleges was to develop the talents not only of students but also the talents of faculty. According to Levin (2013), although community college faculty constitute 29% of all post-secondary education faculty, only 30% were employed full-time in 2011, and little was known about their professional and social identities. However, in spite of their diverse origins, cultures, and interests, most of them affirmed the institution was the ideal match for them and that it “supported the same personal attributes they valued in themselves: the desire to influence and support the lives of others through direct, interpersonal contact…and engaging in activities beyond their teaching load” (Levin, 2013, p. 237). The existing unity between institutional priorities and faculty mindset holds enormous potential for a strong focus on community college student development.

Faculty training, focused on understanding the developmental and educational needs of immigrant students, returning adults, first generation college students, and representatives of minority groups, should become an integral part of the professional development plans when hiring faculty at the community college. Faculty, whose first job after graduate school is in a community college, may experience difficulties in the first years and initially feel out of place because high achievement, academic goal directedness, and student selectivity are not the norm (Cohen et al., 2013). However, the
authors contend that with time, “most of them find the community college a personally satisfying environment” because “they believe that they are striving for a higher cause” (p. 80). Faculty awards should be institutionalized to recognize their conscious and deliberate efforts focused on support and development of students on their pathways to gaining the intellectual skills and competence needed for college-level coursework, completing a degree, successfully transferring to a four-year institution, or in achieving their career goals and purpose while attending a community college.

Administrators should be aware that although community college faculty are generally viewed as having “a primary responsibility to teach” (Cohen et al., 2013) and “to enabling many students who would not traditionally be viewed as ‘college material’ to succeed” (Townsend & Twombly, 2007), their impact, as evidenced by student voices and shared experiences, far exceeds the mere acquisition of subject matter knowledge. When quality interactions between students and faculty occur, the latter become powerful agents of student development of all age groups, and arguably, regardless of students’ racial and cultural belonging, status, and level of college preparedness. Faculty time and efforts should be recognized and awarded when devoted to student development in the community college. Faculty should be encouraged to devise, lead, and engage students in projects that are academically-meaningful, integrated in the curriculum, designed to enhance classroom learning, build confidence, and develop a stronger purpose in life. As evident through student voices in the study, these projects should also promote student learning with a global focus and provide opportunities for strengthening the links and giving back to the community.
Institutional leadership should work closely with faculty to highlight the importance of knowing their students, their specific needs, their fears and the importance of development through transitions. Immigrant students experience difficulties in understanding a new educational system, a new culture, and a new language. With transitions in mind, English as a Second Language programs help students acquire the language of instruction in higher education institutions in the United States. General education courses in composition and in oral communications help students overcome their fear of speaking in public, voicing an opinion, and expressing themselves professionally. Such programming efforts will result in a strengthened link between gains in intellectual competence and development of purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) with students at the community college.

In conclusion, community college administrators and educational professionals should listen to and learn from students’ voices and stories. Students should be advised to consciously and persistently seek effective functional and personal interactions (Cox & Oreho, 2007) with their faculty. Collaboration between student services and academic departments towards student success (Kuh et al., 2011) should result in improved student development at community colleges. Finally, in this study, the category of Other revealed that student participants did not distinguish between the role of faculty and the role of administrators and staff in their interactions on campus, i.e. students have the same expectations of care, support, and expertise from all employees at the campus.
Student Perspectives of the Phenomenon: Final Remarks

When Donna stated, “I guess professors are like that lighthouse,” she summarized not only the impact, but also the characteristics and student expectations of the ideal community college faculty member. She had felt “a little bit lost” when she started college and shared her gratitude and admiration for the award-winning professor in Math, who inspired her as a role model and helped her develop educational goals and a new purpose. Blanca, too, was appreciative of her interactions with faculty. She had “learned a lot from everybody’s experience, from all my professors”, and further clarified, “I learned that you can fail sometimes, and it’s ok.” Chris was touched by his Chemistry professor’s compassion and that, “he always talks to me in his office like a father.” When Chris’s family was going through hard times and his working two jobs had “affected my performance in his class”, the faculty member noticed the change and reached out to Chris. Consequently, he helped him realize that “school was a priority” and stated the professor had “opened my eyes” by asking, “are you a student that works or are you a worker that studies?” Enrique admitted that the realization that he “matters” to faculty, who also made the effort to remember his name, had “changed” him and he now aspires to one day have “the potential to be, hopefully, as great as they (faculty) are. And if I’m fortunate, bigger than they are.” He wants his faculty to feel “proud of the person they have cultivated.” Faith laughingly calls herself “the poster child of the college”, in reference to the opportunities the community college provides to adult, returning students. She describes the ideal faculty as someone “you can talk to, is there to help you if you have any kind of struggle in the class, and (to) give you good advice.” Her interactions with faculty had “opened a whole new world” and had “opened her eyes on
how many things are available to me…things that I didn’t even know were there”, unlike before when “she was afraid to take new steps.”

Student participants emerged as keen observers of both the environment and the realities in the community college. Gio realizes “faculty are so busy and there are so many people in the classroom. It’s difficult to really get in touch with them.” He shared a faculty member had played a key role in his regaining purpose when, at one point, he “felt like maybe college wasn’t the best choice, maybe it wasn’t, really.” He credited his interactions with a faculty member who helped him “stay on track” and realize the benefits of a college degree. Inspired, trained, and mentored by his faculty at the community college, Hugo stated he wanted to “make a difference in this world”, that college is not only about “getting a job and then doing it for the money”, and that talking to his faculty has “made me take my future more seriously.” Finally, motivated by “a great professor, here on campus”, Alex shared that there was “more to life than the community college” and that he aspired to “move on” and transfer to an out-of-state institution, following the advice of his professor who had told him that “the further you go, the more valuable you are.”

In conclusion, Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) recommendations on the role and influence of faculty on student development are valuable and valid in the setting of a 21st century community college:

Faculty can encourage student development – as scholars and teachers, mentors, role models, and skilled listeners. They can strengthen their influence by grounding their interactions in a basic understanding of developmental theory and by refining their interpersonal skills. This responsibility extends far beyond the traditional role of classroom professor (p. 317).
References


Appendix A

Participants’ Narratives

**Student 1: Alex** is a Hispanic male and an Honors College student, who, at the time of the interview, had plans to transfer to an out-of-state university and had chosen his major – Journalism and Communications. He reflected on his educational advancement at the college and was cognizant of the role of faculty in the development of his academic skills, confidence, and purpose. Although he was a full-time student at the Honors College, he also held a part-time, 25 hour-per-week job. At the time of the interview, he had accumulated 35 college credits with a GPA of 3.9, selected his career path, enrolled in a couple of courses at another campus of the same college offering Journalism classes, and started planning his transfer to a four-year university. He was the first student to fill out the demographic questionnaire and to accept the invitation for an interview. His excitement and willingness to share mostly positive experiences with interactions with faculty at the campus were evident.

Alex perceived faculty as having a strong impact on his development and was appreciative of their knowledge, dedication, efforts and availability in and outside the classroom. He credited his faculty for his gains in maturity and in a deeper understanding of the world and “why people do things”. More specifically, he perceived faculty as caring individuals who had a motivational effect on his development of academic skills and purpose. He stated he valued their dedication and methods of teaching, and related stories about his professors in Humanities and Sociology. He credited his improved communication skills to his English Composition, Literature, and Journalism professors and reflected on his ability to relate and apply what he has learned in real-life situations, “So, I appreciate their hard work and all we could learn, so whenever we face these things in our daily life, we appreciate it and we know we are learning in the classroom. So, it is gratifying to see all this payback.”

As a recent immigrant from a Central American country and a native speaker of Spanish, he was grateful for the opportunities to acquire written and verbal English communication skills. He acknowledged his improvement and rapid progress, and shared he felt confident in his future. He saw faculty as motivators, as caring individuals who teach well when they “love what they do.” When reflecting on purpose, aspirations and motivation, he shared he felt inspired by their personal stories and gave an example of a faculty member’s participation in the 60’s Civil Rights movement while drawing analogies and inspiration with contemporary struggles of the Hispanic minorities in the United States.

He shared a quote he had heard and remembered from one of his faculty, “the further you go, the more valuable you are”, and his encouragement to transfer to a university outside South Florida. Alex also credited his International Relations faculty with making the time to help and mentor him and concluded that a passion to teach was the most important quality of his college professors. He shared he experienced college as a different world from high school in that faculty were there to help but students also developed as independent individuals and motivated learners:
I like that it’s a different world from the education that you receive in high school. I learned that you are more on your own but you have so many resources as well. Everyone is here to help you out if you want the help of anyone. And that is something which I appreciate from all my faculty; like, whenever you need anything they’ll be there. And sometimes it’s hard for them, they have to do so many things at the same time – so many classes, papers to grade, everything. But they still take a couple of minutes to help you out. So, I really appreciate that my experience has been great, I couldn’t be happier at the Honors College. And I learned so much from all my teachers and I just want to keep going.

Student 2: Blanca is a Hispanic female who, at the time of the interview, had accumulated 41 college credits and held a GPA of 3.23. She was confident in her choice of major and career focus. She shared she wanted to pursue Medical Engineering as her major and was grateful to her high school Biology teacher and her Chemistry college professor for imposing academic challenge and rigor, for inspiring interest in the subject, and for instilling confidence in her success. She was engaged in a grant-funded project where community college students conduct undergraduate science research projects at a private university in the same city. Recalling her immigration from a Central American country five years before, she credited her high school English teacher for the consideration and encouragement in reading complex literary texts in English as well as her college composition professor for helping her develop academic writing skills needed for college-level studies. Throughout the conversation, Blanca drew comparisons between her learning experiences in high school and in college. She shared high school was “easy” but when she transitioned to college “she crashed a wall”. In an attempt to explain the meaning of this expression, she talked about the extended time spent on studying and on campus, on learning to learn independently, on acquiring research skills, on communicating professionally, and on overcoming academic challenges in college. She reflected on feeling inspired by her college teaching faculty and credited them for making learning “fun” while being “strict”. She shared her appreciation of “learning to fail” through faculty guidance, understanding, and caring. Her perspective was that the college professor made all the difference between passing and failing a class, and gave an example of the negative consequences of a college faculty who did not exhibit interest in teaching the classes and referred students to the textbook for gaining knowledge. This is how she highlighted the importance of faculty interactions with students and in gaining competence:

I would like to add that professors are really important in your education. And I can tell you that if you have a bad professor, you can fail a class. I had a professor who would tell me – read the book. And then you come here and you have a test. You lose that person to person interaction that sometimes is really important to you. It makes a difference, the professor makes a difference between you failing or you passing with great competency or with good grades.

When reflecting on her purpose in college and career goals, she related she found the life stories of her faculty inspirational and that she admired their professional accomplishments. She talked about her Chemistry professor attending an Ivy League university and shared she someday would like to “discover something”, too. According to
Blanca, the personal example set by the faculty, coupled with their high expectations and academic challenge, their availability to give advice and to encourage students on college and career opportunities, contributed to a student-faculty relationship beneficial to the development of students’ purpose and goals:

She inspired me, she told me to go do research, learn, have the experience. And my Chemistry professor that I had last semester, here in college, he inspired me a lot, too, because he pushed me to the limits. That’s one of the reasons and I know it was good for me because I learned a lot. He shared with me his experience which I value because I learned a lot and I could see where I could go, what I can become. And yes, my Biology teacher here, and in high school, too. She was great because she was a Chemistry teacher in Cuba and then she came here and now she is working at the university, which is something really good because you wouldn’t believe that coming from another country you would be a teacher in a good university here, in the United States, which is something…I could do it, I could.

Student 3: Chris is a 22-year-old Hispanic male who had emigrated from a Central American country with his family two years before. At the time of the interview he had accumulated 35 college credits, held a GPA of 3.88 and, in addition to being enrolled full-time, worked 20 hours per week as a student assistant at a college academic department. He shared he had engaged in the student leadership academy on campus during the previous year and had subsequently become actively involved in a college organization focused on recruiting and helping recent immigrants with the acquisition of English language skills and on advisement in navigating the US college system. His justification was that he, himself had benefited from this organization and wanted to give back. He stated:

In (Central American Country)a, everything is the same. I mean, for college you don’t have this amount of options, these wide options that you have here. So, when you get here, you’re lost. Because there are so many options, you don’t know what to do.

Thinking back two years before, he shared he “was afraid of college…of speaking in class” and “didn’t know anything, any English.” He perceived faculty support, their encouragement to participate and to speak in class, and “to do my best in everything,” had helped him in his development of competence, more specifically in overcoming the language barrier, building confidence, and developing his communication skills in speaking and in academic writing. He reflected on the role of faculty in his development and that he valued individual faculty expressions of care, advice, lending an ear, and an understanding of his personal problems. He remembered their words of encouragement, “everything will be ok,” and spoke fondly of his science professor who “always talks to me as a father to a son.” Chris dwelled on faculty care, support, and encouragement as important factors in his development in college and used specific examples, i.e. his Economics professor who wanted him to speak up in class and whom he approached at the bus stop one day “because I didn’t have a car back then” and told him that although he had all A’s on written tests, he had only been in the country for less than two years and lacked the confidence and English speaking skills. The student asserted that following the
interaction the professor was careful to explain the subject matter in class with more attention to his comprehension of the material presented in English. He also acknowledged his development and learning through the two consecutive composition courses he took with the same English professor who, according to the student, in the first semester, did not understand his ideas and was not encouraging, which made him feel “mad”. He related how he challenged himself to take another class with her and both of them noted his improvement or, as the student stated, “I could see my development with her.” In addition, he credited a campus administrator in helping him define and pursue his purpose in college and goals in life through her openness to students, sound advice on defining priorities, balancing school and work, involvement in campus life, and on his ultimate goal of transferring to one of the “big” universities. This is how he perceived her impact:

And I have always had this idea to transfer to one of these big schools, Stanford is my first option. But, you know, I was afraid because I came here only two years ago. I came here when I was 20 years old. The other students, my peers are like, 18. So, I felt a little bad about it. And I felt like…what am I going to do in Stanford? A Cuban guy that has been here for only two years. I felt that I couldn’t do it but she always encouraged me. And she told me that I can do it, that if I do my best I can reach it, I can reach that goal. She was always very encouraging.

**Student 4: Donna** is a female Hispanic student and a recent immigrant from a Central American country, who had arrived in the United States with her family three years before. As a non-working, full-time student, at the time of the interview, she had accumulated 38 college credits and held a GPA of 3.92.

She started the interview by sharing her deep admiration for her Math professor who had recently achieved national recognition and an award, and credited this “amazing” professor for inspiring her to select a college major in Computer Science. The student offered the following explanation for the latter development:

But I have to say that the way she talks about teaching and the way she talks about her job was the thing that actually made the most impact on me. And surely, after I was over with her class I decided to change my major.

She shared this was a change from her initial decision to pursue a major in Foreign Languages, in preparation for to law school and in meeting parental expectations, mostly of her mother, who wanted her “to be a doctor or a lawyer, you know parents…” The student further reflected on academic challenges, the positive learning outcomes of faculty high expectations, as well as the availability and ease of communication with tutors and professors on a “small campus” where “they’ve always been there for me”. She related her efforts in overcoming the language barrier and the fear and shyness she initially experienced in the classroom. She shared she appreciated the formal and informal interactions with faculty which had helped her develop communication skills and noted the importance of classroom presentations and public speaking assignments coupled with constructive feedback from faculty on her performance. She was grateful for the academic challenges she had faced and restated the developmental effects and learning outcomes stemming from faculty high expectations and student increased efforts. The student further highlighted that, “the hardest thing I’ve ever done is write
essays” and at that point in time was working on it because of “that professor”. She summarized the role of faculty on her development in college in the following way:

They (the faculty) are here to help me, and if I have any questions, I’ll just go to them. It’s not like they are making it hard, you know? It’s just they are here to help me and I see it that way. I don’t see college as something difficult as of right now. But when I transfer, they’re going to kill me (laughs). I like the routine and the fact that we have classes five times a week. Otherwise, I would go crazy, I don’t know what to do and so I actually like it, the way classes are done and the way the professors are just there for you. It just kind of makes everything right in the world for me. Like, it gives me a purpose to wake up in the morning.

Student 5: Enrique is a Hispanic male who had been taking classes at the college campus for over two years and, at the time of the interview, held a high position in a student organization on campus. As such, he shared he was present and actively engaged on campus outside his regular class schedule. His visibility and involvement in extracurricular activities on campus had resulted in closer communications with both students and faculty, as related by him during the interview. At that time he was a non-working student, had accumulated 88 college credits and held a GPA of 3.1. He had set his mind on a career in the healthcare industry and was also learning to play the guitar.

Enrique shared he was happy on campus and valued the personal contact with faculty and their availability and readiness to help, “ever since I joined college, the faculty have always been there to lend a hand.” He acknowledged the impact of faculty on his growth and credited his development of competence and academic skills to faculty high expectations of students coupled with their support and care. He reflected on how his professor in science had helped him build confidence through encouragement to speak up, to voice his opinion, and to think critically. Similar to the other interviewed students, he credited his faculty for helping him overcome the fear of public speaking and improve his academic writing skills. He described his experience with his professor in English and her spending time with him during her office hours to provide constructive feedback on his writing assignments. He noted her acknowledgement of his potential, and providing practical advice on the importance of continuous practice and of seeking help with tutors in the writing center. He concluded with a smile that, “faculty are tough because they want you to grow” and added that, “their support and their constant mentorship pushed me to believe in myself, to believe that I can make a difference, that I am the difference, so…”

Enrique shared he wanted his faculty to be proud of him and clearly stated his ambition to reach their level of achievement and to even surpass his teachers. When asked about the impact of faculty on his development of purpose and goals, he emphatically stated and repeated, “I have a name”, further clarifying that faculty recognize and address him by his first name on campus. He stated, “It’s incredible, it’s a nice feeling to know that you matter.”

He summarized the impact his English professor and his Chemistry professor had had on him as, “in every single way”. His English professor “instructed me to be clear, I believe, as of yet, now, (at) the peak of my writing level.” His Chemistry professor “has
actually helped me become the person that I am today by speaking in class. They’ve taken away that fear of opening myself up to who I am, they have honed me into becoming a better writer and a better speaker, a better student.”

**Student 6: Faith** is a Hispanic female, a 41-year-old mother of two and a high-school drop-out, who first attended the college to complete her GED after coming to the country as an immigrant. Encouraged by her son, also a student at the college, as well as her family and friends, she decided to stay on, enroll in college-level courses, and pursue a degree in Psychology. Through her story, Faith revealed she was a true believer in the power of education and opportunity even during trying times of transition. She sounded truly optimistic and laughingly shared how her son supported her in overcoming her fear of adapting to an unfamiliar educational system and of being “too old” to go back to school. He now called her “the poster child” of the college. In addition to taking a full load of semester credits, she shared she worked 20 hours per week and, at the time of the interview, was close to the completion of 24 college credits with a GPA of 4.0. She credited her professors in Speech and in English for overcoming her fear of public speaking and gaining academic writing skills. She also acknowledged the role of her professors for the exposure and for “learning to communicate with people from other cultures.” Faith asserted she “was also learning things that would be good for my career in the future.” She reflected on the new dynamics of a college writing course and that she did not feel it was a “burden”, the latter expectation she explained was drawn from her experiences “back in the days when it was “like a boring thing, sitting in the chair and writing, writing, writing, nothing else.” She was especially pleased with the civic engagement component in her English course which provided an opportunity of “giving back to the community and getting involved in what was going on around the school, preserving the planet, things like that I think are very important.” She also perceived the community service piece as a way to “connect with teachers and doing things that are helpful.”

Faith reflected on the role of academic support and acknowledged the impact of the campus tutors and faculty support in overcoming the language barrier and improving her college writing skills. She proudly shared she ended up with an A in her first English class and concluded, “I was surprised because it was a skill I didn’t even know that I had.” She shared she had gradually built confidence in her writing and speaking skills through “good teaching”.

She summarized the impact of her return to school and the effects of her interactions with her teaching faculty so far in the following way:

And they have this whole world in front of me and now it’s like, “I’m not going back”. I’m this whole new person and I really like what I’m doing. And happy with what I’m doing. And it’s a lot of work because I work, I have two kids and a house, and I’m coming full time to school. So it’s hard work but I’m doing it in a way that it’s not that stressful. It’s kind of like, fun. I wake up and I don’t mind that my first class is at 7 am, I’m happy I’m going to school and I never miss a day. It’s not something that I think, “Oh, my God, going to school…I don’t want it.” Now I want it, I’m happy doing this.
**Student 7: Gio** is a male Hispanic student who, at the time of the interview, had accumulated 30 college credits and held a GPA of 3.0. As a high school student, he had taken dual enrollment courses at the college, then spent an academic year at a small, out-of-state, private four-year college in the North, and subsequently returned to enroll in the Computer Animation associate in science program at the community college.

At the start of the interview, he offered a short summary of his perspective of the impact of faculty on his development in college. He emphasized the importance of faculty encouragement and high expectations of his academic performance, “she expects from me, like, a certain degree of excellence”, and acknowledged the role of academic support and improved writing skills for success in college-level classes. He further elaborated on the benefits of constructive faculty feedback on individual student assignments. He gave an example of his faculty in English Composition who, in addition to working individually with students, also used technology to enhance learning. He concluded, “So, we learn a lot from her, she’s really pushed us to be better writers, in her English Comp 1 class.” He shared his perceived connection between improved writing skills gained through English writing and literature courses, and the skill of character development needed in Computer Animation, i.e. his choice of degree. For his understanding of character development in animation, he credited and shared his appreciation of the guidance and encouragement from his “writing teachers over the years.”

Gio made a clear distinction between faculty who are accessible and available, with whom a student can sit down and talk about “anything that is going on with your life”, and faculty who are hard to reach and difficult to talk to. He made a point that interactions with faculty occur when students seek those interactions and make an effort to see faculty during their office hours.

When reflecting on purpose, he admitted there were times when he had questioned his ability and the need for completion of a college degree. He credited his faculty for their encouragement in his decision to persist:

There was one point that I felt like maybe college wasn’t the best choice, maybe it wasn’t really. Not that it was a bad idea because college never is bad idea, maybe it just wasn’t for me. But then I thought back to what my instructors have been saying about the kinds of careers that I was looking at and that it would be a better option to stick it out in college. Although, if I wanted to leave and do anything else, that would be fine. And I really need to go to college but it’s a choice so…I thought about it and yes, it’s a choice and a very big commitment that I will go through, so...I decided to go through with it and they applaud me for that.

**Student 8: Hugo** is a male Hispanic student who, at the time of the interview, had accumulated 57 credits and held a GPA of 2.71. He shared his major academic interests and strengths were in English literature and that he had been actively engaged with the campus student publications during the previous year. It was at that time that he acquired, through faculty recommendation, a part-time, 25-hour-per-week position as a student-tutor at the learning center of the campus where he was still working at the time of the interview. During the conversation, he offered a unique insight on his perspective of the
transition from a student to a tutor at the same campus, on being “included in that (faculty) family” and in “feeling comfortable in being a little more informal” with college employees. He shared that while taking classes and interacting with faculty, he had taken special care to observe and learn from their teaching practices and techniques and to apply those while interacting with students at the learning center:

I know what is expected of the teacher. Just because when students come in to see me with papers and any questions and concerns they may have, there is a guideline of what is expected of the student when they come to see me. Further on, he stated his deliberate observations on how faculty act, talk, and interact with others have been beneficial in making him really pick up on what works for students and what doesn’t work.

Hugo shared he took pride in his professional relationships with faculty and instructors at the learning center and asserted that his job of helping students made him feel “valuable” and “worth something.” More importantly, he had observed that employees at the learning center were “having fun” and loved their job which made him want to progress and give back, to “get those degrees already and see how I can touch other people’s lives.” This is how he described his experience as a tutor and student on campus:

These are all people that are great at what they do. And it’s really cool to be able to take a little bit from everyone and to also help out students because one thing that we always talk about there. Since I am also a student I know what’s expected from tutors, from teachers…just like as an instructor I know what’s expected of the students, you know, so it’s really cool to have that knowledge of both sides and to be able to use it.

Hugo reflected on the values of faculty mentorship and that he related to two of his English professors, in particular, because he “sees a lot of similarities” between himself and them. One of those faculty served as the advisor of a student club in support of school children in a Central American country. Through involvement in the organization, Hugo acknowledged his developmental outcomes and his gaining a global perspective, a compassionate outlook, and a better understanding of the world. He shared he took pride in the fundraising activities that had helped “these poor kids” and expressed satisfaction in his newly-found purpose as a result of his involvement in a faculty-led project.
Appendix B

Categories

1. Availability
   A. Approachability
   B. Help
   C. Support
   D. Time

2. Care
   A. Knowing students
   B. Understanding students
   C. Encouragement
   D. Compassion
   E. Awards

3. Fear
   A. Of challenge
   B. Of a new start
   C. Of a new culture
   D. Of a new language
   E. Of expression
      I. of public speaking
      II. of expressing opinions
   F. Of faculty
   G. Of college
   H. Overcoming fear

4. Transitions
   A. Transition from high school to college
   B. Transition to university
   C. Acculturation
      I. to a new country
      II. to a new language
      III. To a new culture
      IV. To a new education system
   D. From student to worker and from worker to student
5. Academics
   A. High/low expectations
   B. Clear guidelines
   C. Constructive feedback
   D. Challenge
   E. Effort

6. Teaching
   A. Faculty expertise
   B. Dedication to the teaching profession
   C. Gift of teaching
   D. Joy of teaching
   E. Lack of teaching skills

7. Competence
   A. Writing
   B. Speaking
   C. Critical thinking
   D. Real life application of learning
   E. Improvement
   F. Motivation

8. Confidence
   A. Development
   B. Self-esteem
   C. Maturity
   D. Choice
   E. Failure

9. Purpose
   A. Choice of major
   B. Aspirations
   C. Goals
   D. Career focus
10. Involvement
   A. Engagement in extracurricular activities
   B. Social responsibility
   C. Giving back
   D. Work on campus

11. Stories
   A. Faculty success stories
   B. Student stories of hardship
   C. Student stories of success
   D. Inspiration
   E. Role models

12. Values
   A. Family
   B. Inspiration
   C. Appreciation
   D. Expectations
   E. Value of opportunity

13. Other
   A. Online education
   B. Tutors
   C. Mentors
   D. Administrators
   E. Recommendations
Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire for Student Participants

Dear student,
The information from the questions below will be kept strictly confidential. I will use your contact information to schedule our interview only if you are selected to participate. Thank you!

Michaela Tomova

Q1 Name and student ID_____________________________________________

Q2 Telephone __________________________________________________________

Q3 Preferred email address ________________________________________________

Q4 Gender

☐ Male ( )

☐ Female ( )

Q5 Age______________________

Q6 Ethnicity

☐ White, non-Hispanic ( )

☐ Black non-Hispanic ( )

☐ Hispanic ( )

☐ Asian/Pacific Islander ( )

☐ Alaskan/native American ( )

☐ Multiethnic ( )

☐ Other ( ) ________________

Q7 Primary language spoken at home

☐ English ( )

☐ Spanish ( )

☐ Other ( ) ________________
Q8 On which campus do you take classes? Choose all that apply.

- Campus 1 ( )
- Campus 2 ( )
- Campus 3 ( )
- Campus 4 ( )
- Campus 5 ( )
- Campus 6 ( )
- Campus 7 ( )
- Campus 8 ( )
- Other institution ( ) ________________

Q9 Do you work while in college?

- Yes ( )
- If yes, how many hours per week do you work? ________________
- No ( )

Q10 How many semesters have you been at MDC?

- This is my first semester ( )
- More than one semester ( )
- More than two semesters ( )

Q11 How many college credits do you have? ________________

Q12 What is your college major? ________________

Q13 Do you have any questions for me? ________________
Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

Date_________________

Dear student,

You have volunteered to participate in a study on student development in the community college. The information you provide is valuable and will help increase the overall understanding of the student population, and how you perceive interactions with teaching faculty affect your development of competence and purpose while in college.

Your participation is voluntary, it relates to past experiences, and in no way will affect your status or academic performance at the college. You may choose to withdraw at any time.

Participation in the interview will require one hour of your time outside classroom hours. You will be asked to answer questions related to your college experience that will inform the study. Your responses will be recorded and the researcher will take notes. All information and recordings will be kept strictly confidential. For the purposes of the study, participants’ names will be assigned a code and real names will not be used throughout the process.

The study is conducted by Michaela Tomova, (title and position) at the college, as part of a dissertation to fulfill the requirements of a Doctoral Degree in Higher Education at the University of Miami, Coral Gables.

Student statement:

I agree to participate in the study of students’ perception of psychosocial gains in the community college and the investigation of the effects of student-faculty interactions on the development of competence and purpose. I understand what my participation is on a voluntary basis and that I can withdraw at any time.

Participant name and signature____________________________________________

I guarantee the confidentiality of the student participants and the ethical principles of research.

Researcher name and signature___________________________________________
Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Some of the most important outcomes of your college education include your increased competence and learning as well as clarity of future goals and purpose in life.

When in college you communicate with faculty inside and outside the classroom. Think about and reflect on how your faculty have influenced and encouraged you and your development while in college.

1. Tell me about your experience with one or more of your faculty. How do you think they have affected your development in college?

Prompts to question 1:
How have faculty influenced your:
   a) classroom learning and academic skills
   b) ability to communicate
   c) view of your abilities and confidence in yourself
   d) other ways?

2. Tell me about how your interactions with faculty have influenced your purpose while in college and in life in general?

Prompts to question 2:
How have faculty influenced your:
   a) decision to be and stay in college – your aspirations
   b) who and what you want to be – your goals
   c) personal interest
   d) other?

3. How can your professors help you become more competent and purposeful in your education and in life?

Prompts to question 3:
Tell me about your favorite teacher. Do you have a role model?
Is there anything more you would like to share about your college experiences and specifically, about what you expected and what you learned from your faculty?