

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHridge

Exploring the Preparation and Readiness for the Department Chair Role

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

By

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Dedication

To my wonderful family who gave me everything

I ever needed to be happy and successful

and

To my best pal in the world

Ben Schneider

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## Abstract

Exploring the Preparation and Readiness for the Department Chair Role

By

Joan L. Schneider

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

The growing shortage of community college leaders in the United States is expected to increase steadily in the next few years due to a mass retirement of deans, presidents and provosts. The failure of community colleges in California to prepare to replenish the leadership pipeline threatens the mission, function, and livelihood of these essential institutions.

Those who hold the title of president, provost, or dean often begin their leadership path as a chair of an academic department. Department chairs have historically and typically assumed their role with no formal knowledge and skill preparation to enable them to serve effectively. This study explored how prepared and role-ready department chair perceived themselves to be upon assuming the role. Qualitative methodology and a multiple case-study approach was employed to collect data. The process involved

open-ended interviews with twelve department chairs employed within a large community college district.

The study used the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory to explore contributing factors from previous experience that contributed to the preparation and role-readiness of department chairs. A goal of the study was to gather findings that would potentially assist colleges in the professional development of future chairs. Findings were consistent with the body of scholarly work on the role preparation/readiness of department chairs. The majority of chairs received no regular, planned or formal knowledge and skill preparation prior to entering the role. This study found that while most of the participants perceived themselves to be ready to accept the role, they were not prepared to engage in the actions required by the position.

This study examined various elements from study participants' professional, academic and life experiences which were felt to be of relevance to their preparation and readiness to serve in the role of department chair. Based on the findings the following recommendations were made: 1) The establishment of in-house professional development programs for faculty interested in leadership positions within the institution, 2) The establishment of a preparatory program for newly elected department chairs combining didactic and mentoring strategies, and 3) Further research on the topic of this study targeting a significantly larger number of participants and using quantitative methodology in addition to qualitative.

## **CHAPTER 1: INRODUCTION**

Community colleges in California provide a highly desirable and cost-effective option for higher education for a number of reasons. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) reports that nearly half of all undergraduates in the United States attend community colleges (2016). In addition, the AACC compares the average annual tuition and fee structure required by public community colleges of \$3430 to that of public, in-state 4-year colleges which costs \$9410 (2016). Many students, including first generation, low-income and underserved students are choosing community colleges not only for economic reasons but also for the open access policies (AACC, 2016).

Currently, California has the largest system of community colleges in the nation with 113 colleges (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2016). According to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), community colleges are the state's most cost-effective system of education and students who earn a degree or certificate from these institutions double their earnings over the next three years (2015). Watts and Hammons (2002) assert that community colleges serve as an essential part into both the nation's education and economy. In addition, the CCCCCO provides the following facts and statistics on California Community Colleges: a) they are the largest provider of workforce training in both the state and the nation; b) they educate 70% of the state's nurses; c) they train 80% of the firefighters, law enforcement personnel, and emergency medical technicians; d) 29 percent of University of California graduates and 51% of California State University graduates began their higher education experience in California community colleges; and e) 48 percent of The University of California bachelor's degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics are earned by students who transferred from a California community college.

Community colleges are open access institutions serving multiple missions including transfer, vocational, developmental, and community education (AACC, 2015). They are unique in form and function and have been defined as "an amalgam of liberal arts curriculum and efforts to promote student transfer" (Cohen & Brawer, 1987, p. 5). These publicly funded and administered institutions have a unique set of challenges such as serving traditionally underserved and underprepared populations in areas as diverse as career and technical education, liberal arts, and lifelong educational pursuits (AACC, 2016; CCCCO, 2015, Piland & Wolf, 2003).

Community colleges are charged with providing access to non-traditional students while operating on a limited funding base (Boulard, 2004). The structure, operating budget, and mission of community colleges are distinct from that of four-year and private institutions (AACC, 2015). Community college expert and scholar Delores McNair (2010) refers to the community college setting as "unique, and requisite leadership skills are unique as well" (p. 199). Leadership within the community college sector is paramount as these are often under-resourced institutions that strive to serve communities with high need. With this in mind, community college leaders are tasked with providing intelligent and creative strategies and solutions tailored to the needs of this dynamic environment.

### **Problem Statement**

The growing shortage of community college leaders in the United States is expected to increase steadily in the next few years (Duree, McNair, & Ebbers, 2011; McManus, 2013). Focht (2010) states that not only is there a leadership crisis due to an imminent mass retirement of deans, presidents and provosts, but also that the supply of "willing and

capable” leaders is decreasing. Thus, it may be estimated that the supply of effective, motivated leaders will surely fall critically short of demands within the next decade, particularly if steps to address the impending leadership crisis are not taken soon. A failure by community colleges to replenish the pipeline of available candidates will likely have catastrophic implications to the mission and function of these institutions.

The responsibility of promoting the livelihood of each community college begins with individuals in leadership positions. The critical tasks and leadership responsibilities within an environment fraught with constraints falls on the shoulders of the individuals in these roles (Basham & Mathur, 2010). With this in mind, effective community college leadership depends on a cadre of individuals who possess the knowledge and insight to provide high quality educational services while competently managing the unique needs of the community college environment. Ottenritter (2006) states that effective community college leaders promote both the short-term and long-term health and livelihood of the institution. The success and sustainability of a community college institution rests on the strength of its leaders and, according to Pernick (2001), leadership skills can be learned though when done so “on the job” the organization’s welfare is placed in jeopardy.

It has been documented that the first step in community college leadership typically begins with the role of department chair (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004; Cohen & March, 1986; McDade, 1987). It has been estimated that approximately 80% of administrative decisions in higher education are made by department chairs (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004; Roach, 1976; Woodburne, 1958). However, department chairs are faculty, i.e., academic content experts and scholars (Fogg, 2001; McLaughlin et al, 1975) and often enter the

role because they are the only available faculty member who is qualified to accept the position or they are the person who demonstrates the least resistance to assuming the role (Robinson-Backmon, Kiel, Malone & Mautz, 2004; Sirkis 2011).

While it would suggest that efforts to recruit more individuals to enter the leadership arena in the position of department chair would provide a logical intervention towards solving this crisis, recruitment is not the only consideration in this endeavor. There is no guarantee that once in the position of department chair, an individual will continue on the leadership path. A study by Gmelch et al (1990) indicated that only 45.6% of department chairs surveyed would be willing to serve a second term in the position. It is essential to identify why department chairs don't stay in the role. Burns (1992) sources Role Ambiguity Stress and a feeling of not being adequately trained to handle job responsibilities as being significant sources of stress for department chairs. This source of stress then leads to role dissatisfaction and job burn-out.

The leap from serving as a scholar and academic content expert to that of leader is often vast. Sirkis (2011), a community college scholar and director of professional development, has examined this practice and states that "Faculty come to the position [department chair] frequently by "default" and without a ready set of management and leadership skills" (p. 46). Other sources indicate that the common means of satisfying the learning curve is met through unstructured on-the-job training. McPhail Naples (2006) describes faculty who have been "thrown into their faculty leadership roles" or learned by "baptism by fire" and states "this type of training is inadequate for faculty leadership and for mid and senior-level administrators" (p. 118).

The drastic differences between the functions of scholars and those of leader or administrator create a significant learning curve (Gmelch & Miskin, 2011). There is an absence of published literature to indicate and describe the manner in which community colleges regularly and consistently attempt to address this learning curve with department chairs. In addition, no consistent and standardized preparation for the role of department chair has been documented, creating a significant gap in the literature. If department chairs are learning how to perform job requirements at the same time they begin serving in the role, the knowledge, skills and attitudes they bring with them logically shape and inform their actions. This study serves to address the lack of information on how community colleges prepare department chairs to begin their role and how chairs perceive their level of preparation upon assuming their leadership role.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

This study explored and examined the critical factor of role preparation/readiness within the most commonly overlooked leadership entry position: that of the department chairperson. Department chairs are, essentially, academic faculty elected or assigned to the unique role of department leader. Before assuming this leadership role, these individuals are typically scholars and content experts within their discipline (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004). The type of knowledge and skills typically required of department chairs include responsibilities in the areas of human resource management; budgeting and accountancy; grant writing and funding; and ensuring compliance with institutional and accreditation mandates (Carroll & Gmelch, 1994; Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, & Beyer, 1990; Tucker, 1992; Wolverton, Ackerman, & Holt 2005). Unfortunately, these

abilities are not routinely developed and addressed within traditional faculty roles of scholar and academic (McLaughlin et al, 1975).

A current review of scholarly work evidences much regarding the knowledge and skills a department chair is expected to possess, however little data is readily available to identify how they acquire these abilities and, more importantly, if they acquire them before they assume the responsibilities required of the department chair position. There exists a significant gap in the literature to describe how department chairs are intentionally prepared to assume the role along with the regularity in which this preparation takes place in the community college environment. This study specifically focused on acquired experience that department chairs perceive to have prepared them to serve and function in the role of chair with competence and confidence. It additionally examined elements of desirable preparation that participants may feel they lacked at the time of appointment.

An assumption of this study is that department chairs who experience job satisfaction will be less likely to abandon their position due to stress and burnout and more likely to develop the desire and expertise that will enable them to rise within the community college leadership ladder. The purpose of this study, based on this assumption, was to identify the perceptions of department chairs within a large urban community college district referred to as Seaside Community College District (SCCD), a pseudonym. The focus of the study was to explore and identify the perception of preparation and role-readiness that study participants possessed at the time they assumed the role of department chair.

## **Research Questions**

A review of the literature assisted in formulating the rationale for this study along with the following research questions:

1. How do department chairs at SCCD perceive their level of preparation/readiness at the time they assumed this position?
2. Which previously acquired knowledge and skills do department chairs draw from that helped prepare them for their position?
3. Which previously acquired knowledge and skills did department chairs feel they lacked in terms of preparation for their role?

In this study, preparation has been conceptualized as the knowledge, skills and abilities relevant to and required of the role of department chair to perform the job competently. Readiness has been conceptualized as the ability to perform the role of chair competently, with a moderate level of confidence and without undue stress and/or feelings of inadequacy.

## **Role of Researcher**

At the time of this study, I had been employed as a department chairperson within the college district serving as the site for the study for ten years. My interest in this topic, as a researcher, stemmed from the challenges and experience of learning the various skills, knowledge and competencies required of me as I began acting in the role of department chair. Colleagues in the same position, not only within the SCCD, regularly related the same perceptions of frustration in navigating the role of chair. The frequency of this commentary made me question whether the accounts were simply coincidental or if they truly indicated a problem of wider and larger proportions. I then developed an interest in

researching this subject, particularly after it became apparent that various questions existed to create scope for exploration and study.

The study specifically explored the factors perceived by study participants to have prepared them for their role as department chair at the time of appointment. Conversely, the study also examined the knowledge/skill based elements perceived by participants to be necessary, but ones they felt to have lacked upon beginning to serve in the role of department chair.

### **Theoretical Conceptual Framework**

This study employed the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory as a basis for the study design and data interpretation. The "Dreyfus Model" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1986; Dreyfus, 1982), or "Five Stage Model of Adult Skill Acquisition" (Dreyfus, 2004), has been used by researchers to explain the phenomena of skill acquisition in both educational and professional practice environments (Benner, 2004; Hall, Ellis & Grealy, 2013; Lyon, 2015). The model is based on the understanding that contextual experience is an essential factor in both critical thinking and problem solving. The model is organized along five distinct stages of skill acquisition and the cognitive processes associated with each stage. The Dreyfus Model dovetails with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory which serves to explain the process and value of experiential knowledge. The Experiential Learning Theory also identifies the strong link between previous experience and the manner in which learners approach new experiences (Jenkins & Healy, 2000). Thus, both frameworks provide value to the purpose and type of inquiry of this study.

## **Overview of Methodology**

The purpose of the study was to discover the perceptions surrounding the role entry of chairs within a region of SCCD. This study was qualitative in nature and based on the phenomenological research tradition. Phenomenological research serves to inquire and describe lived experiences of participants relating to a specific and shared phenomena (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

The method of inquiry and data collection was a multiple, or collective case-study approach (Cousin, 2005). The use of multiple case studies is typically for the purpose of identifying similarities and differences among cases (Dasgupta, 2015). In this research scenario each study participant constituted a separate case. The process utilized open-ended interviewing to obtain data. The intention of using the open-ended format was to allow participants to fully guide or “create” the form and content of their responses (Verhaeghe & De Ruyck, 2008). After the requisite permissions and approvals for the study were secured, four department chairpersons were selected from each of three colleges comprising a region of SCCD. Voluntary study participants were recruited from each campus and were asked to participate in a case-study based interview. Participants responded to twelve open-ended questions designed to explore various facets of their perceived levels of role readiness and preparation upon beginning their role as chair. The theme of leadership was explored with some distinction as a critical aspect of the department chair role.

Responses were aggregated and organized according to the following themes emerging from the study: 1) Perceived Level of Role Preparedness; 2) Factors Identified as Supporting Role Preparedness; 3) Elements of Role Preparedness Identified as

Lacking by Participants; 4) Perceived Level of Role Readiness; 5) Factors Identified as Supporting Role Readiness; 6) Elements of Role Readiness Identified as Lacking by Participants; 7) Background Serving in a Leadership Position; and 8) Formal and Informal Leadership Preparation.

Recorded data was transcribed and each study participant was provided with transcripts of their interview for the purpose of member checking prior to coding and thematic data analysis. Thematic data was aggregated according to the outline above and sorted according to a positive direction (supportive), a negative direction (lacking or missing) or indicative of new/emerging themes.

Findings and interpretations have been documented in the final chapter of this study along with implications for future study and practice. Subject and site confidentiality have been strictly maintained at all times. Transparency involving collection methods, confidentiality safeguards, and the compilation of research findings have been maintained and documented.

### **Limitations/Delimitations**

In this study it has been essential that participants were fully cognizant of the scope and breadth of the role and responsibilities of department chairs. A study parameter stipulating that participants must have served as department chair for a minimum of six months was applied as it was believed to be the minimum amount of service in the role required for adequate comprehension of role requirements.

A significant potential study limitation concerned the fact that I was serving as both principal investigator of the study while also being employed at the site of the study. In addition, I was serving as a department chair at one of the study sites. These factors

have been documented as increasing the potential for researcher assumption and bias secondary to serving as an “insider” (Sill, 2014, p.22). Conversely, it is possible that participant responses were altered and/or affected by an assumption that certain facts or occurrences were known or experienced by me as an insider of this group. Efforts were made to select participants that I have had a limited or non-existent working relationship with on my college campus and the other two study sites. It was after careful consideration that I elected not to eliminate my place of employment, due to the belief that by rejecting this site a valuable source of participants and relevant data would be eliminated.

An initial concern existed over the potential hesitance of subjects to reveal information with complete accuracy due to concerns over confidentiality. This concern was addressed by informing participants of the process designed to ensure confidentiality of their participation and the data gathered. Another limitation of the study involved the predictability and generalizability of a study conducted on a fairly small scale. While the results and conclusions may be applied to the study environment, applicability to other sites and environments is not ensured. Therefore, study outcomes have been stated as being representative exclusively of the population studied and are addressed as such within implications for further study.

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 serves to identify the role of department chairs in the context of serving as entry-level community college leaders. The imminent and critical shortage of leaders within the community college environment is defined along with the urgent need to strengthen the leadership pipeline. The critical position that department chairs occupy

in developing into community college leaders is identified. This chapter, additionally, describes the rationale, significance and purpose of the study.

Chapter 2 provides a survey of current scholarly literature in relation to leadership in community colleges and specifically as it applies to the role of department chairperson. A focus on factors which enable department chairs to assume their roles competently and those shaping the concepts of role readiness and preparation are included. This chapter identifies gaps in the literature which impact the relevance of this study.

Chapter 3 describes the methodological plan of the study. The site of the study, research design, tradition, and theoretical concepts that have influenced the plan are discussed and defined. The data collection process and rationale for the plan are described in detail within this chapter.

Chapter 4 describes and discusses the data collected by the study. These findings are placed in the context of the participants' assessment of their own readiness to begin the role of department chair along with their perception of having been prepared in the knowledge and skills typically required to perform the role effectively. This chapter, additionally, explores themes emerging from the study and compares and contrasts their regularity as stated by the study participants.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of study outcomes, the rationale for conclusions, and the application of theoretical frameworks to the study outcomes. This chapter, additionally contains recommendations for future study and recommendations for future practice and policy.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Chapter Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine how prepared and role-ready community college department chairs perceive themselves to have been at the time of their appointment. The research questions established to guide the study have been designed to seek knowledge not been documented in current literature. This chapter provides a survey of scholarly literature in the field of higher education and community colleges. The survey includes literature that touches upon relevant concepts and data related to the role of department chairs. The themes explored in this review include the following: 1) the generally perceived definition of the department chair role; 2) the process by which department chairs enter the role; 3) role/job responsibilities commonly attributed to the department chair; 4) the relationship between the department chair role and community college leadership; 5) essential leadership competencies (knowledge, skills, behaviors); 6) theoretical constructs that guide the study design and assumptions; and lastly, 7) the critical role department chairs play in the future of California community colleges.

The most prolific and comprehensive collective of scholarly work describing the role of the department chair was authored between the 1980's and the early 2000's by Carroll (1994) Carroll and Wolverton (2004), Creswell et al, (1990), Gmelch (1994, 1995, 2004), Wolverton, et al, (1998, 2005, 2006) and others. This work has since served to collectively define the unique role of the department chair. The critical concept differentiating the role of academic faculty from that of department chairperson is the concept of leadership. Mezey et al, (2006) state "It is significant that most chairs are not provided with formal training before taking the position" (p. 304). According to

McLaughlin et al, (1975) chairs are trained as scholars and educators, rather than leaders and administrators. Thus, attaining the position of department chair requires a faculty member to transition from their customary sphere of expertise to one in which they lead their peers and represent the department, with no assured or consistent preparation. The question, therefore, arises as to how department chairs are, in actual practice, prepared for their role. Current literature demonstrates a significant gap in providing a response to this question.

The role of department chair is often cited as the entry point and initiation to the community college leadership ladder (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004; Cohen & March, 1986). The first rung on the ladder is created when a faculty member, as a scholar and expert in their field of study, is appointed or elected to the role of department chairperson. Subsequent rungs on the ladder include positions as college deans and vice presidents. As this is often the case, it would suggest that the strength of the foundational knowledge of department chairs – and their continued travel up the ladder - could critically and positively impact the future of California community colleges. Ottenritter (2006) states: “an effective community college leader strategically improves the quality of the institution, protects the long-term health of the organization, promotes the success of all students, and sustains the community college mission, based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends” (p. 16). This statement indicates that the effective preparation of individuals entering leadership positions will significantly benefit colleges in meeting institutional missions as well as benefit the communities they serve.

An examination of current literature on the subject of community college leadership reveals an urgent situation that confirms the need for timely and adequate preparation of individuals who will serve in leadership roles (Bagnato, 2004; Ebbers, Conover, & Samuels, 2010; McNair, 2010; Vaughn, 2001). As the “baby boomer” generation prepares to retire, the United States is threatened by a growing shortage of community college leaders. This threat is expected to increase steadily in the next few years (Bechtel, 2010; Duree, McNair, & Ebbers, 2011; McManus, 2013). Vacancies created by the impending retirements will logically be filled by a steady progression of entry level leaders as they travel up the leadership career ladder. Competencies required by future leaders have been addressed by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and have been referred to in recent efforts to proactively prevent a state of emergency.

Lastly, this chapter discusses theoretical perspectives which serve to illuminate the contribution of experience, particularly progressive and sustained experience, and the importance of role and competency based preparation. The Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1986; Dreyfus, 1982) has been noted as a framework that provides value and substance to ongoing research involving skill acquisition and the articulation of knowledge (Benner, 1982, 2001, 2004). The importance of David Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) in higher education and adult learning will also be referenced. Kolb’s model (Kolb, 1984) is valuable in explaining the role of experience within knowledge attainment and skill acquisition. Both theoretical frameworks provide structure to the study through their insight into role competency preparation based on experience. The literature review

concludes with an identification of gaps in the current literature surrounding the role of department chairperson. The relevance and purpose of the following study in closing the gap are outlined and established.

### **The Role of the Department Chairperson**

#### **Historical Perspective of the Role**

Community colleges were established in the United States for the purpose of addressing social, economic and political issues and experienced a considerable growth as institutions of higher education following the Civil War (McArthur, 2002). They began evolving at the end of the 1800's as an extension of the K-12 system and progressed during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century due to an increasing demand for education, particularly skilled and vocational (Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Sydow & Alfred, 2013). Since the inception of these institutions, community colleges have become significant providers of adult education. They have expanded from being vocational and transfer based programs to include developmental education offerings and programs targeted at adult learners with specific needs.

The evolution of the department chair role occurred as the infrastructure of higher educational institutions developed. According to McArthur (2002), as these institutions grew and diversified in subjects and specialties, the need for separate academic divisions became apparent by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Subjects and disciplines formed separate divisions and the number of faculty in an institution multiplied. Thus, as McArthur indicates (2002), the need for individuals to lead and direct the division, or department, became apparent and the department chair position was created. Since the role's inception, department chairs have evolved into an essential bridge between faculty

and institutional administrators in the process of accomplishing the mission and purpose of the institution.

### **The Department Chair Today**

The role of the department chairperson is essential to a community college.

According to Hecht et al. (1999), even though department chairs may lack formal or positional authority, the role may actually serve as one of the most important leadership positions in community colleges. It has been estimated that approximately 80% of administrative decisions in higher education are made by department chairs (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004; Roach, 1976; Woodburne, 1958).

While role definitions and job requirements of department chairs may vary between institutions, efforts to create a consistent definition of the role have been attempted over the last few decades (Ackerman et al, 2005; Berdow, 2010; Carroll & Gmelch, 1994; Creswell et al, 1990; Hecht, 2000; Lumpkin, 2004; Sirkis, 2011). The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (2004), the largest system of community colleges in the world, has provided the following statements to define the distinctions between positions:

“Faculty/Faculty Member- Employee of a district who is employed in an academic position that is not designated as supervisory or management.

Faculty Academic Chair - Faculty member in a generally temporary position to carry out organizational duties for a department or division: a) May or may not be elected; b) May or may not remain member of the faculty bargaining unit; c) May or may not receive additional compensation.

Department Chair- An individual who carries out certain organizing functions of a department; most commonly a faculty member (p. 8)."

These definitions illustrate the divide between the role of faculty member and that of academic/department chair. The divide is created through the distinction of adding leadership and management functions to that of an individual previously and solely responsible for academic and scholarly functions.

Scholars in the field of higher education have sought to define the core meaning of the role of department chair. Cohen, Brawer & Associates (1994) identify the department chair as a middle manager who must satisfy both upper administration and faculty. They describe the role as serving as the individual who is immediately responsible for the welfare and health of the department, faculty and staff; as well as ensuring desirable student outcomes. Lumpkin (2004) further elaborates on the department chair's role in supporting the structure of the department as a separate unit. She describes this as the "establishment of priorities and planning for the short and long-term growth and vitality of the department" (p. 45). She also states that the importance of creating strong interpersonal relationships with colleagues, the establishment of effective channels of departmental communication, and the ability to negotiate and manage conflict is crucial to the role of department chair.

While there is no consistent and unified definition of the role of department chair within the literature, there are numerous common threads. Based on the collective and descriptive statements drawn from the literature, the role of the department chair in this study is defined as a faculty member who has been formally appointed to the role of department leader, manager, and/or organizer who does not serve under the auspices of

college administration. The lack of consistency within higher education in regularly and consistently defining the role of department chair and articulating the definition creates an element of inconsistency for chairs. Perceptions of department chairs regarding their role within institutional context is often referred to under the heading of role “identity”.

### **Role Identity**

One of the primary issues that plague department chairs as they transition from the role of being purely “faculty” to that of faculty “leader” is that of role identity. Jain et al (2006) clarify the meaning of role identity as arising from a specific social position coupled with an individual’s contextualized interpretation of the role. Department chairs are socialized as scholars, first and solely, within the higher education context (Gmelch, 1995). While the job duties, or tasks, required of department chairs may vary from institution to institution, scholarly efforts have been made to define the intrinsic characteristics of the role. Gmelch and Miskin (2001) have identified four main role categories under which the functions and tasks of the department chairperson fall. These categories, and resulting role identities, are stated as the following: a) faculty developer, b) manager, c) leader, and d) scholar. The faculty developer takes on the tasks of recruiting and hiring faculty, conducting faculty evaluations, maintaining faculty morale and motivation, and the promotion of professional development. Manager tasks are related to departmental financial and budgetary maintenance, record and compliance establishment and maintenance, and the assurance of adequate departmental instructional resources. The leader category involves both departmental and institutional centered responsibilities such as planning for both short and long term departmental goals and

participation in activities which support institutional goals and promotion of the institutional master plan. Scholar functions relate to the personal promotion of content expertise, research, and contribution to the field of study.

Additional literature describes data obtained directly from chairs. Carroll and Wolverton (2004) state that over 40 percent of faculty who became department chairs derive their identity as emanating exclusively from their faculty persona rather than that of leader. Hecht (2000) states that chairs, particularly new chairs, often self-reported their role as being largely that of facilitator or faculty supporter.

Department chairs are often viewed – by themselves as well as others – in a position of an intermediary between a group of faculty and college administration (Hecht, 2000). Gillett-Karam (1999) refers to department chairs as being “not really” faculty or administrator. This dichotomy is conversely stated as the “ambiguous nature of the role itself, which is typically seen as part faculty and part administrator” (Rakos, 2001 p. 31). One consistency among the many commentaries is that the role of department chair is often viewed with the primary purpose of serving as a communicator or facilitator between faculty and administration.

Hecht (2002) stresses the critical relationship between positional identity and the ability to adapt to the role of chair. One of the challenges experienced by new department chairs is need for a “recalibration” of relationships with colleagues as the chair defines their role as a leader within the department. Chairs may be viewed as being placed in the position of directing, advising, and evaluating individuals that were once, essentially, role equals and the resulting change in identity requires significant adjustments on both sides.

In summary, department chairs enter the role as faculty and some, particularly if they reluctantly entered the role, do not re-imagine their new status as leader as distinct from that of their previous status as a faculty member. The failure of chairs to transition from their previous identity to that of their current role suggests a significant barrier to growth as a leader.

### **Attaining the Chair Position**

Various factors have been identified to explain who generally becomes a department chair and how they attain the position. Carroll and Wolverton (2004) describe the individual who becomes department chair as typically one who has attained the status of midcareer faculty member. Chairs commonly attain their role through a faculty election process or by administrative appointment (Hecht 2002). While the process of attaining the role varies, the reasons why individuals choose to serve as chairs vary from person to person. McArthur (2002) asserts that some individuals choose to accept the challenge due to extrinsic reasons, such as persuasion by colleagues or superiors. Others choose to attain the role due to intrinsic reasons such as the belief that they can help their department reach a goal or a set of goals.

Many concerns arise from the customary practice employed by colleges in selecting department chairs. Sirkis (2011) identifies the dilemma of the community college chairperson in particular as “often perceived as more of a burden than an honor” and asserts that faculty often enter the position by “default”, without a clearly defined role, and lacking established management and leadership experience and training. According to Wolverton and Ackerman (2006), community colleges spend little time in considering

the best candidate to serve as department chair and even less time in preparing the chosen person to serve effectively and competently.

In addition, McCarthy (2003) describes a personal journey progressing from serving as a faculty member, department chair, dean of academic affairs, and vice president of instruction that culminated in the presidency of a community college in northern California. She illustrates the personal conflict that arose from “the lack of training that would build decision making skills” (pp. 39-49). Dr. Jennifer Faust, scholar and former associate vice president for academic affairs, posits that many problematic issues that escalate to higher levels of administration could be effectively handled if department chairs were properly trained upon entry of their position (2015). She also asserts that institutions that do not ensure adequate preparation and leadership training of department chairs put themselves at peril.

### **The Job of Chairing a Department**

In relation to activities inherent in the day-to-day role of the department chairperson, a review of the literature indicates the actual number of “tasks” required of chairs to be between 24 and 97 (Carroll & Gmelch, 1994; Creswell et al, 1990; Tucker, 1992; Wolverton, Ackerman, & Holt 2005). Essential tasks include the following: organizing departmental activities; planning and evaluating curriculum development; representing the department at college, university, and professional meetings; communicating institutional and professional concerns to faculty; participating on institutional committees; conducting research, maintaining currency and proficiency within their discipline; obtaining and managing grants and contracts; encouraging and promoting faculty professional development; recruiting and selecting faculty and staff hires;

determining and implementing long range departmental goals; managing departmental conflict; conducting faculty and staff performance evaluations; preparing and managing the department budget; and maintaining departmental records and documentation. Problem solving, conflict resolution, and communication are other responsibilities commonly attributed to the department chair role. Some chairs are also responsible for a teaching assignment in addition to their department chair responsibilities (Hecht, 2000; Ackerman, Holt & Wolverton, 2005). This dual function can create the potential for role conflict. Hecht (2000) refers to scholarship and research as being a department chair's "major sacrifice" (p. 3). This commentary may provide insight into reasons that faculty often feel reluctant to attain the role of department chair.

### **Department Chair Preparation**

An essential focus of this study pertains to the question of how department chairs are prepared, or learn, to do their job. Numerous scholarly sources identify a consistent and common lack of preparation of department chairs as they begin serving in their role (Eley, 1994; Jackson, 1996; Lumpkin, 2004; McLaughlin et al, 1975). Chairs, therefore, commonly segue from a scholarly position of subject expertise to a position of questionable preparation and readiness. While faculty members may possess well defined teaching skills and expert knowledge in their discipline, they do not necessarily have the requisite leadership skills and knowledge required of department chairs (Cooper & Pagatto, 2003; McLaughlin et al, 1975). According to Gmelch et al (2002) only 3% of chairs receive training in leadership. Creswell et al (1990) posits that "chair training in administration and leadership occurs primarily from on-the-job experience or from observing admired leaders" (p. 4). This assertion creates concern stemming from the

fact that there is no guarantee of a mentor being available. Smith and Stewart (1999) state that most department chairs learn how to function in their roles through an informal process of self-directed discovery. Carroll and Wolverton (2004) assert that relatively new department chairs (in the position of less than one year) complain that “they do not feel as if they have enough information to do their jobs properly” (p. 7). In a study by Wolverton, Ackerman, & Holt (2005, p. 232) department chairs reported the following task areas as those they felt least prepared for at the time they assumed the role of chair: a) budget; b) evaluation and supervision of faculty; c) time management; d) building community within the department; e) balancing the demands (between scholarship vs. chair-ship); and f) legal aspects. These six role requirements are, alarmingly, among the most essential to the role of department chair, as previously indicated.

In an effort to provide department chairs with some form of reference as to what their job entails, various scholars and experts in the field have authored “self-help” books to assist department chairs in performing their role (Allard, 2011; Creswell et al, 1990; Gmelch & Mishkin, 1993, 2011; and Seagren, Creswell, & Wheeler, (1993). In addition, scholarly resources have been published and are available to inform chairs about academic leadership as it pertains to their role (Bolman & Gallos 2011). Unfortunately, according to McArthur (2002), these publications do not provide a panacea because they fail to address unique institutional requirements.

A lack of institutional consistency in preparing faculty to serve effectively as department chairs is well documented. A review of the literature suggests that a missed opportunity exists as institutions fail not only to prepare chairs for their role, but in also failing to strengthen their leadership ladder.

## **Community College Leadership Ladder**

Riggs (2009) describes the career ladder which begins with the position of faculty member and progresses through “faculty leader” and dean before entering into top level institutional leadership positions. The division or department chair has been sourced as the first step on the leadership track towards more advanced administrative positions (McLaughlin et al, 1975; O’ Banion, 2007). A significant problem exists due to the fact that department chairs do not necessarily continue to advance in leadership roles. Gmelch (1994) states that approximately only one out of every five chairs transitions into an administrative position. According to Carroll and Wolverton (2004) 20 percent of department chairs move on to other leadership/administrative positions. Various rationales have been cited to define the lack of mobility, Gmelch (2004) asserts that higher education traditionally fails to “fan the fires” of leadership enthusiasm and motivation among faculty. In addition, when examining the full leadership spectrum, most institutions fail to create a plan for leadership training, promotion, and succession planning (Gmelch, 2004; Ackerman, Holt & Wolverton, 2005).

## **Preparing Future Leaders**

As community colleges are charged with the critical responsibility of preparing future leaders, it is necessary to determine which critical concepts shape and define leadership preparation. In 2006, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) was awarded a grant by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to address the issue of community college leadership in the United States. The AACC subsequently developed a framework titled ‘Competencies for Community College Leaders’ for the purpose of defining and articulating essential leadership competencies. Various studies have

utilized the AACC framework to guide inquiry into the status of community college leadership.

Duree, McNair, & Ebbers (2011) facilitated a qualitative study that identified perceptions of community college presidents in relation to the level of leadership preparation they received prior to being appointed. Participants stated that a combination of graduate studies and professional experiences – particularly that of serving as vice or interim president - participating in professional development activities, receiving mentoring, and observing leaders at work as being useful components of their preparation. The authors recommend the creation of leadership succession plans coupled with professional development activities based on the AACC competencies to “grow” viable candidates for future leadership positions within the college. They also recommended the use of the AACC competencies to inform doctoral studies programs in community college leadership. Wallin (2012) describes the incorporation of the AACC competencies and asserts that the competencies must continually be reinterpreted and reevaluated in order to remain relevant within changing environments. Duree & Ebbers (2012) address the AACC competencies and suggest certain means to enhance the readiness of an individual in preparing for the role of community college president. These strategies include the completion of a doctoral program of study, assuming academic leadership positions in the community college setting, engaging in leadership development programs, obtaining a leader-mentor, seeking fund development experience, developing critical communication and relationship-building skills, and raising awareness of the use of data to support decision making.

In addition to the preparation of future leaders to accomplish a list of “tasks” based on established competencies, it is vital to obtain perspective from those who have served in leadership roles. In response, McPhail Naples (2006) conducted an action research study that tested leadership engagement in a large, urban, multi-college district. Results from this study include a summary of faculty perceived barriers in becoming effective leaders: a lack of administrative training, unclear district policies/practices, and the lack of organizational resources. McPhail (2014) recommended on-site training and mentorship and states “community colleges must become increasingly engaged in growing their own leadership pipeline” (p. 82).

### **“Grow Your Own” Leadership Preparation**

A review of scholarly work reveals that there is a need to prepare future leaders in community colleges (Bagnato 2004, Kezar & Rieelle 2010, Wallin 2006). Even though a sizable gap exists in identifying recent leadership preparation programs, there is a current buzz of activity around a strategy within the community college collective to address the urgent need for leadership training and mentorship specific to the site. The strategy, presumably, places the onus on the individual institution to create its own pool of future leaders via internally designed innovations and interventions. Focht (2010) illustrates this trend and states that numerous community colleges are preparing for the future through on-campus “Grow Your Own Leader” (GYOL) professional development programs. The purposes of these “academies” or “institutes” are, essentially, to develop leadership expertise, promote awareness of matters critical to community college institutions and systems, and to increase knowledge and understanding of institutional factors unique to community colleges. GYOL programs indicate significant potential for

faculty development, particularly in bridging the divide between faculty scholar and department chair.

This concept has been further defined by Kezar & Reille (2010) who have examined strategies to meet the increasing need for community college leaders through GYO leadership programs. They conducted a study that applied action research for the purpose of obtaining perspective on which elements would enable a specific community college to conduct an effective GYO program. They utilized a case study approach to conduct 12 semi-structured interviews with individuals employed at the associate dean level or higher. In addition, they examined institutional documents and conducted “stakeholder” meetings to collect additional data and triangulate findings. Several implications for colleges to develop an institutional GYO program emerged from the study: a) develop an awareness of local, or institutional, bias towards valuing certain competencies over others; b) conduct a needs assessment to identify specific aspects essential to the specific institution; c) pair the needs assessment with national leadership competencies (AACC competencies were used in this study); d) use both internal and external presenters in the program; e) consider a regionally based program to counter the limitations of a single campus based program; and f) evaluate the program’s effectiveness. Thus, this study illustrates the valuable opportunities offered to institutions by the development of professional development aimed at preparing leaders within their own ranks.

McPhail (2014) indicates three major benefits to institutionally based GYO's. Firstly, internally designed leadership development programs can be tailor-made to facilitate the chain of succession. Secondly, they connect employees to the business side

of the institution's function. Lastly, they foster collaboration by connecting employees within separate and distinct departments to the institution as a whole.

The aforementioned studies supplied a valuable perspective to the research study described in this document. As the study focus involves department chairs' perceptions of their knowledge and skills they brought with them to their role, it conversely carries the potential to identify skills and knowledge that were commonly missing from their repertoire as a scholar. The studies previously described have provided considerable perspective on emerging interventions. In addition, two specific theoretical perspectives have added dimension and substance to the study.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

This study employed two theoretical frameworks to explain the impact of experiential knowledge in preparation for complex roles. The first is the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1986, Dreyfus, 1982) which is based on a progressive, five-stage model that scaffolds previous learning into sequential levels and identifies the effect each level has on practice. The second theoretical framework informing this study is David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory which offers insight to the breadth and scope of learning through experience. Both frameworks have been widely used in scholarly studies.

#### **The Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition**

The Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition was developed by two researchers, Stuart E. Dreyfus, an applied mathematician, and his brother Hubert L. Dreyfus, a philosopher. The "Dreyfus Model", also referred to as the "Five Stage Model of Adult Skill Acquisition" (Dreyfus, 2004), was created in concert with a study of chess players, Air Force pilots, and others as they demonstrated various levels of skill attainment (Dreyfus

& Dreyfus, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1986; Dreyfus, 1982). The model is based on the understanding that contextual experience is an essential factor in both critical thinking and problem solving. The Dreyfus Model has been used by scholars and researchers to understand and identify aspects of educational and professional skill acquisition (Benner, 2004; Hall-Ellis & Grealy, 2013; Lyon, 2015). Leading nursing scholar, Patricia Benner, applied the model to her groundbreaking work which sought to explain the process of skill acquisition in clinical nursing. She demonstrated that as clinical nurses gained experience, their levels of proficiency also increased and that the cognitive processes that guide performance vary at each stage of proficiency. Benner's body of work based on the Dreyfus Model has continued for over two decades and has promoted the use of the Dreyfus Model in later studies in nursing education (Ramsburg & Childress, 2012).

The Dreyfus Model is based upon five distinct stages of skill acquisition as well as the progressively complex thought processes associated with each stage of skill attainment. Briefly summarized, the stages of the model are that of: a) Novice- the stage in which the individual recognizes salient, objectively based facts and features along with clear guidelines that are context-free. During this stage the individual lacks experiential reference and must rely on external direction; b) Advanced Beginner- the stage occurring after an individual is exposed to significant practical experience involving a task and is able to perceive similarities between previous situations and the current one. Actions can be affected by the current situation as well as previous context-free experiences; c) Competent- the stage characterized by the level at which the individual is able to meld a progressively increasing amount of experience with context-free rules towards problem

solving and decision making. The individual is able to discriminate and choose the most salient features of both areas to facilitate appropriate decisions and actions.

The subsequent stage is: d) Proficient- the stage occurring when the individual intuitively processes task parameters followed by the use of analytical judgment on how to proceed. This stage transitions from the previous in that it is characterized by a progression from detached understanding to that of involved understanding. The final stage is: e) Expert- in this stage, the individual is able to be engaged within the decision making environment and able to respond correctly and efficiently without an obvious calculation of alternatives. The individual at this stage is intuitive rather than analytical, and fully immersed and able to intellectually direct their actions (Benner, 2004; Dreyfus, 2004; Lyon, 2015).

According to Hall-Ellis and Grealy (2013), “an important assumption of the Dreyfus Model is that, with experience and mastery, skill is transformed” (p. 589). They indicate an essential feature of the model; if the expert practitioner backtracks to the process they established in the earlier stage, their performance will deteriorate. Lyon (2015) applied the theory to a study that explored discernable skill progression among expert dental educators and the factors that supported their progress from the novice level through that of expert. She states that her observations aligned with the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition and that the model described a learning sequence that was consistent with her findings.

The Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition has been employed in this study as a framework to identify various levels of skill proficiency, in this case those essential to the role of department chair. The model assists in explain skills and the complexity that

differentiate the role of faculty member, entry level chair and that of a progressively accomplished department chair.

### **Experiential Learning Theory**

Another theoretical framework that serves to explain the process and value of experiential knowledge is David A. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984, 1988). This framework is referred to by Jenkins & Healey (2000) as "one of the best known educational theories in higher education" (p. 185). Yardley et al (2012) explain the value of experiential learning thus: "previous experience affects how learners approach new experiences" (p. 162). The intent of the theory is to explain why learning through experience is effective and which steps must be taken for the experience to result in successful learning. Maiya (2015) describes the theory as "It defines learning as a process of knowledge creation through experience transformation, so knowledge becomes the result of experience understanding and transformation" (p. 52).

Lisko & O'Dell (2014) define the Experiential Learning Theory as stating that knowledge occurs through the transformation of experience into already present cognitive frameworks, which then results in how an individual thinks and behaves. They also assert, according to Kolb's theory, experiences are grasped through apprehension or comprehension. Lisko and O'Dell describe the theory as sorting learning into four stages: concrete experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation and state that all stages of the cycle must be accomplished if learning is to take place.

While the Experiential Learning Theory has been referred to extensively in management education (Bevan & Kipka, 2012; Furutan, 2014), it has been demonstrated

to be useful in veterinary training (Meehan & Menniti, 2014), applied to medical residency training (Riddle, Yudkowsky, & Gelula, 2007), and integrated within an agricultural training program (Baker, Robinson, & Kolb 2012). The application of the theory in one study demonstrated a 97% success rate in the development of confidence and competence of students to teach music (Russell-Bowie 2013). This theory has thus been demonstrated as one which may be considered relevant and applicable to studies among various disciplines. The theory has been of value in this study as it serves to explain how, and in what manner, experience prepares individuals undertaking new experiences or roles.

Both The Skill Acquisition Model and the Experiential Learning Theory are of significant value to a study involving readiness and preparation in that they seek to explain the phenomena of skill acquisition and the value of experiential knowledge. These theories have been utilized within this study to inform how experience, preparation, readiness, and skill attainment relate to the role of the department chair.

### **The Significance of the Literature Gap**

A review of current scholarly literature indicates that a crisis in community college leadership is imminent. The supply of leaders is diminishing and this dilemma is expected to continue and escalate in the near future to a point of crisis. It has been demonstrated through a review of the literature that the community college “leadership pipeline” typically begins with community college faculty who transition into the role of department chairperson, the common entry level leadership position. The literature also indicates a lack of consistency in the preparation of individuals beginning to serve in this vital role. There have been very few studies performed to describe and explain the

experiential factors a faculty member typically possesses as they assume the role of department chair and which knowledge and skill factors they are typically lacking for them to be successful in their role. One purpose of this study has been to assist in filling this gap and provide data that will be useful to the promotion and preparation of leaders in the community college environment.

### **Summary of Literature**

A review and synthesis of recent literature highlights numerous concerns relating to the state of leadership within California community colleges. As many leaders: college presidents, vice-presidents, and others are preparing to retire, the need to prepare future leaders is a clear and present imperative (Bechtel, 2010; Duree, McNair, & Ebbers, 2011; McManus, 2013). These sources state that the necessary supply of willing and competent leaders available to meet the demand created by vacated positions is disastrously below requirements. In order to effectively prepare and maintain a healthy leadership structure within California community colleges, leadership mentoring and preparation interventions must be thoughtfully designed, and implemented without delay.

It has been demonstrated, through scholarly work, that the common initiation to the community college leadership ladder is that of department chairperson (Riggs, 2009; McLaughlin et al., 1975; O' Banion, 2007). It has also been demonstrated that an overwhelming number of department chairs do not progress upwards along the ladder, often resuming a teaching role rather than advancing in a leadership role (Gmelch, 1994; Carroll & Wolverton, 2004). Therefore, it is apparent that a significant number of valuable and critically needed leadership candidates are lost as well as the opportunity to prevent a leadership crisis in California.

There exists a significant amount of literature detailing the roles and responsibilities of the department chairperson (Carroll & Gmelch, 1994; Creswell et al, 1990; Tucker, 1992; Wolverton, Ackerman, & Holt, 2005). The overwhelming majority of this literature was written between the early 1980's and the early 2000's, thus leaving a gap in recent literature. Another gap exists within the literature to address the consistency and regularity in which department chairpersons in higher education are prepared for their roles, particularly prior to role attainment. It is not clear whether the gap exists due to a lack of published studies or essays, or whether, as a number of studies assert, there exists no consistency and regularity of preparation for department chairs prior to assuming their roles.

The scholarship consistently refers to “on-the-job” training as being the main factor in explaining how department chairs navigate their roles and duties (Creswell et al, 1990). If department chairs commonly begin serving in their role without reliable and meaningful preparation, this would indicate that they must rely on past experience to help them perform with any adequacy in their new role. No studies have been apparent to identify which past experiences are common among faculty who become chairs to assist them to perform in their jobs. Another gap exists in explanation of what department chairs feel was missing from their past experience to help them to perform their roles effectively upon appointment.

The review of literature provides an account of efforts within the community college sector to defend against the impending leadership crisis. “Grow your own” (GYO), or “in-house” leadership preparation programs are being developed to promote from within and offer numerous advantages. In addition to defining competencies and knowledge

requisites specific to the institution, these programs are said to help in creating and promoting a succession pathway for the college. In addition, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) has created *Competencies for Community College Leaders* (2006) to provide an organized framework for the purpose of articulating the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary for effective leaders.

Two theoretical models, the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition and David A. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory work in concert to inform this study of the importance and influence of skill attainment and experience involving the undertaking of a new role. These theories have provided a multi-staged structure to explain how learning and experience progressively prepare individuals to achieve and develop role competency through the process of acquiring knowledge and skills. They also supply perspective on the merits of experience and serve to explain how experiential knowledge and skills develop and translate to more complex abilities.

This purpose of this study has been to obtain a descriptive picture of how a group of department chairs within a specific community college district perceive the breadth and scope of their role preparation at the time they began serving as chairs. The study has examined the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they were able to draw from their previous experience as scholars to assist them to successfully serve in their role as chair. In addition, data describing essential elements of preparation felt to be lacking by participants has been sought. It has been desired that this study and conclusions will provide useful and valuable data and help to inform future leadership development efforts. This literature review has been used to guide the study methodology which is described in Chapter 3.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Chapter Introduction**

The study was designed to explore and identify the perceptions of academic department chairs relating to their level of readiness and preparation when they entered the role. The basis for this study stemmed from my experience in the department chair role and my interest, as principle investigator, in determining what common knowledge and skills chairs commonly possess when beginning to serve in their role. The study also sought to identify necessary elements of the role that study participants felt themselves to be missing. This study was based on the assumption that adequate preparation of department chairs and entry-level leaders will result in: a) more efficient and effective role performance; b) greater role satisfaction; and c) enhanced recruitment of future community college leaders. The methodology plan designed for this qualitative research study is described in this chapter. The Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition and David A. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory were used as the theoretical frameworks upon which the study was guided.

The first part of the chapter identifies the research design and tradition the study methodology was based on followed by a description of the study setting and context. Site selection and sampling techniques along with the rationale for their use are identified and described in this chapter. The process for data collection including collection instruments, process timeline, transcription methods, and process of analysis are described. A discussion of the researcher role and its potential effects on both the study and the researcher are included in this chapter. Ethical considerations relevant to this study are also identified.

## **Research Design and Tradition**

This study employed the phenomenological research tradition in which the lived experience provides the basis for study (Cresswell, 2014) along with commonalities among study subjects (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012). The rationale for basing the study methodology on this tradition is best illustrated by the following quote: “The goal of phenomenology is to return to this familiar world and re-examine through reflective awareness what human experiences are like from that vantage point” (Powers and Knapp, p. 100). The goal of the study has been to discover commonalities and repeated themes based on the phenomena and real lived experiences of department chairs. An examination of the unique experiences of individuals upon beginning to serve in the role was expected to provide data of benefit to the workplace as well as the academic leadership community.

A collective case study approach (Creswell, 2012) has been used to gather data regarding the experiences of chairpersons serving as study subjects. This methodological approach is defined as a qualitative research design with the purpose of studying phenomena in its natural context (Anthony & Jack, 2009). In addition, this approach supports the intended purpose of the study in promoting understanding of the experiences of study participants (Cousin, 2005) via intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Various focus points of inquiry have formed the basis for study: what have the study participants experienced and how have they lived the experience of entering the role of department chairperson? What are their perceptions of this time and how ready and prepared did they feel to perform their jobs? What experience and knowledge did they

bring with them to help them serve in their role as chair? By examining chairs' experiences through the lens of a case study approach, the commonalities, patterns, and regularity of shared experiences have provided valuable data.

### **Research Setting/Context**

#### **Site Description**

The environment chosen for this study, Seaside Community College District (SCCD), is made up of 9 individual campuses serving a large urban community for over 70 decades. The subjects and programs offered at each campus vary by individual community demographics and local industry. SCCD serves a diverse student demographic with eighty percent of the students served estimated as belonging to underserved populations which include first generation college students, English-language learners, students of color, students with learning disabilities, and students who live in poverty (Buck & Cordes, 2005). The district supports “lifelong learning” and states that over half of the students enrolled are over 25 years of age and one quarter of the student population is older than 35 years of age. The district covers nearly nine hundred square miles between the nine campuses and has been divided into three geographic regions. The most recently published statistics provide enrollment numbers of between 8,000 and 26,000, depending on the college. The following is demographic data published by the three sites that selected for this study:

**“College A”:** The most recent data, from Fall 2016, provides the following student demographics: Female (61.2%), Male (38.8), Asian (4.3%), Black (2.6%), Filipino (3.8%), Hispanic (79.3%), Multi-Ethnicity (1.5%), Pacific Islander (0.1%), Native American (0.1%), Unknown (1.8%), White (10.4%).

**“College B”:** The most recent data, obtained from Fall 2016, provides the following student demographics: Female (55.9%), Male (44.1%), African-American (4.8%), American Indian/Alaskan (0.2%) Asian (7.3%), Filipino (3.8%), Hispanic (46%), Multi-Ethnicity (3.1%), Pacific Islander (0.2%), Unknown (2.8%), White Non-Hispanic (32%), Non-Native English speaking (21%).

**“College C”:** The most recent data, from Fall 2015, provides the following student demographics: Female (57%), Male (43%), Asian (8%), Black/African-American (5%), Hispanic (42%), Native American/Alaskan (0%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0%), Two or More Races (10%), Unknown (5%) and White (30%).

“College A” is a smaller campus than either “College B” or “College C” and has a smaller range of program offerings. All three colleges articulate similar missions and purposes. While there are certain similarities among the three sites, such as student gender proportion, other demographics such as ethnic composition differ. Seaside Community College District states a purpose of providing students access to quality educational opportunities that will enable them to transfer to four-year institutions, enter the workforce, and/or engage in lifelong learning.

### **Site Selection**

Individual colleges as sites for the study were selected via a convenience sampling method based on size and access. The convenience method of sampling was chosen due to the advantage of providing a desirable and readily available option (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This approach provided the option to select sites offering optimal researcher access combined with a willing environment. Because the purpose of the

study included the collection of data specifically within SCCD, no sites outside the district were considered.

### **Access and Relationship to the Site**

The president of each college was contacted for the purpose of presenting the study and gaining administrative approval to conduct the study at their respective institution. Upon administrative permission, additional required approval (Institutional Review Board /Office of Research) was obtained. Invitations to participate in the study were distributed to department chairs by the vice-president of academic affairs or other individual selected by the institution via email. The invitation informed potential participants of study details so they were able to make an informed decision whether to participate.

### **Sampling Strategy/Data Sources**

Criterion sampling was used as the sampling strategy for this study. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) endorse the use of this strategy in phenomenological studies as it supports the consistent selection of individuals possessing the desired attributes. The criteria established for inclusion in this study was that the participant must have served as department chair for a minimum of six months within their institution. The length of time served in the role was not a concern because the study examined the entry factor and not longevity.

After obtaining a list of volunteers and verification that they met study criteria, participants were selected with attention to choosing participants representing diverse disciplines and years of experience within the institution. The snowball strategy was necessary at one of the sites in order to obtain the requisite number of participants. This

strategy is defined by Sadler et al (2010) as a partially self- directed method of recruiting additional participants through referral from initial participants. Each subsequent participant, in turn, refers additional participants and the participant pool grows exponentially. A list of alternate participants was maintained in case a participant was required to opt out of the study.

Four department chairs at each campus were interviewed to equal a total of twelve interviews/case studies. This number was felt to be adequate as the goal of the data collection was to obtain information specifically descriptive of this college district rather than a larger population. A description of the purpose of the study along with the interview protocol was provided to each study participants, both verbally and in writing. Due to the fact that participants were adults and their participation was entirely voluntary, the university IRB determined that informed consent was not required. Each interview lasted up to forty minutes depending on how predisposed participants were to share in addition to their verbal style. The time and location of interviews were chosen by each participant to facilitate their comfort and convenience. Each interview used a standardized list of open ended question and participants were encouraged to reply as fully as they were comfortable and willing to do so within the context of the questions. Researcher input was limited to the clarification of responses to minimize undue researcher influence. All interviews were audiotaped after participant permission to do so was obtained.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The data collection instrument used in this study was based on an open-ended interview protocol. Study participants were asked to respond to a standard template of

open ended questions that provided structure for inquiry while allowing them to respond in their own words. The rationale for using this type of instrument is that an open-ended structure is useful in that it elicits participant guided responses, and in doing so the phenomenological discovery process of the “lived experience” (Bloomberg and Volpe, pp 32) will be protected. Depth probing, or the pursuit of essential points to “capture the unseen” (Glesne, pp 134) was also used to encourage participants to fully describe their experiences. Brief prompts were used to encourage interviewees to fully explore their experiences and describe them without restriction. Participants were allowed freedom in their choice of words and the length of their response. The only interviewer intervention required involved the clarification of responses. Verbal responses to each question/topic were recorded and all recorded data along with manually obtained notations were secured and preserved in a manner to provide access only to the research team.

Data collection activities were based on three points of contact. The first consisted of an in - person, telephone or email contact for the purpose of describing the study and obtaining a verbal commitment to participate. This interaction was used to determine a desirable time and location for the main data collection interview.

The second contact consisted of the one-on-one data collection interview. Participants were provided with a hard-copy of the study protocol/advisory previously sent to them via email. At the beginning of each recording, participants indicated their consent to be audio taped. They were then asked to respond to the standardized list of open-ended questions and were encouraged to share their experiences and perceptions relating to their role as department chair.

A third contact, via email, was conducted for the purpose of providing interview transcripts and offering the opportunity to validate data accuracy via member checking. Upon the conclusion of data validation, the researcher-participant relationship was concluded.

### **Data Collection Timeline**

The timeline for data collection spanned a three- month period. This timeframe was determined, in large by participant availability. It was necessary to collect data, in part, during the summer when chairs availability was decreased.

### **Data Transcription**

Each “case” was assigned an identification code and all traceable identifiers were removed. A professional transcriber was obtained to convert recordings into text. Upon the provision of each transcript, copies were provided to the corresponding study participant for the purposes of member- checking and validation of data accuracy.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis commenced upon the completion of member- checking. Themes and conceptual identifiers relating to knowledge, skills, attitudes, and the elements of leadership were sorted according to the concepts of readiness and preparation. Themes were further sorted according to the direction the data took; positive (supporting) or negative (lacking or absent). Repeated or commonly occurring themes were quantified in a simple manner to document significance. Special interest was directed to data pertaining to the knowledge and skills relevant to the preparation and readiness for the department chair role. Study participants’ leadership background and experience and the

impact on their perceived readiness and preparation were examined as a separate dimension.

The Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition and Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning were used to guide data analysis and the formation of study conclusions. Implications and recommendations have been constructed, also in reference to these frameworks

### **Researcher Role**

As the principle investigator of this study, I also served in various roles that intertwine with my educational and occupational background. At the time of this study, I was employed as a department chairperson within the Seaside Community College District, the environment for the study. I became interested in the questions posed by this study while serving in this role. My initial experience as a new department chair was complicated due to a lack of preparation and orientation due to unique circumstances. Conversely, my professional background and experiences in acute patient care and hospital administration prepared me for various leadership and managerial responsibilities, although not within the educational context. The potential for researcher bias has been acknowledged and recognized within this study and, as the researcher, I have recognized these implications.

### **Effects on Study**

Glesne (2011) warns of the dangers that researcher bias exerts on study validity and trustworthiness, pp. 49- 50. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2011), "analysis ultimately rests with the thinking and choices of the researcher" (pp 126). My role as a colleague of the study participants exerted a tangible potential for researcher bias along with a potential threat to data integrity. The college I have been employed in was

selected as a site for the study only after careful consideration. I believed that the benefits of including this college as a site significantly outweighed the potential risks. Care was exercised to minimize participant reactivity (responses based on the reaction to being studied as opposed to authentic responses) along with care to minimize researcher influence and the threat of data distortion.

Having been employed as a registered nurse in acute patient care settings I have a considerable amount of experience in conducting objective and non-judgmental, data-seeking interviews and I employed those skills while collecting data. I purposely did not reveal or discuss my past experiences prior to the recorded interviews to avoid influencing or leading participant responses. Open ended questioning and neutral verbal prompts were employed as interviewing techniques to encourage authentic responses.

During data reporting, direct quotes were used to the extent that they were deemed relevant and appropriate. The paraphrasing of responses was done carefully to decrease the likelihood of data distortion, unintentional misrepresentation of responses and/or an intrusion of personal bias.

### **Effects on Researcher**

Caution was exerted to protect the study from researcher effects, i.e., data distortion due to personal perceptions, experiences or proximity to the study site. In addition, care was taken to exclude the intrusion of personal experiences into the interpretation of data, from the collection stage throughout interpretation of findings. Strategies were employed to minimize bias intrusion, such as avoiding seeking subjects that I have worked with and have had conversations with regarding our roles. In this way, it was

expected that assumptions from past interactions would be diminished. Interactions throughout the study were confined solely to data collection activities.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The foremost ethical consideration in this study has been that of confidentiality. Steps were taken to assure study participants that their responses would remain confidential and data would be free of identifiers, either overt or suggestive. Participants were provided with a description of safeguards and steps that were and will continue to be taken to ensure the disassociation and removal of identifiers within the data. This description includes the steps involved in the disposition and storage of data. All participants were given the option of choosing non-worksit interview locations to ensure their comfort, however this option was not chosen by any participant. In addition, any participant who would become uncomfortable with participation was allowed to withdraw from the study at any time, but this need did not arise.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has introduced the road map of a study of twelve community college department chairs' perceptions of their role preparation and readiness to begin their role as chair. The study was designed to gather and interpret data to be of value to the environment studied regarding the professional development of future and current department chairs. Data gathered by this study will be discussed in Chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND RESULTS**

### **Chapter Introduction**

This purpose of this chapter is to present research findings obtained from the study. Participant profiles provide insight into the participants' background and history as it relates to the role of department chair. Participants' perceptions of their readiness and preparedness to serve as chairs at the time they assumed their role are described in this chapter. Common themes appearing within the data are identified, aggregated and presented in both narrative and table format.

This phenomenological case-study process explored perceptions of department chairs within a specific region of a large community college district. A survey of literature relating to the role of department chairs indicates that the vast majority of department chairs are prepared and enculturated to serve as academic faculty, i.e. scholars and academic content specialists (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004; Gmelch 1995; McLaughlin et al, 1975). Various knowledge and skills that are essential parts of the department chair role are not typically experienced within the role of academic faculty member. In addition, it has been noted that department chairs often learn their role "on-the-job" without having received any structured or consistent preparation in the areas of knowledge, skills or behaviors (Mezey, et al, 2006).

This study examined not only how prepared study participants perceived themselves to be for the role of department chair, but also identified relevant elements from their previous experience serving in both faculty and non-faculty capacities. The study was able to identify common barriers experienced by department chairs as they transitioned from the faculty role to that of chair. In addition, study participants shared what they

believed community colleges institutions could do to promote and support the successful transition of faculty into the role of department chairperson.

Data collection was conducted through 12 case study based, open-ended interviews. A total of 12 department chairs within a large community college district were selected from a pool of volunteers to participate in the process. Participants were asked to share the experiences involving their transition from that of faulty member to that of department chairperson.

### **Study Participants**

Individuals participating in the study had served as academic department chairs, either currently or formally, at the institutions in which they were employed as faculty members. Four participants from each of three campuses within a multi-campus community college district formulated the pool of study participants. All three institutions belong to the same college district and are governed by the same overall policies and guidelines. Participants not currently serving in the capacity of department chair at the time of the interviews had left the role no longer than three years prior to the study.

Among the twelve volunteer participants, ten were female and two were male. As the ethnicity and age of participants was not felt to be relevant to the study and would not be explored as a dimension, this information was not purposefully sought. It may be estimated, however, that participants were between the ages of 30 and 72 years of age and that 75% were of white/Caucasian ethnicity with the remaining of African-American, Asian-American and Latino/Hispanic background. The length of service, both as faculty and department chair, varied significantly among the participant group. While effort was

made to select a diverse participant group, the availability of participants exerted a deciding factor. Pseudonyms have been used to identify all participants. Participant Profiles are summarized below in Table 1

Table 1

*Study Participant Profiles*

Name	Gender	Highest Degree	Discipline and Campus	Currently Chair Y/N	Years as Chair
Andrea	F	Doctorate of Education	Child Development “College C”	Y	4
Barbara	F	Master of Arts	Kinesiology “College A”	Y	12
Charles	M	Doctor of Philosophy	English “College C”	Y	1
Cheryl	F	Master of Arts	English “College B”	Y	10
Diane	F	Doctor of Philosophy	Foreign Languages “College C”	N	10
Elizabeth	F	Master of Science in Nursing	Nursing “College C”	Y	12
Grace	F	Master of Arts	Child and Family Studies “College A”	Y	4
Lisa	F	Doctor of Philosophy	Sociology “College B”	N	5
Peggy	F	Associate of Science	Agriculture “College B”	Y	1
Serena	F	Master of Science	Kinesiology “College B”	Y	4
Steven	M	Doctor of Philosophy	Mathematics “College A”	N	17
Susan	F	Master of Fine Arts	Art “College A”	Y	7

## **Participant Background Profiles**

The following data is intended to provide a brief description of each participant's background as it relates to department chair role preparation and readiness:

Andrea has earned an EdD degree and has served as the department chair of Child Development for four years at the time of this study. Prior to being employed at a community college, she served as an academic advisor for the child and adolescent department at a local university. She has also been involved as a child development specialist at a community social services organization as well as director of a program at a pre-school setting.

Barbara, who has earned an MA degree, had been serving as department chair of Kinesiology at her college for the last 12 years. She had also served as Academic Senate President at her college. Charles, who had earned a PhD degree, had been serving as department chair of English for almost one year prior to the time of our interview. He stated that during the first eight months of that period he had served as temporary chair, but possessed all the powers and functions as that of a permanent chair prior to having been formally elected to the position. His past leadership-inclusive activities included having served as a referee in his sons' soccer league and having engaged in leadership activities as a graduate student.

Cheryl had served as the department chair of English for the previous ten years. She believed that she was "one of the most experienced chairs within [her] institution." She reported that she served as "Vice-chair of the department, although that was on an informal basis. I didn't get release time; I just volunteered to do it."

Diane served as department chair of Foreign Languages for 10 years until shortly before the interview. She stated that she had chaired various types of committees and had served in non-academic leadership roles. Elizabeth earned a MSN degree and had been the department chair of Allied Health/Nursing for twelve years. Prior to entering academia, she served as a charge nurse on an acute-care hospital unit. She was also previously employed as a manager at a telecommunication company.

Grace, who had an MA degree, was serving as department chair of Child and Family Studies and had been doing so for 4 years. This was her second “go-around” acting as department chair. Her background included having served over 10 years as an Early Childhood Educator and program director as well as having taught in a major university before immigrating from Canada. She served as vice-chair of her department for 16 years prior to her initial term as department chair.

Lisa, who had earned a PhD degree served as the department chair of Sociology between the years of 2008 and 2013. She also began serving as the Academic Senate Secretary at her college at the same time as she began serving as department chairperson. Peggy earned an Associate of Science degree and began serving as department chair in 2015. At the time of the interview, she had just completed her first year in the role as chair. Her academic area was that of Veterinary Technology and she served as the Program Director in addition to serving as academic chair.

Serena attained an MS degree and had been department chair of Kinesiology at her institution for four years. She began serving in this role during her second year of employment as a faculty member at her college. Prior to being employed at the college, she served as a group fitness coordinator for a company and “oversaw close to a hundred

group fitness instructors.” She also served as a wellness coordinator and was in charge of directing wellness and fitness activities for military personnel as well as civilian personnel working in a military capacity.

Steven had earned a PhD degree and had served as department chair of mathematics for seventeen years. He went on sabbatical two years prior to the interview and, upon that circumstance, the department vice-chair assumed the role. Prior to entering the area of academia, he had been employed as a systems engineer at a premier technology company. In this capacity he led teams in evaluating design and recommending software programming in machines to fit customer requirements”.

Susan came from an art background and had earned a Master of Fine Arts degree. In addition to having taught this subject in higher education, her background included having served as the manager of an art gallery whose purpose was to serve disabled adults in the community. Her position at the art gallery involved the responsibility for staging and producing art shows, maintaining the art gallery website, promoting the art gallery to the public and creating the budget for the art gallery. In the community college environment, Susan had served as department chair of Art for seven years, making this her third term elected to the position. Prior to this role, she served in the academic senate at her institution as well as Vice-Chair of the Multi-Media department prior to becoming department chair of the Art department.

As evidenced, study participants came from a variety of educational and employment backgrounds. Their collective range of disciplines and content expertise was wide and covered both purely academic as well as Career and Technical (CTE) areas of instruction. Nine of the twelve participants (75%) were currently serving as department chair and the

remaining three (25%) had left the position between one month and three years prior to being interviewed. Collectively, the group of study participants had 87 years of experience in the role of department chairperson. Five were educated at the doctoral level, 6 at the graduate level and one at the associate level. They had been employed outside academia in a diverse range of fields such as performing and studio arts, acute patient care, retail, telecommunications, high-technology, early child education and wellness/fitness.

### **Conceptual Themes**

#### **Leadership Experience and Background**

A specific theme explored in this study has been that of leadership preparation, as it is a critical part of the department chair role. Elements of preparation explored in the study were that of both formal and informal leadership preparation. Participants were asked to: a) indicate if they had served in any leadership capacity prior to assuming the department chair role, b) describe any leadership role(s) experienced prior to becoming department chair, c) describe any formal leadership preparation they had experienced, such as university/college coursework and d) describe any informal leadership preparation, such as workshop attendance or having been mentored.

One third of the participants stated that they had received some type of formal leadership preparation/education prior to becoming chair, while two thirds did not. Nearly half of the participants perceived that they had experienced “informal” leadership preparation in the form of being mentored by a leader, learning from the mentor and modeling their own behaviors on those of the mentor. Over half of the participants stated having experienced no type of informal leadership preparation. Several of the

participants had a history of having served in leadership positions, in both academic and non-academic settings. One participant had served in the military. Only one individual indicated that they had not previously served in what they felt to be a leadership capacity prior to becoming chair. A number of reported leadership experiences were outside academia and some were from the community or social, rather than employment, setting.

### **Perceived Leadership Preparation**

Andrea, chair of Child Development, indicated that she had experienced formal/academic leadership preparation in both her graduate and doctoral degree programs. Her doctoral degree was in educational leadership and she stated that the focus of her program was on organizational leadership. In addition, Andrea believed that she had experienced numerous opportunities to “exercise” her leadership abilities while serving as a faculty member prior to becoming a department chair, but did not elaborate.

Cheryl stated that she had received formal/academic leadership experience during her graduate education in Marriage and Family Counselling. Similarly, Grace stated that her formal and/or academic leadership preparation was limited to the area of “adult learning, adult learning communities, and collegial strategies” within her graduate studies. Serena indicated that she received formal leadership preparation through her previous employment. Barbara, Charles, Elizabeth, Lisa and Peggy, on the other hand, stated that they had no formal/academic leadership preparation prior to becoming department chair. Diane, when asked if she had received any formal/academic leadership preparation prior to serving as chair, replied “no, absolutely none”. Steven indicated that he had no formal/academic leadership preparation prior to taking on the role of department chair

“because [his] background was pure mathematics”. Susan, with a laugh, indicated that she had experienced no formal leadership preparation.

A summary of their leadership experience and background are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

*Past Leadership Experience*

Participant	Description
Andrea	University Academic Advisor Child Development Specialist Director of Preschool Program
Barbara	Academic Senate President
Charles	Department Vice-chair
Cheryl	Department Vice-chair (unofficial)
Diane	Committee Chair Non-academic leadership positions
Elizabeth	Charge Nurse in an acute care hospital Manager at telephone company
Lisa	N/A
Peggy	Veterinary Technology Program Director
Grace	Director of Early Childhood Program Department Vice-chair
Serena	Group Fitness Coordinator Government Wellness-Coordinator Military Health and Wellness Coordinator
Steven	Systems Engineer
Susan	Academic Senate Parliamentarian Department Vice-chair Art Gallery Manager

As indicated above, 11 out of the 12 participants indicated that they had some level of what they classified as leadership experience. They indicated that they had gained this

experience in both academic and non-academic settings and in areas that both related to their current discipline as well as other areas.

### **Department Chair Role**

One of the significant factors influencing the level of readiness and preparedness of department chairpersons is the manner in which they attain the position. The process for selecting and appointing chairs varies within colleges and districts and may include direct appointment or by selection determined through a departmental faculty voting process (Hecht, 2002). While some candidates purposely seek the position, others do so following strong encouragement or pressure secondary to workplace situations (McCarthy, 2003). A review of literature reveals regularly occurring situations where chairs attain the position by “default” due to an absence of other individuals in the environment who are qualified or willing to serve as department chair (Robinson-Backmon et al, 2004; Sirkis, 2011).

The role attainment process at Seaside Community College District (SCCD), as specified by institutional policy and the faculty contract, mandates that the selection of department chairs is to be accomplished through a vote by regular department faculty. Each potential candidate for a department chair position is required to submit a formal request to stand as a candidate for the following three-year term. There is no current term limit, however candidates must receive an increased percentage of the total vote following the second term and thereafter, as stated in the contract. As all the participants in this study had attained the role within SCCD, they did so consistently after being voted in to the position by departmental faculty.

The motivation for running for chair among the study participants was stated as being consistent with that of the literature; some had been mentored and coached to move into the role, for some it was a logical progression in their career development; others became chair because there was no one else qualified and/or available to step into the role. All of the study participants indicated that they had been interested in the challenge of serving as chair.

### **Defining Role Preparedness/Readiness**

In this study, preparation has been conceptualized as the acquired knowledge, skills and abilities relevant to the role of department chair. Study participants were asked to relate the elements from their background believed to have promoted their ability to step into the role and perform the required actions necessary to accomplish the job of department chair. “Role Readiness” has been conceptualized as the perceived ability to perform in the role competently, with a moderate level of confidence and without undue stress and feelings of inadequacy. It is assumed in this study to bear a strong influence on the ability of the individual to assume the role and perform the duties required of a department chair.

Care was taken in the data collection process to: a) communicate the conceptual difference between the themes of preparation versus that of readiness and b) to differentiate the two concepts in the reporting of data. Even so, both themes intertwined at various intervals and clarification has been provided through the use of direct participant commentary.

## **Perception of Role Preparedness**

When asked to describe their perceived role preparedness at the time they assumed the role of department chair, only one person (8%) stated that they felt prepared. Six individuals (50%) felt that they were prepared in some areas but not in others. Five of the participants (42%) stated that they were not prepared or did not feel prepared for the role at the time they assumed the role of chair. Positive factors that the department chairs felt supported their perceptions relating to their level of preparation are further described below.

### **Elements Identified as Supporting Role Preparedness**

Various elements were identified as having helped to prepare participants for the role of department chair. Some elements were derived from participants' academic teaching experience and others from employment in non-academic positions. Other factors included participants' own student experiences or life-experiences. Each individual demonstrated a unique set of elements that they believed to have helped prepare them for the role of department chair.

Andrea, chair of Child Development stated that understanding the student population is an essential process in serving as chair and that she gained this understanding while serving as an instructor. She also mentioned that her persistence in having assimilated as an immigrant helped her become a stronger learner and promoted her ability to adapt to new situations.

Barbara, chair of Kinesiology, indicated that she had served as "sort of a vice-chair" before serving as chair and that "the chair at the time sort of mentored me." She also believed that her background in kinesiology helped prepare her for the role of chair in the

areas of organization and working with groups of people. She also strongly believed that her athletic and coaching background prepared her for the role of department chair.

Charles, department chair of English, stated that his student experience from undergraduate through doctoral degree programs taught him “the importance of cooperation and sharing.” He shared that he is also a professional opera singer and actor and believed that this background assisted him to “quickly get to the motivations of others and to react to them honestly” and “not get controlled by them.” Charles felt that his acting background prepared him to handle stress and that this positively impacted his level of readiness for the role of department chairperson.

Cheryl, department chair of English, stated that her experience as vice-chair, coupled with having worked closely with the previous department chair, provided significant preparation for the role as chair. She also felt that her years as a faculty member had been useful in preparing her to connect with faculty and student issues. Cheryl believed that her teaching and counselling background helped to prepare her for the role of chair.

Diane, chair of Foreign Languages, reported that she had the opportunity to “shadow” the previous department chair during the year before she assumed the department chair position. She indicated that this individual was available by telephone “anytime I needed to ask questions” after having retired. Diane felt that her background serving on committees as well as her time as a graduate student provided her with leadership opportunities that prepared her for her role as chair. She also mentioned that her work experience in retail helped prepare her for certain demands of chairing an academic department.

Grace said that she had “wonderful role models and wonderful mentors” who “were instrumental in helping me see how important the community college system was.” She believed that her experience as the director of early childhood programs provided her with experience in coaching and mentoring adult learners. Peggy also indicated that she had worked closely with the individual who had previously served as the director of the Registered Veterinary (RVT) program. She shared that she had “modeled my leadership style” after this individual. In addition, Serena related that she had worked closely with the department chair of a program she was employed in previously as an adjunct faculty. She stated that she learned “a lot of good skills” from this experience that she incorporated into her role as chair. Serena said that her “four years in the military” prepared her to “follow orders and see them through and work independently.” She indicated that this quality prepared her to be “a good leader”, to stay organized and to create solutions.

Susan believed that the advisement and guidance obtained informally from another department chair–also serving as Academic Senate President–helped her on an ongoing basis after she became chair. She stated that she had attended workshops provided to department chairs by the union, but that the purpose of the workshops was solely to “make sure we followed the contract”. Susan indicated that the workshops for department chairs were offered to those already in the role and not, per se, in preparation for the role. It is Susan’s belief that having previously worked with poor supervisors helped to prepare her for her role as chair. She referred to situations perceived to have been handled unfairly and stated “I want to treat other people the way I like being treated”. Susan stated that her level of preparation to serve as a chair was reinforced by

having taught in the classroom and that this had allowed her to help other faculty solve instructional problems. She felt that her other non-faculty employment helped her in terms of understanding budgets, time management and other managerial skills.

### **Elements of Role Preparedness Identified as Missing**

Several participants in the study felt they were missing essential elements that would help them once they assumed the role of department chair. A number of these elements were identified in hindsight through their reflections. These areas focused strongly on a gap between the knowledge necessary to carry out the role of department chair and the skills required to effectively serve in the position.

Andrea, chair of Child Development, stated that she lacked “the ability to help my small department-because we were very small at the time in terms of full timers-to help them understand the challenges we were facing”, such as the rationale for budget cuts and cancelled classes. Andrea said that the only “training information” she received was “a hard copy of the program review” left by the previous department chair. She stated “I don’t think I was prepared”, “You can’t really be prepared for something that you don’t know you are missing out on” and “at the time it seemed like extremely difficult because I had never done it before.”

Barbara, with her 12 years of experience being chair, felt that she lacked the knowledge of “a lot of stuff that happens at the district level and actually with the contract in terms of hiring and those kinds of things.” She stated “I was really just prepared for a small portion of being a chair” and “not the bigger picture as it relates to a district.” Barbara believed that she did not anticipate the high level of time commitment, especially the time spent with faculty-particularly adjuncts-as well as the volume of

meetings requiring attendance. She indicated that preparing seniority lists and completing computerized new-hire information entry was something she was not prepared for and stated “it was all the paperwork that was very daunting and I wasn’t prepared for that.” Barbara also stated “I think being department chair and being prepared to become a department chair is something we need to do a better job of” and that “we should do more in preparing our chairs. The faculty should be prepared when they become chairs, and I feel we don’t do much to prepare them.”

Charles, department chair of English, stated that he had an excellent mentor while beginning to serve in the role of department chair, but not so in preparation to become chair. He indicated that he was “not knowledgeable about many of the legalistic and formal considerations, especially the procedural aspect of what has to happen, for example in faculty evaluations and administrative evaluations.” He said that he was unprepared for student complaints and that “I was unprepared for students to come in my office and break down and cry.” Charles also named “hiring” as a process he found to be challenging. Charles believed that he “was unprepared” at the time he assumed his role as chair and that he was “thrown into it.” He indicated that he felt especially unprepared for the “technical demands” and “emotional demands of the job” and says “I was unprepared to stop my creative work.”

Similar to Charles and Barbara, Cheryl stated that she was not prepared for all “of the procedural stuff” but that the department had an experienced secretary who assisted her in this area. Cheryl indicated that she was unprepared for tasks related to “human resources or personnel or work environment or plant facilities.” Diane also felt that she was underprepared for certain procedural actions required of department chairs. She

specifically mentioned class scheduling and “dealing with problems that were not my own” as major obstacles she had to face as department chair.

Elizabeth, who served as the Nursing department chair, stated she had participated in leadership roles throughout her employment history and that “I think every leadership position has its own set of challenges that you need to learn or have some guidance in how to do it properly.” She stated she was not prepared for the dual roles of being department chair and program director along with the need to accommodate two sets of mandates, one established by the college/district and the other by the state professional regulating body. Elizabeth said she felt ready to become chair but that “I had absolutely no training whatsoever” and “there was no mentoring.” She indicated that she “literally learned day-by-day” and that “you kind of operate by the seat of your pants.” Elizabeth feels that her lack of knowledge relating to “knowing the mandates to become a department chair” negatively impacted her readiness to assume the role of chair. She stated “I never want anyone to go through with what I went through” and “I had said that one year before I decided to retire, I would train someone for that full year. My hope is to prepare them so that they don’t have to go through with what I went through, because I don’t think that’s fair.”

Lisa stated that she felt she lacked preparation in “all areas of leadership”. She commented “for me just starting out it was more like baptism by fire. There were a lot of areas and I did not really know what I was getting myself into.” Lisa stated that “it’s not like you can sign up for some kind of leadership training that will tell you this is what you do as a chair” and “you have to reach out to people that have experience as chair and talk to people the informal way and that is how you learn.” She believes that for other

leadership roles there is “more training available and that is not really the case for chairs” and stated “I think it would be more helpful if we had some kind of training available for incoming chairs. Maybe it would just be good to have some kind of chair orientation, even if it is something online that people can watch on their own free time or some kind of mentoring that can be a little more formal.”

Peggy also shared the same sentiments as others as she said she “had zero training to become department chair”. She believes that managing the budget for the various programs under the umbrella of her “department” is an area she lacked preparation in although she was already experienced in preparing the budget for her specialty program in Agriculture. Peggy indicated that she was not trained in the scheduling process, how to gain access to the budget system or how to work with “priority or seniority lists” and that this had negatively affected her level of preparation.

Serena related that she was not prepared for the need to “set really good boundaries” particularly in the sense of direct faculty communication during non-work hours and in the absence of non-urgent matters. She said that she lacked readiness and preparedness within the “academic setting dealing with unions, priority and seniority lists, as well as generational gaps, things like that.” Serena shared another sentiment that others touched on as well by indicating that she had experienced “OJT, we called that on-the-job training in the military.” She perceived her level of preparation for the role of department chair as “zero.” Serena commented “I guess there is no real preparation and sometime you are really the last man standing as it was in my situation, you just kind of have to take it on.”

Steven had become department chair during his second year as faculty and stated that he felt unprepared for the academic environment. Steven related that he was not

prepared for “the bureaucracy” and times when “something was wrong and it had to be fixed and it was out of my purview and I didn’t have the authority to do anything about it and nothing ever happened.” He felt prepared to lead a team but was unprepared for the environment and the responsibility of “committees after committees.”

Susan indicated that she felt challenged in dealing with conflict, particularly involving consensus among multiple faculty when she began serving as chair. She also felt unprepared for a “to-do list” that is “a mile long.” Susan stated that she was unaware of how the seniority list must be followed and that this led to a grievance which could have been prevented otherwise.

Various role preparation elements perceived by participants to have been missing are identified in Table 3. Multiple responses in a specific area are indicated.

Table 3

*Elements of Role Preparedness Identified As Missing*

<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Skills</b>
Hiring Process/policies (3 responses)	Scheduling (6 responses)
District Issues/Mandates (2 responses)	Faculty Evaluations
Procedural Issues	Taking Student Complaints
Accreditation mandates	Conflict resolution
Contractual Issues	Dealing with Problems
	Budget Management
	Setting boundaries
	Program Review
	SLO’s

## **Perceived Role Readiness**

The majority of the participants, (75%), in the study stated that they felt ready to accept the *challenge* of the position despite the absence of role training. The most commonly referenced reason for feeling ready to serving as chair was stated as the ability and desire to “take on a new challenge.” A number of the participants perceived the opportunity to serve as chair as the next logical step on their career path. Others stated that they specifically desired a new direction as well as additional challenge in their professional life at the time they became department chairperson.

District policy required all candidates, such as the study participants, to submit a declaration of candidacy for this role. Thus, the voluntary and willing aspect of these individuals to have accepted this role is assumed. Additional commentary on this topic emerged from the interview process. Barbara indicated that she personally felt ready to take on the challenge of serving as chair even though “there were things I particularly didn’t know about the job; I was ready to do the job.” She also stated “in reality there was much more of the job that I was not prepared for, absolutely.” Cheryl indicated that there was no training for the job of department chair available, but that she felt ready to begin the role. Diane stated that in terms of role readiness, “I felt ready not in terms of preparedness or knowledge, but I felt ready to take on that challenge.” Study participants, in large, felt ready to begin a new role. Those indicating that they did not perceive themselves to be ready did so in the context of not knowing the processes/procedures related to the role or because they lacked knowledge or skill preparation for the role.

### **Elements Identified as Supporting Role Readiness**

Andrea stated that her extensive background as a student and her belief “that I am a lifelong learner” coupled with “having had wonderful experiences with faculty on all levels” supported her readiness to become department chair. She continued to share “I think that when faculty show an interest in wanting to get into these leadership positions there should be a mechanism of some type of opportunity within the district, or even at specific colleges or at individual colleges, for opportunities to learn about what it might be like to be department chair.” Andrea stated that she started helping new chairs during her second year in the position due to experiencing challenges while learning the role. Similarly, Elizabeth believed that her background serving in leadership roles helped to support her readiness to begin serving as department chair and stated “if you have some tools, such as leadership tools, you know what you need to do to investigate how you move forward or what you need to do.”

Grace felt that she was ready to assume the role of chair due to her years of having served as vice-chair and the fact that she had experienced good working relationships with her colleagues. Grace believed that her background in Early Childhood Education led her to value ‘listening, observing, communicating effectively and being a nurturer’ and this promoted her readiness to begin serving as department chair. Lisa, a sociologist by training, stated that even though she wasn’t prepared for what the job entailed, her personal willingness to learn and perform the job correctly supported her readiness to take on the role. She states “the first semester was hell, but of course it got easier. After the first year it becomes easier.”

Peggy believed that she was “very, very ready” to serve as department chair and that “I was ready personally, I had been through a personal tragedy and I was ready to find something to fill that void.” Peggy thought that her 30 year history teaching in the Registered Veterinary Technician program and her having graduated from this program supported her readiness to begin serving as department chairperson. She felt that her background in veterinary medicine help prepare her in areas of communication, the ability to respond in emergency situations and the ability to “think on your feet.” Steven, who had led his mathematics department for 17 years, indicated that he felt ready to “lead a team to do something” upon becoming chair, even though he was “totally unprepared for what the team was doing here. I didn’t have a clue, basically.” Steven stated that he was a quick learner and that he liked being department chair “even with all the frustrations.”

Susan believed that she was elected to the position of chair because she possessed certain essential qualities that support role readiness. She stated that she was perceived by faculty to be very organized and had devoted “a lot of time on curriculum”, ensuring that “curriculum was brought up-to-date.”

The various reasons provided by the participants expressed why and how they were prepared for the role of department chair are summarized in Table 4. Multiple responses may have been provided from individual participants.

Table 4

*Elements Identified as Supporting Role Readiness*

<b>Factor/Element</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Past experience as faculty	2	17%
Past experience as a student	1	8%
Experience as vice-chair	1	8%
Mentored by previous chair	3	25%
Previous college-based leadership	3	25%
Previous non-college based work experience	6	50%
Specialty/Subject	6	50%

**Elements of Role Readiness Identified as Missing**

Participants shared various elements they felt they did not possess to adequately serve as department chairs at the time of their appointment. A number of beliefs were stated as being secondary to a perceived lack of knowledge and skill preparation relating to role-readiness. Andrea stated “there was a period of time after I became chair where I felt like I was not competent in anything that had to do with leading this department.” She shared that she began serving in the role of chair without a previous chair who could offer help and support. Andrea identified scheduling, knowing how to use the online scheduling and management system, as “things that a department chair needs to know and needs to know right away” as factors lacking and influencing her readiness to serve as chair.

Charles related-in terms of role readiness-a personal lack of procedural knowledge and stated “this is really important.” He also commented that he was not ready “for so many hours at the computer doing tasks.” Grace stated that she lacked readiness to work with institutional “systems” such as “the reporting, accountability, and mandates.” She also

mentioned a lack of orientation on how “the contract” applied to “our work.” Grace shared that although “chairs have a very challenging role” she found the role to be very satisfying and important.

Peggy stated that she lacked confidence to serve as chair and that this diminished her actual readiness to begin serving in the role even though she possessed the qualities of being “open-minded”, “inclusive” and “willing to listen to everybody and to consider everything without shutting anyone out.” Serena felt that she lacked readiness in working with “different personalities.” She stated that facilitating the process of getting “everything done without actually creating a lot of extra work for myself” was a challenge as she began serving in the role of chair. Susan stated that she “probably wasn’t ready because you have to learn everything on the fly”. She shared that it would have been beneficial “to have more training” and said that her college is attempting to do this more.

Six knowledge based responses, with a result of eight total responses, in this category were reported. Seven skill based responses, with a result of eight total responses, in this category were reported as well. One response in the domain of attitude/behavior was stated as “personal confidence” and was the only response in this domain.

Overall, participant responses relating to their perceptions of readiness were generally positive. It is noted that the major areas of concern reported in relation to readiness were strongly linked to the concept of preparation.

### **Application of Theory to Collected Data**

One of the theoretical frameworks employed by this study is that of the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1986; Dreyfus, 1982).

As stated previously, this model is based on the understanding that contextual experience is an essential factor in both critical thinking and problem solving. It is organized along five distinct stages of skill acquisition and the cognitive processes associated with each stage. As skill acquisition is an essential part of preparation and role readiness, reported data has been applied to the framework. The experiential factor of participants is critical to the application and indicates that half of the individuals entered their role in the stage of “Novice” due to having stated no previous experience or mentorship. The remaining 6 of the participants placed in the category of “Advanced Beginner” having indicated that they had gained a *limited* amount of experience through informal mentorship or purposeful observation of an experienced department chair. None of the study participants indicated the level of experience or background required to place them in the “Competent”, “Proficient”, or “Expert” categories. Table 5 summarizes salient features of each stage and the relationship of experience to each stage.

Table 5

*Application of the Five Stage Model of Skill Acquisition based on Dreyfus, S. (2004)*

	<b>Thought Process</b>	<b>Role of Experience</b>	<b>Behaviors / Performance</b>
<b>Novice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on discrete facts, features, and rules</li> <li>• Recognizes clearly defined context-free elements</li> <li>• Must rely on textbook forecasts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No experiential background exists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannot forecast expected outcomes due to lack of experience.</li> <li>• Behaviors are extremely limited and inflexible.</li> </ul>
<b>Advanced Beginner</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connects concrete situations with examples of the same experience           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begins to learn from mistakes</li> <li>• Remains dependent on others to provide experience-based judgement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical experience is essential to achieve this stage</li> <li>• Is able to differentiate and recognize subtle situational elements through experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actions are based on both the new situation and the earlier context-free components</li> <li>• Advanced beginners are highly focused on examples of colleagues and mentors</li> </ul>
<b>Competent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to combine acquired knowledge and context-free rules to develop solutions</li> <li>• Context becomes progressively critical to the decision process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiential learning is critical for advancement to this stage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops an emotional attachment in chosen actions based on desire for self-competency and perception of responsibility</li> <li>• Becomes progressively more adept at managing priorities</li> </ul>
<b>Proficient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analytically approaches situations to guide responses and formulate solutions</li> <li>• Intuitive responses are developing</li> <li>• Able to recognize when she or he has a good sense of the situation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge gained from previous experiential learning may be used to mentor learners in earlier stages.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actions are based on reasoning and recognition of required recourse</li> <li>• Plan of action is decision-based</li> </ul>
<b>Expert</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has developed significant understanding of environment and ability to recognize refined cues within</li> <li>• Translates previously acquired learning to focusing on aspects of the situation that are changing</li> <li>• There is a significant focus on intuition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collective depth of experience may be used to teach learners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The individual is consistently engaged in a fluid, efficient performance that is responsive to situational context</li> <li>• Responses are reactive rather than studied and premeditated</li> </ul>

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented data involving the study of perceived preparation and readiness for the department chair role based on 12 case-studies. Study participants were chosen from a variety of academic disciplines, with a wide range of experience in the chair role and demonstrating a solid base of knowledge and skills required to serve as department chair. Participant responses provided insight into their scholastic and employment backgrounds along with other elements believed to influence their readiness/preparation for the department chair role. In addition, elements derived from their experience as academic faculty have been gathered to shed light on their perceived relevance to readiness/preparation for the role of department chair.

A majority of study participants (75%) reported a perception of having felt ready to assume the role of department chair at the time they did so. The remaining twenty-five percent indicated a lack of knowledge and/or skills as the mitigating factor impacting their perceived lack of readiness. All of the study participants, however, indicated readiness for the role according to the context of seeking the challenge of a new role.

Few study participants (25%) reported a perception of having felt prepared to assume the role of department chair at the time they assumed the role or retrospectively. Specific data was obtained to describe elements of knowledge and skill that participants felt they lacked upon commencing to serve in the chair role. Participants indicated having received no formalized, consistent and/or established preparation prior to serving as chairs. This circumstance is consistent with that evidenced within scholarly literature. Study participants' comments included: a) "I was unprepared. I was thrown in to it"; b) "Well, because of the concept of department chair and I'm working in an academic

setting that is new to me -I would say zero”; and c) “I probably wasn’t ready because you kind of have to learn everything on the fly.”

Study participants reported a variety of both formal and informal elements believed to have prepared them for their position. Specific roles or settings were indicated as having been perceived as beneficial in preparing them for the role of chair. These elements included employment experience in the industrial setting, experience as academic faculty, committee participation, previous leadership experience, having served as vice-chair and having been mentored by a leader. The most commonly indicated factors were: a) having been mentored by the previous chair (25%); b) previous college-based leadership experience (25%); c) previous non-college based work experience (50%); and c) discipline/subject (50%).

Participants related the necessary knowledge and/or skills they felt lacking in when they began to serve as department chair. The knowledge/skills most commonly sourced as missing were stated as related to: a) district-specific policy/procedures and systems; and b) requisite policy/procedures and systems related to human resources processes. Other areas mentioned pertained to “all areas of leadership”, college accreditation issues, conflict resolution skills, contractual mandates and faculty interactions and student interactions. Specific elements of knowledge and/or skill participants felt lacking in were stated as being: scheduling (50%), hiring process/policies (25%), understanding and managing district mandates (17%), managing conflict resolution, managing contract related issues, performing faculty evaluations, problem solving and dealing with student complaints.

Conclusions interpreted from the data collected from study participants is discussed in Chapter 5. Implications for practice and future study on this subject is presented in this chapter as well.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **Chapter Introduction**

This qualitative study explored the perceptions of twelve community college department chairs relating to their role readiness and preparation at the time they assumed their role as chair. The purpose of the study was to provide findings that could contribute to the field by recommending practices to assist faculty in serving as department chairs effectively and without undue stress. The rationale for the study was based on review of scholarly work by Ackerman, Holt & Wolverton (2005), Carroll & Gmelch (1994), Carroll & Wolverton (2004), Creswell et al, (1990), Gmelch (1994, 1995, 2004), Wolverton et al, (1998), Wolverton & Ackerman, (2006).

One of the significant transitions from serving as faculty to department chair involves the element of leadership. Department chairs are essentially academic faculty who are elected or assigned to the unique role of department leader. According to Knight & Holen, (1985), department chairs must be “half-bureaucrats and half-faculty members” (p 32). While the position of department chair is rarely considered to be an administrative position, either formally or informally, the chair serves as the individual with the greatest responsibility of representing the academic department to administration and the rest of the campus. It is within this context that the concept of leadership is brought into play. Some of the new responsibilities required of department chairs as they begin to serve in the role require knowledge and skill competency in the areas of human resource management; budgeting and accountancy; grant writing and funding; and ensuring compliance with institutional and accreditation mandates (Carroll & Gmelch, 1994; Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, & Beyer, 1990; Tucker, 1992; Wolverton,

Ackerman, & Holt, 2005). These responsibilities are generally not learned and developed within the sole role of serving as scholar/academic (McLaughlin et al, 1975).

This chapter will serve to examine data obtained by this study, present conclusions derived from the study data and review the data through the lens of existing scholarly literature. In addition, an application of The Skill Acquisition Model and The Experiential Learning Theory will be used to develop conclusions; and suggest recommendations for further study and practice.

### **Discussion**

The main themes that the study was structured upon were: 1) Role Attainment; 2) Role Preparedness; 3) Role Readiness; and 4) Leadership Experience/Preparation. For the purposes of inquiry, the study was based on the following three research questions: 1) How do department chairs at SCCD perceive their level of preparation/readiness at the time they assumed this position? 2) Which previously acquired knowledge and skills do department chairs draw from that helped prepare them for their position? 3) Which previously acquired knowledge and skills did department chairs feel they lacked in terms of preparation for their role?

The setting for the study was Seaside Community College District (SCCD), a pseudonym for a large urban college district made up of multiple campuses in the western United States. Twelve study participants, four from each of three schools comprising one region of the district, made up the pool of participants. Three of the participants were no longer serving in the role of department chair but had left the position no longer than three years ago. The rest of the chairs interviewed were currently serving in the role. The length of time served as chair ranged from between

one and seventeen years. Participants came from a variety of disciplines and had experienced numerous professional roles prior to entering academia.

Volunteer study participants were recruited from each campus and were asked to participate in a case-study based interview process. Participants responded to twelve open-ended questions designed to explore various facets of their perceived role readiness and preparation upon beginning the role as department chair. The theme of leadership was explored with distinction as a critical aspect of the department chair role. Responses were aggregated and organized according to the following themes emerging from the study: 1) Leadership Experience and Background; 2) Perceived leadership Preparation; 3) Perceived Role Preparedness; 4) Elements Identified as Supporting Role Preparedness; 5) Elements of Role Preparedness Identified as Missing; 6) Perceived Role Readiness; 7) Elements Identified as Supporting Role Readiness; 8) Elements of Role Readiness Identified as Missing.

Themes emerging from the collection of data were aggregated according to the outline above and sorted according to taking a positive direction (supportive), taking a negative direction (lacking or missing) or indicative of new/emerging themes. Data was presented in both a narrative and table report format and was discussed according to the study research questions.

### **Research Questions**

***Question 1: How do department chairs at SCCD perceive their level of preparation/readiness at the time they assumed this position?***

## **Perceived Role Preparedness**

One of the themes explored in the study was that of role preparedness, operationally defined as possessing the acquired knowledge, skills and abilities relevant to the role of department chair. Elements of preparedness in this context referred to the knowledge and skills deemed essential by participants to complete the requirements of their job as chair. All the participants in the study, as consistent with the literature (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004), served as academic scholars prior to serving as department chair. The exploration of acquired knowledge and skills in the study was not solely limited to the academic setting. Knowledge acquired from previous life experiences and employment within and outside the academic domain was explored.

Among the twelve study participants, one individual (8%) stated that they felt prepared for the role of department chair at the time they began the serving in the position. Six of the participants (50%) stated that they believed themselves to have been prepared in some aspects required of the role, but not in others. Five of the chairs (42%) stated that they were not prepared or did not feel prepared for the role at the time they assumed the role of chair. In view of these responses, it has been interpreted that there was no regular and/or consistent feeling of preparedness reported by study participants. This finding is consistent with that reported in scholarly literature (Bramlett, Scoles, Martens, & Gowin, 2015). In this study, the large majority (92%) of the participants stated feeling only partially prepared, at the most, to assume the role of chair.

No regular or consistent manner in which chairs attained role preparation was reported. This occurrence is also consistent with that sourced in the literature.

McPhail Naples (2006) reflects on the experience of learning the role of department chair and describes it as “a baptism by fire”, a term used by the study participant Lisa who remarked “But for me just starting out, it was like baptism by fire.” None of the participants indicated that they had received intentional and/or planned preparation for the role of chair from their institution, an occurrence also consistently described within the literature. Serena referred to her experience as “on the job training” another term used to describe the phenomenon in the literature. While three individuals in the study indicated that they had been informally mentored by a department chair or other leader in the setting, this was a chance occurrence and not one established as a regular role preparatory intervention. Four participants had served as the vice-chair of their department, one unofficially, also creating the conclusion in this study as an inconsistent factor relating to role preparation.

### **Perceived Role Readiness**

Another theme explored in the study was that of role readiness, operationally defined as the belief of the individual in their ability to perform in the role competently, with a moderate level of confidence and without undue stress and feelings of inadequacy. The majority of the study participants felt ready to accept a new challenge; in fact, several sought the opportunity because they desired it. Susan, however stated “I probably wasn’t ready because you kind of have to learn everything on the fly.” She also stated “Maybe it would be nice to have more training, and I think the college is improving with trying to improve training.” Barbara said “I felt ready as much as I understood the job to be ready” and “even though there were things I didn’t particularly know about the job, I was ready to do the job.” Steven stated “I felt that I was fairly ready to lead a team to do

something, but I was totally unprepared for [was] what the team [was] doing.” When indicating a deficiency in perceived readiness, study participants consistently indicated a lack of preparedness as the mitigating factor. Even though the majority of the participants felt “ready” to serve as department chair, the foundational elements supporting their perception were varied and personal.

***Question 2: Which previously acquired knowledge and skills do department chairs draw from that helped prepare them for their position?***

The elements perceived by study participants to have prepared them for the role of chair were highly individualized and random in nature. Andrea felt that her life experience of having immigrated to this country and assimilating into a new environment helped prepare her to learn new roles, but not that of department chair. Barbara, and Peggy felt that their experiences within their discipline helped to prepare them for some of the demands of the role. Charles and Diane indicated that their experiences in graduate school helped them and Grace, Steven and Susan believed that their previous work-related experience assisted in their preparation. Serena said that her experience having served in the military helped to prepare her for the demands of the department chair role. Susan indicated that her opportunities to observe both strong and weak leaders informed her level of preparation to become department chair. The knowledge and skills attained by participants prior to becoming chair were very specific to the individual and occurred secondary to each individual’s personal history of experience. There were no reports of participants’ engagement in structured department chair preparatory activities prior to role attainment.

### **Elements Identified as Supporting Role Preparedness/Readiness**

The elements of role readiness reported by participants as having supported their levels of readiness were random and highly individualized. These elements were stated by participants as ones derived from their personal work background and unique life experiences. Specific factors mentioned included: a) past experience as faculty; b) past experience as a student; c) having served as a vice-chair; d) having been mentored by another chair; d) previous college-based leadership experience; and e) experience/knowledge derived from their discipline/subject.

Susan felt that “having the experience on campus and having prior experience in the classroom” helped support her self-perception of readiness. Barbara, Lisa and Diane, also, sourced their experience as faculty or involvement in campus committee such as the academic senate as ones that helped ready them for the role of department chair. Grace, Barbara, Peggy, Steven, Elizabeth and Charles indicated elements from their personal background as those that helped support their perceived readiness to begin the role. Serena specifically mentioned her background in the military as being of help to her. One individual said that they perceived themselves as ready to take on the role because they followed a strong and competent chair.

***Question 3: Which previously acquired knowledge and skills did department chairs feel they lacked in terms of preparation for their role?***

### **Elements of Role Preparedness Identified as Missing**

The elements of department chair role preparation that participants perceived were missing were largely process related. In the domain of knowledge, participants stated that hiring policies, district and accreditation mandates, contractual issues and general

procedural guidelines were those they felt themselves to be insufficiently prepared for. In the skills domain, they stated that scheduling, faculty evaluations, student complaints, conflict resolution, problem solving, budget, program review documentation and student learning outcomes (SLO's) were the areas they felt deficient in. Serena stated that she was unprepared for the occurrence and frequency of non-urgent faculty contact during non-work hours. She also related that she was unequipped to respond by setting boundaries with offenders. Other study participants indicated that they received no orientation or "help" from outgoing chairs of the department, thus requiring them to navigate the waters unassisted. Susan stated that she was not prepared in lieu of having the necessary knowledge that may have prevented an actual faculty grievance. Grace indicated the unclear boundaries between that of department chair-a peer position-and that of administration positions as detrimental to role identity. She also believed that the resulting ambiguity negatively impacts chair preparedness. Lisa stated "I wasn't really prepared for, like, knowing what the role actually entailed, specifically."

Participants indicated, with consistency, that they did not believe themselves to have been fully prepared for specific role responsibilities such as budgeting and conflict resolution. Others indicated responsibilities specific to the district and/or college such as performance evaluations, program review, contractual issues, administrative policies, and hiring procedure.

### **Elements of Role Readiness Identified as Missing**

Those who indicated that they lacked role readiness did so in the context of lacking knowledge, skills or awareness. As these have been defined by the study as preparatory elements, it is interpreted that preparatory elements exerted a significant effect on

participants' perceived readiness to serve as chair upon role attainment. A further exploration of this theme indicates: a) a lack of knowledge of how to effectively serve as chairs; b) a lack of skills required to accurately complete the tasks required of the role or "job"; and c) a lack of understanding of the management process and/or culture of the institution as being essential fundamental elements of role readiness according the study participants.

Other commentary indicated specific elements perceived as missing by individuals when they began serving as department chairs. Susan stated "my biggest challenge is sort of dealing with conflict" and getting "two people to agree." Grace related, when asked to describe what she perceived to contribute to a lack of readiness, "I keep coming back to systems like all of the reporting, accountability, and mandates – the State mandates, the District mandates, the campus mandates." Barbara, when asked about her level of readiness at the time she began serving as chair, stated "I wasn't prepared for all of the district things I had to do; you know I had to do more in my district discipline meetings and I had to make sure that my faculty were attending certain meetings so I guess it was more things and ground to cover" and "I guess I was just inundated." According to Lisa "I think it would be more helpful if we had some kind of training available for incoming chairs. We have training for new hires, and we have training for new senate roles, but there is not specific training for chairs." Elizabeth commented "I lacked the knowledge of knowing the mandates to become a department chair' while Charles reported "I certainly lacked knowledge of procedure and this is really important".

In view of these comments, study participants indicated the readiness elements they felt to have lacked as being knowledge and/or skills, i.e., preparatory elements. It has,

therefore, been interpreted by this study that the stated lack of readiness occurred in concert with a lack of preparatory elements.

### **Background Serving in a Leadership Role**

While there are many facets to the department chair role, an essential role element is that of leadership. Bowman (2002) states that department chairs serve as leaders when they focus on processes that involve the institution's culture as well as its mission and vision. While the role of department chair is not intended to be an administrative one, chairs serve in a pivotal role between that of the department faculty and that of the first level administrator. Many role responsibilities of the chair are management based, and the positional role of the department chair is that of "lead" faculty member representing the department to administration and the college. As leadership is such a critical aspect to the role of department chair, it was explored in the study. Participants were asked to provide information describing their formal and informal leadership experience as well as their perception of how this experience impacted their readiness and preparation for the chair role.

### **Formal and Informal Leadership Preparation**

Four of the twelve participants (33%) stated that they had experienced leadership preparation in the formal sense. Andrea, Cheryl and Grace said that they had obtained leadership preparation in their graduate studies while Serena indicated that she had received formal leadership training in previous non-academic jobs. Five of the twelve participants (42%) said that they had received informal mentoring from a leader in a manner that could be applicable to the role of chair. These responses indicated that none of the study participants perceived having received formalized leadership training in

preparation for serving as department chair. The incidence of leadership preparation described by participants in this study indicated an irregular and inconsistent pattern.

### **Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition**

The study used the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition as one of the theoretical frameworks of the study. The “Dreyfus Model” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1986; Dreyfus, 1982), or “Five Stage Model of Adult Skill Acquisition” (Dreyfus, 2004), states that contextual experience is an essential factor in both critical thinking and problem solving. The model is organized along five distinct stages of skill acquisition and the cognitive processes associated with each stage. It is based on the understanding that contextual experience is an essential factor in both critical thinking and problem solving and has been used by scholars to both explain phenomena and as a basis for further theory (Benner, 2004; Hall-Ellis & Grealy, 2013; Lyon, 2015). As an example, Benner demonstrated that as clinical nurses gained experience, their levels of proficiency also increased and that the cognitive processes that guide performance vary at each stage of proficiency.

The five distinct stages of skill acquisition according to the model are: a) Novice; b) Advanced Beginner; c) Competent; d) Proficient; and e) Expert. A belief operationalized by this study is that department chairs, in order to function adequately, must enter their role minimally at the level of Advanced Beginner, though the ideal stage would be that of Competent. According to the Dreyfus Model, at the Advanced Beginner stage the individual would have been exposed to significant practical experience involving a task and would be able to perceive similarities between previous situations and the current one. Half of the participants in this study provided an

indication that they entered the role of department chair at the level of novice. This assertion is based on the data indicating that only several of the participants had gained the “significant practical experience” required of the Advanced Beginner. In addition, although they may have entered the role with certain skills and knowledge at the level of Advanced Beginner, the occurrence was random and often grasped within a different role context than that of department chair. While the individuals in the study attained higher levels of skill acquisition as department chair, some eventually at the Expert level, they did so after actually serving as department chair for months to years. The disparity between participants’ actual Novice or Advanced Beginner level when they entered their role and the ideally desired level of Competent indicates a significant gap. This gap involves a reported lack of knowledge and skill preparation as the underlying factor in creating the disparity. This occurrence, in turn, creates a significant potential for frustration leading to job burn-out and costly errors, as demonstrated by participant commentary.

### **Experiential Learning Theory**

David Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory (1984, 1988) also identifies the connection between previous experience and the way individuals learn and adapt to new experiences. This theory is one of the premiere educational theories utilized within higher education (Jenkins & Healey, 2000). The theory posits that learning through experience is effective. Lisko & O’Dell (2010) interpret the model to indicate that knowledge occurs through the transformation of experience into already present cognitive frameworks resulting in how the learner thinks and behaves. The Experiential Learning Theory is based on four stages: concrete experience, reflection, abstract

conceptualization, and active experimentation. All stages of the cycle must be accomplished if learning is to take place.

Participants in this study indicated significant inconsistency in the pattern in which they obtained experience in the elements required of the department chair role. In addition, there were significant areas of knowledge and skill experience that participants stated as having missed prior to beginning to serve as chair. This, according to this theory, the participants in this study entered their role at a disadvantage in relation to role readiness and preparation.

In addition to providing substance to the analysis study data, both theories provide value and advisement to the development of implications for practice and further study. These theories serve as a framework for future recommendations in both areas.

### **Implications for Practice/Policy**

A review of scholarly literature describing the current state of community college leadership reveals considerable concern due to the large-scale retirement of baby boomer aged leaders (Duree, McNair, & Ebbers,, 2011; Focht, 2010; McManus, 2013). As the community college leadership pipeline regularly begins with the position of department chair, it would be logical to begin reinforcing the pipeline at that level. Even without this dire concern, it has been demonstrated that the position of department chair is a critical one in the community college. With this understanding, it would be wise for college campuses to take action to ensure that more faculty are ready to accept the role of department chair and that department chairs are prepared before they begin serving in the role.

A lack of the establishment of a regular and consistent program of preparing department chairs in the knowledge and skills they need to serve in the role is a universal one. The necessary knowledge and skills required to perform in the role effectively are missing due to a lack of experience or exposure to didactic or practical learning opportunities. Thus, the majority of chairs entering the position do so at the “Novice” or “Advanced Beginner” stage according to the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1986; Dreyfus, 1982). This indicates the ability to function limited to a reliance on rules and examples, rather than applied knowledge, intuition and judgement based on critical thinking. The literature repeatedly and historically documents a lack of department chair preparatory practices within community colleges in the United States over the last several decades (Smith & Stewart, 1999).

In recent years, a movement called “Grow Your Own Leaders” has begun appearing for the purpose of: a) strengthening the community college leadership ladder through recruitment; and b) to enable potential and current leaders to develop their leadership potential through professional development. In this manner, community college campuses and districts design and implement their own professional development programs to include a curriculum based on the leadership structure and functions in their institutions. One of the greatest benefits of this type of program is that it can be customized to address the specific practices and policies of the institution, therefore achieving greater relevance and applicability.

Ideally, in the academic division, this program would be offered and presented to faculty before they enter the role of chair. Various strategies have been demonstrated as

effective in this context including didactic formats and mentorship/shadowing experiences. Learning activities may be provided in a traditional classroom setting, a self-study online format or a combination of these methods along with others. Curriculum would need to be based on the knowledge and skill requirements of the role as specific to each institution. The amount of detail required would be advised by a survey of previous knowledge and skill attainment of prospective participants.

In addition to didactic preparation, data obtained in this study strongly supports the value of role mentoring. In the case of the participants in this study, mentorship occurred in a generally informal fashion. A practice to be considered by colleges would involve mentorship on two levels. The first level would center on pre-role attainment mentorship, as mentioned by a number of the study participants. A program of pairing individuals interested in becoming department chairs with those experienced in the role would most likely assist in the recruitment of potential leaders along with preparing them for the entry role. The next level of mentorship would occur at the time an individual officially begins serving in the role of department chair. New chairs would be partnered with experienced chairs for the purpose of advisement and support.

Another strategy, in process at one of the colleges, is the development of a handbook, or manual, for department chairs to guide them through required processes. This offering could be provided online and/or hard copy format. It is recommended that professional development opportunities for potential and current chairs be provided on a regular and routine basis. It is essential that these activities are promoted to target participants and delivered in an accessible format. The time and monetary investment in

providing these activities in addition to those previously stated will assuredly be worth the investment to the institution.

### **Implications for Future Study**

This study was conducted on a small scale within a limited environment. No studies similar to this one were discovered through a review of current and historical literature. One of the intentions of this study was to perform a preliminary exploration to advise further inquiry. A qualitative methodology was used in this study to obtain foundational information that could be used in both qualitative and quantitative inquiry on a larger scale. Implications for future study suggest that increasing in the number of participants, conducting the study at larger institutions and surveying institutions with a greater gender and ethnic diversity of chairs may be beneficial. It may also be advantageous to increase the number of dimensions studied through the creation of a larger in-depth survey tool. As the study described in this document served as a foundational one, it bears replication to determine if additional patterns of consistency exist, even though the data obtained is consistent with scholarly literature.

Another potential basis for research would be an examination of what degree of skill attainment department chairs felt they possessed specifically as indicated by the Dreyfus Model of Skill Attainment. This would potentially be of assistance in determining professional and role development requirements in general, or of specific groups. Subsequent longitudinal studies could be performed at yearly intervals to identify progress. The Dreyfus Model would, additionally, serve as an excellent basis for study on the full spectrum of the community college leadership structure from entry levels to that of college presidents and chancellors.

An additional model relevant to leadership roles and further study is that of *Competencies for Community Colleges*, created by the American Association of Community Colleges (2006). This framework utilizes the categories of Organizational Strategy, Resource Management, Communication, Collaboration, Community College Advocacy and Professionalism to indicate the actions and behaviors required of effective community college leaders. The categories are descriptive in a broader sense, but could be easily adapted to articulate descriptive data related to specific leadership roles.

### **Limitations**

As stated above, this study was conducted on a relatively small scale for the purposes of creating a foundation for further study. In addition, the study environment was exclusive to three campuses within a single community college district. Therefore, as anticipated, results of this study are exclusively applicable only to the environment studied.

An additional limitation potentially affecting generalizability and applicability of results to other like populations involves the group studied. Due to the limited availability of participants in relation to the number desired, it was not feasible to obtain individuals from a wide variety of disciplines and ethnicities as well as achieving a gender balance in the participant pool.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to examine how prepared and role-ready community college department chairs perceived themselves to have been at the time of their appointment. The study explored the dimensions of knowledge and skills study participants believed to be critical to their role and ones necessary for them to possess in

order to perform their job effectively. The study also explored the means by which the chairs in the study obtained the essential knowledge and skills.

The data obtained by this study was in concurrence with that sourced by scholarly literature on the subject. Both conclude that few chairs experience regular and consistent role preparation intended to ready them for their role. The elements believed by study participants to be essential to the role of chair were reported as evolving through highly individualized and inconsistent means. Some of the reported elements believed to have prepared and readied study participants were derived through non-college related situations and activities. The experiences related as being of most value included both structured and practice-based learning opportunities and role modeling experiences through mentoring.

The role of the department chair is a critical one in community colleges. It serves as both an introductory and pivotal position on the community college leadership ladder. The role of chair is that of both faculty member and leader and serves as a point of articulation between department faculty and college administration. Actions and decisions made by department chairs exert a great deal of influence on the functioning of their institution as well as the success potential of the students served. The quality and success of these actions and decisions is dependent on the range of knowledge and skills possessed chair as they fulfill their role. A failure to prepare and ready chairs for their role ultimately translates into a failure of the college to serve students and the community most effectively.

An important conclusion of this study is that colleges are not purposely at fault for the widespread lack of role preparation of department chairpersons. It has, throughout

history, rarely been established as a standard of practice even though scholarly literature has demonstrated the need for this preparation. Perhaps prospective and established department chairs have not exerted a loud enough voice collectively to achieve this necessary outcome. It is possible that college leaders don't know how critical the need for department chair role preparation actually is and what efforts must entail.

A collaborative effort by both faculty/department chairs and college leadership/administration in developing and providing effective professional development for department chairs will benefit the chairs, the colleges and ultimately the students and community served. A critical aim of this study has been to give impetus to the establishment of conversations and plans for the purpose of strengthening the role and efficacy of department chairs.

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## Appendix A

### **Invitation to Participate in a Doctoral Research Study: Exploring the Preparation and Readiness for the Department Chair Role from Joan Schneider**

Dear Colleague,

My name is Joan Schneider and I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at California State University Northridge. I am writing to request your participation in a study I am conducting as part of my doctoral degree requirements.

The purpose of this study is to gather information from department chairs on how their past experiences helped to prepare them for their role as chair. The criteria for participation in this study are: a) that you have served as a department chair within the LACCD for a minimum of six months within the last five years and are b) willing to relate your experience.

Your voluntary participation in this study will include an interview which will be scheduled at a time and place that is convenient for your schedule. The interview will consist of approximately twelve questions and will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

Your participation will be valuable in contributing towards understanding factors that lead to role preparation and readiness of department chairs and will be much appreciated.

All information provided will remain confidential and your name will not be disclosed in any way.

If you have any questions about the study or would be willing to participate in the study, please contact me at [schneijl@piercecollege.edu](mailto:schneijl@piercecollege.edu) or (818) 710-2971.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

*Joan L. Schneider*

**Joan L. Schneider M.N., R.N.**

**Doctoral Candidate**

**California State University Northridge**

**Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies**

## Appendix B

### CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

#### Department Chair Study Interview Protocol

**Participant Pseudonym:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Welcome and introduction:**

“Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I’d like to give you the opportunity to ask any preliminary questions that you have about what we are doing today”.

#### **Purpose of the interview:**

“As we discussed, this interview is a one-on-one interview for the purpose of collecting information for a research study that will explore the perceptions of department chairs of the previous experiences that assisted in preparing them for their position. During this interview, we will discuss your impressions and attitudes about your own experience”.

#### **Timing:**

“Today’s interview will last approximately 45 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?”

#### **Main Questions:**

1. What is your current role?
2. When were you appointed to this role?
3. Prior to attaining this role had you served in any leadership role (if so, what)? Please describe).
4. Did you have any formal (academic) leadership preparation prior to attaining the role of department chair such as university/college coursework? Please describe.
5. Did you have any informal leadership preparation prior to attaining the role of department chair such as workshops or mentoring? Please describe.
6. What elements within your background do you feel helped to prepare you for the role of chair? Please describe.

7. What elements of role preparation do you feel you lacked upon assuming your role? Please describe.
8. What do you perceive as your level of readiness at the time you assumed your role as department chair? Please describe.
9. What do you perceive as your level of preparation at the time you assumed your role as department chair? Please describe.
10. What elements within your background do you feel supported your level of readiness to assume your role? Please describe.
11. What elements of role readiness do you feel you lacked upon assuming your role? Please describe.
12. What else would you like to share on this topic?

### **Debriefing and Closing**

“Thank you for participating in today’s interview session. I greatly appreciate you taking the time and sharing your ideas with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifiable characteristics will be used in any report or document. I would like to request an opportunity to provide you with a transcript of our conversation at a later date so you may review it for accuracy. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this interview. Do you have any questions at this time?”

## Appendix C

### **CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT ADVISORY Exploring the Preparation and Readiness for the Department Chair Role**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This study is being done as part of the requirements for the Ed.D. degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

#### **RESEARCH TEAM**

##### **Researcher:**

**Joan L. Schneider M.N.**

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

18111 Nordhoff St.

Northridge, CA 91330- 8265

(818) 677-2591

[schneijl@piercecollege.edu](mailto:schneijl@piercecollege.edu)

##### **Faculty Advisor:**

**Dr. Dimpal Jain Ph.D.**

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

18111 Nordhoff St.

Northridge, CA 91330- 8265

818/677-7895

[dimpal.jain@csun.edu](mailto:dimpal.jain@csun.edu)

## **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this research study is to explore perceptions of department chairs of the previous professional experience that supported their preparation and readiness for the role of chair.

## **SUBJECTS**

### **Inclusion Requirements**

You are eligible to participate in this study if you have served as a department chair in the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) for at least six months and within the last five years.

### **Time Commitment**

Two interviews will be scheduled at a time and location that is convenient for you. The introductory interview will last approximately 15 minutes and no longer than 20 minutes. The data collection interview will last approximately 45 minutes and no longer than 60 minutes.

## **PROCEDURES**

The following procedures will occur: if you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to meet with me briefly so I may inform you about interview process and to schedule a mutually agreeable time and place for the main interview. The main interview will be for the purpose of data collection and should last no longer than one hour. Participation is voluntary and you may decline to respond or withdraw your participation at any point during the study. If you are uncomfortable answering any of the questions, you will not be required to answer them and you may continue to participate in the study.

## **RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to meet with me to discuss how your experience prior to becoming department chair helped to prepare and ready you for this role. Possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include: potential discomfort in answering questions about past career based work experiences such as: fatigue, boredom, mild emotional discomfort and/or embarrassment. You will not be required to answer any questions you are not comfortable answering to remain in the study. The study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life.

## **BENEFITS**

You may not directly benefit from participation in this study, however your participation is valuable in contributing towards understanding factors that lead to role preparation and readiness of department chairs.

## **ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

## **COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT**

### **Compensation for Participation**

You will not be compensated for your participation.

### **Costs**

There is no cost for you to participate in this study.

### **Reimbursement**

You will not be reimbursed for any out-of-pocket expenses such as parking or transportation fees.

## **WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES**

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. **If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the research team immediately.** There is no penalty for answering questions a certain way or for not completing the interview. You may request the audio recording device to be stopped at any time and/or leave the interview at any time without giving a reason and without facing any consequences. The research team may also end your participation in this study if you do not follow instructions, miss scheduled appointments, or if your safety or welfare are at risk.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

### **Subject Identifiable Data**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission or as required by law. Names will not be used in the reporting of findings. All efforts will be taken to ensure your confidentiality as a participant in this study. If you consent to participate, you will choose or be assigned a pseudonym to protect your confidentiality. No other identifying information will be used and your college or district will not be identified by name in any published report.

### **Data Storage**

The audio recordings will be stored in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher until they are transcribed. Following transcriptions, the audio files will be destroyed. All research data will be stored on a laptop computer that is password protected.

### **Data Access**

The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

## **Data Retention**

Once the interviews have been conducted, you have a period of 30 days to request and review the audio files and/or transcriptions (whichever are available) from your interview. If you withdraw consent after participation in the interview, your digital audio files and/ or transcription files (whichever are available) will be immediately destroyed. The researchers intend to keep the research data until analysis of the information is completed and then it will be destroyed.

## **Mandated Reporting**

Under California law, the researcher(s) is/are required to report known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any researcher has or is given such information, he or she may be required to report it to the authorities.

## **IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

**Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Please read the information in this form and feel free to ask any questions that you have about the study.