

JOURNEY TO THE PRESIDENCY:  
STORIES FROM WOMEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

A Dissertation  
by  
SARA ALLISON CARR HOLMES

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## **Abstract**

### **JOURNEY TO THE PRESIDENCY: STORIES FROM WOMEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS**

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Currently women are grossly underrepresented in presidential positions in higher education, specifically community colleges in North Carolina. Using a feminist perspective, this qualitative case study explored the journey through leadership of six women presidents within the North Carolina community college system. Specifically, my study included a detailed examination of the perceived barriers and challenges faced by six women presidents as well as the factors motivating each to advance to the position of president. Interviews were the primary means of data collection; however, other documents and artifacts were collected and analyzed. Transcripts were coded and analyzed to reveal commonalities and differences among pathways. From the analysis, two success indicator themes as well as three barriers and challenges themes emerged. The success indicator themes included descriptions of and stories about significant people and influential networks of support, while the barriers and challenges faced by presidents were characterized by experiences of oppression, selection and hiring practices, and disconnection. Themes were further divided to review experiences by veteran presidents versus those of newer presidents. Veteran presidents were those with more than 10 years of experience in their current position as well as more than 20 years in

education, while new presidents were those with less than 10 years of experience as president and less than 20 years in education. Because the focus of this study was to highlight practices and experiences that impeded and motivated women to advance, it was important to compare stories to interpret the range of motivators and hindrances for advancement. This study provided rich, thick data from stories in interviews which contribute insight into possible changes of practices within community colleges so that more women, African-American and other minority women, are able to progress into executive leadership roles.