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Faculty and Student Interactions at the Community College: An Examination of the Interaction Order

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FACULTY AND STUDENT INTERACTIONS AT THE COMMUNITY
COLLEGE: AN EXAMINATION OF THE INTERACTION ORDER

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FACULTY AND STUDENT INTERACTIONS AT THE COMMUNITY
COLLEGE: AN EXAMINATION OF THE INTERACTION ORDER

by

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DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
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Abstract

Community college students represent 46% of all incoming freshman undergraduate students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). Increasingly, research on community colleges is focused on student success and in particular student engagement. One area of student engagement is faculty and student interactions which are an essential part of the collegiate experience.

The purpose of this study is to examine faculty and student interactions at the community college, in particular, the type of interactions, the nature of the interactions as well as how students interpret their interactions with faculty members. With an ever growing emphasis on accountability via student success outcomes within community colleges, it becomes important to better understand how best to support students.

This study asked the following research questions: What type of interactions occur? What is the nature of the interactions? and How do students (describe or interpret) the interactions?

Three primary theories guided this study: Goffman's (1967, 1969, 1983) interaction order, Stanton-Salazar's (1997) institutional agents and Rendón's (1994) validation theory. These three frameworks were used in this qualitative, interpretive approach, which primarily utilized interviews to examine and understand faculty and student interactions.

There were 28 interviews as well as participant observation that was conducted at two campuses within one community college. There were 19 students and 9 faculty members that were interviewed and nine themes emerged from the analysis.

Specifically, this research can aid policy and practice within community colleges as they seek ways in which to assist students in their educational endeavors.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Three hundred and seventy years after the first college in our fledgling nation was established to train Puritan ministers in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, it is no exaggeration to declare that higher education in the United States has become one of our greatest success stories.

(Preamble: A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education. Report by the United States Department of Education, 2008)

Higher Education

Higher education expectations in the United States are tied to long held beliefs that getting a degree will bring with it economic mobility, social mobility and success. In fact, some components of the American Dream have been directly tied to achieving a college degree. Recently, President Barack Obama has initiated a two-fold plan with regard to community colleges. This plan has primarily focused on prompting 5 million individuals to enroll in a community college and or a vocational program by the year 2020. Secondly, in the 2015 State of the Union Speech, President Obama set forth a vision for a long term educational plan in the United States to provide tuition free community college for individuals who can maintain a 2.5 and who are willing to adhere to specific guidelines in terms of programs and graduation timelines. Also, community colleges would also have to provide guarantees to automatic transfers to four year institutions or vocational programs that have a proven history of high graduation rates (Hudson, 2015). This is significant because more than half of all college students start at a community college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014).

College degrees still hold prestige despite the economic recession which began in the United States in 2007 (Rampell, 2009). It has been estimated that people holding a college degree can earn up to \$570,000 more over a lifetime than a person holding just a high school diploma (Greenstone & Looney, 2011). Additionally, earning an Associate Degree can mean

that an individual can increase their earnings between 13%-22%. (Karpilow & Reeves, 2013). Most recently, it has been suggested that a college graduate earns about 70 percent more than the average person with only a high school degree (Greenstone & Looney, 2010). Hence, higher education continues to be emphasized and is often synonymous with upward social mobility in the United States. However, recent findings suggest that there are some concerns regarding the accessibility, affordability and accountability of the very institutions that hold the upward mobility promise.

In 2006, United States Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings formed a commission on the future of higher education examining the effectiveness of postsecondary education in the United States. The yearlong study resulted in a report entitled: *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education* found that the areas that are in need of most attention include: access, affordability, quality, and accountability. Additionally, the report indicated that there are some significant shortcomings within the U.S. higher education system to include: a multi-layered confusing financial aid system, students who spend years taking remedial classes for skills they should have mastered in high school and college graduates who lack the reading, writing and thinking skills that are expected by employers (U.S Department of Education, 2006).

As it relates to access, the commission noted that “unduly limited by the complex interplay of inadequate preparation, lack of information about college opportunities, and persistent financial barriers” make it difficult for individuals, especially low-income and racial ethnic minorities to access higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p.7). This issue of access is not the only issue as access does not always equate with completion. In 2011, the completion rate for first-time undergraduate students who began their pursuit of a bachelor’s degree at a 4-year degree-granting institution in fall 2005 was 59 percent (NCES, 2014). To add

to the complexity of access and completion rates is the fact that students who transfer and complete a degree at another institution are not included as completers in these rates. Access to higher education does not always translate to being able to complete the higher education trajectory.

Moreover, the report contends that the current financing of higher education is dysfunctional and while tuition has increased and funding in states has decreased, students are concerned about their options and it is more often the case that need-based financial aid is not keeping pace with rising tuition. As higher education costs increase, the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance estimates that in the first decade of the new century, financial barriers will keep nearly two million low- and middle-income college qualified high school graduates from attending college (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Hence, the push for higher education is crucial while the affordability of a college degree remains elusive for some.

However, the yearlong study on the future of higher education, as it relates to the quality of student learning, found some additional concerns. For some, while the focus has been primarily on getting students into college, too little attention has been paid on helping students graduate. Hence, approximately 66 percent of full-time four-year college students complete a baccalaureate degree within six years. These numbers also reflect the percentage of students who begin full-time in four-year institutions and graduate within six years (NECS, 2014).

As reflected from the Spellings Report, higher education is one of the key components that are crucial to individual economic security, but the deliverer of that education remains an important consideration. Although most people envision a typical college undergraduate fresh out of high school, 18 years old getting ready to embark on their academic journey at a four

institution, the facts are more complex. Of the nation's 12 million undergraduates, more than 4 in 10 attend a community college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014).

Community colleges in the United States are ever evolving institutions. Currently, there are 1,132 community colleges in the United States with 986 public institutions, 115 independent institutions and 31 tribal institutions (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). These two-year colleges are typically open admission institutions, offering transfer credit, vocational education, contract education for local employers, remediation, and community service programs. The community college mission is one that has historically been focused upon democratization of higher education. However, some contend that the community college reinforces inequalities between rich and poor (Goldrick-Rab, Harris, Mazzeo & Kienzl, 2009). Although there are some unique tensions regarding community colleges, the larger goals of these institutions remain intact and they include: an open-access admissions policy, a comprehensive educational program, a focus on community programs, teaching and lifelong learning (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014).

Moreover, in conjunction to these goals, community colleges try to be all things to all people despite the fact that broad scale social forces swirl about them; community colleges are propelled mainly by their own internal dynamics (Cohen & Brawer, 2014). Community colleges are also seen as contradictory institutions. Supporters contend that community colleges increase baccalaureate attainment by providing access to higher education for students who would otherwise not attend college, while critics argue that these institutions decrease baccalaureate attainment for students who would otherwise attend a 4-year institution (Alfonso, 2006; Keene, 2008). Additionally, Brint & Karabel (1989) argue that political and economic elites have

historically promoted community colleges to socialize the cost of training workers and reproduce class structures which then fail to live up to the democratic promise of which it was intended.

Most often higher education discussions in the United States are poised and focused on four year institutions as community colleges have not received as much attention as their university counterparts. This can be justified in the fact that community colleges suffer from low completion rates, especially among students from disadvantaged backgrounds. For students from low-SES backgrounds, these rates were even lower as only one-third of community college students earned a formal degree within six years of enrollment (NECS, 2014).

Today, community colleges are often the first place of contact for many students, especially students who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are first generation students (Kariplow & Reeves, 2013; Rosenbaum & Deil-Amen, Person 2009). In fact, half of all college bound students start at one of the 1,132 community colleges in the United States as enrollment for community colleges was at 12.8 million students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). The information for community college enrollment for the fall 2012, which is the most recent data, is listed below:

Table 1.1: Community College Headcount Enrollment (Fall 2013)

Program type	#	%	Attendance	#	%
Credit	7.4 M	61%	Full-time	4.5 M	61%
Continuing Education	5.0 M	40%	Part-Time	2.9 M	39%
Total	12.4 M	100%			

Source: American Association of Community Colleges.(2013) Fast Facts. Retrieved from <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Pages/fastfactsfactsheet.aspx> Estimated change 2014: -3.4%

Additionally, the demographics of community college students indicate that students are typically older 21-39 years old, 39 per cent which are first generation, 57 per cent are women, 50 per cent are Caucasian, 20 percent Latino and 14 per cent African-American and 6 per cent Asian-American (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). The information for the demographic data for community college students is provided below:

Table 1.2 Community College Student Demographics (Fall 2013).

Age	%	Gender	%	Ethnicity	%
Average	28	Women	57	White	50%
Median	24	Men	43	Hispanic	20%
				African-America	14%
				Asian	6%
				Native-American	1%
				2 or more races	3%
				Non-resident	1%

Source: American Association of Community Colleges, (2013). Fast Facts. Retrieved from <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Pages/fastfactsfactsheet.aspx>

Student engagement has been a highly researched area, especially in the area of student success as studies have found that the more students are engaged in the institution they attend, the more likely they will remain at that institution (Astin, 1984, 2005; Tinto, 1993). More specifically, Tinto's interactionist theory (1993) and Astin's theory of involvement (1984; 2005) highlight the important role that faculty-student interactions play in the student attrition and persistence rates.

Although, most of the research on faculty and student interactions has focused primarily on four year institutions, very little attention has historically been paid to community colleges (Karp, Hughes& O’Gara, 2008). In fact, past research has suggested that faculty and student interactions are significant from the student’s perspective.

The National Survey of Student Engagement has been collecting data on student engagement in the form of surveys for the last 16 years. The survey has been administered to over 4.5 million students since 2000. This survey asks students various questions about the interaction they have with students and has found that faculty and student interaction have added to the student college experience. These surveys ask the student several questions that include discussing grades, papers or working on assignments inside or outside of class (NSSE, 2014). Kuh et al. (2005) similarly found that .meaningful interactions between faculty and students are meaningful from the student’s perspective as they can contribute to persistence.

In their book, *How college affects students: A third decade of research*, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) arrived at a similar conclusion as they report that faculty-student contact benefits students cognitively, interpersonally, and developmentally. They also found that increased interaction between faculty and students serves to strengthen the bonds students have with their institution, thereby increasing the likelihood of social integration and persistence.

Lundberg & Schreiner (2004) explored faculty and student engagement and its relationship to learning on seven different ethnic groups. The researchers surveyed over 4,000 students of color who indicated that frequent and high quality interactions was a predictor for learning for these students.

Thus, interactions between faculty and students at the community college are necessary to understand as the first contact with higher education for the majority of college students is the community college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore faculty and student interactions and in particular, the type of interactions, the nature of the interactions and the way in which students interpret their interactions with faculty. The study contributes to the current literature on the interactions between faculty and students at the community college. As noted earlier, the current literature relating specifically to faculty and student interactions at the community college is sparse. Hence, this study will contribute to the current literature on student engagement at the community college through the lens of faculty and student interactions. Increasingly, the conversations about higher education have become focused upon the community colleges, and in particular student achievement and success. Part of that success lies in the relationship between faculty and students (Kuh et.al 2005; 2007, Tinto,2000; Rendón,2011). The role of faculty as important institutional agents who provide forms of social and cultural capital through varied interactions can help students' social and academic integration (Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

Additionally, Kuh et al. (2005) noted that as a result of faculty and student interaction, faculty members can become role models, mentors and guides for lifelong learning which are essential to high-quality learning experiences. These experiences with faculty can be highly beneficial as faculty members are usually the individuals who spent the most time with students in a given semester.

Moreover, it is hoped that this study will shed additional insight into the community college experience and what students take away from their interactions with faculty members. These settings have historically not been on the forefront of discussions about higher education in the United States. Therefore, this purpose of this study is to shed light on how students understand their experiences with faculty at the community college.

Significance of the the Study

This study is important for future practice, policy and research. First, this study can inform administration about how to best support their students. The era of accountability has come to the community college as states are demanding more tangible results as it relates to student outcomes. Student success measures have now been the primary way in which state legislatures measure “success” in community colleges. Hence, this study could help stakeholders at the community college to organize their programs around best practices that could include more intentional programs led by higher education institutions that focus specifically on faculty and student interactions. Secondly, this study will be able to inform community college faculty about the valuable role they play inside and outside of the classroom. The majority of the time, faculty is the first line of interaction that students encounter. Students see their professors more often and for longer periods of time as a semester can be long as five months. Therefore, it may be helpful to use this study and others to inform faculty training efforts on perhaps student support measures which include faculty and student interaction.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As mentioned earlier, the primary focus of this study is faculty and student interactions. Before exploring those important relationships, it becomes necessary to understand the origins of the community college. The background on community colleges will be discussed as well as how these institutions have evolved from their 20th century role as a supporter to the workforce to their 21st century role as providers to half of all college students in the United States (Leonard, 2010). Research on the role of student engagement within community colleges and in particular the interactions that take place between faculty and students include both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches. The research in this area has also varied from pinpointing more practical approaches to faculty-student interactions while other research has had a more theoretical focus.

The Community College

Community colleges are relatively new educational institutions compared to their university counterparts. In the 1900's the United States experienced an increase in secondary school enrollment and a more populist view of the importance of education in public life, emphasizing the need for what would become community colleges. As demand for post-secondary education increased, numerous educators proposed the idea of junior colleges in order to accommodate growing demands. One of the first junior colleges, Joliet Junior College in Illinois opened in 1901, with a focus primarily on general liberal arts studies. The colleges then transitioned in 1930's following the Great Depression to job-training programs in an effort to ease unemployment. Then, in 1948, the Truman Commission suggested the creation of a network of public, community-based colleges to serve local needs and these junior colleges also officially

changed their name to community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

The 1960's ushered in the opening of 457 new community colleges around the nation fueled by the social activism of the baby boomer generation who wanted equality of opportunity in education. Additionally, the community college of the 1970's and 1980's focused upon broader community interests that included vocational training and certification of various industries. Today, there are 1,123 community colleges in the nation including private and tribal colleges, which enroll 12.4 million students in the United States (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Most recently, community colleges have become the focal point of national dialogue as discussions about the significance of community colleges has been highlighted by President Barack Obama who initiated a White House Summit on Community Colleges in 2010. The summit was the first-ever inclusion of community colleges into the wider political discourse in the United States with the hope of promoting the critical role community colleges play not only in developing the workforce but also in reaching larger higher education goals. Since the inception of the summit, a number of developments have occurred, including offering the public the opportunity to participate in generating ideas for future satellite summits and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has provided financial support for a new community college expansion program entitled, Completion by Design, a \$35 million investment over five years to 3-5 multi-campus groups of community colleges in nine states serving the largest populations of low-income students (Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Ohio, New York, North Carolina, Texas, and Washington (White House, 2011). This is an important development for community

colleges which have historically been overshadowed and overlooked by the more traditional four-year institutions.

Community colleges are open access institutions that enroll about half of all students who are enrolled in higher education institutions. Today, community college students are usually first generation students who tend to have lower family incomes and who are racial/ethnic minorities. Additionally, community college students are older, working either full or part-time and are recipients of some type of financial aid to include approximately 33% of students who receive Pell Grants (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Of the 12.4 million students who attend community college, the demographics indicate that students are typically older 21-39 years old, 39 percent which are first generation, 57 percent are women, 50 percent are Caucasian, 20 percent Latino and 14 percent African-American and 6 percent Asian-American (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Community colleges have not only been focused on their increasing enrollments, but it have also been concerned about persistence, as community colleges have completion rates of 31 percent for first-time undergraduate students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). Community college students are more likely to reflect the factors that put students most at risk for not attaining a degree (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2012).

Research on community colleges has been focused upon student success, persistence rates, experiences occurring inside and outside of the classroom, involvement in campus community activities, participation in special programs and departure from college all together. Additionally, there have been some foundational findings on the examination of role of the community college in general. Some of the research on community colleges stems from tracing the linear history of community colleges within the United States (Bragg, 2001) as well as an

examination of its contradictory role as a provider of remedial education on the one hand and producer of workers for the evolving market economy on the other hand (Freeman, 2007).

Additionally, Brint & Karabel (1989) have argued the historical and contemporary role of the community college involves a larger macro purpose in that the institution has become central to the contemporary pursuit of the American dream. For Brint & Karabel (1989), the divergence between community colleges and the democratic ideal is rooted in current political, economic and social contexts. This divergence has primarily based upon delivering on promises of democratic ideals and the realities of access and opportunities of the current educational system. The linkage between community colleges to the democratic ideals embedded in American culture has provided for some internal struggles for community colleges. For the most part, community colleges have historically been buffeted by contradictory pressures of capitalism and democracy, efficiency and equality and diversion and democratization (Brint & Karabel, 1989). It is important to note the evolution of the community college in connection to its current institutional structure have lead to a better understanding of how these two factors play a role in the student experience at the community college.

Building upon early work that has been completed on the college student experience as it relates to persistence rates (Tinto,1993, 1997) and the experiences of first generation students attending community colleges (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991,2005; Pascarella, Terenzini, Wolnick & Pierson,2007) have provided greater insight as to how students navigate higher education settings. Pascarella and Chapman (1983). Moreover, Stahl and Pavel (1992) followed with the use of multiple variables to examine academic, socioeconomic, and motivational variables as it relates to students' attrition rates at community colleges. While student persistence in higher education settings have been the focus of early research, there have also

been other researchers who provided additional revelation as it relates to non-traditional community college students.

For example, Rendón (1994, 2002) reviewed the validation of culturally diverse students and how in class and outside of class validating experiences are important to academic and social adjustment of students who may be uncertain of their success on a college campus. Student Validation Theory (Rendón, 1994, 2002) has six elements that contribute to the academic and personal growth of students, one of which involves the proactive role of faculty as important agents that assists students in their academic and overall individual development. Thus, Rendón's (2002) validation framework as outlined in "Community College Puente," has been pivotal as it employed a framework for working with and affirming students of color, many of whom are low-income and the first in their families to attend college. These early works have helped to lay the foundation in attempting to understand the factors affecting the academic and social experiences of students and how those experiences contribute to student success.

One of the more recent contributions to the dialogue regarding community colleges within the last five years is the work that is being done at the Community College Leadership Program housed at the University of Texas at Austin. This work has primarily focused on how community college student experiences are linked to student success measures. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) has been an integral part of understanding of student engagement at the community college. These surveys have been utilized for 10 years and most recently have focused their attention on attempting to identify and promote high-impact educational practices in community colleges. Additionally, the survey examines the levels of engagement between faculty and students (Community College Survey of Student Engagement 2013).

Also, The Lumina Foundation, a private entity which has as its primary objective providing high quality educational experiences and increasing college attainment for students who have traditionally been under-represented in higher education, has focused on community colleges through several funding initiatives. Moreover, Lumina has been at the forefront of the higher education discourse in terms of attempting to make fundamental changes in higher education in what they call “disruptive innovations.” While Lumina continues to make grants to educational institutions and other nonprofits for original programs, it also contributes limited resources to support selected community and other charitable organizations. Recently, Lumina have advocated best practice models as well as student success paradigms that are specifically focused around interactions between faculty and student in higher education settings (Lumina, 2013).

Faculty and Student Interaction

A significant amount of research has focused upon the effects of faculty-student interactions on student outcomes in four year as well as two year higher education institutions. Research has indicated that student to faculty interaction is important to the growth of students. Student and faculty interaction have a great influence on student development especially when faculty make themselves available outside of class. These interactions have contributed to student’s academic and social development (Astin, 2005; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Tinto, 1993, 2002; Deil-Amen, 2010; Carrasco-Nungary, 2011).

Furthermore, while some research has explored best practice models, others have examined specific instances of interaction. Cox (2013) explored the significance of faculty and student interaction and indicated that there were certain factors that supported the conclusion that faculty and student engagement assisted with attrition rates. Some of the variables of the

interaction that Cox (2013) focused upon include: discussing grades with faculty, asking questions in class, and talking to faculty about career plans. Davenport (2012) proposed similar findings that higher level of student-faculty interaction led to higher GPAs ,especially for Latinos students. This research supports others who have suggested that faculty and student interactions are an integral aspect of community college environments. Some current research reflects that frequent and high quality interaction can have more immediate results as Ewer (2007) examined the academic interactions of students within a community college setting and assessed whether those interactions affected the student retention for the following semester. Ewer (2007) found that students who connected with other students inside and outside of class, through interactions with faculty inside and outside of class, and with other staff through academic encounters, extra-curricular activities or other campus connections, graduated, transferred to another institution, or reenrolled the following semester at a rate of 91 percent.

Although more traditional in-class interactions have been one of the primary focal points for researchers, others have sought to explore the out-of class interactions and the level and effect that those interactions have on students. Gauthier (2012) revealed that there is no single formula utilized by students and faculty when interacting outside of the classroom, rather the interactions are a combination of shared experiences which translate into student-faculty interaction being an essential component in the student experience. Some have sought to find more specific linkages between faculty and student interactions and the organizations themselves, in this case, the community college. Hence, Nitecki (2009) applied a macro, mezzo and micro level approach to understanding the nature and types of interaction that takes place between faculty and student. She found that in terms of the nature of interactions that those interactions varied because often the interaction is highly dependent upon the individual faculty

member's personality, professional approach and teaching style and most often occurred inside the classroom. Moreover, Nitecki (2009) found that faculty and student interactions have potential to impact student aspiration as well as student confidence.

Faculty and Student Interaction-Four-Year Institutions

Some early studies have focused on faculty and student interaction through the lens of student persistence. Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure focused exclusively on student engagement and student involvement. Tinto (1993) states that the classroom is the central place for student engagement, particularly for commuter students as student and faculty contact has a direct influence on persistence. Other studies such as Astin's (1984) Theory of Involvement concluded that the more students are involved in campus activities whether it is an academic or social activities, the more students learn and the greater their success will be at the college level. In addition, faculty can be an integral part of student persistence as faculty interaction in and outside of the classroom can assist students with individual growth and success (Astin, 1984). It is also important to note that the two above models do not always adequately address the community college student who is likely from a marginalized group (Rendon, Jaloma, & Nora, 2000).

Other researchers (Cox & Orehovec, 2007) using an empirical approach have indicated similar findings as they relate to student and professor interaction. The study focused upon eight different aspects of student-faculty interactions (respect, guidance, approachable, caring, interactions outside of class, connected, accessible, and negative experiences) as predictors of students' academic self-concept, motivation, and academic achievement. For some students, the mere presence of faculty members outside of class was valuable to the student. Thus, the study indicated that the interactions do not need to be academic to be meaningful to the student.

Moreover, the personal interactions between student and faculty can assist the student with feeling like they are important, and through this interaction students can develop meaningful relationships with faculty members. For example, Alderman (2008) analyzed faculty-student interactions at a four year institution and ways in which students interact with faculty members outside of the classroom and found that some of the most meaningful experiences for students stem from students visiting faculty offices during office hours. Alderman (2008) posit that whether the office visit is casual or more serious in nature that the office visit itself sets up the potential for future interactions because the student feels comfortable approaching the faculty member for academic as well as non-academic issues.

Faculty and Student Interaction-Community College

Another important empirical research study has made a contribution to understanding student to faculty relationships focused on two community colleges and how they use their student success courses to help build student to professor relationships. O’Gara, Karp & Hughes (2009) found that students, when prompted, built important relationships with their professors. Moreover, institutions that initiated interactions between faculty and student were found to be important to the student and helped to build a trusted relationship between faculty and student that transcended the community college setting. According to Bharath (2009), institutional prompting of student and faculty interactions can have a significant impact on community college students, especially when it involves mentoring of students. Additionally, students with a higher number of interactions were more likely to persist than students with little or no involvement with faculty regarding personal or family issues. Some interactions between faculty and student are initiated by the institutions themselves through formal mentoring programs that pairs faculty and students for a given period of time (Bharath, 2009). Kerr (2009) noted that

these formal relationships can be mutually important to the student as well as the faculty member as these types of interactions can be a platform for meaningful future interactions. This is consistent with other studies which indicate that meaningful interactions result in noticeable persistence rates (Kuh et al., 2010; Kinloch, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Vito, 2007). Moreover, there have been other studies which pointed to the significance of faculty and student interaction on academic achievement and college satisfaction (Hylton (2013). Similarly, Kim (2006) examined directions of causality between student-faculty interaction and educational outcomes and found college factors predicting student-faculty interaction, as well as different patterns of student faculty interaction by race and that the potential synergy between student-faculty interactions is important to and for students.

Similar findings suggested that interactions whether they are taking place at a community college or four-year institution have an impact on students. Townsend & Wilson (2006) focused on comparing student and faculty relationships at a community college versus a university and found that community college students placed a high emphasis on the interactions they had with their professors, and in some cases they felt as if their professors were available to them and that they could get one on one time with the professors. Even in online distance learning courses, the faculty and student interaction can contribute to students satisfaction with a particular course (Restauri, 2006).

Some research has inserted and added other variables such as race and ethnicity into the discussion of student and faculty interaction at the community college. Other researchers have made additional inquiries into student success as it relates specifically to students of color (Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Rendón, Garcia & Person, 2004; Davenport, 2005, Alford, 2012). This area of research is of particular interest to many as the demographic changes within the

larger United States and Latinos are far more likely than any other ethnic group to be enrolled in a community college (Martinez & Fernández, 2004). This has been supported in other research, especially as it relates to the experiences and outcomes of first generation students in community colleges (Pascarella, Terenzini, Wolniack & Pierson, 2007; Zeidenberg, Jenkins & Calcagno, 2007).

Alford (2012) measured the different levels of student-faculty interaction experienced by ethnic/race group and found that frequent contact with faculty positively predicted persistence for students of all ethnic groups. In addition, Alford (2012) reported that African-American and Hispanic students reported having more frequent interaction with faculty when compared with Multi-ethnic and White students. Isaacs (2011) utilized a phenomenological research method that explored African-American students and their interactions with African-American faculty and staff members and found that these interactions are critically important to the student's academic and social growth.

These studies underscore previous literature that indicated that any and all types of interaction are important and contribute to persistence rates within the community college setting (Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Ewers, 2007; Cox, 2013). Others have examined the impact of interaction between Latino students and Latino faculty and found that there is no direct correlation between positive Hispanic faculty engagement and positive Hispanic student retention. Flint (2008) concluded that although there was no direct correlation between the two groups and retention of Latino students, that there was significant indirect correlations that existed between Latino faculty members and Latino students. Evidence from the study supports existing literature and suggests that frequent student-faculty interaction positively predicts student persistence (Bharath, 2009; Kuh, 2007). Creasy, Jarvis & Gadke (2009) have also

suggested that the development of close, supportive relationships with instructors strongly predict positive student achievement. However, Smith (2010) contended that adjunct faculty at the community college can have an adverse effect on students because of the lack of engagement and availability of part time faculty members.

Additionally, the interactions between faculty and student can be viewed as important in creating social and culture contexts within the faculty to student relationship. Carrasco-Nungaray (2011) used social capital theory and faculty as institutional agents as a way to analyze the impact of faculty and student interaction. Carrasco-Nungaray (2011) contended that the faculty member who has access to resources and share their personal forms of “capital,” such as knowledge, power, privilege, and contacts with students can greatly assist the students with the formation of their own capital. As the student becomes empowered by the acquisition of their own capital, the potential and the possibility of upward mobility through higher education can be achievable. Therefore, the interaction becomes significant especially from the student’s perspective. This finding is congruent with Jovel’s (2008) work which showed that the interactions that take place between Chicana/o faculty and students are shaped by the social capital each one brings into the interaction. Thus, students can construct their own social capital through building strong multidimensional relationships with faculty members of the Chicana/o on community college campuses. Research specifically focused on community colleges have identified faculty as the primary source of social capital both in and out of the classroom. In fact, students indicated that faculty interaction was more pivotal for “social capital transmission” than their exchanges with advisors or counselors (Deil-Amen, 2011,p.82).

Schweinle, Reisetter & Stokes (2009) found in their study that it was important to students that their professors to get to know them as individuals and by their first name. Students

emphasized that a personal and caring relationship with their professors and an open-door policy was important to them. Students value a teacher who can make each person feel as they are an important part of the class. Also, some findings support the significance of faculty and student interactions that impact student experiences and decisions that students make while enrolled at the community college. Moreover, these interactions translate into important mechanisms for student success such as: motivation, support, modeling, inspiration and guidance (Leonard, 2010). Some quantitative research has reviewed faculty and student interactions to determine the relationship between the intent to persist among students using age, sex, generation status, children, employment, and enrollment status as variables. More specifically, students who have higher student-instructor interaction are 1.11 times more likely to persist, and students who have increased instructor-student interaction are 1.22 times more likely to intend to persist (Mitchell, 2011). More importantly, these faculty and student relationships seem to be the glue that help students stay connected to what Tinto (1993, 1997, 2002) calls the academic and social fabric of the school.

Another more recent qualitative research has indicated that one-on-one communication and assistance from faculty confirmed students' abilities, contributed to their academic performance, validated their self-worth, assisted with their sense of competence and belonging, and last contributed to belief in the students' ability to succeed (Deil-Amen, 2011). Additionally, Rockstroth (2011) indicated in numerous interviews with students from three California community colleges that students found that their success within the community college setting was due in part to the interactions between faculty and student.

In sum, the above studies add to the current discussion on community colleges, student and professor relationships. These studies support the idea that research on faculty and student

interaction is significant as the changing student demographic and the ways in which learning institutions understand, accommodate and engage the emerging population will be the focal point for many higher education institutions (Rendón, 2009).

Therefore, in an attempt to understand the complexities of the student to faculty relationships it becomes important to situate this work in a larger theoretical framework. This framework will hopefully expound upon the social phenomenon of interactions that is taking place between faculty and students within the community college.

Theoretical Framework

This study will be situated in body of work termed the interaction order that Goffman (1961, 1975, 1983) explored during his career, which is built upon symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism views meaning as arising within the interaction between people and stems from the early work of Mead (1934). Blumer (1969) who was a student of Mead coined the term symbolic interactionism which holds that when a person interacts with another individual, there is a mutually created meaning about the subject under discussion as well as the interaction itself. There are three basic tenets of symbolic interactionism: 1) people act toward things on the basis of their meanings 2) meanings are not inherent; rather they are negotiated through the interaction with others and 3) meanings can change or modified through the interaction (Blumer, 1969). As students and faculty interact with faculty both of them might step away from that interaction with an understanding that may require them to act based on what happened during the interaction. Moreover, based on the faculty and student interaction that took place above, both parties have a particular unique understanding of what happened during the interaction that is solely their own. Last, faculty and students may ultimately mutually agree upon the interpretation of the exchange that took place between them.

Goffman (1983) extended Blumer (1969) as he examined how people interact with one another as well as the meaning behind the interaction. This is defined as the interaction order as he indicates here:

“Social interactions can be narrowly defined by that which uniquely transpires in social situations, that is, environments in which two or more individuals are in each other’s presence. “

Goffman (1969) indicated that self is on-loan to us from society; it is created through interaction with others and ever changing based on the social context. The significance in Goffman’s (1983) work is that the micro-level analyses of face to face of every day interactions are powerful because the meanings of both verbal and non-verbal behavior help to explain the social order of particular things (Powell, 2013). This theory could be helpful in uncovering the nature and meaning behind the interactions that take place between faculty and student.

For Goffman (1961), the study of every unit of social organization must eventually lead to an analysis of the interaction of its elements. The analysis of interaction between individuals is in many ways is the foundational mechanism by which basic relationships are formed. Goffman (1981) indicated that social structures were dependant on face to face encounters. But, there is an additional element of the social interaction that Goffman (1961) is focused upon which is mainly how the interaction shapes the organization of the self. Thus, an individual’s behavior is not automatic, but rather constructed on the basis of the meanings that are attributed to a particular situation. Meanings are then attributed to both verbal and non-verbal behavior. The body, for example, may be mobilized to create an impression to significant others.

However, some individual behavior is not automatic, but rather constructed on the basis of the meanings that are attributed to a particular situation. In this case, as faculty and students interact with one another inside or outside of the classroom, the meanings and actions beyond

what is spoken needs to be further explored for a greater understanding of what these interactions mean for students. For the most part, this study is aimed at better understanding if the everyday interactions will impact a student academically or socially (Goffman, 1983).

Another element within the social interaction for Goffman (1959) lies in the expressiveness of the individual which involves two activities: the expression that the individual “gives” which means verbal symbols or their substitutes which the individual uses solely to convey information, and “gives off” which relates to a wide range of action that was performed for reasons other than the information conveyed.

An additional theory that may help to explain the interactions between faculty and student lie in the work of Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2010) who has researched the issues of Mexican-American youths in high school. Although this research is aimed at secondary institutions, it may offer some applicability to the community college setting. Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2010) uses the concept of institutional agents to explain how people who have a significant status can help students navigate social infrastructures. Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2010) states that institutional agents have the capacity to transmit directly, or negotiate the transmission of resources and opportunities for their students. Moreover, Stanton-Salazar (1997) has argued that underrepresented students do not adequately possess or have access to the informal or formal social networks. Institutional agents can then make a difference in the lives students as these agents help students understand complex systems, provide advice on academic endeavors as well as provide emotional support and encouragement (Stanton-Salazar, 2010)

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

This study was designed to explore the interactions that take place between faculty students within a community college setting. In an effort to examine the interactions, a qualitative method was employed. The rationale behind this approach stemmed from the belief that students' perspectives and voices on the interactions with their professor may be better understood under the scope of qualitative methodology. Qualitative methods offer a range of epistemological, theoretical and methodological possibilities (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2006). In this case, these possibilities may lie within the in-depth interviews which will be conducted in an attempt to figure out what may be occurring at the community college between faculty and students. As mentioned earlier, previous research on interactions between faculty and students at the community college has historically focused upon student success, engagement and retention (Kuh, 2005, 2007; Pascarella, Terenzini, Wolniak & Pierson, 2007; Tinto, 1993, 1997, 2002).

Moreover, the above mentioned research has not reflected the changing student demographic that has become so evident at the community college with 45% of all undergraduate students attending a community college and 36 % of those students being first generation (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). Hence, few studies attempt to look holistically at the interactions between faculty and students and how those interactions are interpreted from the perspective of the student. And while faculty is one of the first and sometimes only points of contact for students, it becomes imperative to understand the nature and type of interactions as well as how students come to understand the interactions that occur.

Qualitative research produces both exploratory and highly descriptive knowledge while deemphasizing the solely causal models and explanations. This is because qualitative researchers are after meaning which is found within their data and their analysis of that data (Hesse-Biber &

Leavy, 2006). There are two reasons why this researcher chose qualitative methods for this study. First, this particular project which examines the interactions between faculty and student lends itself to an inductive model as qualitative research seeks to understand how people interpret their experiences as well as what meaning they attribute to those experiences (Merriam, 2009). Secondly, the hermeneutic tradition or interpretive epistemology is based on the interpretation of interactions and the social meaning people assign to those interactions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) which is an appropriate fit for the exploration of the relationships between faculty and student.

Moreover, qualitative methods is best suited for this study because it will allow for a more comprehensive analysis as interviews, transcription and coding could elaborate on any additional themes that may important, as Geertz (1973) termed this type of methodology as rich, thick description which is paramount to qualitative research. This study will utilize qualitative methods to answer the research questions. Thus, three research questions anchored this study at West Mountain Community College (*pseudonym*):

- What different types of faculty-student interactions take place at West Mountain Community College?
- What is the nature of faculty-student interactions at the West Mountain Community College?
- How do students interpret (describe) their interactions with faculty at West Mountain Community College?

This study went through the protocol of the Institutional Review Board of two separate institutions (See Appendix A and Appendix B) to ensure that participants were treated with the highest ethical standards.

Research Site

The setting for this research study was West Mountain Community College (WMCC) which was established in 1969 with the first campus which was located within a federal military base and enrolled 901 students. The institution became accredited in 1973 and began to expand to various parts of the city and today includes 5 campuses. The sixth and newest campus currently under construction will be completed in 2017. The institution offers an Associate's of Arts Degree and an Associate of Applied Science Degree with enrollment at approximately 30,394 students. The student demographic depicts that 12,976 are male and 17,418 are female. Also has a median age around 20 years of age with approximately 84.7 percent Latino, 8.1 percent Anglo, 2.2 percent, African-American, 0.9 percent, Asian-American and 0.3 percent Native-American. WMCC students are primarily part-time students totaling 19,902 while full-time students number 10,492. The college has a number of students who are receiving Pell Grants at around \$15 million each fall and spring semesters. In addition, the college relies heavily on adjunct faculty for instruction with over 993 part-time faculty and 442 full-time faculty teaching at the college. Faculty members must have a minimum of a Master's Degree with at least 18 credit hours of teaching experience which is mandated by the accreditation agency. Also, in terms of oversight there is an assigned dean for each of the five campuses. The policymaking for the college is made by seven elected trustees from various single member districts in the West Mountain region. The trustees oversee more than \$100 million in allocations to the five WMCC campuses (El Paso Community College, 2013).

For this study, the researcher focused upon two of WMCC five campuses. The two campuses that participated in the study were Lakeview and Pinco campuses. The rationale behind the choices is that this researcher is employed by West Mountain Community College-

Lakeview campus which will provide the researcher with access to students and colleagues. The rationale behind the Pinco campus is that it is the largest of all five campuses which may provide for a variance of faculty and student perspectives.

Student Participants

All participants were faculty and students from West Mountain Community College (WMCC). All students who participated in the interviews were enrolled at WMCC during the Spring Semester 2015. Since all students were undergraduate students, the focus was to interview students who have been at WMCC for at least one semester. The rationale behind this is that the researcher wanted to interview students who have had some familiarity with the WMCC and who have likely had some previous interactions with WMCC faculty prior to the semester in question. The rationale for interviewing faculty was an attempt to triangulate and better understand the student interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The selection of the students was based upon WMCC's core curriculum. WMCC has a core curriculum based upon the following nine academic areas that include: 1) Communications 2) Math, Life / Physical Sciences 3) Language/ Philosophy/ Culture 4) Creative Arts 5) History 6) Government, 7) Sociology/ Psychology 8) English 9) Education. Since the majority of students who are taking classes at WMCC are taking these classes as part of their core degree plan, the selection was based on the hope that the researcher could get a cross section of students that would be representative of the demographics at WMCC. Also, in an effort to ensure that both Lakeview and Pinco students would be represented, I chose to divide the student interviews between the two campuses. Hence, 9 students from Lakeview were interviewed and 10 students from Pinco were interviewed for a total of 19 student interviews.

WMCC's Early College High School program will be excluded entirely from this study. The reason is that students who are under 18 years old may need parental consent and to avoid concerns that the Institutional Review Board may raise regarding this, this particular population will be excluded from this study.

In the spring of 2015, the Lakeview and Pinco campuses were contacted via email and telephone to seek permission from enter their classrooms to recruit students for interviews. Six instructors responded at WMCC indicating that I could come in at a prescribed time to present myself and the study. A telephone call to the instructors was completed to solidify the time and classroom. In addition, a cross section of students would be represented so visits to some of the evening classes at WMCC was completed.

Six classes at Lakeview and Pinco campuses were visited. An explanation of the study to the students and asked them if they would be interested in participating in the interview. Several sign-up sheets that created abd handed out to students who were interested. Also, students were given the researcher's contact information if they had questions. From the 6 classrooms, 23 students who signed up to be interviewed. A follow-up telephone call was made to each of the individual instructors at WMCC to thank them for allowing me time to speak with their students. Students were telephoned and set up times at their convenience to interview them which is described in the student interview section below.

Each of the student participants were provided with an informed consent form and questions were answered if they had any. Students also filled out a student information form that had some basic questions about their gender and ethnicity. The student information form did not have any identifying information.

Faculty Participants

Faculty at West Mountain Community College also participated in this research study to ensure that a cross section of faculty to include both full-time and adjunct faculty would be included. A total of 9 faculty members were interviewed: 4 full-time faculty and 5 adjuncts. All faculty members taught at either Lakeview or Pinco campuses and were teaching in various disciplines such as: History, Art, Government, Court Reporting, Math, Music, Sociology, Philosophy and Education. The researcher visited 5 faculty members and explained my study and asked them if they would be willing to participate in an interview. An email was sent to the other 3 members as they were at teaching at other campuses. A telephone call to one faculty member and asked their permission to interview them.

Data Collection

This study had two forms of collection: (1) interviews and (2) classroom observation. Both of these methods provided insight into a deeper understanding of the types of interactions that take place between students and faculty, the nature of what is communicated between student and faculty and how students understand the interactions that occur.

Student Interviews

The qualitative portion included in-depth semi-structured interviews with the students. Intensive interviewing is a directed conversation that permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience (Charmaz, 2006). Merriam (2009) indicates that interviews are used when behavior cannot be observed and when researchers need the interviewees to interpret their circumstances. Moreover, qualitative research relies on exploring a social or human phenomenon wherein the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports views from informants and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative

interviews can be used to yield exploratory, descriptive and explanatory data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Interviews can be a way of learning and understanding a particular phenomenon.

The student interviews were conducted during April and May of 2015. A total of 19 students were interviewed and all were conducted via face-to-face. The interviews were conducted in a mutually agreed upon place: Eight of the interviews were at the Pinco Campus, seven of the interviews were conducted at the Lakeview Campus, two of the interviews were conducted at the local public library and two of the interviews were conducted at a local McDonald's Restaurant. As mentioned earlier, I had no previous or current relationship with any of the students who were interviewed for this study.

The interviews lasted on the average between 35-55 minutes in length and were recorded using two applications on an Android Tablet called: Titanium Recorder and Smart Voice Recorder. Permission was given by student participants to record the interviews. In addition, field notes were also taken during the interviews. There was one student interview that was recorded that was inadvertently recorded over by another student interview. An attempt to telephone this student to see if there was a possibility if there could re-interview but was unable to reach the student. However, field notes taken during this particular interview were thorough enough to incorporate into the analysis portion of this study.

Prior to each interview, a summary was provided of the research study and each participant was given an informed consent (See Appendix C). The student participant signed the form and all hard copies were then secured in a locked file cabinet by which the researcher is the only person who has access to these forms. Also, all soft copy formats will be stored in a locked personal computer of which the researcher has sole access. The confidentiality, anonymity of all student and faculty participants was protected at all times.

Additionally, students who were interviewed were asked to fill out a Student Information Form adapted from Ntecki (2009) (see Appendix D) which included: date of the interview, zip code, age, student status, gender, ethnicity, household income, veteran status, major, whether they are first generation college student, and long term goals.

The student interviews followed a semi-structured format and consisted of questions adapted by two previous studies conducted by Alderman (2008) and Nitecki (2009). The following are some questions that were asked during the interview: Do you interact with faculty outside of classes? How? What are the most meaningful/positive interactions you have had with faculty? Have you ever had a negative interaction with a faculty member? If so, can you describe it? How would you describe the quality of your interactions with faculty outside of the classroom? Have any of your instructors ever encouraged or discouraged you? Can you describe the experience? What did your instructors do if you stopped coming to class or had difficulty with an assignment? When you communicate with your instructors is it inside or outside of class? Have you ever had to seek help from one of your instructors either in class or outside of class? There were two additional questions that I asked in addition to the questions outlined in the protocol. No other additions, deletions or modifications were made to the Student Interview Protocol. A complete list of the student interview protocol for the questions can be found in (Appendix E). Moreover, the interviews will also attempt to explore and understand participant responses as well as explore emerging themes

All student interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcription process is not passive as how researchers collect data is crucial to the analysis and interpretation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). The transcription included all verbal as well as non-verbal data. In addition to

the transcription, handwritten field notes that were taken during the interview were typed up in an effort to make sense of the conversation between the student interviewees and myself.

A twenty dollar cash incentive was provided for each individual student at the completion of each interview. Also, at the end of each interview, the Student Information Form was used to write specifics to include memos that highlighted include some the most significant things the interviewee stated.

Faculty Interviews

Prior to each interview, a summary of the research study and each participant was given an informed consent (See Appendix F). The student participant signed the form and all the forms were then secured in a locked file cabinet by which I am the only person who has access to these forms.

The faculty interviews were conducted during April and May 2015. A total of nine faculty members were interviewed. The interviews were conducted at the Lakeview and Pinco Campuses. Each interviewed lasted on the average between 30-45 minutes and all interviews were recorded using two applications on an Android Tablet called: Titanium Recorder and Smart Voice Recorder.

The faculty interviews followed an in-depth semi-structured format. The faculty interviews consisted of open ended questions adapted by (Nitecki, 2009). Some of the questions faculty was asked during the interviews included: Can you describe your students? How do you engage your students with the course content? How do you handle who do not attend or are doing poorly in your class? How available and approachable are you for your students? How do you communicate with students outside of class? What does the outside of class communication consist of? Can you describe a meaningful interaction with a student? What occurred? A

complete list of the questions can be found in the Faculty Interview Protocol in (see Appendix F).

Additionally, the faculty members who were interviewed were asked to fill out a Faculty Information Form adapted from Ntecki (2009) (see Appendix G) which included information such as: date of interview, department they teach in, gender, ethnicity, employment status, home campus, years of teaching, courses taught, number of students each semester and highest level of education. Also, at the end of each interview, the Faculty Information Form to include memos that were highlighted to include some the most significant things the interviewee stated.

A ten dollar gift card to Starbucks Coffee to each of the faculty upon completion of the interview make sense of the conversation between the faculty interviewees and myself.

Classroom Observations

There were four classroom observations that were completed between March and April 2015 and each observation lasted for 1 ½ hours each. Each of the four observations was done in various disciplines such as: Math, History, Education and Art. The researcher had gained permission from each instructor prior to the visit. The researcher took field notes during the observations.

Of the four classes that were observed, two of the classes included the faculty that I interviewed for this study. The observations focused on an attempt to understand the in-class interactions that take place between student and faculty. I was open to emerging themes that arose during the observation process and I took thorough field notes on a number of things I observed. The observation was used to consider any new emerging themes that may not have been mentioned in the interviews. Some of field notes had a direct connection to my previous

research questions to include how students interacted with faculty in terms of what was being spoken during the in class interactions.

The observation took place at both Lakeview and Pinco campuses and included visits to daytime classes that would likely have more traditional students as well as evening classes that were more likely to have non-traditional students attending classes.

Data Analysis

According to C.Wright Mills (1959) there is no one right way to go about analysis as analysis is about intellectual craftsmanship. Creswell (2007) notes that there are eight steps in analyzing qualitative data which include creating and organizing the data, examining and making margin notes, coding (from initial to focused), describing and forming themes, interpreting themes and presenting the findings.

The qualitative portion of this study includes analysis of the student and faculty interviews using a methodological approach taken from grounded theory. Grounded theory is a form of analysis developed initially by Glaser and Strauss (1967). While Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2006) may have somewhat divergent approaches to grounded theory. Both approaches stem from the somewhat unusual reconciliation of Chicago School of pragmatism that Strauss comprised and the Columbia University positivism that Glaser embraced. Hence, both Glaser and Strauss were interested in studying and understanding fundamental social experiences (Charmaz, 2006). On the other hand, Charmaz (2006) who was a student of Strauss at the University of California and had Glaser as the chairperson of her dissertation, has a looser approach to grounded theory and contends that grounded theory is “systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories grounded in the data themselves” (Charmaz, 2006,p.2). Nonetheless, both approaches whether it be Glaser and

Strauss (1967) or Charmaz (2006) derive from the same foundation as all of them use basic grounded theory principles.

The centerpiece of grounded theory research is the development or generation of a theory closely related to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). One of the justifications for using this methodological approach taken from grounded theory stems from the belief that grounded theory can reach across substantive areas and into the realm of formal theory, which means generating abstract concepts and specifying relationships between them to understand problems (Charmaz, 2006).

In current study of the examination of the interactions between faculty and student, the methodological approach taken from grounded theory will be instrumental in that it does not assume or presuppose anything, rather it is hoped that this particular research study can open through up new diverse ways of thinking about and discussing faculty and student interactions at the community college. This study chose to follow

Creswell (2009) indicates that there are several steps to the initial analysis process which include the preparation of the data, the organization of the data, the exploration and coding of the data, description of findings and formulation of themes, interpretation and a final check for the accuracy of the findings. The process of data analysis involves moving “deeper and deeper into understanding the data like peeling back the layers of an onion” (Creswell, 2009, p.183). Additionally, qualitative analysis is an on-going process involving continual reflection about the data (Creswell, 2009).

The primary method of analysis was completed using a software program named NVivo® 10 administered by QSR International. The software program was purchased and the researcher contacted the one of the educational labs at the university where the researcher is

enrolled to inquire about training. And, while QSR offers extensive on-line training using numerous videos as well as a built in example within the software purchase to allow users to go step by step through the entire analysis, the researcher wanted to ensure that specific one on one training was completed. A staff person associated with the educational lab provided the researcher with the one and one software training. The researcher was able to speak to the trainers throughout my use of the software as questions arose about how to navigate the software.

More importantly, since I was new to the NVivo® qualitative software program, I decided to run one student through NVivo® and simultaneously manually code that same student interview. I found that the student interview (mentioned above) coded with NVivo® and coded manually resulted in very similar findings. Thus, I then decided to exclusively use the software for the rest of the interviews. These procedures will be explained in greater detail below.

Before any analysis can take place, it is important to have the interviews transcribed. All student and faculty interviews were transcribed as well as all field notes (taken during the interviews and classroom observations) were typed up in a word document.

With regard to NVivo®, a project was created within the software titled: “Faculty and Student Interactions at WMCC.” Then, all transcriptions were imported into to the software and are put into separate sub-file folders identified and separated by the students and faculty names. In terms of coding, NVivo® assists with the organizational aspect of coding but the researcher creates the actual codes. Also, instead of the actual word codes it uses the word nodes and there are two types of nodes: parent nodes and child nodes. Parent nodes are larger headers that perhaps one would use, in my case, the word interactions would be a parent node. A child node would be a sub-header, in my case, the word personal or academic would be a child node.

I imported (uploaded) the interviews into the software. From that point, I opened three screens: the interview, the nodes and the highlighter. I would then go through the interviews line by line and coded the interviews using nodes. I created some nodes ahead of time. For example, one of my research questions was, what type of interactions are taking place? Are they taking place in class or outside of class? Hence, I created a couple of nodes ahead of time and named them: in-class interactions and out-of-class interactions. But, some nodes also emerged from the data while I was coding. For example, one student indicated that they felt a connection to one of their professors and that the professor eventually offered them a job. In this case, I coded this using nodes: business turns into personal. Using NVivo®, I was able to drag and drop portions of the interviews that I felt were compelling as it related to my research questions. This process is almost like a cut and paste method that one would use to move around information from one document to another document. The last thing I did was create coding stripes within the text for the nodes. This would be similar to manually using a highlighter on a particular text.

I also used NVivo®, to aggregate the interviews. After I had coded using nodes in NVivo®, I would click aggregate (child) nodes and it would pull together information from the nodes I selected. For example, it would pull together all the instances in which I used a particular node.

The examination of the transcripts of 28 interviews: 19 students and 9 faculty members provided some variances and perspectives as it related to the themes that eventually emerged.

The one manually coded interview that was previously mentioned involved several steps. I printed out all the data and organized them into three separate categories: student interviews, faculty interviews and classroom observations.

Next, I reviewed the typed transcriptions of the student and faculty interviews and the classroom observations to ensure they were readable and clear. Creswell (2009) indicates that one of the first things a researcher can do is to try to get a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning as to what the participants are saying and what the general tone of the ideas expressed may be interpreted to mean.

The transcribed interview data was then coded which involved attaching labels to segments of data that depict what each segment of the interview is about. Coding is the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions of broad themes in the data before giving them any type of meaning (Creswell, 2007). Charmaz (2006) states that the use of coding allows the researcher to distill and sort data in an effort to provide comparisons with other segments so that the researcher can examine what is happening in the scene when they code it.

For the manually coded interview, I created a two column sheet wherein I could write notes or words next to what the interviewee stated. I would then examine the transcribed sentences and write down words or phrases that attach to the segment of the text under exploration. I did this through line by line coding for this interview as I wanted to see if I could understand the underlying meaning behind the words that were spoken (Creswell, 2009). I tried to be true to the words of the interviewee with my own word choices as by staying as close to ensure that the examination of any emerging themes is unpacked.

This type of coding is sometimes referred to as *vivo* codes. Charmaz (2006) indicates that *in vivo* codes are characteristic of social worlds and organizational settings. Later, as the researcher gets deep into the data, they can test the initial codes against the extensive data, all of which is a process. Coding is the first analytical step in defining what the data is about and what

it means. Thus, researchers try to make an interpretive rendering that begins with coding and that illuminates studied life (Charmaz, 2006).

For this manually coded interview, I attempted to reduce the codes from the interview into various theme(s) that eventually emerged from the data. Quantitative codes takes segments of data apart, name them in concise terms and then propose an analytic handle to create abstract ideas for interpreting each of the segments. Moreover, coding builds the analytical frame by which the theoretical integration will eventually help assemble (Charmaz, 2006).

The researcher explored the data to the point of saturation wherein no new information was being added to the understanding of the topic under investigation (Creswell, 2007).

Trustworthiness

A fundamental principle of qualitative research is to ensure that the researcher has provided the rigor necessary to establish that the findings of the study are accurate. There are several steps that a naturalistic researcher can take to demonstrate that the research has met certain reliability procedures. These reliability procedures differ from quantitative research that is focused on validity and generalizability; whereas qualitative studies are concerned with credibility and accuracy (Creswell, 2007). In an effort to establish trustworthiness, I followed the methods outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) which include: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility was completed in the study through triangulation by which various sources were consulted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, as stated earlier, 19 student interviews were completed. But, in addition to those interviews, 9 faculty interviews were completed as well as four classroom observations. Interviewing students and faculty provided me with better

insight to the interactions that were taking place at West Mountain Community College. By examining different sources, the researcher can use various sources to build a coherent justification for themes (Creswell, 2007). Also, for this study I was able to visit two different campuses at West Mountain Community College. One was the largest campus at WMCC and the other is known as the smallest campus which provided for some variances which helps to undergird the issue of credibility.

Transferability

Thick description is one the best practices methods by which a researcher can ensure that they have provided the necessary elements to enable individuals to reach a conclusion about whether or not transfer is a possibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick description can transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences as well as being able to transport the reader to the setting (Creswell, 2007). I have attempted to complete transferability through detailed descriptions of the setting, and most importantly of the student and faculty participants who participated in the interviews. I also took thorough field notes during all 28 interviews and the four classroom observations.

Dependability and Confirmability

To ensure that trustworthiness is a priority throughout the study especially in terms of the analysis, the researcher must ensure that they understand that a policymaker may formulate policy as a result of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicate that one way to do this is through member checking. Member checking is when the researcher goes back to the source to ensure credibility. Since the participants, in this case the student and faculty interviewees, provided the initial constructions

of which the findings and interpretations were made (the reconstructions), it is they who must find the reconstructions credible.

In this case, after the transcriptions were complete, there were some of the answers that I felt I needed more clarification. I did make contact with those particular students to see if they could review and clarify the specific questions. I was able to get the needed clarification from the students who were contacted for this task.

Last, it is important to mention that this study is driven by qualitative interviews that then connect to emerging themes found as the data is analyzed. This study is not an attempt to make any generalizations about community college, its students or faculty. The trouble with generalization is that they do not apply to particulars (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Hence, this study is engaged with the particulars of how West Mountain Community College students tell their story about their interactions with faculty and what those interactions mean to them. Thus, this study is aimed at providing a better understanding of the faculty and student interactions.

Integration of Symbolic Interactionism and Institutional Agents as a framework

Using the two above theories may help to explain and understand the interactions that occur between faculty and students at the community college. Drawing upon symbolic interaction may provide a gauge for how students understand their interactions with faculty. Since symbolic interactionism is based upon interpretation, in this case student interpretation, it becomes crucial to understand what student state about how they perceive faculty as their answers could be helpful as institutions seek answers about student success in their institution. Another important element for consideration is that since 46% of all students start at the community college and 36% of them are first generation, an understanding of how students

perceive and interpret their encounters with faculty will be crucial. (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015).

If a positive interaction takes place, that could mean that students may persist at WMCC however, if a negative or indifferent interaction occurs, it could mean that students become discouraged and perhaps leave the class or the institution all together.

The other theory that will be applied is Stanton-Salazar (1997) theory of institutional agents which asserts that certain individuals in society (in this case, faculty) hold important positions of authority as well as have significant knowledge of the working systems in place. These institutional agents work in important positions at schools and can provide networks, connections and support for students. Moreover, institutional agents possess high degree of human, social, and cultural capital that they may use to transmit or negotiate institutional resources and or support on behalf of the student. Also, the role of the teacher does not start and end within the confines of the classroom. Rather, teachers hold multi-stranded roles such as informal mentor, co-parent, advocate, counselor, social worker and knowledge agent. Last, because these agents work within a stratified structure, they too, reproduce racial and class inequalities (Stanton-Salazar,1997).

The application of Stanton-Salazar (1997) is important for this study as the faculty is the first point of contact for students. It is very likely that students may access faculty if they have a question or concern. In terms of the community college, students and faculty are engaged 2-3 times a week for an hour or more each session. Given that each semester can last up to 4 ½ months, so it is quite probable that faculty and students will interact with one another at some point during that time period. Students at the community college are usually only at the institution for a 2 year period and so institutional agents may become important for students who

need a letter of recommendation or need to complete community service projects for specific degrees.

Also, faculty may not just be accessed for solely academic reasons, rather, it may be the case that students will open up to faculty about their personal lives. Another application of Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011) may lie within the reality that faculty members act as informal and unspoken role models for students. Again, as the faculty is the primary contact for students inside the classroom, students may look to faculty as they interact with other students. Students may pick up on verbal and non-verbal cues from the faculty member about how the institution works or perhaps personal achievement of goals or even how to deal with conflict.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings

This study was an attempt to understand faculty and student interactions at the community college. For this study, the primary vehicle for understanding faculty and student interactions at the community college was qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviews can be one way to move deeper into understanding as researchers can make an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data (Creswell, 2009).

Previous studies on faculty and student interactions (Astin, 2005; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Tinto, 1993, 2002; Deil-Amen, 2010;; Kuh et al., 2010; Kinloch, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Vito, 2007) have indicated that these interactions in many ways play a role in the academic and social development of students. Other studies have focused their attention specifically on understanding interactions at the community college. (Pascarella, Terenzini, Wolniack & Pierson, 2007; Zeidenberg, Jenkins & Calcagno, 2007 Carrasco-Nungary, 2011).

This study is an attempt to contribute to the existing literature on faculty and student interactions at the community college. This research was also an endeavor to try to address some of the gaps in the research specifically relating to faculty and student interactions taking place within the community college setting. As stated earlier, this study is significant because approximately half of all freshman who will start college will enroll at a community college (American Association of Community College, 2014).

There are four questions that anchored this study which included: what type of interactions are taking place between faculty and student at West Mountain Community College? What is the nature of faculty-student interactions at the West Mountain Community College? And how do students interpret (describe) their interactions with faculty at West Mountain Community College?

Introduction of Student Participants

A total of 19 students were interviewed for this study. All of the 19 students were enrolled at WMCC as undergraduates for the spring semester of 2015. Table 4.1 provides some details about the student participants of this study to include the student pseudonym, age, gender, student status, ethnicity and an indication of whether or not the student were first generation college students.

Of the 19 students who were interviewed, 7 were male and 12 were female. The students ranged in age from 18 years old to 43 years old. There were 15 Latinos who participated in the interview process, 3 Anglos and 1 African-American student. Nine of the students were full-time students and 10 were taking class on a part-time basis. Of the student participants, 11 (Beatrice, Ben, Lisa, Tito, Kristen, Wesley, Rose, Andie, Ruth, Denise and Penny) were first generation college students and 8 (Ralph, Maddie, Jeff, Ramon, Charolette, Mark and Gemma) indicated tthat they had an immediate family member who had at some point attended college.

All of the students were undergraduate students attending West Mountain Community College at either the Lakeview or Pinco campuses. All of the 19 students had been taking classes at WMCC from 1 year to 4 years and had a variety of reasons why they chose WMCC. Some students stated that WMCC was affordable and close to their homes while others said that their age was a factor because some of the participants were non-traditional, older students who were stated they were frightened to start at a university.

The average household income for the students who were interviewed ranged from \$30,000-\$50,000 a year and 2 of the 19 students were veterans of the military.

Table 4.1 provides data on the student participants to include: name (pseudonym), age, gender, ethnicity, student status and whether they were first generation college students.

Table 4.1 West Mountain Community College Student Participant Demographic Snapshot

Pseudonym Student Name	Age	Gender	Student Status	Ethnicity	First Generation
Ralph	19	M	Full-time	Latino	No
Beatrice	18	F	Part-time	Anglo	Yes
Maddie	21	F	Full-time	Latino	No
Ben	21	M	Full-time	Latino	Yes
Lisa	29	F	Part-time	Latino	Yes
Tito	36	M	Full-time	Latino	Yes
Kristen	19	F	Part-time	African-American	Yes
Wesley	27	M	Part-time	Latino	Yes
Rose	43	F	Part-time	Latino	Yes
Jeff	26	M	Full-time	Latino	No
Andie	35	F	Part-time	Latino	Yes
Ramon	20	M	Full-time	Latino	No
Charlotte	23	F	Part-time	Anglo	No
Mark	18	M	Full-time	Latino	No
Jimena	20	F	Part-time	Latino	No
Ruth	18	F	Full-time	Latino	Yes
Denise	37	F	Full-time	Latino	Yes
Penny	29	F	Full-time	Latino	Yes
Gemma	21	F	Part-time	Latin	

Introduction of Faculty Participants

A total of 9 faculty members were interviewed for this study. There were 6 female and 3 males who were interviewed and all were teaching within a myriad of disciplines (see Table 4.2). There were 6 Latinos and 3 Anglos that completed interviews of which 4 were full-time faculty members and 5 were adjunct faculty members. The average amount of years faculty members taught at WMCC ranged from 8 years to 21 years and all had a Master's degree and 2 faculty members had 2 Master's degrees. Also, faculty stated they taught from 30 students up to 195 students per semester.

Table 4.2 provides data on WMCC faculty to include: name (pseudonym), gender, ethnicity, courses taught, teaching status and years of service at WMCC.

Table 4.2 West Mountain Community College Faculty Demographic Snapshot

Pseudonym Faculty Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Courses Taught	Status F/P.T	# of years at WMCC
Renee	F	Latino	Court reporting	Full-time	9 ½
Valente	M	Latino	Art	Part-time	12
Faith	F	Anglo	Sociology	Part-time	16
Efren	M	Latino	Music	Full-time	8
Sandy	F	Anglo	History	Part-time	10
Maria	F	Latino	Philosophy	Part-time	15
Ileana	F	Latino	Government	Full-time	21
Vero	F	Anglo	Math	Part-time	20
Manny	M	Latino	English	Full-time	11

The rationale for choosing the faculty is that they are typical of community college faculty throughout the United States. There are a greater number of Latino and African-Americans teaching at the community college as well as gender parity among male and female faculty members. There is also a large number of adjunct faculty at the community college, about two-thirds of all community college faculty teach part-time within all community colleges within the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008).

Organization of Chapter

This chapter will be organized around the each of the three research questions that this study focused upon. Each section will be divided into the questions starting with first question. After each research question, the student narrative will follow. Then, the faculty narrative at the end of each of the three research question sections. The students and faculty pseudonym names will follow the narrative and will be placed in brackets. Also, the key findings (themes) that emerged from the data will be intertwined into each section. Last, at the end of each major section within this chapter, the theoretical frameworks symbolic interactionism and faculty as institutional agents (see Chapter 3) will be revisited and applied in an effort to better understand the interactions that take place between faculty and students at WMCC.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked: What different types of faculty-student interactions take place at West Mountain Community College?

All of 19 students stated they interact with faculty members inside and outside of the classroom. What becomes important to understand from the various types of interactions is what is the take away from the interactions from the students perspective.

Students tended to engage with the faculty more frequently inside the classroom than outside of the classroom but there were significant instances to indicate that a moderate amount of classroom interaction was taking place outside of the classroom. Many students indicated that they prefer to speak to the faculty in person after class. Only one student indicated that they interact with faculty on-line via email or text message. Once students indicated if they were interacting inside or outside of the classroom, a follow-up question was asked in terms of how are they interacting with faculty and what is taking place in the classroom?

From the data that was analyzed as it relates to question 1, the student responses from the interviews indicated that there were three overarching themes taking place inside and outside of the classroom to include: 1) students feel encouraged by faculty 2) students feel like the faculty care about them 3) faculty members are helpful; and, 4) knowing students names is important. Each of these themes will individually be discussed within this chapter.

The students' preference for face to face communication was evident and their answers were telling but the nature of what is spoken during that communication seems to be the most meaningful according to students. In an effort to understand interactions at WMCC, a context for the interactions that take place inside and outside of the classroom will be necessary.

In-class interactions

The majority of interaction and engagement between faculty and students are taking place inside the classroom and the students seem to prefer this method of communication. Students often indicated that time is factor for them and that they prefer to ask questions face to face as well as some students indicate that talking with faculty in person provides a better personal experience and connection.

“I would rather speak to my professors personally. I like hands on. I think that maybe some extra questions come up and you might think of something else. I think being there

with a person is better. Personal experiences are always better for me. I don't think that I ever emailed, I try to get it while I am in class." [Charolette]

"I feel like it may be better to communicate in person. In most of my classes, my professors give the students attention." [Mark]

"I like to talk in class. I really like to have face to face. I would call myself an old soul. It is funny because my generation is totally into technology." [Jimena]

"I like to talk to my professors inside of class. I would rather take care of this stuff in class and I don't have time to send emails." [Jeff]

"I do have a lot of questions and I am not afraid of asking questions. The professor sometimes goes fast and people get frustrated. I think it is best to speak up in class to get the answers you need while you are there." [Wesley]

Also, students did not hesitate to ask for help when they needed it. In one of the follow-up questions regarding in-class-interaction, students were asked if they felt like their expectations were met by their professors while they were in the classroom. Many students indicated that they did indeed feel as if faculty were attentive to them, answering their questions as well as providing direction and clarity on assignments inside the classroom.

The faculty perspective-Inside the classroom

Many faculty members agreed that the majority of communication between the students and themselves take place inside of the classroom. Several faculty members spoke about the importance of trying to establish a rapport with students inside of the classroom and many indicated that they had hoped that the interaction taking place inside of the classroom would carry over outside of class. Some faculty mentioned that engaging students during class was extremely important to them which in turn can point to students not only engaging faculty more during a given semester but can also create a deeper understanding between student and faculty.

"I also do question and answer periods while we are in class and from the very beginning, I try to engage them by learning their name first. I try my best to pronounce their names.

I try to give them points for attendance as well. I want them to know from the very beginning that they matter. I will work with students. I am huge on communication. I want them to realize that this is a give and take conversation and in a classroom this is what takes place. In the end, I really want them to ask questions.”[Faith]

“I liken being in the classroom to sitting around the dinner table talking. There are plenty of opportunities during that conversation to speak and listen. I try to find small ways to encourage them even as I call attendance. I create opportunities to speak with them, even if they are small conversations. I try to allow them to share with me while we are in class. I do this throughout the semester.” [Efren]

“ Everytime I hand back something to them in class, I tell them to talk with me about their grades. I have individualized sheet for each one of them. I try to establish a pattern of speaking with them on a consistent basis so it becomes a continual conversation while we are in class.” [Vero]

“I often find that interactions in the classroom often lead to interactions outside of the classroom. I think it helps students in the long run. I try to know every student’s name. I want them to feel like individuals in my class. They are somebody and I try to convey that by calling students their names. They are more than a piece of knowledge, they are people. I feel like a mother to many children.” [Maria]

“I try to create a loose environment in the classroom so students can feel free to speak. I remember I had one student Amber (not you) who told me that she feels very comfortable in my class talking and expressing herself and that made me feel like I was setting the right tone in class.” [Valente]

As faculty understand their role inside the classroom and as they try to create their own niche within the walls of their own classroom, faculty may be creating a richer context by which students make connections with faculty members who seem to providing academic support as well as emotional support in some cases.

While in-class interaction tended to be predominant in terms of the interaction according to the interviews, there were also many instances wherein students were communicating and interacting with faculty outside of class. Although, these interactions tended to occur less, it appears from the perspective of the student that they were in many ways meaningful. Out-of-class contact often focused on the specifics of a given assignment or additional questions that

student had about a particular topic, however; some of the interactions also centered around personal issues the student had that would arise throughout the semester in question.

Out-of-class interactions

Although out-of-class interactions between faculty and student took place less frequently, students still continued to seek out faculty members during their office hours and via email. The majority of the time, students tended to communicate with the faculty about academic assignments but they also sought out faculty for advice regarding personal problems. In sum, students reported that they communicate with faculty in person the majority of the time. However at times, they will go to see faculty during office hours and and will sometimes email them regarding issues that arise. WMCC students explain their experiences:

“There have been several times that I have spoken with my teachers in their offices. The teacher was fully paying attention to me even though there were numerous people that wanted to talk to them during their office hours.” [Ralph]

“I emailed a professor a question regarding a project. I think they answered within two hours. On that same class on the day to a final, my day took the car to the gym. We only have one car. I called my teacher and they told me that they would give me a half hour window. The teacher told me that if I did not take the final, they would fail me.” [Rose]

“Barely last week, I went in to speak to Mr.Wong for advice. It had nothing to do with WMCC but another school. I asked him about an audio school that I had heard about. I asked him if he knew where I could find a student loan or something. He started to ask me questions about the school and if it was accredited. He told me to be careful. He told me of a nursing school that had problems and the students ended up not getting a degree because something had happened. He told me he would find out where I could get money for this school. I appreciated this because I cannot get this advice at home. My mom does not know about these things. My dad knows a little about these things but he lives in another city. I really cannot tell anyone these things.” [Ben]

The faculty perspective-outside of the classroom

Faculty at WMCC also stated that a great amount of interaction occurs outside of the class setting. The faculty indicated that the majority of the conversations were taking place during office hours but sometimes these interactions are impromptu such as in the hallway or at the

restaurant that is on campus. Nonetheless, faculty seems to deem these interactions as a way to help students in a time of need.

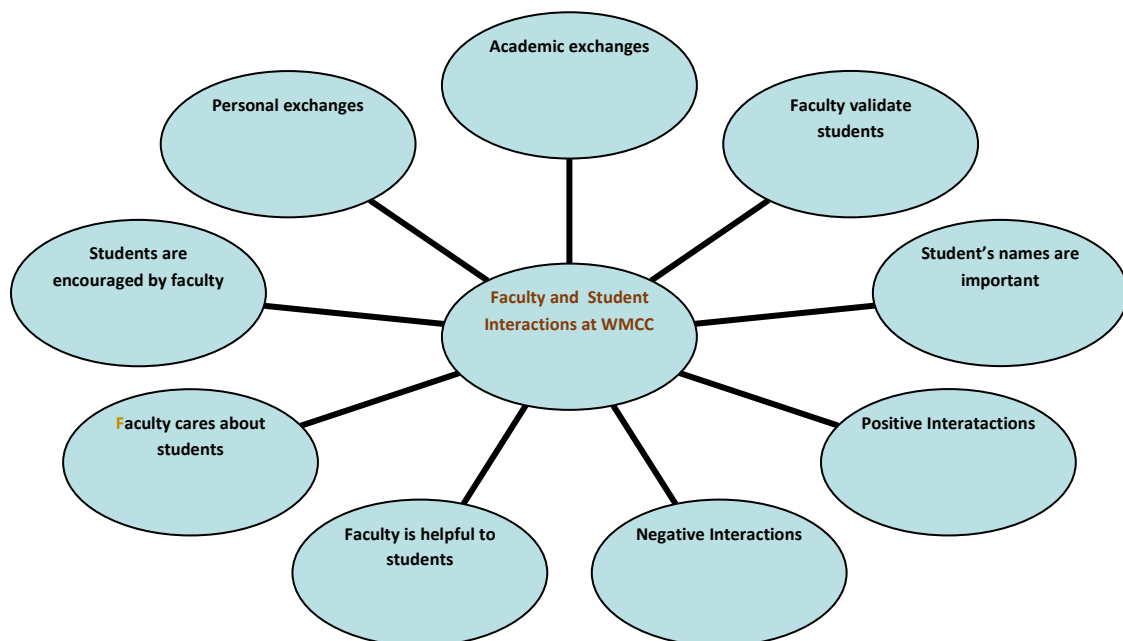
“I find that the out-of-class interaction is often associated with things that happen to students outside of class that will affect their work. I try to help them navigate through these things the best way I can. I often will reach out to students if I do not see them and ask them if they are okay. I sometimes will ask them to come and see me to ensure that I can get them on track.” [Renee]

“I personally give my students my cell phone and they will text but most of it is very practical. For example, they may say that they are having car problems or work problems or family problems. And, I have always tried to work with the students and I do not feel as though they have ever abused it.” [Valente]

Renee, faculty who has taught at WMCC for 9 years stated that she tries to treat each student as an individual in an attempt to understand their situations so she help them beyond the classroom.

From the in-class and out-of-class interactions, nine themes emerged as illustrated in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1 Faculty and Student Interactions at WMCC depicted by theme.



From the data that was analyzed as it relates to question 1, the student responses from the interviews indicated that there were three overarching themes taking place inside and outside of the classroom to include: 1) students feel encouraged by faculty 2) students feel like the faculty care about them 3) faculty members are helpful; and, 4) knowing students names is important.

Key finding (theme #1): Faculty encourage students

As stated earlier under research question 1 in this chapter, one of the key themes that emerged from the data was that students indicated that they felt encouraged by faculty. This encouragement took place inside and outside of the classroom. Most often, the encouragement was associated with what was spoken to the students. According to the students, they stated they often felt like they knew that the encouragement helped to make the students want to do better on that particular subject or overall. Sometimes, the encouragement stemmed from a note a faculty member left on a paper. Overall, students acknowledged that WMCC faculty members encouragement help to motivate them as illustrated by these examples:

“My professors have been encouraging, especially Mr. Jaramillo and Mr. Walstrom. For example, Mr. Walstrom, my English Professor will write notes on my paper, You did amazing, I like this essay. I really never even knew I could write an essay but he said he was happy with the 3 essays I turned in, so far. I get my motivation from my professors telling me I can do things.” [Kristen]

“I feel that Mr. DeGraw is great, if I cannot catch him in his office, he will talk to me after class if I need him. Sometimes he will say that he has another class and will tell me walk with him so he can help me. I feel like the professors are open, especially if you let them know ahead of time what is going on, they will make the time for you. They make me feel like I should keep on going to school.”[Tito]

“All my professors have been encouraging, some more than others. For example, I am determined to get good grades and if someone encourages me, I know I can do it.” [Andie]

“I remember one time that I got some feedback on my paper from Mr. Jaxson after one of our tests. I remember Mr. Jaxson asking me a question on the paper. He wanted to know what had happened because I should have gotten an A and not the grade that I got. I knew I would do better next time and I did.” [Denise]

“ Ms. Manafy will explain the math and if you did understand then cool and if you did not then she will ask you what you did not understand and go through it step by step and that is encouraging because math does not come naturally to a lot of people. The way she sets up tests and homework does not discourage you but encourage you. All her homework she sets up to help with the test so on the test there is extra points to be earned and it helps. I have never had that happen to me before.” [Penny]

“There are a lot of times that I have feel my teacher and other people who work here encourage me. One time I made a presentation at the library. It was for my speech class. I made a story out of photos at the library, like a PowerPoint kind of and it was about my decision to come here. I named the presentation, Was it the Wrong Decision? When I started there was only my teacher and my classmates in the room but at the end when I turned around, there was Ms. Minn, she is the librarian and this other girl. At the end, they started clapping. They told me they liked the presentation. This made me feel good.” [Rose]

One of the most memorable interviews came from one of the students [Rose] mentioned above. She had been emotionally moved to tears by the event she described in the library. She indicated that she had been a stay at home mom for 25 years and did not speak English when she arrived at WMCC. She decided to come to school because her daughters were grown and she felt like she could help them if she received an education. Rose stated that she was fearful of school and did not know if she would fit in because she was older than the other students. She stated she started with mostly taking remedial classes at WMCC and then learned English and after that began tutoring other students in biology. It seemed as though the presentation in the library was turning point for her. It was clearly evident that WMCC had made an impact in her life as she repeatedly mentioned that she felt as though she belonged and that she was feeling more confident about herself because of WMCC. She cried many times during the interview as she continued to explain her experience:

“The community college has helped me. When I was young, I started a dentistry program and I could not finish because I got married. I went a lot of places and could not find help. I then found the community college, they gave me financial aid and now I feel different. I came here 5 years ago and have begun to feel different. I am a different person.” [Rose]

Faculty interviews-faculty encourage students

Faculty members also provided insight into the ways in which they try to establish ways to engage and encourage the students who are in their classrooms. Faculty revealed they were in a unique position to create and develop the class so that constant and consistent interaction is taking place throughout the semester. Other faculty members spoke about how they wanted to be the source of encouragement for their students.

“I am available to my students and I don’t leave until the very last student who wanted to see me does see me. I know a lot of these students come from challenging backgrounds and I feel a sense of responsibility to the student in my classes. I know sometimes I am the only source of motivation and encouragement and help for them.”
[Manny]

“I feel like I am available to students and I want to create an environment for them to assist them. I do not have to do this but I want to create a rapport with them and I feel like it can make for a stronger classroom. Once you create this type of a classroom, you can also create avenues for discussion outside of the classroom. I think for some of my students I have become a source of help for them.” [Maria]

Overall, faculty members felt the importance of being available for students. One faculty member indicated that they had purposely moved out of the adjunct faculty office that all the faculty members share to the restaurant area. They stated that they intentionally wanted to engage students outside of the classroom as they felt that students could be intimidated to go into an area where numerous faculty members are present. In the end, this faculty member felt that moving from that particular office to the restaurant has helped and provided more opportunities to engage and speak with students in a looser more comfortable setting. This faculty member expressed the importance for them to connect with their students from the first day and throughout the semester. This particular faculty member mentioned their intentionality of trying to get to know every one of their students beyond their names.

Understanding student encouragement by faculty through the lens of symbolic interactionism

WMCC student interviews provided rich data for analysis. These interviews have helped this researcher to better understand the interactions between faculty and students. Symbolic interactionism will be used as a context for analysis for this study. Symbolic interactionism helps explain not only individual personalities and how individuals are linked to one another but it helps to explain the processes by which the social order and social change is constructed (Ferris & Stein, 2012). As mentioned in Chapter 2, there are three basic tenets of symbolic interactionism: 1) people act toward things on the basis of their meanings 2) meanings are not inherent; rather they are negotiated through the interaction with others and 3) meanings can change or be modified through the interaction (Blumer, 1969). Additionally, Goffman (1961) extended and added another element of the social interaction that is focused on how the interaction shapes the organization of the self. Moreover, Goffman (1969) asserted that there are some basic concepts to describe and analyze of face to face interactions which include: 1) the perspective of the acting subjects 2) the characteristics of the actors 3) the relation between the actors 4) the characteristics of the situation 5) the performance of the act and 6) the interpretation.

WMCC students indicated above that they feel encouraged by their interactions with faculty. This was especially prominent in the case of Rose (mentioned above). As she received positive feedback about her presentation from the librarian, a meaning was created for Rose by that particular interaction. For Rose, she stated the remarks that Ms. Minn made about her presentation made her feel good about herself. As Rose interpreted Ms. Minn's statement about her presentation, she may have then acted as a result of the interpretation. Although, the interaction between Rose and Ms. Minn was short in nature, it created a powerful reality for

Rose. Based on Rose's background, she continued taking classes at WMCC and eventually began to work in the tutoring center assisting students with biology. Thus, college actors may play a large role in student's lives.

Other students who responded during the interview process who felt encouraged by the words of their instructors may also point to how face to face interaction could be one way in which students create their own meaningful academic and personal realities.

Key finding (theme #2)- Faculty care about students.

Students also articulated the way in which they felt like the faculty cared about them as persons. There were several instances in which students' personal situations were the reason for the interaction. Nonetheless, students sensed that faculty members cared about them regardless of the reason for the interaction.

One student spoke at length about a situation that had occurred during the semester in which the student had an opportunity to speak to a faculty member about a very personal situation. The student described a circumstance during one day in class in which she had become emotional during class and started to cry. The student noted that during class that she were crying and being comforted by another student in the same class when the faculty member came over to them to see if everything was okay. The student indicated to the researcher that her spouse had recently left the marriage due to religious differences and this was the reason she had cried on that day in class. The student described the details:

“ I explained to Dr. Amir what happened to me and I cried. She took me aside and hugged me and told me that that has happened many times in her country. She knows a lot of these traditional religious people and she said that many times these kinds of things happen to people of this particular religion. I was very surprised because Dr. Amir is very serious and does not usually hug people. I think she really cared about me. She told me that if I ever wanted or any one of the students ever needed to talk with her, that was available. She also said that any information that anyone shared with her would always be kept confidential.” [Denise]

Additionally, other students indicated that they felt as though faculty members concerned about their wellbeing. Students noted that when the interactions such as the ones described below occurred that the student felt that the faculty member was responding to them as persons and were understanding of their particular situation. Some of these interactions were intertwined with both academically related issues and personal issues. Nevertheless, students felt that these engagements as described below were beneficial to them:

“I liked the professor. She took her time with the work even though it is was a short time because it was the summer, the professor worked well with students. When she wrote on my paper it was always comments like good job or something that was uplifting. You could tell she cared about the students and what she was doing.” [Ruth]

“This semester has been tough on me. Everything happened. My job changed my schedule and I became a supervisor, I had to go to court. I was scheduled for Ms. Swanson’s 9am class and I would oversleep. Ms. Swanson took me aside to ask me how I was and if I needed anything because I showed up to the 11am class which is the same class that she also teaches. She asked me what was going on and I felt like I could be honest with her. She always understands. I feel like people care for me when they do this. I know they get paid for teaching. As a person, I have had a lot of teachers who have worked around my issues.” [Jimena]

“It is a nice place, the teachers are caring. The instructors are responding very professionally. I think they take a lot of their time and it feels like they provide their full attention toward the student. The professors that care are going to give you a good answer.” [Mark]

One student offered additional insight about how they felt like the faculty cared about them.

They indicated that during one lecture and class discussion about depression that after the lecture the student felt like they had some similar symptoms that could be depression. Later, the student told the faculty member about it and asked for further clarification regarding the symptoms of depression. The faculty member spoke to the student at length but ultimately walked them over to the counselor on campus. The student indicated that they were open to talk to someone on campus who was trained in this area. In the end, the student stated that they felt like the faculty member and the counselor cared about what was happening to them at that time.

This is not an isolated incident as many faculty member expressed that they felt like they did not have the skill set to help students with these types of issues and they would ultimately refer students to the trained counselor at WMCC.

Faculty Interviews-faculty care about students

Faculty members indicated from some of their interviews that they wanted to be available to students and wanted to show them that they care about them. Faculty indicated that they try to convey to their students that the interaction and potential interaction does not always have involve negative circumstances. One faculty member stated it this way:

“I tell my students that they do not have to have a problem to come and speak with me. I really care about these students. I try to say hello to my students in the hall when I see them. The students have several ways to contact me and I encourage them to use it. Communication is huge for me. I try to convey to them that telling someone you will not be in class is important because it is a courtesy.” [Faith]

This particular faculty member went on to describe in detail the ways in which they try to engage students inside and outside of the classroom. The faculty member mentioned the multiple ways in which they try to draw out the student to be their best selves which they said involved quizzes, exams and critical thinking projects as well as outside of the class opportunities for students to volunteer. The faculty member stated that they try to convey to the students that they matter.

Other faculty members noted in the interviews that they cared about their academic endeavors as well as cared about the students as people.

“I try to be professional but also show elements of my own humanity. These small gestures can go along way with students as they try to figure out how things work here, one of the most important things is to try to always remember we were all students at one time. So, I try to keep it simple with them but let them know I am here for them.” [Efren]

“I have seen students come into talk to Elisa (another faculty member) all the time and she has been helpful to students. Every single instructor has always been respectful,

never short and I have seen all of my colleagues be very helpful to all of their students. I think a lot us bend over backward for our students.” [Sandy]

“ I want to help them (the students) as they fulfill their endeavors. I feel like students trust me and I feel at times I have been an informal advisor for many students over these past 12 years.” [Manny]

The faculty at WMCC reiterated their commitment to their students inside and outside of classroom as they attempted to make the classroom a place in which student mattered. Many faculty members were also cognizant of trying to create that same atmosphere for students outside of the classroom as well. By doing this, faculty can be in positions to help students even when the students are not enrolled in their classes and as the current students become former students. The establishment of on-going communication can be a building block for students at the community college as they navigate the higher education trajectory.

Understanding how faculty care about students through the lens of institutional agents

Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011) proposed that institutional agents, in the case of WMCC, faculty provide critical support for students. He proposed six roles that institutional agents can play which include: 1) advisor 2) bridging agent 3) institutional broker 4) bridging agent 5) resource agent 6) advocate 7) coordinator 8) knowledge agent 9) integrative agent 10) networking coach 11) cultural guide and 12) resource agent. These roles translate into agents supporting students academically, socially and to some extent emotionally.

Although Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011) primarily was focused on minority youth in primary school settings, his theory is clearly applicable to WMCC. Several students indicated in their descriptions of the interactions felt as though faculty cared about them as people. Faculty are unique positions at the institution because they are not only the primary person who interacts with the student the majority of the time but they are usually the individual the student contacts when things do not go as planned.

Denise's description of events at WMCC is a prime example of how she was emotionally supported by faculty during a difficult time in her life. Dr. Amir, whom Denise describes as "a serious person," noticed Denise's distress, took her aside, gave her a hug and talked to her about the situation and even at one point telling Denise if she ever wanted to speak with her again that she would be available.

This is what Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2001) indicates when he points out how institutional agents can sometimes provide not only academic direction but emotional support, motivation, encouragement when students encounter self-doubt in their collegiate experience.

Faculty members are in the front lines along with the students. It is very likely that faculty members will encounter students who are having problems at some point in their careers. From the interviews completed with WMCC students, faculty has through their actions and words made their students feel like they care. Denise's example is not an isolated one as not only did several students plainly state that they felt cared about but the faculty interviews also prove telling as faculty also concur that they care about what happens in the lives of their students.

Of the 19 students who were interviewed, 11 were first generation college students. This is important to note because these students most often do not come to college with the knowledge in understanding how the system of higher education functions. Therefore, they may rely on faculty to assist them with that effort. This is what Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011) calls the transfer of social capital, a theory first introduced by Bordieu (1986). Moreover, students tend to rely on institutional agents for assistance. As the findings of this theme (faculty cares about students) the narrative was compelling as students described that faculty have in many cases extended themselves beyond their job descriptions.

Key finding (theme) #3- Faculty members are helpful

Students also gave multiple examples of the way in which faculty were helpful to them. The interviews with the students revealed that students feel as though faculty members at WMCC want them to do well in all of their classes. Faculty members can serve as crucial academic power bases that can mediate between the student and the institution (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2010).

Several students provided numerous examples of the way in which they state that faculty is helpful. Some of the examples stemmed from students believing that faculty is approachable and available to them. Students clearly conveyed that faculty members provide opportunities to talk to them about classwork and beyond.

One student discussed how a particular faculty member cultivated an environment in the classroom that then translated into help outside of the classroom. This particular student described a situation in which a faculty member teaching non-traditional students in the evening began each class with providing information on current WMCC scholarships that were available to students. According to the student, this faculty member would give extra credit points students if they applied for the scholarships throughout the semester. The student also explained a situation in the same class wherein the same faculty member organized a baby shower for a student in the class who was expecting a baby. Each student contributed \$5.00 and at the end of the semester was able to provide the expectant student with a small gift from the entire class.

Although, it is likely that the situation described above is an anomaly, it was clear that it made an impression on the student who was interviewed. Other examples also portray faculty members as being helpful to students.

“The teachers make you feel comfortable it is sort of like: I am here to help or I am here for this or that. They are not like parents but they are advising and helping all the time. They are never like judging you. They are understanding and helpful.” [Ramon]

“If I had missed something in Ms. Mendez’s class I might ask her for leniency. I would not be afraid to ask her. She has done these things before. My other teachers are the same way, they are helpful.” [Gemma]

“I like the teachers because they are not like high school. They are not “up on you,” but they seem concerned. They are helpful and they understand things.” [Kristen]

“For me, the teachers are excellent. I admire people who are educated and they have knowledge and now they are teaching someone and they are helping students to reach our major or to become somebody. All of them in different ways, are helping us to graduate. Each teacher has given me something to help me move forward.” [Andie]

“WMCC is my get away. Even if I have had a bad experience, I keep on going. If I need help, I will ask the teacher for help because they have helped me before.” [Rose]

Many of these examples above center around how the student felt about their experiences with faculty members. The majority of students indicated that faculty members made an impact on them. These examples by which students indicate that they feel as though faculty has helped them can have a potential impact on their persistence within the community college setting as previous studies indicate (Bharath, 2009; Kuh, 2007; Kinloch, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Vito, 2007).

These types of interactions can create a culture of openness between the student and faculty member which in turn can assist students as they continue their academic journey.

Supplemental Findings-Faculty is available and approachable

Two additional sub-categories that are related to (finding #3-faculty is helpful) centered on the availability of faculty for students and faculty being approachable. These two sub-categories would not be considered major findings because they were not as prevalent in the analysis as the major findings but were present enough to be mentioned.

The availability of faculty and what students stated about faculty being approachable is characterized in the following narratives:

“Overall, the professors are very available and accessible.”[Lisa]

“I know Mr. Terry would be available. He tells us his office hours. Other people have their office hours and it all works out.” [Jeff]

“I feel that my professors are very honest about their office hours. They will often say, I cannot be at my office during office hours on this day, if you need to see me, we can make arrangements. The thing I take issue with is that they do not set a time for just you; you could be in there with other people as well. They are very good about it.” [Ben]

“I feel like for Ms. Martinez and other professors that I have, that when I talk to them, it just not have to be academic, I could talk to them about anything”. [Ralph]

“I think I would go talk to the professors. Well, for the most part, I feel like I can go talk to them, I feel like they are open. I think the professors have an open mind.” [Maddie]

Although these two sub-categories were not as prominent as the key findings (themes), they are important to acknowledge. This context may help faculty understand the important role they play at the community college. This information may also help students as they reach to faculty for guidance and direction in some cases.

Understanding how faculty is helpful, approachable and available through the lens of symbolic interactionism

Students at WMCC described the faculty in terms of being helpful, approachable and available to them. These are interpretations are very often the case of interpretations that are made after an interaction between students and the faculty members who are in front of them on a daily basis. Symbolic interactionism is one way with which researchers can take a peek into the dynamic between faculty and students.

For Goffman (1974), interactions are produced from the social encounter. He examined and analyzed social settings by which one or more people would encounter one another. These

interactions have meanings attached to them that stem from happiness, sadness, embarrassment and pride. Goffman (1972) is interested in the processes within the interaction and how that unfolds for the individuals involved within the interaction as social interactions hold value and meaning for the participants involved.

The present study's findings regarding research question 1 found that students indicate that faculty is helpful, approachable and available to them. Through the interviews, students commented on what they perceived as faculty assisting them in various ways either with academically related issues and or personal issues. Students also mentioned that faculty was present when they needed them and if a problem arose that they could likely talk to the faculty about the situation because faculty was "approachable" from their perspective.

The examples that were mentioned above regarding the scholarship help and impromptu baby shower help to illustrate what Goffman (1967) indicated about how interactions can hold meaning and value for those involved. For students, the actions of the faculty member ie; the baby shower and scholarship information led students to believe that this faculty member was helpful. Students acknowledged during the interviews that they can run into problems that are beyond their control and that faculty members are often there for them in these cases. It is likely that not every faculty member is going to have a baby shower for each of their student but it had an effect on the student who conveyed the memory.

Another student mentioned that they felt as though faculty were different than parents because they are "not up on you," but were more like people that could be approached without judgment. The student indicated that they felt good about the behavior and actions of the faculty member. Perhaps these examples pinpoint what Goffman (1967) indicated about emotions being attached to a particular interaction.

Key finding (theme) #4- Knowing students' names is important to students

Students in this study were asked to describe some of the things that were important to them as students inside and outside of the classroom. One of the things that they consistently mentioned was that it was important to students when faculty knew them by name. Students indicated that they felt more like individuals. Some research maintains that when faculty learn students' names and use their names in conversing with them that students feel as though they are validated by faculty. Validation is based upon acts that are authentic and on-going (Rendón, 1994). The act of learning student's names can hold significant meaning for students as they may feel like the institution cares about them as a student and as an individual. Similarly, faculty at WMCC also indicated that they put great effort in trying to remember all of their students' names. Some faculty in their own interviews even mentioned that knowing their students by name can be a first step toward a great working relationship. This was consistent with what the students indicated about faculty knowing their names.

Some students describe their understanding of faculty knowing their names:

"I think that it is important for instructors know my name. I do not like if they do not know my name. I feel like they care if they know my name because if they know your name, they know your work. Also, they can see what the student is about." [Maddie]

"I think my history professor knows because I always am answering the questions. I think it is important for my teachers to know my name because what if you need to get an extension and they don't know who you are. It might make a difference." [Mark]

"My professors know my name and my work. I think it is very important for my professors to know my name. I feel like they care and they see how you work. They know me and put attention to me. I think that if they put attention to me that it gives me confidence and I look forward to class [*sic*]." [Ben]

"Since I was little, I think it is important to know people's names. I want my professors to know my name. If my professors know my name and they do, it feels good inside. I think it leaves it good impression." [Gemma]

Faculty findings-Students' names

Most faculty were in agreement with students that knowing the names of their students was key to showing students that they mattered. One faculty member indicated that they tried to make the classroom a space where students could be themselves and learn at the same time. Some faculty recalled when they were students and the significance it held when faculty knew them by name. It clearly was a memory that faculty could easily recall. One faculty member commented that they felt that when faculty knew students' names that it made the student feel like they belonged and were special:

“I try to break the ice. The students do matter to me. It takes time to know people's names but I believe it is worth it because I want them to know they matter.” [Faith]

“I think that when you know a student by their name that it is intentional and I think when you do that in the classroom I think that makes the student feel better. To me that shows how I care. So you have that connection.” [Vero]

“I feel like knowing a name is important. Sometimes, I have a hard time remembering their names. But, I try to do this because it makes them feel special and that they are important and the interaction is more focused as I get a chance to know them.” [Wendy]

Knowing the names of students resonated with faculty members as many stated that knowing the names of students was one way in which they could be a rapport with students. However, for many faculty the reality of having up to 40 or more students in one classroom posed a very real challenge. It is often the case that faculty at WMCC who teach full-time within the core curriculum can have up to 195 students per semester and an adjunct faculty member can have up to 100 students in a given semester.

Understanding how knowing student's names are important through the lens of symbolic interactionism

In the *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959), explored the intentionality of actions and what those actions mean for those who were exposed to the action. For Goffman

(1959), meanings are conveyed through verbal and non-verbal behaviors and are in the context of every day situations that people encounter. In the *Interaction Ritual*, Goffman (1967) moves toward constructing and perhaps deconstructing the elements of how face to face interactions take place. He indicated that as people enter into interactions with others, they carry with them their own set of “commitments,” of how things may operate in a given situation. Individuals therefore give and receive information with one another (the interaction) and as people interact with one another further meaning is created by what took place between the two parties.

As faculty and students interact at WMCC, they mutually create meaning. In the case of learning the names of students, some students indicate that this is an important element for them. Furthermore, faculty also commented that when they learn student’s names that it is an intentional act by which they feel that they are more connected to the student. Hence, the faculty member and the student both come away from the interaction with a mutually created meaning that perhaps can create a better learning environment. Students may feel like faculty cared enough to learn their names and faculty may feel like the student is more engaged in the learning process.

The meanings people attribute to the words and actions of others is worthy of discussion in the context of faculty and student interactions at the community college. Gemma’s experience underscores the point. Recall, she stated that since she was young that knowing people’s names is important because it leaves a good impression. She states that when her professors know her name that it makes her feel good. Hence, as faculty get to know the names of their students and then use their names in conversations with them, students attribute meaning as in Gemma’s case wherein she states she feels good about herself because faculty took the time to get to know her name.

The application of symbolic interactionism within the context of WMCC's faculty and student interaction lies in that the meaning that is created by the interaction of the above two parties. This interaction has then by interpreted by the student who then may take action based on the meaning of the interaction. For example, recall the interviews with Mark and Ben above in this section. Mark asserted that when his teachers know his name, it matters to him, because later he may ask them for an extension on an assignment. Hence, the interaction between Mark and his teachers perhaps may provide for him a potential opportunity to approach his teachers for more time should he need it. Thus, this potential opportunity is the action that Mark took based upon the interactions with his professors.

In the case of Ben (see above), his interpretation of the interaction created a meaning and to a larger extent, a inner self-confidence by which he states that he looks forward to attending class. For Ben, he states that he feels that his instructors pay attention to him and therefore he has gained confidence because they know him, his name and his work. As a result, Ben's interpretation of the interaction has caused him to gain some personal attributes (confidence).

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked: What is the nature of faculty-student interactions at the West Mountain Community College?

This question was really the heart of this study as I had embarked on this research project with the hope of finding out what is the nature of what is being spoken between faculty and students. This is one of those questions that had a multitude of answers. Some students indicated that they spoke to their professors not only about academic issues but also about personal situations as well. There were many student participants in this study who indicated that they felt like they could trust faculty with personal issues. One student described a personal situation

in which the student was having a difficult time at home, at work and at school. The student felt as if “everything was going wrong.” Additionally, the student mentioned that they were having financial troubles to the extent that they did not know if they could get back and forth to school because they did not have money for gas. This student decided to go and speak to one of their professors about the reasons why they were missing so much class. The student noted that the conversation turned into something more in terms of the faculty member listening to the student’s concerns and offering to listen and help should this kind of situation happen again.

Overall, students at WMCC speak with faculty about academic and personal concerns. For students, being able to communicate with faculty when a need arises is important to them. Many students noted as previously mentioned that they prefer to speak with faculty in person (see in-class interaction in this chapter). Also, as students were asked during the interview process about what is spoken during the interactions, they gave examples of issues that were personal in nature but what they perhaps perceived as having a bearing on their academic standing in class. However, there were some students who felt very comfortable sharing personal details of their lives with faculty members.

Faculty members also indicated that students often spoke to them about deeply personal issues that often opened up opportunities for faculty to listen to students and often help them if possible with advice about these issues. Both faculty and students indicated that they felt a sort of openness that existed at WMCC.

From the data that was analyzed for research question 2, there were two major findings and or themes that emerged that center around: 1) academic exchanges and 2) personal exchanges.

Key finding (theme) #5- Academic exchanges

On any college campus in the United States, it is likely that faculty and students will encounter one another throughout a semester. There is a greater probability that the dynamic inside of a classroom between faculty and students will often revolve around academic endeavors that are classroom specific. These academic transactions are important to students because students are many times concerned about their grade in a particular class. However, there is also a fair amount of communication that is occurring outside of the classroom (see out-of-class interaction in this chapter) at WMCC. These personal exchanges will be discussed later in the chapter.

The student participants provided several examples of the academic exchanges they have with faculty members. The majority of students initiated the academic conversations with faculty members and some of the more meaningful exchanges are captured below:

“Last Friday, I had to get my driver’s license test. It was the same hour as Jennifer’s class. I told her I was not able to make it. When I got to class, Jennifer asked about the test and I told her I did not pass and that I will take it again. She asked what had happened. I told her and she told me that I would be able to turn in the work that I missed and she helped me get the information I missed during the class session.”
[Maddie]

“I had a situation at home so I emailed about some assignments that I needed to get to my teacher. I was not sure if they were going to get them in time and I thought I might get trouble because they do not accept emailed work, only hard copies. It turns out that after emailed them that they answered immediately and told me that they would accept my work over the email.” [Ruth]

“One time, I emailed a professor a question regarding a project. I think they answered within two hours and I was kind of surprised it was so fast. But then in that same class on the day to a final my dad took the car to the gym. We only have one car. I called my teacher and they told me that they would give me a half hour window and that they would wait for me. The teacher told me that they do not usually make exceptions especially during finals. I made it to class and I was really happy they worked with me.”[Mark]

There was this one time that was going to an interruption in my attendance and I wanted to let them know if I could do some of my work early. I really liked the personalization.

Because I had attended a university, you don't get that same face to face interaction. Half of the time, you do not even know who your professor is and so being here at community, there was something I appreciated about the time that professors took with me. They told me, let's see what our options are, we can do this or that. I really appreciated the time they took with me. I appreciated their presence. I expected them to work with me and they did." [Ramon].

For many students, these academic exchanges are creating an atmosphere at WMCC wherein students felt as though faculty members would work with them regarding particular instances in which their work may be affected. Three of the nineteen students who were interviewed had attended other higher education institutions such as: Arizona State University, Texas Tech University and DeVry University before attending WMCC. All three students had similar sentiments in their perception that faculty makes students feel as individual persons.

When the question about academic exchanges was posed to faculty at WMCC and there were so many instances in which faculty is consistently engaged with students on academic issues that this dissertation alone could likely not contain them all. On an almost daily basis, students contact faculty about absences, grades, clarification on assignments and help for preparation for tests. Therefore, the researcher has opted to focus on the personal exchanges between faculty and student.

Key finding (theme) #6- Personal exchanges

Students identified many examples in which personal exchanges with faculty members left lasting impressions on them. These types of exchanges can be building blocks for future interactions as students began to build rapport and trust with faculty members. In many cases, students stated that faculty members had helped them get through difficult times. In one case, a student relayed that they had a field trip at a particular venue wherein they were meeting their class and their professor to complete some volunteer work for extra credit. During the event, the student had an opportunity to speak to the faculty member one on one and the student described

this as a conversation as “one of the most meaningful,” that has ever happened to the student.

The student indicated that it was not so much what they spoke about but that the faculty member seemed interested in the student’s life. Because of this particular event and interaction, the student told the faculty member that they would be willing to volunteer at future events in an effort to help the faculty member should they need assistance. Thus, these personal exchanges can help to connect students not only to the faculty member but also to the WMCC community. This student was clearly moved by this interaction with the faculty member.

Many of the exchanges below describe the student struggling with a personal situation and faculty member being showing concern and offering help:

“I had a communication with my Education Professor. He is a great guy. He grew up in the 1960’s. He always comments on my t-shirts. He is old school but he somehow understands young people. We had a conversation one time about life and some things I was going through and it felt like it was not just teacher to student but friend to friend.”[Mark]

“It is really cool. I had a personal problem and I did not know what to do. I went to talk to my boss who is also my teacher. I told her what was happening. She did not judge me at all. I was scared but it felt like I was going to a friend and someone who knows what they are talking about.” [Jeff]

“One time I remember that my teacher saw me crying in the hallway with my friend. They came over to see if I was okay. I ended up telling her what had happened. I was not getting along with my parents and I wanted to move with my boyfriend to Austin. My teacher listened to me for a long time and I cried. She told me these things we go through in life don’t last forever. I wrote them a letter later thanking them for listening. I will never forget it.” [Kristen]

For some students, faculty members can be a source of help and guidance during times of distress. Many students commented that faculty members were always ready to listen to students even when the subject matter has nothing to do with class. Some of these interactions above were high quality interactions that can leave a lasting impression on students. Moreover, these

interactions that students pinpoint do not seem to be infrequent but a part of their everyday pattern of experience at WMCC.

As students described some of these personal exchanges above, it was clear that the way in faculty responded to the students was significant for the student. During the interviews, student participants commented on their belief that faculty was not only available for these types of conversations but also approachable. Other students noted that they felt like if they had a personal problem that they could speak with their professor. The majority of students felt faculty members would be understanding of their particular situations. Although, this researcher did not specifically address the question of professional and personal boundaries within the interview protocol, it was very clear that students felt as though they could indeed speak with faculty about their lives outside of the classroom.

Faculty findings-Personal exchanges

Similarly, faculty members also lamented on their own personal exchanges with students. From the faculty's perspective, these personal exchanges with students were often characterized one way in which faculty can show students that they care about their everyday lives. As mentioned in an earlier, some students do not think of faculty as quasi-parents and therefore the ability of students and faculty to speak about private concerns with faculty is part of the mutual understanding between faculty and students. The confirmation of this perspective is illuminated by some of the faculty at WMCC who stated:

“ I had a student a couple of semesters back and she was standing outside the main building and I told I would see her in class later and she just broke down in tears. She told me her best friend had committed suicide yesterday and I looked at her and I gave her a hug and asked her to sit with me. I told her that I, too, had lost my brother to suicide and I know the pain involved. I told her that if she ever wanted to speak about this further, I am available. ” [Sandy]

“ A student in one of my summer classes told me that they had just gotten out of federal prison after serving a 5 year sentence. You could tell he was unsure of himself. He seemed a little apprehensive to engage in class or even outside of class. I began to joke with him inside of class a little about small things like the weather, parking issues on campus. Eventually, he came to see me regarding an assignment and later on it became a routine for us to meet occasionally so I had the chance to speak with him one on one. He told me some things about his time in prison that were not that pleasant. I appreciated these conversations and I could see he did as well.” [Valente]

“ I have been teaching here a very long time. I have heard so many things about students’ personal lives that I do not even know where to begin. I have tried to cultivate an atmosphere where students feel like they can be themselves and if they need to, they can have a safe place to speak. Students have shared with me about their issues with addiction and I try to be compassionate and empathetic. I know they cannot share some of these things with just anyone. I believe we are in these positions of trust and they understand this.” [Manny]

From these exchanges, it appears as though faculty at WMCC are concerned about the well being of their students. It seems that no interaction is too small or too difficult for faculty members. For the most part, faculty stated that they often did not ask students specific questions about students’ personal lives but the conversation would often move toward that direction. One faculty member commented that they have come to think of students as their family for that given semester. Also, faculty stated that as they spoke with students that there was this natural transition to speaking about every day life.

Understanding academic and personal exchanges through the lens of institutional agents

Stanton-Salazar (2001) examined the social networks of 250 Mexican-American high school students in six high schools in California. His findings indicated that the students relied heavily on their teachers and counselors (institutional agents) to help them navigate the complex web of the school infrastructure. Furthermore, Stanton-Salazar (2001) elaborated specifically on how agents provide support for students. He contends the support comes from seven forms of institutionally based funds of knowledge that include:

- 1) Institutionally sanctioned discourses- the process of using socially acceptable ways of using language and communicating
- 2) Academic task specific knowledge- the knowledge of specific discipline areas
- 3) Organizational or bureaucratic funds of knowledge-an understanding of how a bureaucratic system operates to include chains of command
- 4) Network development- the knowledge of how to work with gatekeepers and the building ties with peers and other key players
- 5) Technical funds of knowledge- the knowledge of computer literacy, time management skills and test and study skills
- 6) Knowledge of labor and educational markets- the knowledge of job and educational opportunities
- 7) Problem solving knowledge- how to integrate the other six institutionally based funds of knowledge to problem solve and make sound decisions (Stanton-Salazar, p.296).

Additionally, Stanton-Salazar (2001) description of the six forms of institutional support that teachers help to provide students extends the funds of knowledge that were described above.

The six forms of institutional support include: 1) funds of knowledge that help students understand the implicit and explicit socialization of systems 2) bridging- liaison to the gatekeepers and others at the school 3) advocacy-process of intervening on behalf of another 4) role modeling- modeling specific behaviors that effective in mainstream society 5) emotional and moral support- support of students in mainstream domains 6) personalized evaluative feedback,

There are some applications and linkages that can be made with the current study as it relates to academic and personal exchanges between faculty and students and funds of knowledge outlined by Stanton-Salazar (2001). For example, there were numerous cases mentioned in the student narrative exhibited the six forms of institutional support and the seven forms of funds of knowledge.

Most students in their descriptions of the academic exchanges are interacting with their instructors about missed assignments, clarification on assignments, attendance concerns and help with specific discipline related questions articulated that they were in need of their professors

help. Most of the time, faculty are the individuals who are in total control of these types of questions and students many times need clarification and often permission from faculty about academic related issues. Recall, Ramon's situation (mentioned above), he had an interruption in his attendance and stated they he expected that his professor would work with him to find a solution and in the end the professor actually did. Ramon's personal circumstance is connected to problem solving tenet found within the seven forms of institutionally based funds of knowledge. In this case, Ramon's problem can only be solved by his instructor. In some ways, his instructor is role-modeling for Ramon how to communicate and ultimately solve a potential problem that could perhaps have impacted his academic standing in the class.

Additionally, Kristen's case is another example of how personal exchanges are a way in which faculty can provide emotional and moral support to students which was number five in the six forms of institutional support outlined by Stanton-Salazar (2001). Recall Kristen's story, as she is crying in the hallway, her professor sees her and comes to speak with her about her situation. Kristen states that the faculty member took her aside, sat with her and listened to her. Kristen states that it was something that she will always remember about her instructor. She then wrote a letter to the professor expressing her gratitude for listening to her and being there for her. When faculty members support students in a time of need, it can be one way by which the faculty is creating an confirming and supportive atmosphere which can be beneficial for students academically and socially.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asked: How do students interpret (describe) their interactions with faculty at West Mountain Community College?

When students were asked to describe these interactions, they often characterized the interactions in one of two categories: “it was good” or “ it was bad.” Also, when a follow up question to specifically describe the events or experiences they were referring to, only then, did student begin to convey their descriptions and interpretation of particular interactions.

Students explained in great detail some of the experiences they had with faculty members. Students were not shy expressing their opinions about faculty and often shared what they had heard from others on campus about particular faculty members. Many students commented that even before they took classes with particular faculty members that they consulted their peers and a website known as Rate My Professor in which students could leave anonymous comments about faculty members.

During the analysis, there were two themes that emerged from the data: 1) positive interactions and 2) negative interactions, both of which will be expanded within this chapter.

Some of the findings in this section also suggest that while both positive and negative interactions are taking place consistently that the negative interactions often left a lasting impression. For example, when students articulated a particular negative experience they would often go back to that experience several times during the course of the interview even when the conversation seemed like it had moved beyond that exchange. Conversely, positive interactions between faculty and student were usually high quality interactions wherein both faculty and students stated were meaningful.

Key finding (theme) # 7- Positive interactions

Students gave many examples of positive interactions that they had with faculty members. Some of these interactions took place inside and outside of the classroom and students. Students mentioned that faculty was often available when they needed to speak

with them about particular concerns. A couple of students mentioned that even when faculty members had others waiting to speak with them, that the faculty would give students their full attention during these conversations.

One student depicted a particular exchange in which a faculty member asked if the student was dyslexic as the faculty member was an expert on learning challenges and immediately asked the student if she had ever been diagnosed with dyslexia. This student is a non-traditional student in her late 20's who came back to school after working for about four years. She was taking classes part-time at both Pinco and Lakeview campuses and was working a full-time job. This student had attended a higher education institution located in another state and decided to come back home and began attending WMCC. She is interested in pursuing a degree in a health related field.

The student described the interchange:

Ms. Carpenter at VV knew I was dyslexic the first time I wrote something for her. She took me aside and asked me if I was dyslexic. I told her I was and that I was diagnosed a long time ago. She told me that she has some type of training that makes her an expert in dyslexia. She did not make me feel bad about this and told me that she would work me one on one to get you through this class. She had several exercises and things she does to work with people who have this. I do not think she had to do this for me because I am not her only student. She helped me through the class and made me feel better about who I am. She told me a lot of people have dyslexia and do very well in school and in life.” [Gemma]

This event was particularly memorable to the student because she mentioned that she felt ignored during her K-12 educational experience because of her dyslexia. She indicated that her parents did not have a lot of information on the challenge during that time period and relied on teachers to help them understand Gemma's case. She stated that this interaction with Ms. Carpenter was important for her as she finally felt like someone understood and that she was not alone in her learning challenge. Gemma even indicated that this interaction

with Ms. Carpenter helped her to feel better about herself. It is these types of interactions that can assist students not only their academic development but overall social development (Tinto, 1993,2000).

Other students described positive interactions with faculty members as well. Some of the descriptions that were given include examples of faculty members being concerned about students well being and helping students build confidence in themselves. One student during the interview even commented that in the 4 semesters at WMCC that they had never encountered a negative experience with a faculty member.

For many students, these positive interactions can be determined by many variables. For example, the number of students in the classroom can be a determining factor especially if it is a core class which can have up to 40 students. Another factor may be faculty attitudes toward the student. Two students mentioned that if they perceive that faculty is dismissive toward students that they would be discouraged to approach the faculty member. However, the majority of students indicated positive encounters of engagement with faculty. One student described their sentiment about a particular faculty member who was informally mentoring them during the semester:

“I have been struggling with school a little. I am receiving help from the disability office. I was in the military for 14 years and have done several combat tours in Afghanistan and Iraq. I have some injuries from this. I took me a while to get back to into school. I don’t feel like I am gonna make it sometimes. I am in Mr. Atencio’s class right now. He started talking with me about school and then about life. He can see that life is complicated at times, he understands this. He has a child too. He has taken a lot of time with me. He told me that I can finish here and transfer to a 4 year university. I really had not thought about that before. I am a little scared about this though.” [Tito]

This student who is a veteran described how he has had to overcome some personal issues as when he returned to civilian life. He has been a student at the WMCC for the last 4 years. He mentioned that he feels frightened at times of big places like universities. During the interview, I commented to him that he had been all over the world and asked him what he feared the most about attending a university. He stated that he was uncertain of his abilities to succeed in a four year institution. He went on to state that Mr. Atencio had helped him see that there is life beyond the military.

From the interviews and according to students, it was not uncommon for faculty members to act as informal advisors for their students. From the demographic information provided in Table 4.1., 11 out of the 19 students at WMCC who were interviewed for this study are first generation college students. Some of the students indicated that their family members were not in a position to provide assistance or guide them through college. Hence, these students many times turn to faculty members for advice and direction. These particular type of interactions can be an interpretation of faculty members caring about them and could lead to a student trying harder and wanting to do better academically as a result of the interaction.

Another positive interaction came from another non-traditional student who is studying chemistry at WMCC. The student was describing an event that took place in class that left an impression on him. He conveyed that there were presentations going on in class on that particular evening and one of his classmates got up to give her presentation. He stated that as she began to present that she appeared nervous and was stopping and starting the presentation several times. But, what caught his attention was the interaction that took

place between the instructor and the student giving the presentation that really stood out to him. He explains what he witnessed:

“I remember one time in Mr. John’s class that there was a lady giving a presentation and who is barely learning English. She was having problems getting through the presentation and it looked like she was stressed. The lady stopped student the presentation and was like, I am sorry for saying things wrong. Mr. John stopped her there and said that is nothing to be sorry for. She finished the presentation. Right there, that was a little thing but it sent a message that even if you are doing something wrong, as long as you are trying, it is okay. With that class, it feels like this is a legitimate class.” [Wesley]

This particular experience for was meaningful and seems to have left a long lasting impact.

These types of positive interactions can perhaps provide emotional support for students as they navigate their collegiate endeavors and life in general. One of the purposes of this study has been to provide a better understanding of interactions at the community college.

The above example is one that points to the importance of understanding how faculty relates to their students and also how positive interactions can create avenues for more interaction inside and outside of the classroom setting.

Faculty findings-Positive interactions

When I posed the same question to faculty about describing their positive interactions with students, they too, provided many examples of how they felt as though they had made a connection with their students. Sometimes it was students who had initiated the positive interaction whereas other times it was faculty initiated. Whatever the means, both students and faculty were beginning to foster a strong student and faculty relationship.

One faculty member who taught at WMCC as an adjunct for 10 years indicated that she had many memories of positive interactions that she had with students. This faculty member teaches 3-4 classes and has up to 100 students in a given semester. The faculty

member also indicated that they spend a good amount of time on campus and that she has always tried to make herself available to her students. She commented on a current student:

“I have one current student that I am helping. He is a veteran and because he is on the G.I. Bill, he is not allowed to take any remedial courses as the government will not pay for these types of classes. But, he needs them in the areas of math and writing. He reached out for some help even though I am not his Math or English Instructor. I told him I would help him. So, he writes something for an assignment and then I go over it with him. Yes, he could go to the tutoring but we have a connection. I don’t have that many students who want that kind of help but I felt it important to help him. I want him to do well and I know he can.” [Sandy]

The faculty member noted that this interaction was important for her to help this student even though it was clearly not her responsibility or obligation to do so. She mentioned that she has high standards and expectations of her students and wanted to prepare them for the future. She stated she attempts to recognize each individual student for as person. In the above example, Sandy is providing assistance to her students beyond the classroom. As some research has indicated, any type of interaction, even small encounters can send a strong message of belonging to students. Cotton & Wilson (2006) found in their study that when students interact with faculty that are not their instructors academic interaction is important, whereas; when students interact with faculty that are their instructors social interactions appear important.

Another faculty member echoed the same sentiment about his positive experiences with students. This faculty member indicated in the interview that in his 12 years of teaching that he has tried to cultivate a more “casual” approach to the student / faculty dynamic. He asks that students call him by his first name only and has tried to set the tone for his classroom around a give and take on-going conversation between himself and the students. He commented that this has worked well for him. He stated that he has had numerous exchanges with students over the years but one experience stood out for him:

“Every semester there is going to be different types of students. For example, this student that I am thinking about had a disability and I remember she would ride her bike to school every day. She lived sort of far from the campus. I recall one time during that semester that the police came to my class asking about her as she had not shown up on campus. They asked about this student because she did not report to the disabilities office as she usually does as she is on a very rigid routine which does not vary often. I checked my email and sure enough she had sent an email that said she stopped for an iced tea as she was riding her bike to school. Later, she apologized and we ended up fostering a great teacher and student relationship. I had an opportunity later to help her some of her projects, assignments and we still keep in contact today.” [Valente]

This description of positive interaction could point to faculty members better understanding their role outside of the classroom. As faculty build relationships with students first inside the classroom and later outside of class, it could shape their own opinions about the value they bring to the institution. For many faculty members, these types of interactions can underscore the point that fostering these types of interactions matter to both faculty and students. In this particular case, the faculty and student began a relationship that outlasted the classroom and continues today. As a result, positive interactions can indeed impact a student long term.

Key finding (theme) #8- Negative interactions

Although, students had numerous examples of positive interactions with faculty, there were also negative interactions with faculty. During the analysis, as I began to compare the number of times students had positive interactions with faculty versus how many negative interactions students had with faculty. A brief analysis conducted in NVivo 10® indicated that there was just a slight difference in the positive versus negative interactions at WMCC. From the numerical comparison and analysis, there were two more positive interactions as compared to negative interactions.

Further exploration of the interview data suggested that it is often the case that negative interactions that students have with faculty can linger even longer than positive

interactions. In one situation, a non-traditional female student went to see a faculty member during their office hours to get some help with a math question. The student indicated that the faculty member was not in the office when she arrived so she waited outside the door. When the faculty member returned they got on the phone. From the student's perspective, the faculty member seemed upset and bothered by the student's presence. The student said the faculty member told her that he would not help her. The student commented that it was the last time she ever went to see the instructor. The student described the events:

“I think with one of my math professors when I was taking that remedial class it happened. I wanted to talk with him about some questions so I went to his office during his office hours and he was not there. Then, I waited and he came and got on the phone and I went in to ask him a question and he said he could not help me. I felt sad. I never went back to get help from him. I might have went back to get his help if the response would have been different. He seemed busy so I decided to go somewhere else.” [Penny]

In this case, this student is a first generation college student and the impact of this particular interaction could be long lasting as Penny stated that she felt sad after the interaction.

Negative interactions such as this one could possibly have a detrimental effect on a student as students may perceive that they do not belong either in the class or at the school. These types of interactions are important to analyze as perhaps the institution can learn more about what factors lead to success and or failure of the student who attend their institution.

For many of the participants in this study, the negative interactions they encountered with one faculty member began to skew their perception of the entire faculty. For some, it is often not even the words that are exchanged in the interactions but the non-verbal gestures and communication that hits a chord with students. During the interview, some students stated that they received negative, dismissive and or non-verbal communication. Two students recalled their experiences:

“I would say that 4 out of 10 teachers are not flexible. Six of them are flexible but 4 are difficult. Maybe teachers have big egos. Maybe because they had to go through things, they feel like they need to make you go through the same. Some of the professors respond to students like they should know stuff already but if you think about it that is reason we are in the class. The teacher may not say anything but is a look that they give. This may discourage the students from asking any questions. The students do not want to seem like a big dummy. The professors in the harder sciences go fast and they go by an agenda and if they do not meet the agenda they get stressed and we feel it. To me, I would rather learn half of something really good and practice it then pack everything in a month what you should have learned in three months. I personally do not like these things.” [Wesley]

“In my English class, we had a guest presenter. My professor was doing a mini-workshop for us on writing. The speaker and my professor were talking to us about different types of writing. The guest speaker was talking and asked for questions. One of my classmates asked a question about the *Harry Potter* book series and the speaker looked at him like she did not like the question. Then, my professor looked over too and did not say anything but with her eyes, she looked over her reading glasses and gave the student a mean look. It was weird.” [Ruth]

From the above two accounts, these negative interchanges can be troubling for students as faculty often sets the tone within a classroom setting. Thus, even negative non-verbal communication may leave the student discouraged inside the classroom and may deter students from seeking out faculty for help and or advice. More than one student recalled their experiences with faculty that utilized non-verbal communication to convey negativity in their exchanges with students. Often, students indicated that they felt as though faculty members expect them to know certain things when they come into a classroom. From their perspective, students stated that they did not know some things that faculty expected them to know which caused a source of frustration. Students indicated that they were in the classroom to learn and they could not understand why some faculty members were upset because they did not already know certain concepts.

Faculty findings-Negative interactions

. While students were the primary driver for this study, faculty members also provided important insight into some of the negative interactions that have had with students.

Listening to faculty articulate their own experiences provided additional information about the nature of negative interactions between faculty and students at WMCC.

One faculty member spoke at length about his most recent negative experience:

I had a difficult situation with a veteran a while back. He was an older, non-traditional student who was coming back from Iraq and who it seemed had some trouble transitioning back. The student had been a little intimidating to other students, making comments to them. I pulled him aside and spoke with him about it. He got offended and went directly to the dean on campus. He wrote a lengthy letter to the dean and the vice president and told them that I was not fit to teach and that he felt I drank too much coffee which therefore impaired my abilities to teach effectively. I had to meet with my boss and then the dean. The dean eventually met with the vice president on my behalf. I still maintain that he was unstable and should not allowed to return to school until he gets evaluated by someone. There were lots of meetings that took place but in the end, he dis-enrolled himself.” [Valente]

This faculty member still recalled the incident in vivid detail and continued to express his belief that the student should not be enrolled at any school until the student could “decompress,” after his time in Iraq. The faculty member stated that he does not usually become disillusioned because of one incident. Rather, for this faculty member, this one student was not stable enough to be in a classroom setting.

Another faculty member who has taught 16 years at WMCC encountered a student with whom she had to finally seek assistance from WMCC administration. She recalls the situation:

“One time this young man was in class and after class and he came up to me and said things that were quite rude like “because you are a sociologist, you are one the most evil people in the world.” He was incoherent and I had to get the police involved. I had to fill out reports and other kinds of follow-up. I told the dean that I wanted to drop him from the class. I always felt like in these types of situations, that I needed to remain calm and have a poker face. I try to watch my tone of voice as well. I try to control the situation and not let the situation control me.” [Faith]

The faculty member explained that this was not her first negative experience and that her overall teaching tenure at WMCC was filled with more positive interactions than negative ones. It was clear to this researcher that this faculty member did not let this negative experience define an entire student body. Moreover, while all faculty will at some point have negative interactions as well as positive experiences, the hope is that understanding both types of experiences will enable more consideration on the long term impact for both faculty and students. Both faculty and students can use even negative experiences as learning opportunities to seek alternative ways to deal with various types of encounters.

Understanding positive and negative interactions through the lens of symbolic interactionism

Goffman's (1969) work centers around interaction. In *Strategic Interaction*, he stated that face to face interaction is the center of communication. His focus was on the micro-level analysis of what transpires when people interact with one another. His emphasis was not on the societal structures that are in place that determines the social order but how the interactions that take place daily form the structures that exist. Goffman (1983) has suggested in the "Interaction Order," the Presidential Address he gave to the 1982 American Sociological Association, that the micro-interactions people have with one another can have an influence on the macro-level, of which he was referring to society. He also stated that there are various types of classification of interactions that could may be occurring at any given time. Therefore, he concludes that our daily lives are usually spent in the presence of others and our doings are "socially situated" (p.2).

The positive and negative interactions between faculty and students in many ways are manifestations of the interaction order. As faculty and students interact on a daily basis at WMCC, a level of understanding of their own personal roles in the larger social order is

evidenced. Tito's story is one of the most compelling as it relates to the interaction order. Recall, Tito is a veteran of several overseas combat tours to Iraq and Afghanistan. He is a student who receives assistance from WMCC's Office for Students with Disabilities and has been attending WMCC for 4 years and has more than enough credits to transfer to a 4 year university. He indicated many times during the interview his fear of leaving WMCC to a 4 year institution and even at one point in the interview stated: "I don't feel like I am gonna make it sometimes." He noted that his professor, Mr. Atencio has been talking with him about his potential plans for the future. Tito noted that during his interactions with Mr. Atencio that he felt that Mr. Atencio understood the pressures of life. Eventually, Tito stated that Mr. Atencio told him he should think about transferring. Tito explained during the interview that he had not thought about transferring before Mr. Atencio brought it up.

This positive interaction that took place between Tito and Mr. Atencio is an example of how the micro can perhaps have an impact on the macro. As Tito contemplates his decision to move forward to a 4 year institution at the prompting of Mr. Atencio, his future may indeed be impacted academically, socially and for Tito, emotionally. Recall, WMCC is a 2 year institution and Tito has been a student at WMCC for 4 years. Hence, this will likely not be an easy decision for Tito but one that he is contemplating because of his interaction with Mr. Atencio.

On the other hand, not all interactions at WMCC are positive as there were several stories of negative experiences that students had with their professors. As student relayed these negative interactional stories, it was clear that they left lasting impressions upon the student.

The negative interactions that Penny had with the faculty member from math who stated he could not help her, the interaction that Ruth witnessed as student asked a question that frustrated the guest speaker and the instructor and the description Wesley related about how faculty members seem like they have big egos, all connect to the interaction order. For Goffman (1983) these micro-level interactions are the basis of the foundation of society and the interactions, in this case between faculty and students should be further analyzed. Penny, Wesley and Ruth all left the interactions with negative connotations about their experiences with faculty. In the case of Penny, she stated that she did not ever go back to get help and that it discouraged her. This one negative experience that Penny had could possibly impact her persistence at WMCC and or perhaps skew her perception of the WMCC faculty as a whole. The goal of the interaction order is to better understand how the micro-level interactions will impact the macro-level of society. Thus, in Penny, Wesley and Ruth's cases, point out the significance of understanding interactions that take place at the community college.

Key finding (theme) #9- Faculty validate students (from Classroom Observations)

As mentioned in Chapter 3: Methodology, four classroom observations were completed. Each observation lasted for 1 ½ hours each. Each of the four observations was completed within four of the nine core curriculum disciplines to include: math, history, education and art.

In an effort to obtain additional information about faculty and student interactions, an analysis of the classroom is important as it is the primary avenue by which faculty and students interact.

The one primary theme that emerged from the classroom observations was validation of students. This theory was not originally considered and articulated within the conceptual

framework of this study; however, it emerged later and is nevertheless as significant as the other theoretical frameworks discussed in earlier chapters. Thus, an overall summary of the theory will precede the actual classroom observation findings.

Rendón (1994) noted that the validation of students, especially students who come from disadvantaged populations can be powerful. The theory of validation has six primary components that include: 1) educators that create a supportive process inside and outside of the classroom 2) educators that create an atmosphere wherein students feel they are accepted 3) educators that create pre-requisites to overall development of the student 4) extending validation of students to other areas outside of the classroom that they encounter 5) educators who create ways with which students develop holistically and 6) educators who work with students as early as possible. Hence, all of these elements include an emphasis on how the faculty can best support the student inside the classroom. Validation theory, when applied, can have positive outcomes for students academically and socially.

Validating experiences can come in many forms which include: faculty taking the time to learn student's names, faculty gave students opportunities to see themselves as learners, faculty was conscious of student's backgrounds, faculty shared knowledge and became partners in learning with students, faculty told them they could accomplish their goals and faculty served as mentors for students inside and outside of the classroom (Rendón, 1994).

In the case of WMCC, the analysis revealed that validation is taking place, often it seems without it being intentional. Rather, faculty and students at WMCC have a sort of natural authentic rhythm of interaction that is not forced but rather is an evolution in the making.

The Math Class

This particular math class was a remedial math class and had 25 students in it. The faculty member was a retired public school teacher who had 25 years experience and had been teaching at WMCC for the last 10 years. The math class meets twice a week for an hour and half. I visited the class during the day and there was a both males and females as well what appeared to be a diversity of age and ethnicities within the group of students.

On the day of the observation, the faculty member had purchased candy for the class and handed it out before they started. She commented that she wanted to give them something to encourage them as they proceeded to work on their “worksheets.” The faculty member set up an overhead projector by which she worked on specific math problems from the “worksheet” along with the students. This faculty member would call on students by name and ask them what answer they received for a particular problem. The students would answer and then she would ask other students if they thought the answer was correct. If the answer was correct, she would say something encouraging to the student before moving on to the next student. If the answer was incorrect, she would offer help to the student by working the math problem, step by step using the overhead projector. Also, the faculty member would encourage students with words such as: good job, nicely done, good try, good start but. The faculty member would also say that she wanted students who did get the correct answer to get up and go sit with someone who did not get the correct answer and help them with the math problem. During the observation, several students got up and moved around the classroom to assist other students who were having difficulty. The faculty member would verbally inject intermittently throughout the class that she had confidence in their abilities to work through the problems to come up with the correct answer.

Additionally, students would speak freely in the class without raising their hand and the faculty member welcomed each student to speak up if they were not understanding a specific problem. The faculty member was patient with students as they explained how they came up with a specific answer and at least 3 times the faculty member would tell small jokes and the students would either smile or laugh out loud.

One tenant of validation theory is that faculty encourage students by letting them know that they can accomplish what is in front of them (Rendón, 1994). The math class was an illustration of this component as this particular faculty member continually told students that they would and could do the math problems. This can help to build a student's confidence which can then perhaps result in overall academic improvement.

The History Class

The day I attended the history class which is listed as: American History to 1877 is a required core course and had 30 students who were in attendance. The faculty member teaching the class had been teaching at WMCC for 10 years as an adjunct. Since this particular class is part of the core curriculum, this faculty member can have over 100 students in a semester .

On the day that I visited, the faculty member was lecturing on the Jeffersonian Era. The faculty member started the class with taking attendance of which she knew the majority of students by their names and used their names when she referred to them. The faculty member also was conveyed information to the students about an upcoming assignment.

During the lecture, several students raised their hands with questions relating to the lecture and the faculty member called on the students by name and then answered each question thoroughly. She paused and asked the students if they felt like she had fully answered their question. Throughout the lecture, the faculty member would pause and pose critical thinking

questions to the students. Sometimes they answered without being called upon but it also seemed from their appearance that they did not know the answer. There were also a small group of students who repeatedly would provide the answer. The faculty member would acknowledge them by name and would continue to use their name throughout the class.

When the class ended, two students stayed to speak with the instructor. One student whom the faculty member knew by name was concerned about absences while another student was confused about the due dates. Faculty member provided their full attention to the students as she greeted them by name before the conversation. During one of the interactions with the student who was concerned about absences, the student gave a small hug to the faculty member and thanked the student for understanding.

According to Rendón (1994), validation can also occur when faculty members learn students name and use their names when referring to them. In this case, the history instructor was fully aware of her students names and used their names often not only as she took attendance but also as she lectured and called on people.

Moreover, this study's findings (see theme #4- knowing student's names is important to students) points to students feeling saying that they feel as though they matter when faculty learn their names and then use their names. Acknowledging students by name can foster a sense of self-worth among students because students may feel that faculty views them as an individual. Also, perhaps this acknowledgement can translate into student's trying harder and doing better inside the classroom.

The Education Class

The education class is also part of the core curriculum and primarily focuses helping students acquire the skills to help students succeed academically and socially. It is not an

education class in a literal sense but provides students with tools to help them maneuver their education through the vehicle of information.

The researcher visited an evening class. Hence, this class meets during the evening and is composed of non-traditional students who are working full-time in the day. The faculty member teaching this class is a full-time faculty member who has been teaching at WMCC since 2006 who started as an adjunct and has since moved to lecturer status.

On the day of the observation, as the class started, the faculty member told the students to give themselves a round of applause for making it to school one more night. The students laughed and applauded themselves. It appeared to be a routine for them. There were 20 students in this class and when I arrived they were getting ready to hand in an assignment. The faculty member picked up the assignments and then asked them to turn their attention to the chalkboard in class which had some writing on it. On the chalkboard the faculty member wrote down all the names of all the scholarships that WMCC offers to current students. The faculty member explained to the students that he would be giving them extra credit if they complete the application process for the scholarships. The students took down the information of the website where the scholarship details could be found. The faculty member told the students that they were more than qualified for some of these scholarships and that they should indeed apply and if they needed assistance in terms of letters of recommendation that he would be available to them.

The rest of the class was an interactive lecture and the students seemed engaged with their instructor throughout the evening.

Rendón (1994) suggested that validation theory is present when faculty members or coaches assist students as they plan for their next set of classes and for their future. This Mastering Academic Excellence Class underscores this point as this particular faculty member is

encouraging students to apply for scholarships that will impact their future. The careful prodding of the students by the faculty member may provide academic and emotional support for students as they plan the next phase of their academic journey.

The Art Class

The WMCC Art Appreciation Class is yet another class that is part of the core curriculum. Students at WMCC must take one art class and can choose from studio art as in drawing, sculpting and or painting and art appreciation.

The class I visited had approximately 20 students and the composition was made up of varying ages and ethnicities but the class was scheduled in the early afternoon so most of the students appeared to be traditional students. The faculty member had been teaching as an adjunct and lecturer for 12 years at WMCC. This particular faculty member is also a professional artist by trade and has been known to teach up to 8 classes in one semester, some of which are face to face and some classes on-line.

On the day of the observation, the faculty member was completing two tasks simultaneously. The first task was that students were going to be watching a film to evaluate it from an aesthetic perspective. The faculty member showed two short clips of the films and the students then voted on the one they wanted to watch in a later class period. The second task was that student were in the midst of presenting their semester projects. The goal of the project was to allow students to embark on photography. The students had been asked to take several photos of something meaningful to them and then display those images to the rest of the class along with short narrative on the photos. The students proceeded to present their images and their story lines as the faculty member and students listened. The faculty member asked the student questions about their photos.

For the most part, the student presenters seemed very confident in their delivery of the narrative and their display of the photos. Even as the faculty member asked specific higher order questions, the student seemed to be engaged in the process and the faculty member verbalized their approval. The other students who were not presenting commented amongst themselves about the work of their classmate saying things such as: ‘that’s cool,’ “ I like that,” and “nice.”

The element of validation theory that suggests that faculty give students opportunities to witness themselves as successful learners was apparent in the art class. The students of this class seemed to experience the excitement of learning as the students who presented saw and heard the reactions of their classmates and their teacher. When validation is present, students feel capable of learning and have a sense of self-worth (Rendón, 1994). Validation was apparent in this art class as student put their abilities on display for all of their classmates and professor to savor.

There is a distinction that needs to be made at this point regarding the theory of validation as it has been applied in this study and the finding #2- faculty care about students and finding #3- faculty members are helpful to students. While validation theory has elements such as educators creating supportive processes for students inside and outside of the classroom as well as educators creating an atmosphere wherein students feel they are accepted, it is different than what this study found with findings 2 and 3 mentioned above. Primarily, the distinction is drawn based on the fact that validation that was occurring in this study was in the confines of the classroom setting. Although, validation theory does not solely occur in the classroom, in the context of this study during the classroom observations, validation theory did occur. Whereas, in this study faculty caring about students and faculty helping students was occurring inside but primarily outside of the classroom. Hence, for this study, it was not appropriate to include findings 2 and 3 under the umbrella of validation theory.

Chapter 5: Conclusion, Limitations, Implications & Recommendations

Approximately half of all undergraduate college freshman will start their collegiate experience at a community college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). There has been a significant amount of research has focused upon the effects of faculty-student interactions on student outcomes in four year as well as two year higher education institutions. Research has indicated that student to faculty interaction is important to the academic and social growth of students. Student and faculty interactions have a great influence on student development especially when faculty make themselves available outside of class. These interactions have contributed to student's overall academic and social development (Astin, 2005; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Tinto, 1993, 2002; Deil-Amen, 2010; Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Carrasco-Nungary, 2011).

Faculty members play a significant role in the lives of students as many students have indicated that they have frequent interactions with faculty members on an on-going basis and some students even indicate that they view faculty members as role models (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2014). Additionally, faculty and student relationships seem to be the glue that help students stay connected to the academic and social fabric of the institution (Tinto 1993, 1997, 2002).

It must also be noted that there have some concerns about community college faculty, in particular, adjunct faculty who compose the majority of the workforce within community colleges often teaching 58% per cent of courses (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2014). Between 2009-2014, The Center for Community College Survey of Student Engagement surveyed approximately 70,000 adjunct instructors at the community college as well as 32 focus groups that were made up of full-time faculty, adjunct faculty and college

administrators. The research findings indicate that in 2009, 987 community colleges hired 400,000 of which 70% were adjunct or part-time faculty members. These faculty members teach the majority of classes yet receive very low salaries, no benefits and often no permanent work space (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2014). Fain (2014) calls this phenomenon “adjunctification.” and states that part-time instructors have become a fundamental feature of the model that sustains community colleges in today’s higher education landscape.

The purpose of this study is to examine faculty and student interactions at the community college, in particular, the type of interactions, the nature of the interactions as well as how students interpret their interactions with faculty members. With an ever growing emphasis on accountability within community colleges, the purpose of this study is to better understand the type of interactions that take place, the nature of the interactions that take place and what those interactions mean from a student perspective.

Additionally, there were three primary theories that guided this study: (Goffman, 1983) symbolic interactionism and interaction order, Stanton-Salazar (1997) institutional agents and Rendón (1994) validation theory. These theories have been helpful in understanding how students think about their interactions with faculty members. From the analysis, faculty hold an important role as not only a facilitator of learning but in some cases a confidants. In many cases, the interactions went beyond the classroom and these three frameworks helped provide additional insight as to how and what is taking place between faculty and students. These theories have helped to encapsulate how interactions between the faculty and students are complex. Student expressed that they often come away from an interaction with a specific interpretation of the interaction while at the same time rely on faculty for academic and sometimes emotional support.

In an effort to triangulate the findings, 9 faculty members were interviewed for this study. Although, the faculty interviews were helpful in terms of understanding the interactions between faculty and students at WMCC, the researcher did not feel that the faculty had been interviewed to the extent that I would be able to analyze separate categories of findings for this group. Also, the researcher did not believe the interviews were extensive enough to provide this type of analysis. Hence, the faculty findings followed each of the student responses and in many cases they underscored the students' perspectives but more thorough interviewing and analysis would need to be done to provide adequate faculty findings. Perhaps, a study of faculty at WMCC could possibly be entertained in a future study.

This section will outline the three research questions that guided the study as well as a brief summary of the major findings of this study.

Summary of major findings

The three research questions that guided this study were: What different types of faculty-student interactions take place at West Mountain Community College? What is the nature of faculty-student interactions at the West Mountain Community College? How do students interpret (describe) their interactions with faculty at West Mountain Community College?

Research question 1:

What different types of faculty-student interactions take place at West Mountain Community College?

Students at WMCC provided numerous narratives as to the types of interactions that took place. For the most part, students indicated that they most often interacted with their professors in class or immediately after class. They indicated that they thought that they felt more comfortable in speaking with their instructors face to face. Some students also indicated that

time was a factor for them as they did not have the time to send and respond to emails. On the other hand, students also spoke to faculty outside of the classroom. These interactions most often were focused upon academic issues such as absences that could impact an assignment or sometimes clarification on a given assignment. However, there were some cases in which students stated that they spoke to their professors about personal issues.

The study at WMCC examined four different types of interactions that emerged categorized into themes (see Chapter 4) that included: 1) students feeling encouraged by faculty 2) students stating that they feel that faculty cares about them 3) faculty being helpful to students and 4) knowing the names of students is important to students. In addition to these major findings, there were some supplemental findings that are related to the key findings regarding the types of interactions which include: 1) faculty is approachable and 2) faculty is available.

Students at WMCC indicated that faculty provided encouragement to them through their words and actions. Students spoke about situation in which faculty members would write notes on their papers expressing to students that they knew they could do better and telling the students that they had high expectations for them. Also, students expressed that the way in which faculty members spoke to them made them feel as if they could keep on going to school the next semester and beyond. Additionally, students claimed that sometimes it was the way in which the class was set up by the professor that was the source of encouragement.

Student participants also described how they felt that faculty cared about them as people. There were several instances in which students discussed through the interviews how faculty intervened in tough life situations to assist the student. When asked how they knew that faculty cared about them as people, students cited examples that connected to their personal struggles

during a given semester and how faculty showed them they cared about them. Most often, students articulated how during difficult times that faculty spoke to them and in one instance hugged them and listened.

A pronounced theme discussed in Chapter 4 was that students felt that faculty was helpful to them and they gave several illustrations to express this to include statements about how faculty is helpful in a way that is not like parents. Some students felt as though that when they asked for help that they receive it from faculty. In one case, a student noted that faculty is helpful to the degree that it made this particular student feel like they could reach their major and become somebody.

Moreover, students who participated in this study articulated that it was important to them that faculty knew them by name. Students gave examples related to how they felt that if their professors knew their name that they would perhaps know their work. One student mentioned that they thought it was important for faculty to know students' names because if the student needed an extension on a particular assignment, the instructor would know their name and therefore may be more likely than not to grant the extension because they knew the student's name. Also, students stated that when faculty knew their names that they felt good inside.

Students suggested in the supplemental findings that faculty was approachable and available. They gave examples of how students felt that faculty was available to them during office hours and beyond. One student described how they felt that the faculty was open to things and that they could likely talk to them about anything, not even things that are related to academia.

Faculty at WMCC cited examples within their own narrative about how they made attempts to connect with their student through trying to learn their students names to moving

offices to try to be more accessible to students in a space that is more accommodating to students.

Research question 2: What is the nature of faculty-student interactions at the West Mountain Community College?

Overall, the findings for research question two fall into two themes that include: 1) academic exchanges and 2) personal exchanges.

There were numerous academic exchanges that took place at WMCC between the faculty and students. Some students articulated that they spoke to their professors about absences and how it might impact their grade in the course while others spoke to their professors about specific tests and assignments in an attempt to get clarification. One particular student had to go and get their driver's license at the same time as class and their professor allowed them to turn the work that was missed in class. The interviews revealed that students and faculty interacted on a continuous basis regarding these types of concerns. Also, the study pointed to the fact that students most readily spoke to faculty about academic issues. It seemed that often that students' personal issues were connected to the academic conversations that they had with faculty.

Not only did students talk to faculty about academic issues but personal issues as well. There were numerous narratives on the times in which students spoke to faculty members about certain situations and circumstances in their lives. Also, many times during the interviews regarding question 2, students could easily recall instances in which they had high quality interactions with faculty stemming from a personal situation.

Overall, students discussed how they spoke to faculty about life in general, relationship issues and situations in their lives that were very intimate and personal in nature. Students noted that they felt comfortable in speaking to faculty about personal issues and faculty in their own

interviews reciprocated the same sentiment that they did not mind students talking with them about personal issues.

Faculty at WMCC have also characterized that students have shared with them very emotional and personal details of their lives. For the most part, faculty stated that because of the position they held that they thought that students felt like they could discuss situations with them.

Research question 3 asked: How do students interpret (describe) their interactions with faculty at West Mountain Community College?

There were two main themes that emerged from research question 3 to include: 1) positive interactions and 2) negative interactions. Out of all the data that emerged, this question sparked the most descriptive answers out of all the three research questions.

Students expressed their own descriptions of their interactions with faculty. There were about the same number of positive interactions as there negative interactions. It was often the case that students had lasting impressions from both positive and negative interactions.

In terms of the positive interactions, students spoke about how the overall assistance, guidance and empathy that faculty displayed to them at WMCC. On occasion, from the students' perspectives, faculty had went over and above what their job descriptions likely stated. Students clearly recalled the times in which faculty made a difference in their situation either by taking the time to speak with them, by directing them or just by listening to them. The positive interactions seemed to resonate with students as they often referred to experiences with faculty several semesters back in a very detailed and elaborate manner. Just as the positive interactions impacted students, the negative interactions did as well. Additionally, although there were more positive interactions than there were negative, the

negative experiences also seemed to leave a lasting impact on the student as well. During the interviews, it seemed as when students explained their negative interactions that they perceived that other negative interactions could likely occur in the future with other faculty members.

The notion of meaningful interactions has been a crucial component of this study. These types of interactions can have a long lasting impact on students while they are attending the community college and beyond. For example, in 2014, the Gallup-Purdue Inaugural National Report which is a joint research effort between Purdue University and the Lumina Foundation was initiated to explore the relationship between the college experience and college graduates' lives. This web study included 30,000 people who had at least completed a Bachelor's Degree. The study found that student experiences while in college had a relationship to long term outcomes in the lives of students. Students indicated in the study that they felt as though they had at least one professor who cared about them and who made them excited about learning. Thus, as a result, their odds of being engaged at work doubled and they stated that they felt as though they were thriving in all aspects of their lives. The findings of the poll indicate that meaningful interactions with faculty can have an impact on individuals' overall wellbeing (Ray & Kafka, 2015).

Hence, the study mentioned above connects to the current study as the significance and timeliness of understanding how interactions both verbal and non-verbal matter in the long term to individuals who have had meaningful interactions during their college years.

Limitations

One limitation to this study is that only two out of five campuses at WMCC were studied. This research centered on the Lakeview Campus which is the smallest campus in the college

district and Pinco Campus which is the largest campus in this college district. However, there are four other campuses within the college district that enroll a number of students who were not included in this study. This exclusion is a potential limitation because the other four campuses also have significant enrollment numbers of which students might possibly have different experiences with faculty given that these campuses are located in different locations in the city. Also, the differences in size and location of each campus could also be a consideration. For example, the Abique Campus is known to enroll a large number of military personnel. This demographic could possibly have a different outlook on faculty and student interaction. Nonetheless, this researcher believes that WMCC's demographic does not vary to such a great extent that the findings would differ significantly and the researcher is confident that both campuses are a reflection of all WMCC students.

Another limitation may stem from reflexivity on behalf of the researcher since it is the researcher's place of employment for the last several years. The researcher is currently employed at West Mountain Community College and has worked at both Pinco and Lakeview campuses. As mentioned in Chapter 3, none of the researcher's current and or former students participated in the study. However, this was not the case for the faculty members who were participants of this study. The researcher personally knew all 9 of the faculty members who participated in the study. But, throughout the study, this researcher attempted to evaluate the personal investment in the relationships to colleagues. It will be important to understand that the presence of the researcher in the research setting is unavoidable. Hence, the ultimate goal in this study was to consistently consider the management of perception in separating what can be seen and heard from what certain things might mean (Holiday, 2007).

Last, an additional limitation could also stem from the fact that the researcher intentionally excluded WMCC's Early College High School program from the study which is a growing segment of the WMCC demographic. The exclusion of this particular demographic stemmed from their age and this researcher did not want to navigate the parental consent process. This possibly could be a limitation as there is an ever present and growing population of Early College High School at WMCC.

Implications

The community college has increasingly been highlighted throughout President Obama's tenure. The Obama Administration has promoted community colleges from the very first National White House Summit on Community Colleges to the most recent State of the Union Speech in January 2015, in which President Obama proposed that the first two years of community college be free to individuals that can maintain a 2.5 GPA and who are willing to stay on track to complete their particular program (Hudson, 2015).

This study focused on interactions between faculty and students at the community college. From this study, there are some implications for policy and practice that should be considered. First, the 83rd Session of the Texas Legislature held in 2013 passed Senate Bill 1 which mandated that 10% of community college funding will now be tied to student success outcomes. (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2013). Thus, in this era of accountability, community colleges will need to concentrate their efforts on student success models with specific outcomes that can be measured, likely in the transfer and vocational areas.

While there are likely a multitude of contemplations about what qualifies as student success, this study has underscored the value of faculty and student interactions at the community college. The findings of the this study suggested the faculty plays an important role

in lives of students while they are students at the community college. Students spoke extensively about how faculty care, help and encourage them at WMCC. A potential consideration for student success could be built upon the faculty and student relationship and attempts to assess how to foster more interaction. Scholarship in this area stresses that faculty and student interactions matter (Kuh et al., 2010; Kinloch, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Vito, 2007). Also, students have indicated that many times faculty members are role models for them (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2014). Perhaps, community college administrators may want to contemplate how to create more opportunities for faculty and student engagement through specific out of the class informal gatherings that could foster future interactions. These interactions have the potential to assist in the new student success outcomes. For example, faculty and student collobroation on local community projects or even at a micro-level, small campus led activites that could include: photo contests, mini-projects that are short micro-level endeavors that focus on the campus and or roundtable discussions about what could make for a better campus.

Another implication that should be mentioned as it relates to this study is the current structural limitations of the community college system which also existed within this study completed at WMCC. These limitations are far ranging and have historical and contemporary effects on students. The tension exists in that while, community colleges are open admissions institutions and may be often the only opportunity for some individuals to receive a higher education, at the same time, these institutions replicate class inequalities as community colleges have completion rates of 31 percent for first-time undergraduate students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Also, community college students are more likely to reflect the

factors that put students most at risk for not attaining a degree (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2012). Cohen & Brawer

Also, these community college may be also reflective in the over-representation of students of color in community colleges with 57 percent of Latino students and 52 percent of African-American students attending community colleges (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). Cohen, Brawer & Kisker (2014) echo these sentiments as they note the challenges that community colleges face in addition to low graduation rates which include: funding from governmental entities, a disconnect between high school and higher education institutions and the lack of preparation for the job market. These challenges may not be lost on deaf ears as the American Association of Community Colleges has attempted to provide on-going discourse on the outlook for the 21st century community colleges to include academic perspectives on issues such as: the skills gap, college readiness and leadership training (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015).

This study was aimed at trying to better understand the type of interactions, the nature of what is spoken during the interactions and how students describe their interactions with faculty. As it relates to practice, faculty play a pivotal role in the lives of students (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011). This study illustrated how faculty as institutional agents can be a crucial component for students in their navigation through the higher education trajectory.

As stated earlier, faculty hold important positions of authority as well as have significant knowledge of the working systems in place. These institutional agents work in important positions at schools and can provide networks, connections and support for students. Moreover, institutional agents possess high degree of human, social, and cultural capital that they may use to transmit or negotiate institutional resources and or support on behalf of the student (Stanton-

Salazar, 1997, 2011). From this study, the findings suggested that the role of the teacher does not start and end within the confines of the classroom walls but rather is a fluid, on-going and complex dynamic that can only be understood through an intentional level of consciousness.

Also, understanding the significant role that faculty plays in the lives of students can help faculty recognize and acknowledge that they have a remarkable impact on students from day one. From this study, students indicated that this influence did not only occur inside the classroom but outside of class as well. Full-time faculty and adjuncts have a tremendous effect on students. Faculty should consider how their verbal and non-verbal demeanor is noted and interpreted by students.

A potential suggestion to help faculty understand their role inside the class and beyond would be an initial training when they are hired but follow-up training as well. Perhaps this study was one vehicle that can help to identify best practices for new and current faculty members. All faculty at WMCC is required to attend various training in the fall and spring semesters. Possibly these trainings could be focused on the most current qualitative and quantitative research on faculty and student interactions wherein they could receive credit toward these training hours. Also, many higher educational institutions have best practices methods by which WMCC could possibly borrow. For example, St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas promote intentional "mixers," by which faculty and students get together and have small snacks together as a way for students to get to know their professors as people outside of the classroom (Alderman, 2008). As this study indicated, students have expectations of faculty at the community college perhaps these suggested trainings could assist in helping faculty better understand the impact they have on students.

Recommendation

This examined two campuses within one community college district. The findings suggested that faculty members play pivotal roles in the lives of students at WMCC. There are some considerations for future research in this area of faculty and student interactions that should be considered.

Recommendation 1. The community college as this study depicted is an institution that is ever evolving. The one constant within community colleges is that it continues to remain an open admissions institution that generally has a large first time generation demographic. A mixed methods longitudinal study focused on faculty and student interactions would help to explore the perspectives using surveys along with interviews could help to open up more understanding students' perceptions on what makes for high quality interactions. As these first time college students enter the doors of the community college, there is a certain level of uncertainty about the ability to move forward in their own higher education endeavors. From this study, faculty who play the role of institutional agents are the first point of contact for students. Many community colleges are focused primarily on "surviving the first semester or first year." But, institutions have a responsibility to their students for the entire time they are enrolled at the institution. This mixed methods longitudinal study could reveal how best the institution can support their students during their entire tenure at the community college. As stated earlier (see Chapter 2) there are numerous quantitative studies on faculty and student interactions at four year institutions and some at the community college; however, there are few mixed methods studies in this area.

Recommendation 2. An additional study that should be considered is a mixed methods study on faculty at the community college in term of examining what they would determine as

high quality interactions with students. Both full-time and adjunct faculty as we have seen from this study at WMCC teach large numbers of students during a given semester. Full-time faculty at WMCC can teach over 200 students in one semester and adjuncts can top over 100 for a semester (see Chapter 4 introduction of WMCC faculty). This study found that faculty are important figures in students' overall development. Although, there is often a divide among full-time and adjunct faculty in the area of wages, hours and pedagogy, there is a lot that can be learned from all faculty in terms of interaction with students. A mixed methods study could help to reveal what faculty believes are best practices in engaging and interacting with students inside and outside the classroom. From this study, the nine faculty that were interviewed expressed that they feel a responsibility to their students academically and beyond. There were several instances in this study wherein faculty described several positive interactions that they had with students that were sort of impromptu interactions but nevertheless, interactions that left a mutual lasting impression. Further studies could prompt discussions about how to train faculty about the significance of their role at the community college.

There are numerous lessons that this researcher learned from a personal perspective throughout this study. For one, the researcher has always felt a very strong emotional attachment to the community college. Although, this researcher personally never attended a community college during my undergraduate years, the significance of the institution was understood early on in my own academic journey. The researcher attended a university in a large metropolitan city that had a community college, a four year university and a graduate school that shared one campus. Thus, the researcher encountered and personally knew numerous individuals who had attended the community college located on my campus. The people, faculty and staff left a strong impression upon me. There were many encounters with individuals at the community

college helped this researcher to understand the mission of the community college as well as the value of education. An understanding about the meaning of an open access institution was clearly ingrained. Secondly, this study has indeed humbled me as I heard the many stories of students at WMCC. I came to see that what I do inside and outside the classroom matters. Many times I empathized with the participants as I recalled myself, a first generation college student. I am a better person because I had 28 remarkable interactions of my own with 19 students and 9 faculty members at WMCC. I was reminded constantly throughout this study about the reasons why I chose to teach at the community college.

In conclusion, faculty and student interactions are important to study for all of the reasons that were set forth in this study. The changing demographics, the increasing enrollment and the focus on student success measurements at the community college have prompted many to become more interested in researching topics within this setting. And while the debate continues over what the real mission of the community college is: democratizing institutions or giver of second chances, the impact of the community college and the interactions that take place cannot be denied.

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Appendix A



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
Office of the Vice President for Research and Sponsored Projects
Institutional Review Board
El Paso, Texas 79968-0587
phone: 9157478841 fax: 915 747-5931
FWA No: 00001224

DATE: January 26, 2015

TO: Amber Archuleta-Lucero

FROM: University of Texas at El Paso IRB

STUDY TITLE: [665665-1] Faculty and Student Interactions at the Community College: An Examination of the Interaction Order

IRB REFERENCE #: 665665-1

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: January 26, 2015

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. University of Texas at El Paso IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulation **[45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)]**:

- Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

Exempt protocols do not need to be renewed. Please note that it is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to resubmit the proposal for review if there are any modifications made to the originally submitted proposal. This review is required in order to determine if "Exemption" status remains.

We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office.

If you have any questions, please contact Christina Ramirez at (915) 747-7693 or cramirez22@utep.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.



El Paso Community College
P. O. Box 20500
El Paso, Texas 79998

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

February 6, 2015

Amber Archuleta-Lucero
University of Texas at El Paso
Educational Leadership and Foundations
500 W University Ave
El Paso, Texas 79968

Dear Ms. Archuleta-Lucero:

Thank you for submitting your study entitled, Faculty and Student Interactions at the Community College-An Examination of the Interaction Order; the IRB has determined that your study is approved.

Please keep in mind that the IRB must be contacted if there are any changes to your research protocol. The number assigned to your protocol is 1312. Do not hesitate to contact the IRB at (915) 831-2184 if you have any questions.

If your study requires gathering information from El Paso Community College, you must contact the Office of Institutional Research at (915) 831-2184 to request an Internal/External Request for Information Form.

Best wishes for your research work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keith Pannell', is written over a horizontal line.

Keith Pannell
Chair, IRB



December 9, 2014

UTEP Institutional Research
ORSP Admin-209
El Paso, TX 78868

Dear UTEP IRB:

This letter grants Amber Archuleta-Lucero, El Paso Community College (EPCC) adjunct faculty and doctoral student at the University of Texas at El Paso, permission to conduct research at El Paso Community College upon approval of the described research by the EPCC Institutional Review Board (IRB). The project, *"Faculty and Student Interaction at the Community College: An Examination of the Interaction Order,"* entails interviews with EPCC faculty and students who are 18 years or older as well as classroom observation. A formal EPCC IRB application was submitted on October 9, 2014, to the EPCC Institutional Research Office.

If the IRB application is approved, the research will take place at the Valle Verde and Northwest Campuses. This study will NOT include any EPCC Early College High School students or dual credit students. There will be up to 18 student interviews, up to 9 faculty interviews and up to 4 classroom observations.

I understand that the purpose of the study is to better understand the interactions that occur between faculty members and students. The type of interactions and students' understanding and interpreting those interactions will be explored within this research.

El Paso Community College was selected because the focus of this study is an exploration of a community college environment and the interpersonal dynamics that exist between faculty and students. Ms. Archuleta-Lucero is a current EPCC adjunct faculty member teaching government and has taught at EPCC for 7 years.

Ms. Archuleta-Lucero will share the results of her dissertations with El Paso Community College. The research, *"Faculty and Student Interactions at the Community College: An Examination of the Interaction Order,"* can be conducted at EPCC if the study is approved by the EPCC IRB.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Carol Kay', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Dr. Carol Kay
Director of Institutional Research
El Paso Community College

Appendix D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM-STUDENT INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER and PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Amber Archuleta-Lucero, Doctoral Student at the University of Texas at El Paso,
Educational Leadership and Foundations Program, aarchuletalucero@miners.utep.edu

TITLE:

Faculty and Student Interactions at the Community College: An Examination of the
Interaction Order.

DESCRIPTION:

This study involves the examination of the interactions that occur between faculty and students at the community college. This study involves you participating in an interview with me in which you will be asked questions and in which you will discuss with me issues regarding my topic of study. The interview will be recorded and a summary of the interview will be made. You will be asked to sign a promise of confidentiality to ensure your confidentiality. If you agree, I can meet with you after the summary is completed and ask follow-up questions if needed. The length of the interviews will be approximately 1 hour.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

I will keep all information that identifies you in a locked cabinet of which I will be the only one who has access. Any and all information gathered on you will not identify you. I will use pseudonyms and personally identifying information will be removed. There will be no direct link from the data back to the student being interviewed.

BENEFITS:

There are no known benefits for your participation in the study.

RISKS:

There are no known risks to you for participating in this project.

PAYMENT:

You will be paid \$20.00 cash after the interview is complete

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION:

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, or would like to end your participation in this study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to you which you are otherwise entitled.

RESEARCHER AND UTEP IRB CONTACT INFORMATION:

If you have any questions regarding the procedures of this study, you can contact me via telephone at (915) 239-0914 or via email at aarchuletalucero@miners.utep.edu In compliance with UTEP's

Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol approved for this study, any information you provide

will be kept confidential.

Any questions regarding the conduct of this research or your rights as a research participant may be directed to the IRB Administrator at (915) 747-7939.

SIGNATURE:

Your signature on this consent form indicates that you fully understand the above study, what I am asking of you in this study, and that you are signing this voluntarily. If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to ask them now or at any time throughout the project.

Signature_____Date_____

A copy of this consent form can be made available for you to keep upon request.

Appendix E

STUDENT INFORMATION FORM

Date of Interview: _____

If I need to contact you for follow up questions, which is the best method to reach you: _____

Zip Code: _____

Age: _____

What WMCC campus do you attend?

What is your student status?

Lakeview

Pinco

Full-time

Part-time

Gender: _____ female

_____ male

What best describes your ethnicity?

African-America Asian International Latino Multi-racial Native American White

What is your annual household income?

Under \$30,000

\$30,000-\$50,000

Over 50,000

Are you a veteran? Yes No How long did you serve? _____

How long have you attended WMCC? _____

Why did you choose WMCC? _____

Have you ever received services with the Center for Students with Disabilities Office? Circle one: Y or N

Major at WMCC? _____

What is your goal at WMCC? (transfer, get a job, just taking credits) _____

Appendix F

Student Interview Protocol

Adapted from Nitecki (2009)

1. How did you decide to enroll at WMCC?
2. Can you tell me a little about the classes you are taking this semester?
3. What are your goals (academic and personal)?
4. What are your expectations of your professors? Have they met or not met them?
5. Can you describe a POSITIVE/ NEGATIVE experience you have had a with an instructor? How did you interpret this experience?
6. Have any of your instructors ever encouraged or discouraged you?
Can you describe the experience? How did you interpret this experience?
7. What did your instructors do if you stopped coming to class or had difficulty with an assignment?
8. How do you communicate with your instructors inside of class/ outside of class?
Explain how this takes place.
9. Have you ever had to seek help from one of your instructors either in class or outside of class? Can you explain the circumstances and your experience?
11. Have any of your instructors reached out to you regarding an academic or personal issues? Please describe
12. Have you had to reach out to an instructor regarding an academic or personal issue?
Please describe the experience.
13. Do any of your instructors know your name? If so who are they? On a scale of 1-10 1 being not important and 10 being really important, how important is it to you that professors know your name and why?
14. Do you feel as though your instructors have helped you or are helping you reach your goals? How so?
15. Describe the culture of one of your classes in terms of your professors and class dynamic. If you were an expert on this community college and were being interviewed tonight on television, what would you say about WMCC?

Appendix G

INFORMED CONSENT FORM-FACULTY INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER and PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Amber Archuleta-Lucero, Doctoral Student at the University of Texas at El Paso,
Educational Leadership and Foundations Program: aarchuletalucero@miners.utep.edu

TITLE:

Faculty and Student Interactions at the Community College: An Examination of the
Interaction Order.

DESCRIPTION:

This study involves the examination of the interactions that occur between faculty and students at the community college. This study involves you participating in an interview with me in which you will be asked questions and in which you will discuss with me issues regarding my topic of study. The interview will be recorded and a summary of the interview will be made. You will be asked to sign a promise of confidentiality to ensure your confidentiality. If you agree, I can meet with you after the summary is completed and ask follow-up questions if needed. The length of the interviews will be approximately up to 3 hours (one to two hours for initial interview and an additional hour for follow-up questions).

CONFIDENTIALITY:

I will keep all information that identifies you in a locked cabinet of which I will be the only one who has access. Any and all information gathered on you will not identify you. I will use pseudonyms and personally identifying information will be removed. There will be no direct link from the data back to the faculty being interviewed.

BENEFITS:

There are no known benefits for your participation in the study.

RISKS:

There are no known risks to you for participating in this project.

PAYMENT:

You will be paid a \$10.00 Starbucks gift card after the interview is completed.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION:

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, or would like to end your participation in this study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to you which you are otherwise entitled.

RESEARCHER AND UTEP IRB CONTACT INFORMATION:

If you have any questions regarding the procedures of this study, you can contact me via telephone at (915) 239-0914 or via email at aarchuletalucero@miners.utep.edu In compliance with UTEP's

Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol approved for this study, any information you provide will be kept confidential.

Any questions regarding the conduct of this research or your rights as a research participant may be directed to the IRB Administrator at (915) 747-7939.

SIGNATURE:

Your signature on this consent form indicates that you fully understand the above study, what I am asking of you in this study, and that you are signing this voluntarily. If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to ask them now or at any time throughout the project.

Signature_____Date_____

A copy of this consent form can be made available for you to keep upon request.

Appendix H
FACULTY INFORMATION FORM

Department: _____

Date of Interview: _____

If I need to contact you for follow up questions, which is the best method to reach you: _____

Gender: _____ female _____ male

What best describes your ethnicity?

African-American Asian International Latino(a) Multi-racial Native American White

Employment Status at WMCC: Full-time Adjunct Lecturer

Home campus: Lakeview Pinco

How long have you taught at WMCC? _____

How many courses on the average do you teach each semester? _____

Do you teach? circle as many that are applicable:

Face to face Online Hybrid Virtual

How many students do you have (total) in a single semester? _____

What courses do you teach? _____

What is your highest level of education? _____

Do you participate in any outside activities with students outside of class (field trips, projects,
student activities or any extracurricular activities? _____

Appendix I

Faculty Interview Protocol

Adapted from Nitecki (2009)

1. Follow up questions from Faculty Information form
2. How did you come to teach at EPCC?
3. Why did you decide to teach at a community college? EPCC?
4. How would you describe your students?
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your students?
6. How do you engage your students with the course content?
7. How do you handle who do not attend or are doing poorly in your class?
8. How available are you for your students?
9. How do you communicate with students outside of class?
10. What does the outside of class communication consist of?
11. Can you describe a meaningful interaction with a student? What occurred?
12. What kind of feedback do you provide to your students on their work?
13. How do you handle students that are not interested, may not attend, or are performing poorly?
14. Was there a particular student(s) that you reached out to? What were the circumstances?
15. Do you feel like you contribute to your students reaching their goals?

Vita

Amber Archuleta-Lucero holds a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice and Criminology and a Master's Degree in Public Affairs-Political and Government Processes. She has held positions as a investigator for the public defender's office and has also worked within the correctional field. Amber has taught at the community college level for 15 years in Texas. Her research interests include: income inequality, women and gender studies and student engagement at the community college.

Address:

Amber Archuleta-Lucero
6701 South Desert Blvd.
El Paso, Texas 79936