Turn That Frown Upside Down: The Experience Of Higher Education Faculty Moving From Disillusionment To Vitality

Robert J. Martin

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TURN THAT FROWN UPSIDE DOWN: THE EXPERIENCE OF HIGHER
EDUCATION FACULTY MOVING FROM
DISILLUSSIONMENT TO VITALITY

by

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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2015
This dissertation, submitted by Robert J. Martin in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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May 5, 2015

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Degree  Doctor of Philosophy

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Robert J. Martin
April 29, 2015
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Thank you to the participants in this study, without whom this study would not be possible. You graciously shared your experiences with me and, by doing so, you gave me and my readers a sense of hope that it is certainly possible to break the popular view of
how a career unfolds—which may include overcoming a disillusioned state and reaching vitality. It is my wish that if someone is struggling with disillusionment, he or she comes across this study and finds out a little more about overcoming it.

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life itself. I did this, in many respects, for you. I want you to know that you can achieve anything in life that you truly set your mind and heart on achieving. Go for the stars! If Dad could do it, so can you. As much change as will be thrown your way throughout each of your lives, one constant will remain: your dad’s unconditional love for you.
ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the journey of six higher education faculty members who encountered a state of professional disillusionment in their careers but later moved to a professional sense of vitality in the professoriate. Building on the extant literature, this study investigated this phenomenon of moving from professional disillusionment to vitality in the professoriate through the lenses of life course, agency, and job satisfaction. These components provided the structure for the study’s conceptual framework. Employing interpretative phenomenological analysis based on semi-structured interviews, the study traced the journey of these professors to understand how the key encounters of their lived experiences represented aspects of the professional disillusionment as well as the structures and strategies that accounted for their movement into a state of vitality. The findings reveal that the participants underwent this phenomenon in developmental stages. To progress from a state of professional disillusionment to a professional sense of vitality, higher education faculty members must overcome cognitive dissonance, solicit multiple levels of support, and experience self-reflection. Three major policy implications stem from this study: revamping doctorate programs, introducing more professional development opportunities for faculty members, and calling for different organizations and associations to take active roles in the development of future and current faculty members.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Presentation of the Research Problem

What do higher education faculty experience when moving from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality? This question specifically examines a journey that, as I explain below, has yet to be explored through empirical research. That being said, the subject of career vitality among college faculty has not been ignored in the literature. Within the construct of career vitality, extensive research has been conducted on higher education faculty, especially those experiencing midlife career renewal (Baldwin, Lunceford, & Vanderlinden, 2005; Karpiak, 2000; O’Meara, Terosky, & Neumann, 2008; Strage, Nelson, & Myers, 2008). In addition, there is a great deal of literature that focuses on job satisfaction and dissatisfaction factors of faculty in American higher education (Castillo & Cano, 2004; Herzberg, 2008; Hill, 1986; Iiacqua, Schumacher, & Li, 2001; Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2011). Further work has been done on faculty burnout and why professors intend to leave the profession (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1984; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Koruklu, Feyzioglu, Ozenoglu-Kiremit, & Aladag, 2012; Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Watts & Robertson, 2011). Yet the literature has not engaged in an examination of college faculty who experienced a state of professional disillusionment but found a way to move into a state of vitality.
For this inquiry, I conducted a qualitative research study of higher education faculty members exploring their lived experiences in moving from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality. Before proceeding, it is imperative that the reader understands the terms *disillusionment* and *vitality* as used in this study. Disillusionment, according to Corwin, Taves, and Haas (1961), is described as “emerging job dissatisfaction” (p. 141). Huston, Norman, and Ambrose (2007) defined disillusionment as separating oneself from collegiality, decision making, and mentoring. Boice (1986) described disillusioned educators as those who are “chronically depressed or angry about their jobs, who are inactive and unenthusiastic as teachers and researchers, and whose campus participation is passive at best” (p. 115). According to Russell (2010), faculty satisfaction is crucial when determining the overall vitality of an institution. One may argue that the same could be said about the satisfaction of an individual faculty member in relation to his or her vitality. As the reader will discern through a later discussion, vitality is defined by a person’s ability to work toward and achieve personal as well as organizational goals (Bland, Seaquist, Pacala, Center, & Finstad, 2002). The reader should understand that personal milestones may occur in a professional setting. Furthermore, organizational goals could be those that are set for a department, college, or institution. Certain factors tied to job satisfaction may also be key to being vital. Those factors, as identified in the literature, include collegiality, working with students, achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, and growth/advancement (Ambrose, Huston, & Norman, 2005; Bean, Lucas, & Hyers, 2014; Bess & Dee, 2008; Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Castillo & Cano, 2004; Cipriano & Buller, 2012; Corbin; 1998; Hagedorn, 2000; Hill, 1986; Lahiri & Kumar, 2012; Lane, Esser, Holte, & McCusker, 2002).
2010; Milosheff, 1990; Pollicino, 1996). By contrast, job dissatisfaction and burnout have been known to cause disillusionment. Having said that, there is a distinction to be drawn between the two terms. It is important to note that people can experience one but not the other: burned out but not disillusioned or disillusioned but not burned out.

The research problem was to examine higher education faculty members’ lived experiences in moving from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality. Specifically, this study offers insight into the journey that a sample of faculty members experienced to find a renewed sense of energy and passion for their professions. This study is important because it addresses the journey from disillusionment to vitality for higher education faculty members. Although the results may not be generalizable to every situation, they can be useful to understand what some faculty members experienced. Understanding how certain faculty members were able to move from disillusionment to vitality can drive important decisions by disillusioned faculty members themselves as well as organizations, associations, and institutions to address the issue. Furthermore, the conceptual framework of the study took into account faculty vitality as the result of the combination of job satisfaction, life course, and agency. Although life course and agency are defined later in this chapter under the heading “Key Terms,” it is important to discuss them here as well. Life course is defined by Giele and Elder (1998) as “a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time” (p. 22). Stated another way, life course embodies significant events that occur in a faculty member’s career that he or she identifies are being instrumental in a state of disillusionment, transformation toward vitality from disillusionment, or vitality itself. Agency is defined by Campbell and O’Meara (2013) as “taking strategic and intentional actions or
perspectives towards goals that matter to oneself” (p. 383). Simply put, agency comprises important decisions either made for or by faculty members that contribute to disillusionment, the transformation from disillusionment to vitality, or vitality itself. Life course and agency are important components of the conceptual framework because this study explores the phenomenon of moving from disillusionment to vitality in a faculty member’s career as opposed to his or her job. Since no previous study focuses on the journey from disillusionment to vitality, this research filled a significant gap in the research.

Given this research problem, the purpose of my study is to examine the journey of college professors who encountered a state of professional disillusionment in their careers but later moved to a professional sense of vitality. This inquiry is important to inform decision makers and/or leaders in higher education institutions about this phenomenon of professors moving from disillusionment to vitality. As set forth in my study, I uncovered multiple insights about the changes in faculty lives in terms of expectations, supports, and the need for self-reflection. This study investigated the phenomenon through the lenses of life course, agency, and job satisfaction so I could outline some of the commonalities that my sample of participants encountered to find career vitality after a period of disillusionment. (The adjectives career and professional, as used in this dissertation, should be deemed interchangeable.) This knowledge could be used in a host of ways, including but not limited to mentoring decisions and professional development opportunities. In screening participants for this study, I searched for higher education faculty members who self-reported overcoming severe dissatisfaction and disillusionment in their careers and finding a sense of rejuvenation and vitality. As mentioned earlier,
disillusionment has been previously described as “emerging job dissatisfaction.”

Therefore, participants of this study could have referenced a separation of themselves from collegiality, decision-making, and mentorship. They may also have experienced burnout that could cause a feeling of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Finally, participants’ disillusionment may have been manifested in feelings such as disengagement and/or career ambivalence (Corwin et al., 1961; Huston et al., 2007). One way I captured this changed state of being (i.e., from disillusionment to vitality) was to locate professors whom others identify as thriving or doing well yet made some reference to past negative experiences in their careers.

**Researcher Perspective**

The reason why this research was of strong interest to me is because I have encountered an experience potentially similar to the phenomenon under study. Even though I have experienced moving from a disillusioned state to one of vitality, it is important to keep in mind that my experience does not involve higher education, but that of K-12 education. Although the current research was not designed as a comparative study, I was very interested to examine this phenomenon at the higher education level.

My experience involved spending nine years of my administrative career in a small town in North Dakota in the late 1990s. The perception from many of school employees was of a lack of support from either the school board (as evidenced by minimal pay increases and material support) or the community. Not only did the school climate suffer but so did morale. I found myself sliding into a state of disillusionment because of the helplessness I felt in trying to improve these very poor conditions.
The last couple of years working in that particular district were more than I could stand. I updated my résumé and mailed it off to a larger school district in North Dakota. Soon after, I landed a new school administrator position. The environment was different, and I felt pleasantly surprised and reenergized. My commitment level to this school is very high, and I am proud to say that I was integral in helping our school receive a national distinction as a Professional Learning Community Model School. There are fewer than 30 high schools in the nation with that honor, and we are the only one in North Dakota.

My experience has made me wonder what changed for me besides the job itself. I reflected and asked myself: What did I experience that was different? How did I manage the situation? What would I want to impart to others who are feeling uninspired or unhappy in the positions? I wanted to learn more, but I was interested in addressing these questions in another educational context. Specifically, I was interested to know how higher education faculty members experienced moving from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality.

Also, given my personal encounters, I was aware that my biases and experiences may lead or shape descriptions of my participants. My awareness of this possibility kept me attuned to watch my behaviors to avoid leading questions and maintain objectivity so as to not report data incorrectly or interpret with my lens rather than that of the participants.

Focus of the Study

Higher education faculty members were the subjects of this particular study. Needless to say, the focus lay with their ability to overcome a disillusioned state and
becoming vital in their position. The study of faculty career vitality is extremely important in that it may be used to coach (through the supervisory process) others in the field that may be considered as underachieving or disillusioned at the time. All higher education institutions should be constantly striving for continuous improvement. Acknowledging that some faculty are not producing at a higher capability level is a solid starting point. Studying the phenomenon of how others have experienced career vitality may be used to move disillusioned higher education faculty members from a disillusioned state to one of vitality in their own right.

**Significance of the Study**

Exploring the experiences of higher education faculty moving from career disillusionment to vitality was a significant inquiry for several reasons. It is well-accepted that faculty members have an impact on student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Stated a different way, faculty members are responsible for some part of the success (or lack thereof) that students experience. Because of this responsibility, it is crucial to understand the phenomenon of higher education faculty moving from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality. In addition, this knowledge of what moves a faculty member from disillusionment to vitality comes at a critical time for higher education. One could make the claim that there is a high level of accountability within higher education and the time is now to understand this phenomenon and move faculty in the right direction toward vitality (Connor & Rabovsky, 2011; Reindl & Reyna, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Higher education institutions would directly benefit from this knowledge as they could implement strategies, policies, and practices to address those disillusioned faculty
members and help them become vital. A secondary beneficiary would be the students themselves. Having instructors who are fully engaged and vital in their careers would enhance learning and potentially create an environment that would produce more “career ready” students (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Like a domino effect, a tertiary beneficiary would be society in general. If higher education institutions increase faculty vitality, the benefit is likely to trickle down to the students who eventually take their higher skill set to the workforce.

**Conceptual Framework**

This particular study was framed by a concept consisting of three parts. The main research question is, “What do higher education faculty experience when moving from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality?” Again, the disillusioned state was determined by career dissatisfaction and its causes. Similarly, the state of vitality was determined by productivity as well as career satisfaction. Since the study was not simply directed at describing a faculty member’s state of mind, either disillusioned or vital, it was imperative to understand that the study focused on the journey from one to the other. Three key factors suggested themselves: career satisfaction, life course, and agency. The literature review in Chapter II describes these three areas in depth; I introduce them briefly here to show how they fit into the purpose of the study and shaped its conceptual framework.

Accordingly, three research questions fall under the main, overarching research question. The following questions are listed in Chapter III as well.
1. What are aspects of the participants’ work and profession that would be associated with career satisfaction and dissatisfaction? (Level of Satisfaction)

2. What events were critical to the phenomena of being disillusioned, vital, and the transformation from one to the other? (Life Course)

3. How do these faculty describe the key decision points through their encounters of disillusionment, vitality, and the transformation from one to the other? (Agency)

**Inquiry Statement**

The phenomenon under discussion in this study was the move from disillusionment to vitality. A common perception—though not reality—of a college faculty member’s career experience is as follows: early career struggle, better performance through experience and on-the-job training, mid-career stagnation, career burnout, and eventual retirement (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Koruklu et al., 2012; Solem & Foote, 2006; Strage et al., 2008; Watts & Robertson, 2011). This study aimed to show what some higher education faculty members did to overcome this disillusioned state and move to vitality (either for the first time or again).

Because the study required the researcher to draw data from the experiences of higher education faculty members who encountered this phenomenon, a phenomenological approach was used. Phenomenology, as is explained later in greater detail, is a qualitative approach that captures the lived experiences of subjects to construct a deeper understanding of the observed phenomenon. The research question lent itself to
this method because it drew upon the experiences that higher education faculty had when moving from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality.

**Study Boundaries**

In this qualitative study, higher education faculty members experiencing movement from disillusionment to vitality remained the focus. Therefore, faculty members outside of higher education institutions were not considered for this study. Geographical location was also intentionally limited to increase the likelihood of a representative sample. Furthermore, the participants were drawn from the Midwest, specifically North Dakota, which limited the study even further. It would be a mistake to believe that the results hold true regardless of location since the sample was restricted to a relatively small area of the United States.

Another limitation that needs to be considered is the diversity of the participants. To provide some sort of generalization, the participants were sought from four-year baccalaureate-granting institutions. The institutions, which will remain anonymous, were similar in size, each having fewer than 2,000 full time students. The data gleaned from the interview process give the reader a look inside what helped some higher education faculty members move from a disillusioned state to one of vitality; however, these results may or may not be applicable to others. The data collected in this particular study do not claim, nor were they intended to be, universally applicable to any higher education faculty member seeking the same movement from disillusionment to vitality.
Key Terms

In any study, it is imperative that key terms are laid out and defined for the reader. The following terms are used throughout the study and are defined here solely for the reader’s understanding.

- **Agency**: Campbell and O’Meara (2013) described agency as “taking strategic and intentional actions or perspectives towards goals that matter to oneself” (p. 383).
- **Higher Education Faculty**: For the purpose of this study, “higher education faculty” designates faculty members who work in small to very small four-year public institutions of higher education.
- **Burnout**: Brouwers and Tomic (2000) described burnout as “a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity” (p. 239).
- **Collegiality**: Cipriano and Butler (2012) defined collegiality as an American higher education faculty member’s willingness and ability to “work collaboratively in order to achieve common purposes” (p. 46).
- **Disillusionment**: Corwin et al. (1961) described disillusionment as “emerging job dissatisfaction” (p. 141); separating oneself from collegiality, decision-making, and mentoring (Huston et al., 2007); Boice (1986) described teachers who are disillusioned as those who are “chronically depressed or angry about their jobs, who are inactive and unenthusiastic as teachers and researchers, and whose campus participation is passive at best” (p. 115), as demonstrated by disengagement and/or career ambivalence.
• **Faculty Vitality**: Bland et al. (2002) defined faculty vitality as “efforts designed to facilitate faculty members’ commitment to and ability to achieve their own goals” (p. 369).

• **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**: Smith (2007) defined this as a qualitative methodology that examines the lived experiences of participants within the phenomenon of interest. IPA is a special type of phenomenological analysis that provides data in a two-stage interpretative or double hermeneutic approach wherein the participants make sense of their reality and the researcher makes sense of their response.

• **Life Course**: Giele and Elder (1998) defined life course as “a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time” (p. 22).

**Chapter Summary**

This study attempted to contribute to filling the current gap in the literature concerning the phenomenon of higher education faculty members who moved from a disillusioned state to one of vitality. As noted earlier, other studies explain the phenomenon of what a college faculty member experiences when he or she moves from a state of disillusionment to renewal during midlife or mid-career; however, none of them propose looking at this phenomenon through the lens and conceptual framework of career satisfaction, life course, and agency to explain the phenomenon of the movement from disillusionment to vitality. Chapter II reviews the literature in four main sections: the American professoriate; career satisfaction/dissatisfaction factors; burnout; and vitality, life course, and agency. Chapter III presents the study’s methodology as well as its design. In addition, the third chapter discusses in depth the research approach, research
questions, theoretical perspectives, resources, and limitations. After reading Chapters II and III, the reader should clearly understand not only what knowledge was being sought but also how the study obtained that information.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter Overview

In the previous chapter, I noted how the literature suggests that college faculty members are generally thought of as being either satisfied or dissatisfied with their careers. This point highlights the key literature from a rather expansive review of studies investigating faculty career satisfaction. Furthermore, there is a phenomenon described in the literature as burnout, which causes faculty either to remain stagnant or disillusioned. Symptoms of burnout may lead to dissatisfaction of faculty with their positions or even cause them to leave the profession altogether (Lackritz, 2004). According to the literature, one group of higher education faculty members has been largely forgotten in the research: faculty members who have moved from a negative or disillusioned state in their careers to one that is more positive. It may be possible to describe this demographic with a term drawn from the field of psychology: vital. Following Bland et al. (2002), I use the term with some caution to define faculty vitality as “efforts designed to facilitate faculty members’ commitment to and ability to achieve their own goals” (p. 369).

In this chapter, I provide a framework and rationale for a study of those higher education faculty members who have experienced the phenomenon of moving from a disillusioned state in their career to one of vitality. The concept of one’s career is particularly important when speaking about higher education faculty members. Super
(1980) noted that the term *career* has been defined as “the combination and sequence of roles played by a person during the course of a lifetime” (p. 282). Thus, this chapter examines carefully the stages and events that past research has described in characterizing changes in one’s career.

Thus, to dissect the meaning of a college faculty career and draw attention to this construct of the journey from disillusionment to vitality, I present several sections in this chapter. The first section responded to the question, “Who are American higher education faculty?” I provided demographic information about higher education faculty as well as the nature of the work that faculty members do. Faculty work is typically divided into three areas—teaching, research, and service (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Dennison, 2012; Gonzales, 2014; Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2011; Waltman, Bergom, Hollenshead, Miller, & August, 2012). The second section focuses on the literature investigating specific factors noted for career satisfaction and dissatisfaction for higher education faculty members. This allows the reader to understand exactly what comes into play when faculty members are either satisfied or dissatisfied in their careers. This section also sheds light on concepts that emerge to characterize experiences of faculty regarding notions of disillusionment and vitality. A third section builds on the satisfaction/dissatisfaction literature by examining the phenomenon specifically known as burnout. In this section, the prevalent literature explains what contributes to burnout in faculty members and how they describe this experiential state. A fourth section offers insights into the underlying elements of my conceptual framework. Taking into consideration how career processes are critical to understanding faculty experiences
about their career, this section reviews the literature on college faculty vitality, agency, and life course.

Drawing upon the literature on these topics, I argue that something is missing that needs to be studied. To that end, I recognized that one of the “missing pieces” was the experience of higher education faculty members who moved from a disillusioned state to one of vitality. The intention of this study was to fill that literature gap. Thus, as discussed in Chapter I, this study contributes to and builds upon the literature on faculty vitality.

Realistically, this study represents only one tiny part of a larger context concerning faculty career experiences. Some faculty members never experience the phenomenon of moving from disillusionment to vitality; however, I argue that a significant number of faculty do. My inkling is that some faculty members lose energy and effort because they fall into a status quo attitude concerning their career or career performance. Furthermore, it is also possible that some faculty members remain in that state, but that others recognize it and do not wish to remain there. It is the latter and not the former who drove this study. This particular study did not focus on the “why” per se, but rather on “how” certain faculty members overcame a state of disillusionment and found vitality. Because of this focus, the study has merit so we can learn more about the movement one makes from disillusionment to vitality.

**Part 1: The American Professoriate**

Recently, the literature has undergone a paradigm shift from studying the faculty themselves to understanding how they cultivate their careers (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Buchanan, St. Charles, Rigler, & Hart, 2010; Campbell & O’Meara, 2013;
Gonzalez, 2014; Haughton et al., 2013; O’Meara & Campbell, 2011; Perry, Clifton, Menec, Struther, & Menges, 2000; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Studies, as previously described, can serve as a springboard to describe how faculty evolved by becoming more like a cross-section of the American population. Understanding the people who are faculty members provides the basic foundation for studying what it might mean for them to move from a disillusioned state to one of vitality.

**Faculty Work: What Do Professors Do?**

Before one can describe what it looks like to have negative or positive reflections upon one’s career as a higher education faculty member, it is imperative to understand the nature of the work being done. The career of a higher education faculty member has traditionally encompassed three components: teaching, research, and service (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Dennison, 2012; Gonzales, 2014; Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2011; Waltman et al., 2012). These three components are central to the importance of a faculty member’s career not only because they make up the day-to-day duties but also because they are the areas in which a faculty member is evaluated and considered for promotion and/or tenure. Professors often are thought to perform these three functions in unison; however, a vast amount of literature explains how each area pulls the professor in a separate direction and competes for the professor’s time. Further, the literature is clear that not all professors engage in research (e.g., community college faculty) and not all professors have equal distribution among the duties of teaching, research, and service. However, to capture the experiences of many faculty members, the model of teaching, research, and service duties proves broadly useful. Accordingly, the following sections
describe each area of faculty work as well as how they function in conjunction with one another.

**Teaching.** It is common for people to believe that teaching is one-directional, meaning that the lecturer imparts wisdom upon the students. In this model, the major role of teachers is to teach while the students’ role is to learn (Conway, 2012). In fact, the first college teachers were called tutors and were charged with the sole responsibility of instructing in the established curriculum (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). The major vehicles or modalities used were the didactic format of a lecture and Socratic dialogue. The lecturer taught the students the subject matter and offered them guidance. In spite of this model’s popularity, there has been a paradigm shift in the way people look at and experience college teaching. The shift has transformed institutions from places where teaching occurs to places that facilitate learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995). As Biesta (2013) explained, “[T]eaching has become increasingly understood as the facilitation of learning rather than as a process where teachers have something to give to their students” (p. 449). Faculty roles have become much more complex since the early days; however, college professors are still responsible for student learning, usually within a field in which a professor is understood to be the expert (e.g., Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Teaching happens in a variety of ways, most notably in a classroom, where the teacher imparts knowledge upon the students. Other forms of teaching could include but are not limited to advising students, giving individualized instruction, and helping out a colleague with a concern (Conway, 2012). There seems to be outside pressure to refocus on the teaching component of the faculty workload (Altbach, 1995; Boyer, 1991; Waltman et al., 2012). Finally, accountability component of teaching has shifted from faculty being responsible
not only for delivering the appropriate information and curriculum to their students but also to ensuring that the students learn. A faculty member’s ability to embrace the teaching role is critical in his or her overall success in the profession (Conway, 2012).

**Research.** The overall workload of a college faculty member has undergone changes over time. As previously discussed, it was the original role of the college professor to “teach” students material that either was new to them or that they had not fully grasped in previous lessons. Just as teaching is described as the imparting of knowledge, Conway (2012) described research as the “creation and development of knowledge” (p. 20). Research expands upon current knowledge and moves us toward a better understanding, which may also include discovery of new knowledge (Ohrberg, 2013). Considerable literature describes the work of a faculty member as consisting of teaching, research, and service; however, some have noted that research is taking up more and more of educators’ time, and that subsequently teaching and service may suffer (Waltman et al., 2012).

Capturing the evolving role of scholarship, Ernest Boyer published a report explaining how a faculty member’s workload has evolved over time. A professor’s job responsibility has shifted from the historical teaching role to today’s focus on research (Waltman et al., 2012). The reason why research has assumed a more important part in a faculty’s workload is that tenure and promotion often ride on one’s credentials in the field, as measured by number of publications, prestige, and the respect of one’s peers both in and outside of the institution in which one works (Gabbidon, Higgins & Martin, 2011; Miller, 2012). In fact, research often is the primary mode of communication
between professors and their peers, especially when research is ongoing (Harley, Acord, Earl-Novell, Lawrence & King, 2010).

In addition to the literature explaining the growing importance of research to the career of professors, other literature addresses how researchers end up choosing their subjects. Some follow in the footsteps of their advisors, while others will take on a whole new area in which they believe there to be a gap in the literature in their field of interest (Dundar & Lewis, 1998; Perry et al., 2000). Reis (1999) wrote an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that examined how professors choose a research topic. His thought was that although it is unlikely that a professor’s research area will be a direct extension of his dissertation work, it is not out of the realm of possibility that it will be related in some way. Furthermore, Neumann (2006) explained that some professors simply choose an area of personal interest. Although many of the subjects in which professors choose to conduct research have merit, it would seem that a person would be more successful choosing topics that are of great interest. Because research is taking a more predominant role in the work of a college professor, it was important for me to understand how a faculty member moved from being disillusioned to becoming vital.

**Service.** Service often is looked at as the third wheel of the equation and the least important (Baez, 2000). Teaching and research make the majority of the headlines, while service is simply the catch-all descriptor for “everything else”—that is, any aspect of the job that is not teaching or research (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995). Some of the duties described include (Lynton, 1995; Neumann & Terosky, 2007; Whitfield & Hickerson, 2013):

- serving as a department head or chair
• serving on a faculty senate to represent a particular college within the university structure
• serving an academic disciplinary community by organizing a professional development conference
• serving to improve local K–12 schools as a community outreach initiative
• serving in various capacities within the community
• serving outside of the institution but within the discipline
• serving as a consultant to outside entities

Service can prove especially challenging for pre-tenure professors because they spend a great deal of their time teaching and conducting research to establish their own credibility as a prerequisite for tenure and promotion (Reybold & Corda, 2011). Although some evidence shows that service can provide a way for professors to pursue personal interests, there also is evidence that service often is an underappreciated and undervalued component of a professor’s work, particularly when it comes to tenure and promotion review (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Ward, 2003). In spite of its low-profile nature, service is still a recognized component of a professor’s job. Given its prevalence as a significant job component, it had to be considered in a study such as this one.

Integration of work. As noted, there often are three distinct and separate parts of a professor’s career—teaching, research, and service. Some existing literature questions this division and says that although there is a distinct separation, some work of faculty members does not fall into any of those categories but rather is between, beyond, or intertwined (Astin & Chang, 1995; Colbeck, 1998). In other words, teaching, research, and service are intertwined in many ways. Activities that appear to fall into one of the
three categories may in fact be part of another. One example would be a professor who provides guidance to local K–12 schools not only as a service but also as part of a study in his or her research (Conway, 2012). Another example would be a professor explaining research methodology to a graduate assistant; in working with the graduate assistant on research, the professor is actually fulfilling some level of the teaching requirement, albeit absent a classroom. Menges and Austin (2001) described teaching as “the intentional arrangement of situations in which appropriate learning will occur.” Abundant literature demonstrates the need to understand how these three components often work collaboratively with one another (Austin, Connolly, & Colbeck, 2008; Bloomgarden & O’Meara, 2007; Colbeck, 1998, 2002). It was reported that faculty members show increased career satisfaction when they are able to integrate the three main components of their work at the same time (Colbeck, 2002; O’Meara, Kaufman, & Kuntz, 2003).

**Faculty work as the locus of faculty vitality.** It is not easy to understand the profession of a college faculty member, in part because there really is no definitive job description that encompasses all faculty members (Graber, Erwin, Woods, Rhoades, & Zhu, 2011). Professors perform different duties in the three areas of teaching, research, and service (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Dennison, 2012; Gonzales, 2014; Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2011; Waltman et al., 2012). In turn, the institutions in which professors are employed regard those components with varying degrees of importance. In fact, according to Binder, Chermak, Krause, and Thacher (2012), faculty members at research institutions may even be penalized financially if they devote more time to teaching than to research. Conversely, faculty members at community colleges often emphasize teaching and service over research (Sperling, 2003). As important as it is to
understand this variation, it also is important to acknowledge and understand the circumstances that all college faculty share. To understand how a faculty member moves from being disillusioned to being vital, one must first understand who makes up the college faculty and what job duties they perform.

Conclusion

Although this section relates what is typical for many faculty members, it is important to note that the participants in this study do not exactly fit this mold. Because of their smaller size, many faculty members from the institutions from which these participants were drawn and similar institutions do not hold terminal degrees. In addition, these particular institutions are not research universities and therefore the expectation that any given faculty member would conduct research was not as high. Put another way, the duties of the participants in this study skew toward teaching and service.

Part 2: Career Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction Factors in the Professoriate

In the previous section, we saw more clearly who professors are and the contexts that influence their careers. Part II is devoted to describing what the literature says about professors’ career satisfaction. To understand what it means to be vital in one’s career, it is imperative to recognize and delve into the characteristics of career satisfaction portrayed in the literature. As mentioned in Chapter I, the conceptual framework of this study was guided in part by three factors—faculty vitality, life course, and agency. Specifically, this study applied said framework to those higher education faculty members who moved from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality in their careers. When one is “vital,” it could be assumed that he or she is satisfied as well. What does it mean to be satisfied in one’s career? According to Mamiseishvili and Rosser (2011),
career satisfaction is a “global feeling about the job or as a related constellation of attitudes about various aspects or facets of the job” (p. 111).

Many studies similar to the one done by Iiacqua et al. (2001) described faculty members of higher education satisfied by “intrinsic factors while job satisfaction is related to extrinsic factors” (p. 51). Hill (1986) explained the intrinsic factors as job content factors, meaning the factors that relate to the actual components of the work, while the extrinsic factors are called job context factors and encompass aspects of the work environment. The factors that stood out in the research as most influential on career satisfaction for higher education faculty are collegiality and working with students. In addition, Herzberg (2008) and Castillo and Cano (2004) identified additional intrinsic factors: achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, and growth or advancement.

**Collegiality**

Collegiality refers to a college faculty member’s willingness and ability to work collaboratively with others within a department to reach common goals (Cipriano & Buller, 2012). Ambrose at al. (2005) showed that some studies have identified collegiality as the single most important driver of career satisfaction. When professors who work in the same department take the time to invest in and support each other, they tend to have a higher sense of career satisfaction (Pollicino, 1996). Although collegiality often is thought of in a positive light, it sometimes is mentioned negatively. Three areas of collegiality that hold negative connotations are time and interest, intradepartmental tensions, and incivility (Ambrose et al., 2005).

In terms of time and interest, those colleagues who typically say they are satisfied in their jobs find coworkers in their department as being open to helping each other out in
times of need, supportive of other’s success, and invested in each other’s work (Pollicino, 1996). In a collegial environment, coworkers take the time to orient newcomers to the group and show them the inner workings of the department (Bean et al., 2014). Each department functions in unique ways; thus, for new faculty members to hit the ground running, veteran professors must mentor them to a degree and show them various nuances of the department.

Secondly, intradepartmental tensions can have a negative impact on job satisfaction. Collegiality becomes extremely stifled when cliques within the group or other tensions keep faculty members from working together as they should. Sometimes, tension arises because members of a department compete for the same resources (Ambrose et al., 2005).

Finally, incivility has been reported to have a negative impact on job satisfaction. Colleagues have reported encountering not only ostracism but outright hostility (Savage, Karp, & Logue, 2004). Incivility may find its way into a department because of different research interests, competition for similar resources, and incompatible personalities, among other reasons.

**Working with Students**

According to Milosheff (1990), studies have shown that student interaction both inside and outside the classroom proved to be vital to faculty job satisfaction. It was noted; however, that the effect could go in either direction, leading to either greater satisfaction or to dissatisfaction, depending on the effort and appreciation shown by students toward the faculty. Milosheff clarified that point by saying that low job satisfaction is found among faculty whose students appear to lack an adequate
engagement level or demonstrate apathy. Conversely, high job satisfaction was found among faculty whose students were high achievers (Milosheff, 1990).

**Achievement**

Regardless of profession, people innately want to do well in their jobs. Knowing that one is a valuable, contributing member of society is something most, if not all, people want to feel. College faculty members strive to achieve as well (Lane et al., 2010). According to Nandan and Krishna (2013), faculty members find satisfaction in their performance in teaching or in their research endeavors. The will to achieve appears almost universal; however, college faculty look at achievement differently. For example, faculty at a community college tend to focus on their teaching and subsequent student success (Corbin, 1998). Conversely, faculty members at research institutions often measure achievement by their publications in a given time period (Lahiri & Kumar, 2012). What does it mean to achieve? Some may define it by publication and contributions to the advancement of their chosen discipline, others by working with students in a teaching or mentoring capacity.

**Recognition**

The next intrinsic motivator to drive job satisfaction is recognition. Even though it is best to do what is right because it is simply the right thing to do, people often want to be recognized for a job well done. Recognition includes but is not limited to praise by a supervisor, colleague, or peer (Castillo & Cano, 2004). Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) reiterated that college faculty members look to receive recognition from multiple sources including but not limited to their supervisors and colleagues.

**Work Itself**
When looking at job satisfaction factors, one must remember the actual work itself. Faculty who are genuinely satisfied in their work enjoy working with students as both mentors and professors, performing service in the community, and research. According to Hill (1986), the nature of the work itself is what can keep professors satisfied. Castillo and Cano (2004) described work itself as “the actual job performance related to job satisfaction” (p. 66).

**Responsibility**

Responsibility is described as the control a faculty member is given over his or her own job along with any supervisory role over others in the department (Castillo & Cano, 2004). A third component of responsibility is the addition of new and challenging duties assigned (Castillo & Cano, 2004). Responsibility also can be linked with autonomy. Conditions (1986) noted that professors were satisfied when they could “choose textbooks, programs, and media” (p. 2). Making those critical decisions gives a college faculty member a huge responsibility to be diligent in making proper choices. Bess and Dee (2008) explain that autonomy results when someone has a level of freedom making decisions regarding daily job functions related to his or her work.

**Growth or Advancement**

In terms of growth or advancement, it is important to note that many faculty members are working toward tenure. Hagedorn (2000) claimed that advancing and moving up ranks in the tenure process can be a very powerful driver for increased job satisfaction. Ambrose et al. (2005) concurred that moving up the ladder in rank is generally tied to increased job satisfaction.
Part 3: Higher Education Faculty Burnout

The previous section examined the perceptions of why a person is either satisfied or dissatisfied in his or her job. To stop there would do an injustice to the literature. We must go beyond those perceptions and into another phenomenon. When a person is submerged in a disillusioned state for an extended period of time, he or she may become a victim of burnout.

What is burnout? Brouwers and Tomic (2000) described it as “a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity” (p. 239). Lackritz (2004) defined burnout as a “state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding” (p. 713). Finally, Koruklu et al. (2012) see burnout as a “function of stress individuals feel in their social and professional life” (p. 1823). In this section, we will explore the three main components of burnout as set forth by Brouwers and Tomic (2000)—emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1984; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Koruklu et al.; Maslach & Leiter, 2008; 2012; Watts & Robertson, 2011).

Emotional Exhaustion

The first component described in regard to college faculty burnout is emotional exhaustion (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1984). To be successful in this demanding field, professors must dedicate much of their lives to the profession. Time and resources are scarce and professors invest the majority of their time in their jobs. In doing so, faculty can become emotionally exhausted. To say one is emotionally exhausted is to say one has
very little energy left to give. Maslach and Leiter (2008) described this component as the feeling professors have when they are spread too thinly in their jobs, whether in the research, teaching, or service area. Professors may describe this feeling as hitting the proverbial wall. Anderson and Iwanicki (1984) described this emotional exhaustion as a state when faculty can no longer give what it takes for their jobs.

**Depersonalization**

As some college faculty will testify, it is very real to develop an emotional connection to their college or university only to see it deteriorate over time to the point where one experiences a detachment. College faculty who feel this depersonalization do not feel a sense of loyalty to their clients, which could include the institution, colleagues, or students (Gonzalez & Bernard, 2006). Brouwers and Tomic (2000) referred to depersonalization as a “negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people, who are usually the recipients of one’s services or care” (p. 239). Once a faculty member has reached a certain level of depersonalization, he or she becomes a negative person who offers or contributes very little to the overall success of the department.

**Reduced Personal Accomplishment**

To continue to be successful, it is imperative that a college professor feel as though he or she is contributing on a high level. When afflicted by burnout, a college professor will no longer see him or herself as being someone who is doing a good job. In this phase of burnout, Anderson and Iwanicki (1984) claimed that professors “are not happy with their jobs or themselves” (p. 110).

Now that the characteristics of burnout have been established through the literature, it is important to understand the byproduct of the phenomenon. In burnout,
there are really only a few different directions college faculty can take. First, college faculty members can remain in a burnout phase until retirement. In this case, everybody loses. The professor is not happy, feels inadequate, and is generally negative toward anyone with whom he or she comes in contact. Second, a professor can decide that the job is no longer rewarding and leave the profession altogether. In the last section, we will examine a third alternative, perhaps the rarest and certainly the most constructive response to burnout: faculty rejuvenation.

**Part 4: Higher Education Faculty Vitality, Life Course, and Agency**

In the preceding sections of this chapter, I described the American professoriate, factors of job satisfaction, and phases of burnout. I also suggested that there is a gap in the literature concerning the ability of college faculty to go from a state of disillusionment to one of being vital. I conclude that it is possible to rebound from this burnout stage and become as productive and successful as one was prior to its onset. As stated previously, the literature tends to focus on reasons why faculty members are either satisfied or not. The purpose of this study was to not only to acknowledge that there are faculty members that can overcome disillusionment but identify how it was done and explore the journey that a faculty member experiences along the way. This study was intended to assist those universities who want to move their faculty from being disillusioned to being vital, motivated, and fully productive. This study is significant to the field because professors are responsible for student learning as well as important advances in research. It would be foolish to ignore faculty vitality or to give up on assisting those stuck in a disillusioned state.
This particular study had several goals. The first was to explain what it meant for a faculty member to be vital in his or her work: What are some common practices amongst faculty members who are experiencing vitality? How do they describe their positive experiences? A second goal was to describe the converse feeling of being disillusioned, again by looking at common practices and descriptions of negative experiences. The final goal was to take into account the experiences of those who were able to move from a negative and disillusioned state to one of vitality. Throughout the interview process leading up to this study, faculty members were asked to explore why they felt as though they were vital in their position. Detailed and rich descriptions were collected from each and compared with other participants’ responses to find the commonalities. Based upon the findings of the study, I made some suggestions in Chapter V for what institutions, their administrators, and other decision makers can do to support those faculty members who are currently struggling and help them move to a state of vitality.

As stated earlier, the conceptual framework of this study framed the movement of American college faculty members from a disillusioned state to one of vitality by exploring the areas of faculty vitality, life course, and agency. The following paragraphs will explore the literature related to these three concepts.

**Faculty Vitality**

For the purposes of this study, vitality means a person’s recommitment to his or her career and goals (Bland et al., 2002). Obviously, vitality will mean different things to different people. According to the literature; however, there are various indicators that faculty members consider when evaluating this sense of vitality. Three of the most
common indicators gleaned from the literature include collegiality, mentorship, and work environment (Ambrose et al., 2005; Bean et al., 2014; Splete, 1987).

The first indicator that tends to move faculty to vitality is collegiality (Baldwin, 1990; Bland et al., 2002; Dankowski, Palmer, Laird, Ribera, & Bogdewic, 2012; Huston et al., 2007). Being able to bounce ideas off of one another knowing that there is a support structure in place at a person’s job is key. Collaboration with fellow faculty members inside the department as well as in the global context allows questions to be answered, frustrations to be heard, and ideas to be shared. It is no surprise that faculty members find value in working with others both inside and outside of their departments.

The second indicator that is apparent in the literature is the mentorship relationship. Related to collegiality, mentorship allows a faculty member to entrust a single person rather than a group with facilitating conversation and addressing concerns. Mentors are charged with working with newer faculty members and making sure that concerns are addressed and open communication is the norm. Having a strong mentor allows a faculty member to pursue greater productivity since there is a support structure (and possibly a safety net) in place (Bland et al., 2002; Dankoski et al., 2012; Huston et al., 2007).

The third indicator found in the literature is the working conditions (Bland et al., 2002; Dankoski et al., 2012). Many educational facilities are deteriorating due to a lack of state funds. Faculty members have expressed a greater sense of vitality when they feel their physical working environment is up to par so that they can accomplish quality work in both the teaching and research arenas.

**Life Course**
Because I examined higher education faculty members and their experiences in moving from a state of disillusionment to vitality, life course had to be a part of the conceptual framework. Life course refers to the events or perceived events that shape a person’s life from a cultural, social, and historical perspective (Buchanan et al., 2010; Haughton et al., 2013). In this study, faculty members were asked to recount their experiences when they considered themselves disillusioned with various key events that they themselves identified. The line of questioning entailed the journey that the faculty member experienced in moving from one state (disillusionment) to another (vitality). The life course approach brought to light the belief that the journey proceeded in stages not necessarily linked to age.

Agency

Agency is the decision making that goes on for faculty members as they shape their careers (O’Meara et al., 2008). Faculty members often make decisions that are not at all easy. Baez (2000) reiterated this by asserting that faculty do not always make the “right one” (p. 383). The balance between work, life, and research interests are among many variables that go into such decisions (Campbell & O’Meara, 2013; O’Meara & Campbell, 2011). The decisions of each faculty member are unique to his or her own career; however, the interview process revealed certain commonalities. The questions regarding faculty agency remained open-ended at first to allow participants to describe decisions they were making (or not making) during times of disillusionment, during their transition from disillusionment to vitality, and in their current, vital stage. It should be noted that faculty agency includes not only making decisions but also delegating certain
decisions to others. According to Gonzales (2014), agency can be viewed as a continuum with some faculty members operationalizing, some negotiating, and others resisting. This view applied in the context of this study as we explored the differing ways in which participants at different stages in their journey.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the literature as it relates to the composition of the American professoriate, job satisfaction/dissatisfaction factors, and the burnout phenomenon. The three areas of the conceptual framework (faculty vitality, life course and agency) were explored as well. It was revealed that there is a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of college faculty moving from a disillusioned state to one of vitality. In the next chapter, I will outline how the study was designed as well as the methodology used to answer the research questions.
CHAPTER III

DESIGN AND METHODS

Research Approach

In Chapters I and II of this dissertation, I presented the research problem of an overlooked area in the literature—the journey that higher education faculty members experience when moving from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality. Although there is literature focused on the areas of faculty disillusionment and faculty vitality, the missing piece is the focus on the journey from one to the other. There is a popular belief that professors are supposed to struggle at the start their careers until, through professional development, experience, or other factors, they find their niche and work at peak performance. The research shows; however, that occasionally after the prime of a college professor’s career, he or she loses the energy or wherewithal to perform. So many professors reach the point where they hit the wall and coast for the rest of their careers, fading into their retirement years, which is evidenced in the research on “career associates” (i.e., faculty who get promoted from assistant to associate professor but never achieve the status of full professor) (Buch, Huet, & Roberson, 2011; Crawford, Burns, & McNamara, 2012). Nevertheless, as much as people tend to believe that professors’ careers unfold along a prescribed continuum, there is a missing piece to the puzzle. The issue that needed further study is a segment of higher education faculty members who
experience disillusionment at some point in their career yet find a way to overcome and become rejuvenated so they become vital.

This chapter explains the research approaches used to examine this inquiry about such professors. It describes the qualitative method of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which examines a research subject’s life experiences, which in this study is about the journey professors took to move from career disillusionment to vitality. Chronicling these experiences, I am able to construct this phenomenon by uncovering nuanced patterns that describe these career encounters.

To fully understand the research steps used in this study, I set out to describe its design, data collection methods, analytic approach, and other research components. Accordingly, the components of this discussion include the research questions that guide the study as well as the study design and methodology for sample selection, data collection, data processing, and data analysis. Following the study design and methods, I explain the steps needed to protect human subjects as mandated by the University of North Dakota (UND) Institutional Review Board (IRB). I conclude the chapter with a consideration of the limitations of both design and methods.

**Research Questions**

In Chapter I, I presented one overarching research question: What experiences do higher education faculty members have when going from a state of career disillusionment to one of vitality? From this overarching question, several sub-questions connected to the conceptual framework follow:

1. What were aspects of their work and profession that were associated with job satisfaction and dissatisfaction? (Level of Satisfaction)
2. What events were critical to the phenomena of being disillusioned, being vital, and transitioning from one to the other? (Life Course)

3. How did these faculty members describe the key decision points during their periods of disillusionment, vitality, and the transformation from one to the other? (Agency)

**Analytic Lens**

**Phenomenology**

As previously discussed, most prior studies of college faculty careers have focused primarily on such factors as race, gender, and age along with job satisfaction and burnout. Because I sought to understand the experiences of higher education faculty moving from a disillusioned state to one of vitality, this particular study was informed by phenomenology. Phenomenology allows the researcher to make meaning out of the experiences of participants who have experienced a specific phenomenon (Connelly, 2010; Lester, 1999; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy & Sixsmith, 2013;). There are different types of phenomenology. Sloan and Bowe (2014) noted that in a basic form, phenomenology can be divided into two varieties—descriptive and interpretative. Tsorng-Yeh et al. (2014) explained that descriptive phenomenology, also known as transcendental phenomenology, allows researchers to “bring their perspectives, experiences, values, beliefs, and identity to the data collection and analysis process” (p. 6). In interpretative phenomenology, by contrast, the researcher will attempt to keep personal experience, ideas, and beliefs separate from the data collection and analysis. Of those two, the one that offered the most appropriate analytic lens for this study was interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). According to Wagstaff and
Williams (2014), “The aim of IPA is to explore the sense that participants make of their personal and social worlds” (p. 9). IPA was challenging yet appropriate for this study.

When a researcher uses IPA, he or she is undergoing what is known as a double hermeneutic, or two levels of interpretation. First the participants recount their experience and make meaning of them, then the researcher must take that data and find the themes to make sense of it (Huws & Jones, 2008).

I chose IPA for this study because the research question lent itself to this type of methodology. Higher education faculty members recounted their experiences in moving from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality through a series of semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and then was transcribed into manuscript form, from which I identified commonalities, drew interpretations, and made meaning of the data.

A phenomenological study asks individuals to describe their experiences and the researcher is charged with making reality and/or meaning out of those descriptions (Stake, 2010). Edmund Husserl often is credited as being the “founder of Phenomenology” (Tuohy et al., 2013; Wertz et al., 2011). It is important to note that there are at least five different streams of phenomenology. We concern ourselves here with the two main types, descriptive and interpretative. Husserl was given credit for the descriptive form of phenomenology. Martin Heidegger built upon and expanded Husserl’s work to develop interpretative phenomenology. The main difference between the two forms is that in interpretative phenomenology the researcher tries to set aside preconceived notions. In descriptive phenomenology, it is assumed that the researcher cannot possibly do so and so must state his or her biases and explain how those biases
can be overcome when conducting the study (Connelly, 2010). In this study, it was important to understand what biases will arise. The move from disillusionment to vitality is an emotionally-fraught subject. When individuals speak about such experiences, the strong feelings of both the participants and the researcher create the potential for bias. Given this likelihood, interpretative phenomenology presents the better lens with which to analyze the data. Thus, by looking at professors’ individual experiences in moving from a disillusioned state to one of being vital, it was my aim to develop insight into what it meant for higher education faculty members to share their experiences of the journey.

**Retrospective Research**

This particular study involved asking college faculty members about their experiences at two distinct life stages—first their period of disillusionment and then their transition to being vital. I recruited six faculty members and asked them to think back to when they were disillusioned in their careers. This data collection technique, known as retrospective research, has been noted in educational research as well as the social sciences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). Although retrospective research has many positives, it is important to note how challenging this type of research can be. Many times, participants have difficulty recollecting their exact past experiences. According to Hatch et al. (1999), this is known as “memory decay” or “recall bias.” For example, people looking to recount their experiences may twist facts based on their current mental or emotional state. More simply, people may just misremember things (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It could be entirely possible for a college professor to remember his or her disillusionment as less or more severe then it truly was (Casey, 1995).
Returning higher education faculty members to their precise past frame of reference and emotional state is simply not possible; however, I conducted this research to the best of my ability. First, I recruited only higher education faculty members who self-identified as having moved from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality. (The specifics of participant recruitment are discussed in detail later in this chapter.) Second, I asked participants to think about the time before they considered themselves engaged in their career. Third, I strove to consistently remind faculty members to remember that I was asking about the time before they became vital and, specifically, when they considered themselves disillusioned in their career. If participants flipped tense from the past to the present, I clarified the period to which they were referring to keep them on track and focused on the time of their career that was the subject of that particular interview. When participants had difficulty staying in the relevant timeframe, I tried to align the questions to ensure that the data I collected was reflective of the appropriate time in their careers. Since it was truly impossible to capture an absolute representation of what happened or even how each participant truly experienced things, I focused on what they recollected and how they presented that information via interviews.

**Study Design**

As previously described, I designed and conducted a qualitative study using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The research questions listed previously drove the interview process. The interview protocol began with initial structured questions along with several follow-up questions based on previous responses. Because this study used IPA, I considered repetitive language, verbal tropes, and physical gestures as evidence of how the participants relived and reflected on these past encounters. Studies
that incorporate IPA generalize only within the study; however, the ultimate goal is results that can be applied outward to other groups, professions, regions, and so forth. It was essential for me as the researcher, and hence for the readers, to get as close to the participants as possible, capturing the essence of their true experiences and bringing out the fine details that were critical in making meaning from the data. I incorporated those details into the report of my findings in Chapter IV. This section describes the study design, including the participant selection and recruitment processes, data collection, data processing, and data analysis.

**Participant Selection/Recruitment**

The sample size of IPA studies tends to be small, as the purpose is not to make generalized assumptions but rather to tell the story from a focused point of view. Because of the rich, detailed descriptions contained in the interviews, the sample size must remain small so as not to lose important data in the transcription and eventual coding process (Wagstaff & Williams, 2014). Many studies using IPA have interviewed four to eight subjects; this number is particularly appropriate to capture experiences wherein the topic may be considered sensitive or where self-disclosure is difficult. Given these parameters, I sought to interview six higher education faculty members. This number was small enough to ensure sufficient time for multiple in-depth interviews and large enough to produce observable patterns. As mentioned earlier, I solicited participants from three different local institutions that were similar in Carnegie classification and size. The reason for this was twofold. First, the initial interview was conducted face to face; this was much more feasible with institutions located in close proximity. Second, the results were a little more generalizable because the participants were drawn from similar
institutions. Common characteristics of the three colleges were that they all are four-year, undergraduate, public institutions. Enrollment was similar amongst the institutions, as well; each has approximately 2,000 students or fewer on campus.

In my participant selection, I carefully chose faculty members who self-identified as having moved from a disillusioned state to one of vitality. The participants were pre-identified by having received an award from their institution for performance or having been identified and nominated by someone from that institution as a productive contributor in his or her discipline. Following the identification of these faculty members I made initial contact with them via e-mail, asking if they would be willing to fill out a short survey to determine whether or not they fit the description of having moved from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality (see Appendix A). An important component of participant selection was the length of time they reported having been vital. To qualify for this study, participants needed to claim to have felt vital for a minimum of three years. This amount of time was chosen to ensure that a significant period had passed since disillusionment and that sufficient time had been spent in both areas to allow for a definable journey marking the transition. The participants were also asked to recollect their experiences in the journey of making such a transition. In this particular study, the journey itself was deemed just as important of the states of disillusionment and vitality.

As mentioned earlier, disillusionment had been previously described as “emerging job dissatisfaction.” Therefore, faculty members may report their separation from collegiality, decision making, and mentorship. A faculty member may also experience burnout, characterized by feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Finally, disillusionment may be manifested in
disengagement and career ambivalence (Corwin et al., 1961; Huston et al., 2007). One way to capture this change in the state of being (i.e., from disillusionment to vitality) is to locate professors referred to by others as “thriving” or doing well but with some reference to a past negative career experience. To construct my study sample, I used a method known as snowball sampling. Noy (2008) explained that in this type of selection method, “the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants” (p. 330). In this strategy, an initial person known as the “seed” or “source” identifies others who may have experienced the same phenomenon. The contacts that the seed provides are contacted and they in turn provide others who may also fit the criteria. This sends the snowball down the hill, so to speak (Sadler, Lee, Lim & Fullerton, 2010).

The social network that develops based on a common experience or phenomenon is a valuable source from which to draw when recruiting participants for a qualitative study. It is likely that college faculty who have experienced this movement from a disillusioned state to one of being vital know others who have had a similar experience. However, the researcher must remain wary that these personal relationships do not cause bias. I was determined that each participant’s experiences should remain his or her own, and not meld with those of the others. This was not an easy task; however, my awareness of possible bias served me well when conducting this study.

**Participant Characteristics**

In any study, it is imperative to take an introspective look at the participants and their characteristics. This particular study examined the experiences of six higher education faculty members who moved from a state of disillusionment to vitality. The institutions were all very similar in size, demographics, and institution type. The rationale
for selecting three similar institutions was to rule out institution type as a limiting factor. Of the six participants interviewed, only two had completed their doctorates. The reason that the number of doctorates was low in this particular sample could be related to the institution type as well as the disciplines in which the faculty members worked. It is interesting to note that four of the six participants were in the field of accounting. According to Boyle, Carpenter, Hermanson, and Mero (2015), there has been a long-standing lack of accounting faculty with a terminal degree. Although a body known as the Pathways Commission has called to integrate more doctorate-wielding professors into the accounting field, the shift to this idea has been slow. The fact that four of the participants are from accounting raises an important point and could be cause for future study. The other two participants taught physical education and biology, respectively. The group was varied in terms of their faculty experience; the length of their careers ranged from 4-33 years.

Due to the nature of the interview protocol, the participants appeared to reach a comfort level with me, which lent itself to the likelihood of valid data. Every single participant mentioned how he or she enjoyed the time to talk about their experience; some even invited me to come back to the campus to see them if I came through the area in the future. Other cues that indicated comfort included but not limited to handshakes, laughter, and pats on the back. The first round of interviewing was used to establish rapport and collect the necessary data during his or her period of disillusionment. The second interview was used primarily to gather additional information about the participant’s journey toward and in vitality as well as clarification of information gathered in the first interview, and to fill in any other corrections or omissions. All
participants were very cordial and willing to tell their stories of the journey from disillusionment to vitality.

**Data Collection**

After identifying my participants, I interviewed them on at least two separate occasions. To establish proper rapport and gain the participant’s trust, the first interview was conducted face to face. Interviewing participants is the appropriate data collection procedure in this study because, as Seidman (2006) indicated, interviewing “is a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues” (p. 14).

In the first round of interviews, I gathered broad information from each participant. The interview process followed a semi-structured procedure in which I specifically asked questions yet did not direct the information down a path in which I wanted it to go. Participants were allowed to expand upon the specific questions whenever they felt the need. In addition, I asked the participants if they wanted to offer any insight on other factors that may have been responsible for their current state of vitality. At various points in the process it became necessary to prompt them or simply ask them to tell me more.

The second round of interviews focused on the period in the participant’s career when he or she had fallen into a disillusioned state. The interview process focused on open-ended questions or statements that prompted the participant to give a rich description of his or her experience. As needed, prompts were given or participants were asked to simply tell me more. Care was taken throughout the interviews to allow participants to give a rich description of their thoughts. Each participant was given the
opportunity to expand upon his or her story with a personal account of any other factors, both internal and external, that may have contributed to his or her disillusionment.

The initial face to face interview built trust and rapport between the researcher and participant. For practical reasons the second interview was conducted via telephone. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. Participants were informed that if additional information was needed, a third interview would be arranged. Because the participants were so forthright and helpful in the first two interviews; however, no third interviews were actually necessary. The following is a list of questions/statements used during the first interview.

1. What brought you to the professoriate?
   a. How long have you been a college professor?
   b. Before you started, what attracted you to the profession? What did you like about it?
   c. What concerns, if any, did you have before entering the profession?
2. What does faculty disillusionment mean to you?
3. Explain the time when you were not doing so well in your job. What did that feel like?
4. Were there any specific events that led to or caused this? If so, explain.
5. What significant decisions were made either by you or someone for you that caused this?
6. Did you have a “rock bottom” moment? If so, what was it?
7. How did you decide that you wanted to make your job better and move toward becoming productive? Do you attribute that decision to anyone or any particular moment? If so, who and/or what?

8. Is there anything else you would like to share in terms of your experience that you haven’t already shared with me?

Following the first interview, a transcriptionist took the audio recording and transcribed it into a manuscript. Each participant was given a copy of the manuscript to check it over and make corrections or revisions as he or she saw fit. The participants were instructed to look for errors only within the transcript, not in my interpretation of the data. Roughly two weeks after the participants reviewed the transcript, I scheduled a second interview with each of them, this one focused on the present moment in which they considered themselves vital. The following is a list of questions and statements used during the second interview.

1. What does faculty vitality mean to you?

2. Tell me why you consider yourself as vital or flourishing in your job right now.

3. How would you explain any significant event(s) that have caused this vitality?

4. Describe any significant people that you feel are responsible for your vitality.

5. What decisions were made, either by you or someone else, that helped move you toward this current state of vitality?

6. To what do you attribute your ability to stay engaged or maintain vitality in your job? Why do you feel like you won’t have a setback and find yourself disillusioned again?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share in terms of your experience that you haven’t already shared with me? (see Appendix F)

As with the first interview, a transcriptionist took the audio recording and transcribed it into manuscript form. Each participant was given a copy of the manuscript and encouraged to make any corrections or revisions that he or she saw fit.

**Data Processing**

Data processing and organizing for this study was a huge undertaking. As with many other studies before mine, this particular study was conducted in several steps. First, I hired a transcriptionist to listen to and type the interview in manuscript form (Appendix D). Second, I listened to the audio files myself and reviewed the transcriptionist’s work, correcting any errors. The information was housed on a flash drive that was, and still is, stored in a locked file cabinet. The purpose of the locked file cabinet housing the flash drive is solely used for participant protection.

**Data Analysis**

After in-depth data organization and processing came the data analysis portion of the study. For this qualitative study, I used traditional qualitative research analytic methods of reviewing, sorting, coding, and recoding to identify themes and otherwise make sense of the data I had collected (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Bogden & Biklen, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2014). The following sections break down the data analysis process in more detail.

**Initial Exploration**

I started by reading through the interview transcripts several times. As I read, I took notes on certain themes emerging across participants. As I worked through the initial
process, I understood that themes could emerge, merge, or diverge in many different ways.

Coding

Throughout the process of reviewing transcripts, I created a set of codes that appeared to explain the data from the various participants. Codes emerged from the interview transcriptions. According to Creswell (2014), three different categories of codes tend to be discovered. First there is a series of anticipated codes that readers would expect to find based on common sense and subject matter—in this case, dictated by past literature on disillusionment and vitality. Second are codes that are not anticipated and are relatively surprising. Finally, a third category of unusual codes may emerge that may provide an unforeseen insight. I found that the codes in themselves did not give me the in-depth information I sought; therefore, I took apart the codes and developed subcodes as needed. Subcodes often were needed to further develop a more specific understanding of the larger concepts in the codes.

Because of the limited number of participants and subsequent small data set, I interpreted the data manually rather than with data analysis software. Throughout the process of manual coding, I furthered my understanding of each area of inquiry.

Development of Data Patterns

Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas (2013) recommended using thematic analysis when conducting qualitative research. This technique identifies common threads across an interview or set of interviews with several participants. In this particular study, six participants were interviewed in two separate rounds. From those transcripts, the data was broken down as previously stated into themes as well as subthemes.
Coding is a lengthy process in any case, and this particular study as no exception. It took several rounds of coding for the commonalities to emerge. I combed the data and looked for trends. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), “Construct tables are particularly valuable for qualitative surveys, grounded theory, and phenomenological studies since they enable an analyst to focus on one core item of interest” (p. 171). I used construct tables to formulate codes based on quotes from the participants and my interpretation of those quotes. Similar codes were categorized under a common subtheme. Related subthemes were aggregated into main themes. When compiling subcodes, emerging trends can reshape how a researcher looks at the data within each coded area. Incorporating these trends, I began to draft descriptions of the various data patterns emerging from the interviews. Eventually, the themes were organized in a structure that allowed me to identify commonalities across faculty members. It was these commonalities that formed the basis for my findings, which follow in the next two chapters. Throughout the process, each theme was sorted individually; eventually patterns of meaning were identified in the emergent data as well as in the relationships across the various themes. For an example of how I organized data into codes, subthemes, and themes, refer to Appendix G. The emergent data patterns will be further described and explained in Chapters IV and V. I will consider the meaning of the data and its implications for practice in the final chapter.

**Human Subjects Protection**

**Institutional Review Board**

Throughout the study, I remained compliant with the wishes of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of North Dakota. This study was designed to
ensure confidentiality, protect privacy, and minimize risk for participants, and to ensure that all subjects consented to participate based on full information concerning this study. Prior to the study, I submitted a dissertation proposal and secured approval from the IRB (see Appendix B).

**Maintaining Confidentiality**

To guarantee the privacy of all participants in this study, I went to great lengths to keep all of the data confidential. Participants’ privacy was protected at all times. All of the participants’ names, along with those of the universities where they worked, were changed to protect participant identity. Each subject was given a pseudonym or code name to be used on all documentation, including the transcripts produced from the interviews. When anyone or anything else was mentioned by specific name, a code name was given in its place as well. Finally, I made sure that files, documents, and folders were not saved in any way that could identify anyone or anything in particular. All identifying data and information replaced with code names will be destroyed in the near future.

Confidentiality was crucial to this study, as I aimed to protect the participants to the best of my ability. I made it a point to ask each participant, both at the beginning and the end of the interview process, whether they had mentioned anything that they would like to have obscured. Participants had every opportunity to provide their input and look at subsequent write-ups incorporating their requests. At the end of the process, I checked with the participants one final time to ensure that they were all comfortable that the data has been coded in such a way that they would not be identified in this study.
Ensuring Informed Consent

According to Ahern (2012), all study participants should fully understand both the sources of harm as well as the benefits of participation. To ensure that participants were willing to partake in this study, it was imperative that I made them understand the potential pros and cons. Furthermore, even though the participants were not exposed to any reported stress, I did describe how I would attempt to minimize it to the best of my ability. Informing each participant through the consent process (following IRB protocol) was the gold standard to ensure that they understood what the requirements of their participation. First, I asked them to read and sign consent forms that outlined the pertinent information prior to giving agreement; second, I reminded them during each interview that they provided consent for the interview and that they could pull out of the study at any time.

Minimizing Risk to Subjects

In both content and design, a study of this nature was unlikely to put participants at significant risk. However, I was sensitive to the fact that participants would be asked to recall a low point in their professional (and possibly personal) lives. Bringing up unpleasant memories has the potential to cause stress in the participant. I combated this by ensuring the participants that I would maintain confidentiality at all times and that they had the right to discontinue their participation at any time. Furthermore, I obtained contact information for counseling and mental health resources that were available; however, such resources were not needed for any of the participants in this study.
**Study Strengths**

A primary strength of this study was the connectedness among the research topic, participants, conceptual framework, and research methodology. With the research topic examining the experiences of those higher education faculty members moving from a state of disillusionment to vitality, qualitative research—specifically, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)—was the correct method to complete the study. Wagstaff and Williams (2014) contended that IPA is useful “to explore the sense that participants make of their personal and social world . . .” The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) was made up of three components—job satisfaction, life course, and agency. Participants elaborated on what made them feel dissatisfied as well as satisfied, what decisions were either made by them or for them to move from disillusionment to vitality, and what events were responsible for this journey. One of the main advantages to using interpretative phenomenological analysis was that IPA is conducive to producing rich, detailed analysis of an event, experience, or phenomenon (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Miles et al., 2014). The analysis was intensive, complex, and time-consuming; however, the reward was found in the detail and depth of understanding in the topic.
A second strength of this study was its uniqueness. Although there was extensive research on both disillusionment as well as vitality, no study previous to this one had investigated the journey one made in moving from a disillusioned state to a state of vitality. This study pioneered investigation of this phenomenon and laid the foundation from which to examine further.

A third strength of this study was found in its flexibility. IPA afforded me the freedom to make sense of the data through my own perception of it. It is this component that sets IPA apart from other methodologies in qualitative research. Larkin et al. (2006) described interpretative phenomenological analysis as allowing the researcher “an opportunity to deal with the data in a more speculative fashion: to think about ‘what it means’ for the participants to have made these claims, and to have expressed these feelings and concerns in this particular situation” (p. 104).

An additional strength of this study was the participant selection process. Through the snowballing technique and eventual survey, participants were required to acknowledge that they felt as though they had experienced this transition from
disillusionment to vitality. They also needed to disclose that they had been vital for at least three years. By implementing this three-year minimum, this study attracted participants who had experienced a history of vitality and were more apt to be able to describe this journey in detail.

**Study Limitations**

Limitations to the study included restrictions on the validity of the results. Because the sample size came from a tight geographical area, the results cannot be generalized to a larger population. Thus the results are not necessarily applicable to other groups or individuals but are only indicative of the six participants. Hoyt and Bhat (2007) stated that it is not the goal of qualitative research to distinguish fact based on experiences with a phenomenon. Therefore, the findings of this study are relegated only to the participants of this study. Future research must be conducted to confirm or find fault with the findings of this study.

A second limitation was the lack of sample diversity. All six participants were selected from institutions in the North Dakota University System. Although there was a mix of males and females, the study lacked diversity. In fact, every participant in this study was Caucasian.

One final limitation was my own lack of experience in conducting qualitative research. This is the first major qualitative research study that I have conducted. Research of this nature is “heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher” (Anderson, 2010). All of these limitations are aspects for consideration and caution for future research.
**Researcher Perspective**

Because this study is qualitative, my goal was not to report generalizable findings of higher education faculty members. Instead, I sought to capture the lived experiences of six individuals in order to craft an understanding about how professors, under the circumstances described in this chapter and in Chapter IV, encountered disillusionment and vitality. By doing so, I uncovered several assumptions, conceptual expressions, and elements that emerged in my analysis of the phenomenon. Accordingly, this study revealed in-depth, rich descriptions of the phenomenon experienced by the participants. While it is possible that these findings could be applied to other college faculty members in other institutional settings, my intent was to afford these participants a voice to talk about their journeys and to understand transferability by which the connections between the concepts raised and the stories of these participants may resonate with readers of this study who are themselves encountering disillusionment, or who have shifted from career disillusionment to vitality.

**Reliability and Validity**

Qualitative methods have long fought questions of reliability and validity. Much of the problem should be attributed to the fact that not all researchers believe that qualitative methods should be held to the same standards when it comes to these measures. Less than 10 years ago, Wolcott (2005) argued that we need not consider reliability as a central focus of the fieldwork done in qualitative research. Luckily, the pendulum has swung once again to the side where reliability and validity are considered as important in qualitative research as they are in quantitative research. Furthermore,
scholars on both ends of the qualitative–quantitative spectrum have come to accept qualitative methods as valid (Maxwell, 2004).

In my study, I accepted that there was room for human bias both on the part of the participants and of the researcher. The one-to-one format of interview sessions opened the door for human error and bias. To minimize these issues, I conducted the research in a way that acknowledged the real chance of bias and tried to avoid it. For example, during the data collection process I posed questions in such a way as to keep the focus on the participants and allow them to answer the questions based on their experiences without leading them down a path by which they may or may not have wanted to go. I was very meticulous in analyzing the participants’ responses.

As mentioned earlier, this study was retrospective in nature; that is, the faculty members were asked to recollect experiences from a previous stage in their careers when they were disillusioned. It is important to understand the limitations that come with retrospective research. Individuals may struggle to clearly remember specific events, feelings, or experiences that caused them to become disillusioned. As time passes, participants may have reframed their ideas of what truly happened to fit a current interpretation. Either way, scholars in the social sciences have long respected retrospective research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Cox & Hassard, 2007), and the limitations can be overcome when the researcher maintains a meticulous and calculated approach in both the data collection and data analysis stages. While conducting this study, I kept in mind the limitations of retrospective research and controlled for those limitations to the best of my ability. As regards validity, I continued to understand that, as the researcher, it was my job to connect the conclusions drawn from the interviews to
reality; there was no way to measure for its absolute validity, only to understand the role of trying to make meaning out of the data (Maxwell, 2005).

In addition, I used some different techniques to ensure trustworthiness in my research. Those techniques included an audit trail and member checking. The following sections briefly describe each technique used in this study.

**Audit Trail**

Carlson (2010) noted that qualitative researchers find it essential to view everything as potentially significant. It is for this reason that I will keep my interview notes, transcripts, and audiotapes for a period of three years after the study has been completed. All documentation, including the items described above, will be kept in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed only after the three-year time period.

**Member Checking**

Along with an audit trail, this study employed member checking. Participants were given transcripts of their interviews to check for accuracy. This particular technique allowed the participants to make changes they saw fit—to add, delete, or change the context of their words in response to any question.

Participants also were given the section that described an overview of their journeys. Again, they were asked to check for any inaccuracies and suggest changes. Each participant was given an opportunity to reflect on the data, interview manuscript, and journey description. Although none of the participants requested changes to the manuscript, the fact remained that each had the opportunity in case they believed there were discrepancies.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I explained the methodological framework that I used to consider the experiences of faculty members moving from a disillusioned state to one of vitality. Along with the framework, several study design components—such as participation selection, data collection, and data analysis—were described. In the following chapters, I will present the analyses resulting from the methods described in this chapter.
CHAPTER IV
STUDY FINDINGS

Overview

This qualitative study examined one major overarching research question: What experiences do higher education faculty members have when going from a state of career disillusionment to one of vitality? Along with that overarching research question, three sub-questions followed:

1. What aspects of their work and profession would be associated with job satisfaction and dissatisfaction? (Level of Satisfaction)
2. What events were critical to the phenomena of being disillusioned, being vital, and transitioning from one to the other? (Life Course)
3. How do these faculty describe the key decision points through their encounters of disillusionment, vitality, and the transformation from one to the other? (Agency)

The sub-questions all were framed conceptually using a Venn diagram to depict how job satisfaction, agency, and life course come together to describe this state of vitality (see Figure 1). These three components were identified in the literature as feeding into the notions of career vitality. Thus, this deductive approach to interrogating this study’s inquiry represented my theoretical hypothesis of career vitality.
Analysis of these research questions yielded three common themes and several subthemes. In this particular data analysis, the results are organized from larger groups and broken down into smaller chunks. The largest data group in this study will be labeled Themes. Each theme has been broken down into one or more smaller segments of data to report my subthemes. To highlight these experiences, direct quotes will be used to showcase the theme and personalize its meaning. The quotes may or may not be edited for clarity. In the following section, I also present brief summaries of each of my participants’ stories to offer readers a more detailed understanding of what each faculty member experienced as stages in which the faculty member moved from a state of disillusionment to a state of vitality. The synopsis of each individual story provides depth and understanding regarding the results, which I summarize below.

**Participant Journeys**

In this section, I briefly recount the participants’ journeys so the readers have an understanding of the series of events and key encounters that formulated to the phenomenon experience of moving from a state of career disillusionment to vitality. For each journey, I offer introductory information about the participant, recount the negative experiences that led up to and/or illustrate the points of disillusionment, describe the turnaround experiences of the participants’ reported shift toward vitality, and articulate the positive experiences representing vitality as a professional renewal within the professoriate.

**Participant 1: “Bob”**

**Introduction.** Bob has been a college professor for 12 years. Early on in his career, Bob had a realization that higher education is structured differently than he had
initially thought. In Bob’s eyes, a faculty member could have minimal accountability and be allowed to coast in his or her career. Reflecting on his experiences, he explained that he did the bare minimum in the early part of his career as a professor. He recalled that he would often put in less than 20 hours per week. According to Bob, because he “wasn’t an English faculty member” and his courses were already set up online, he knew that he could get by with minimal effort. Bob shared his opinion that the system of higher education is broken, describing inequities among faculty members based on their disciplines. In addition, faculty members were given tremendous autonomy; some chose to take full advantage of it, while others were perceived as fully immersing themselves into their jobs. Bob saw the unfairness in the way people could get away with little work. Bob drew an analogy to the business world where he believed that people would get fired for abusing the system and putting forth a minimal effort. He observed that this type of employment action is not generally the case in higher education. He knew he would be paid the same regardless of the amount of time or effort he expended in his position.

**Negative encounters.** Bob described the start of his disillusionment, and first negative encounter, as the moment when he realized how differently higher education operates from the business world. Bob had experienced success in business prior to entering higher education. In the business world, Bob said, things got done that made financial sense and things were accomplished without having to jump through hoops. Before entering the education field, Bob held a preconceived notion of what higher education was about; he felt that things should be run as they were in the business world. When he found out how different it was, negativity set in. Bob opined that higher education was full of bureaucracy and politics.
Another encounter describing Bob’s negativity toward his career was a direct result of the amount of hours he was putting in early on. Bob expressed that he was charged with growing the program. According to Bob, growing the student enrollment came at a cost. He described the growth of the program from around 50 majors to 208 in just five or six years. Bob acknowledged his feeling of being overworked and said he “. . . put in a lot of hours, a lot of effort, and frankly, I just got burned out.” After the program reached a satisfactory level of majors, Bob noted that he found it possible to pull back on the amount of time he was putting into his job. He communicated that this pullback led to decreased effort and increased negative feelings about his career. Upon reflection, Bob had realized that he had been putting in years of low effort leading to his career dissatisfaction. At his worst, he described his workload as equaling approximately 17 hours per week. He said he was getting by doing the bare minimum and coasted at that pace for two to three years. He did not enjoy getting up in the morning to go to work and would often work very short days. He had very little ambition to do anything extra in his profession, including collaboration with his colleagues. He saw himself as working in an isolated silo where he would come to work, get his tasks done for the day, go home, and repeat.

Bob’s third negative encounter involved a scandal at his institution. According to Bob, some unethical things happened on campus—there were some miscalculations of student enrollment as well as degrees awarded to students who did not deserve them. This made Bob extremely frustrated and negative about his career. Although he could not leave his job outright, he felt as though he needed to do the minimum amount he could get by with because he was so bothered by the scandalous conditions.
During this period in his career, Bob did not see much value in what he was doing. He had left the business world to work with students and teach them differently than he had been taught. He entered the teaching profession because he felt he could do the job better than those who had taught him. But his idea of what higher education might be like as an instructor and the reality of the position were two completely different things. He was taken aback by the amount of bureaucracy and red tape needed to get things done. In business, he said, if you know what needs to be done, you simply do it. According to Bob, in the education setting there are so many individuals who must sign off on every decision that it is not efficient. Bob found the bureaucracy and inefficiency of campus life perturbing.

**Turnaround experience.** Bob described his turnaround as a conscious decision. He determined that he did not want to remain stagnant and negative in his career. He knew that he was not pulling his own weight and that it was time to “grab [his] own bootstraps.” Bob cited intrinsic motivation as a key factor in moving toward vitality. Acting on this internal motivated, Bob made multiple attempts—not all of them successful—to move toward something more positive and productive.

Bob wanted more in his life and career. He knew that he would have to recommit to the profession to find happiness. To find this happiness, Bob said that he tried to re-create his job by adding some responsibilities. He started to coach several sports, including soccer and track. Looking back, Bob said he now believed that he began coaching to see if adding this component to his working life would take away some of the negativity that he harbored toward his faculty position. Bob noted that he believed at the time his journey away from negativity might happen by way of some change in his
routine. Although Bob truly enjoyed the student-athletes, practice planning, and athletic events, coaching never filled the void that he felt in his career. He felt that if he could occupy more of his time with athletics, he would not have as much time to brood on how frustrated he was with his work performance. He considered himself a slacker, and was ashamed to take advantage of a system that allowed him to do so. Athletics were meant as a way to divert his attention, but it failed to do so.

In addition to coaching athletics, Bob also began to teach in Russia. The institution would send him overseas twice a year to teach. Initially, Bob was enthusiastic about the opportunity and experience that he would be able to have in a foreign country, and believed the overseas instruction might reenergize the passion for teaching that he had felt upon entering the field. By leaving his institution behind, so to speak, he could possibly leave his attitude and poor work ethic behind as well. Unfortunately teaching in Russia, like his coaching, was not the answer Bob sought. The lack of accountability to anyone was a constant issue, because it allowed him to put forth just enough effort to scrape by.

Bob realized why he had sought out different things like coaching and international teaching; he was looking for a spark to reignite his career. It became evident, though, that simply adding to his job duties was not the answer that would bring him happiness. Bob came to a realization that the answer was not going to come from the outside, but had to come from within.

Bob says now that the one thing he had in his favor was persistence. Although coaching and teaching internationally did not move him toward a more positive outlook, he knew that something was missing. In his words, Bob recalled that it made him feel
hopeful that there was something out there that he was missing. It was up to him to find how to become productive, enthused, and satisfied again.

**Positive experience.** According to Bob, a couple of major events served as the foundation to increase his professional energy and catapult his career. One of those events was a book publication. He and a colleague co-wrote a book that was published by Wiley Publications. Bob noted that this publication was a major positive experience in his career. He believed that it was instrumental in his movement away from a negative state in his profession. Having someone push him and hold him accountable to see a project through served as a turning point. In addition, the book provided a sense of self-worth that Bob had not felt in a very long time. It had taken a great deal of effort, something he was so unwilling to exert in the past. In a way, Bob felt that he needed something like this to prove to himself that he could be the hard worker that he was in the business sector. Bob also learned a great deal from the collaborative effort he had with the coauthor. This collaboration motivated him to work harder and smarter and to go the extra mile, as he had so often avoided doing in the past. The accountability and responsibility he felt toward his partner was what had been missing in his job previously. He felt a strong desire not to let that person down and to carry his own weight throughout the writing of the book.

Another major event that moved Bob toward vitality was the creation of a new program within his department. He led an initiative that transformed a traditional education setting to one of real-world applications, flexibility, and “outside the box” thinking. He and a colleague built a program that allowed flexible hours, which increased accessibility to students not previously reachable. The program was designed for students
to come in at their convenience and work on real-world problem solving skills. It was meant to be completely student-driven and did away with lectures and other traditional forms of teaching. Bob explained that his program represented a shift from teaching to applied learning. Creating a program from the ground up invigorated Bob; he credited that program, more than anything, with his ability to remake his career into one that he could feel good about again. Taking apart a program and building it back up in a different way took major effort from Bob and his colleague. Bob knew that he could not be successful in this monumental task if he cut corners; he credited this knowledge as a major source of his movement from a negative feeling to a positive one.

Bob believed that the support he felt and continued to feel from throughout the institution directly correlated to the positive turnaround in his career. Whether from colleagues within the department, faculty throughout the campus, or administration, the support Bob received increased his energy and willingness to do his job. The collegiality he experienced was a driving factor in his movement toward a positive state as well as a reason to maintain it. Bob made it known that the journey was arduous and could not have been completed alone.

Bob also enjoyed working with students. He communicated that there was a real focus at his institution on the teaching component of faculty members’ workloads. Bob claimed to invest a great amount of time and energy in students’ learning and hence their success. He said that producing a student ready to enter the workforce is what keeps him motivated. Bob divulged that he wants to make certain that his students are career-ready when they leave the program.
The final factor that Bob acknowledged as related to his positive experience was recognition. Bob noted that recognition is very important to helping maintain his positivity concerning his career. He mentioned that he really does not need the awards, accolades, plaques, or pats on the back; however, he does feel the need to know that peers noticed his hard work and effort. He noted that it is critical for him “to feel like I’m really doing the job.”

Participant 2: “Mary”

Introduction. Mary, currently in her sixth year as a faculty member, said that she had an idea of what being a college professor would be like when she entered higher education. She believed that her colleagues would be supportive and pleasant to work with; her perception; however, did not fit her reality. Mary reported that she had to overcome the negative personalities of faculty members in the workplace, personalities who exuded overconfidence, manipulation, and destructive behaviors. Interestingly enough, Mary credited certain other faculty members and their support with her ability to overcome this sad state of affairs. Mary also cited a deep love for student learning, engagement, and eventual success as keys that helped her find and keep a positive feeling about her career. In fact, her description of her positive state mentioned the engagement in the program of both students and herself. She confessed that she values the teaching aspect of her profession more than anything else and believes that higher education should place more emphasis on student learning, achievement, and success. Mary noted that her family is integral to her success as a faculty member and said that her family’s high regard for education proved very important in her career path. Mary’s mother earned a doctorate and served as dean at a university prior to her retirement. She also cited her
sister, who obtained a master’s degree, as being influential to her. Mary herself she is working on her doctorate. She believed that her family support has contributed to her ability to overcome her negative state and propelled her into a positive feeling concerning her career.

**Negative encounters.** Mary cited her negative reaction to her career as largely attributable to toxic, poisonous, and ugly faculty members. She explained that some faculty members in her department were constantly trying to target someone to go after. Mary believed that she had been the target at one time. Before developing thicker skin, Mary acknowledged that she struggled to deal with this toxic environment. She described these coworkers as being very dysfunctional personalities who only seemed to find joy in other peoples’ misery. She described herself as being in a dark place professionally due to all of the negativity in the department. She spent many evenings on the phone with her parents, crying and trying to figure out what to do about her toxic environment.

Another negative impact came with Mary’s recognition of the difference between academe and teaching. When she first arrived at her institution, Mary believed that higher education would be all about the students—watching them grow and enter the workforce and successfully hold jobs. To her extreme disappointment, though, she discovered the “big brother” system that existed and realized how much bureaucracy went on behind the scenes. She described academe and teaching as in direct conflict with one another. According to Mary, her colleagues were very comfortable with the status quo. In addition, Mary believed that some of those faculty members got to where they were professionally by learning not to play nice with anyone. She said that they would find their little corner somewhere and conduct their research and not support anyone outside
of their own little world. By contrast, she characterized herself as a young and motivated faculty member who caused too much disruption within the department.

A third negative encounter came from the scandal at her institution. She noted that her toxic coworkers were trying to help blow up the institution. Mary believed that a part of her negative feelings toward her career came from people who were trying to destroy everything that was beautiful about the university. She described the scandal as a situation in which certain faculty members were trying to undermine the university to gain personal power. She recalled how she became extremely negative over the ill will shown to the institution by those who should have been working to uphold its integrity.

Turnaround experience. Through a personnel change, Mary was afforded an opportunity to help revamp the department from scratch. She called this the main driver to helping her overcome her state of negativity. She saw the opportunity to build something from the ground up, and that was exciting to her. Mary believed that everything she felt was wrong in her department was suddenly subject to change. Mary recalled that she and a key colleague were able to turn a conventional department into one with a hands-on, flexible approach that prepared students for their careers post-higher education.

Mary knew that she could not make this journey from disillusionment to vitality alone. She cited her faith, family, and a specific colleague as largely responsible for aiding her in the transition. Mary disclosed that she knew she needed to lean on those who loved, supported, and protected her. She described those people as invaluable during her time of need.
Finally, Mary cited her ability to change her focus in her move away from negativity and into a more positive outlook on her career. Instead of worrying about her toxic colleagues around her, Mary made a conscious effort to spend her time and energy on her students. Working with students is what drives her. Along with her teaching, Mary works with job placement, and she noted how much she loves to watch her “kids” grow and become productive after they leave her program. Mary expressed extreme pride when she talks about getting her students lined up for various positions in the community.

**Positive experience.** The first positive experience is that Mary has maintained a focused passion for her students. She communicated that the reason she was brought to the university was not for research or professional gain, but for student success. According to Mary, she found that she could maintain a higher level of engagement when she focused on her students and their outcomes. Student success is at the very top of Mary’s list when it relates to her job as a faculty member.

Mary put a great deal of time and energy into restructuring the program in which she works. Because of that great commitment, she feels that she must continue to protect what she helped build. Mary claimed that she protects the program from the outside world as well as those who are uncomfortable with nontraditional modalities. She noted that she feels as though she is constantly monitoring the program that she helped build from scratch. She acknowledged her high level of engagement with the program as instrumental to fostering student success. She reported her belief that the program reaches students and engages them like never before and she will go to great lengths to make sure the program remains untainted by outside forces.
Participant 3: “Terry”

**Introduction.** Terry is entering his fourth year as a college faculty member. Interestingly, he credited his extraordinary educational experience in high school as the reason for his initial feeling of negativity as a faculty member. He is not a native to this particular region and he described his high school as large, with approximately 2,000 students. He reported that he had incorrectly envisioned peoples’ educational background as similar to his own. Because of this belief, Terry recounted a severe disconnect between his students and himself in his first year as a professor. This disconnect put him in a dark place, and it took some time for him to understand the various backgrounds of his students and what they brought to the table before he could teach them properly. Terry also cited his lack of teaching experience as a reason for his negativity. He explained that he had taken several courses in teaching pedagogy, but his lack of real experience was initially detrimental. He believed that both students and faculty viewed him as a person who took unnecessary risks in the classroom. Terry credited a colleague who reached out to him and solicited his partnership in a research project. This partnership may have been a key factor in making him feel appreciated and hence positive in his profession. Terry proclaimed that he continues to work with this colleague in spite of the fact that the colleague has since moved on from the university. The collegiality that he shared with this person was integral in his journey from a negative feeling to one that was much more positive about his career. Along with collegiality, Terry also announced that students and faculty alike now recognize that he is doing a “good job” and his efforts are being appreciated. The only frustration that Terry elaborated on with his current state is the university administration’s lack of understanding concerning his work. He said that he
feels as though they do not take the time to fully get to the ground level and learn the intricacies of what happens in his classroom on a daily basis.

**Negative encounters.** Terry noted that he attributed his negativity to a couple of different factors. He described his lack of pedagogical skills as one factor. He said that he lacked confidence because he was only half a step in front of his students from day to day. It was a very difficult position; he had to build three or four classes per day for about a year from scratch. Terry admitted to not really knowing what he was doing, with frustration and negativity being the byproducts of his uncertainty.

According to Terry, a second negative encounter that contributed to his distaste for his profession came from the reception he got from his students and coworkers. Terry’s students were not overly receptive to him as their instructor, being lukewarm at best to his teaching methodology. His style was much different than what students were used to, which caused them some discomfort. Although his colleagues may have received his new style better than the students, Terry also revealed that he felt that some of his coworkers thought he was straying too far from the traditional methods of a college professor.

**Turnaround experience.** Noting that he was not native to the state where the university was located, Terry recounted feeling that he needed to better connect with his students. He was initially uninformed about the state’s school system and what the various sizes of schools meant in terms of the type of education students receive. It was only after he realized that his students (most of whom are native to the state) receive varying levels of education that Terry was able to make the connection. He began to foster positive relationships with students after he took the time to figure out who they
really were. In addition, Terry said that his understanding of his students changed his perception of their capabilities and he modified his expectations of them accordingly. He began making an effort to deal with the students who were most resistant and worked hard to garner their support, which eventually he did.

Terry revealed that he made a conscious effort to solicit support, which he received from many different places. Without the support of different people in his life, Terry says, he would not have been able to make the journey from a negative perception of his career to one that is much more positive. Terry’s support came from many different people, some of whom—such as his wife—are very close to him, and others who were not as close but important all the same. Some of those people may be in his life for the long term, while others have flashed in and out of his life more quickly; colleagues, students, or committee members, for instance.

A third contributing factor to Terry’s turnaround was his creation of some courses. He felt a strong sense of satisfaction in his ownership over his curriculum. He described the building of courses as something that pulled him from a negative place concerning his career. It was a rewarding experience to build courses from scratch starting with the syllabus and learning outcomes. Terry recounted that although some of the students and colleagues did not initially agree with some of the decisions he made, many of them came to appreciate and value his effort in that regard.

A fourth turnaround experience, and possibly most important in Terry’s effort to overcome his negativity, was the support of a former colleague. He revealed that the colleague helped Terry start research programs at the institution and worked with him on
various projects. Terry values research just as much as teaching, and found the support and collegiality of this coworker instrumental in his journey from negativity to vitality.

**Positive experience.** Terry draws satisfaction from seeing the fruit of his labor at his institution. He claimed that he feels appreciated for his efforts. He feels positive about being acknowledged for trying new things and for caring about his students.

Because Terry built some of his courses from the foundation level, he still feels the need to work on them for improvement. Feedback from Terry’s students is a key part of this process, and he takes it very seriously. According to Terry, the fact that most students and coworkers have shown appreciation and recognition of his hard work is enough for him to want to continue to improve and maintain his current positive outlook.

**Participant 4: “Cheri”**

**Introduction.** Cheri has been a faculty member for 33 years. She has seen many changes during that time, including the way she feels about her career. During a very dark and negative point in her career, she decided to take a sabbatical. It was during that time that she became reflective about where she was headed professionally and what changes she needed to make. Cheri knew she was not happy with either her coaching or her teaching. Cheri served as head athletic trainer in addition to her other duties. For the majority of her career, she had consistently taken additional assignments and was not truly focused on any one component. The athletic department was not happy with Cheri’s multiple duties; the decision was made to strip her of her athletic trainer duties so she could focus on academia. Cheri credits this departmental decision—with which she, ironically, did not initially agree—with being instrumental in her move from a negative outlook to one much more positive. Another significant event was a change in Cheri’s
teaching modality. Her shift from the traditional classroom setting to online teaching was probably the single most important factor in finding her way out of a negative state. Always an advocate of technology, she has been able to stay on the cutting edge of new technology to reach her students and satisfy their various needs. Finally, Cheri recognized the collegiality at her university as an integral factor in her journey toward a more positive outlook. From administrative support to working with an excellent staff, Cheri said that she has been fortunate to have the backing of various stakeholders who have allowed her to find and remain in a vital state.

Negative encounters. Cheri identified a number of examples of negative encounters in her career. The first was her sabbatical. Cheri said that she had come to a point in her professional career where she was not happy. She was not sure of the exact source of this unhappiness, but felt that she needed to step away from her job and self-reflect on what truly made her happy. Because Cheri’s position consisted of coaching as well as teaching, she was confused as to the source of her negativity. She needed to know if it was the coaching, the teaching, or the combination of both that made her unhappy. In the end, she concluded that she was happy coaching but was not fully invested in her teaching duties.

Cheri noted her increasing cynicism toward her students as another negative encounter. She attributed her cynical attitude to the changing personalities of the students. Cheri asserted that the students she taught earlier in her career were more responsible. She said that students would obey instructions and due dates without question as compared to the students of today. Cheri opined that her newer students, products of the millennial generation, want things done on their time and under their conditions.
Students, according to Cheri, are no longer interested in learning for its own sake; she says that now students just want to know how to get an acceptable grade with minimal effort. This shift in focus frustrated Cheri a great deal. She became cynical when exposed to this attitude over time and she is more fazed by this behavior than she once was. She reported getting short-tempered with those who were unreceptive to correction. Cheri noted that the relationships she had established with many of her students had become strained due to her negative behavior.

Another negative situation in Cheri’s career left her feeling pulled in multiple different directions. She was teaching, coaching, and working in athletic training at the same time. She recounted that she came to work early and left late most days. Looking around the campus, she said that she became frustrated over the amount of time she seemed to be putting in when she compared herself to others. She felt that there were not enough hours in the day to get everything done to a satisfactory level. She wanted to do things at a high level but knew that there were loose ends left because of the many tasks for which she was responsible on a daily basis.

Turnaround experience. Cheri explained that she has always been a self-reflective educator. This trait has helped her in many ways but never so much as when she recognized the negativity she carried in her career. Although some faculty members deny being in such a state and remain stagnant for the remainder of their careers, Cheri wanted to change because she knew she was not happy nor was she doing a service to her students.

Cheri noted several efforts she had made to overcome this negativity. Foremost among these was her sabbatical. She knew that things were not going well and that to get
things back on track, she needed to step away. Figuring out the source of her negativity was key to starting the journey toward something much more positive. The sabbatical helped Cheri realize that she was happy in her coaching; it was the teaching that led to her unhappiness.

Cheri also demonstrated willingness to “trim away the fat” in her job. When she examined all of the duties she was fulfilling, she concluded it was too much for one person to continue. Although she originally felt as though coaching was a source of happiness for her, she knew that she needed to renew her focus and attention on the classroom and teaching. When the department stripped her of her athletic training duties, she decided to give up coaching as well and focus exclusively on her teaching craft. This was a major decision for Cheri, but one that needed to be made.

She also demonstrated a willingness to change her teaching modality. Cheri identified herself as an introvert; being in front of a classroom full of students was not often something she liked to do. Cheri explained that her institution is one of the leaders in technology integration in the region and she used that to her advantage. She, along with some colleagues, transformed their program from a traditional, face-to-face setting to a totally online environment. Online teaching forced Cheri to immerse herself into the curriculum and make constant changes, which has contributed to her journey to vitality.

Finally, Cheri believed that overcoming her negative state and moving toward one much more positive could not have been done alone. She cited several people as responsible for supporting her throughout this journey. Administration, colleagues, and coworkers have all been there along the way, offering support and encouragement as Cheri stepped outside of her traditional modality and into the digital classroom. She
claimed that her efforts were being recognized as well as appreciated and that was something that consoled when times were hard. She indicated that the journey was not an easy one and that the support was critical for her.

**Positive experience.** Cheri believed that one reason for her current positive outlook is her feeling of being challenged. Cheri spent much of her 30-plus years as a faculty member in a traditional setting with her classes all set up and ready to go. Leaving her curriculum unchanged year after year felt, in her words, “stagnant.” Cheri mentioned that during this part of her career, she felt as though she was non-reflective in nature. Once she changed her delivery of instruction, though, she became a much better educator due to her reflectivity. Cheri also claimed that moving from the traditional setting to an online environment has challenged her to continually update, modify, and explore her curriculum. This continual refreshing of course material has added a new, fresh perspective to her job that she had not previously felt.

Another positive experience is Cheri’s sense of self-satisfaction. She now enjoys coming to work every day. Cheri divulged that she comes to work as early as she needs to and will stay as late as she must to do the job. Oftentimes, Cheri said that students will e-mail her late in the evening; she is known to respond and help students in a timely fashion because she knows that they count on her to do so. In the past, during her time of negativity, Cheri would often dread going to work. Because she now looks forward to the job, Cheri said that it has lead her to believe that she truly has made a journey to from a place of negativity to one that is much more positive.
Participant 5: “Adam”

**Introduction.** Adam has been a higher education faculty member for 23 years. He described his journey from a negative outlook to one much more positive as based on two key factors. One was a change in administrative personnel; the other was a commitment to growth and expansion through distance learning and online delivery. Adam described the past president as “dysfunctional,” and felt that much of his negativity stemmed from his lack of fiscal responsibility. The president racked up a million-dollar deficit in a few short years and the faculty felt the effects of that deficit. One example that Adam mentioned was that the staff had to pay for their own staff recognition banquet. Adam found this demoralizing and felt it carried a negative connotation. In addition, Adam reported that the deficit also had a serious effect on the buildings and grounds. Adam described the campus environment as deteriorating, with cracked and crumbling sidewalks and poor drainage. Things began to turn around once the institution hired a new president. Adam noted that the new president and the new vice president of academic affairs were owed a lot of credit for the rebound of the university as well as for Adam’s own movement toward a more positive outlook on his career. The new administration was able to secure funding from the state and finally turned around the aesthetic feel of the campus. Adam felt that when the campus began to improve its grounds and facilities, he began to feel better about coming to work. Adam cited the university’s commitment to growth and expansion as the second main reason for his journey toward a more positive outlook. While the numbers were declining, Adam said that he felt that there was a concerted effort to address the problem by looking at modality. According to Adam, classes usually taught in traditional ways were now
offered over the IVN network and, in other cases, online or in hybrid form. This was a substantial event not only in the university’s turnaround but in Adam’s personal journey to having a more positive outlook on his career.

**Negative encounters.** Adam reported feeling very negative about his job for three main reasons. The first was dysfunctional leadership; Adam described a past university president as fiscally irresponsible. This president ran the university into a million-dollar deficit within the space of a few years. Because of the financial shortfall, people were worried about their jobs, and other financial decisions had a negative impact on morale. In particular, Adam cited the demoralizing decision to make faculty pay for their own ticket to the awards and recognition banquet. Making the faculty pay for this event seemed trivial, he concedes, but it really hurt morale. Sometimes it is the little things, he said, that take people over the edge. Adam experienced an impersonal feeling on campus, and felt that people—including himself—were just going through the motions.

According to Adam, another encounter that exemplified his negativity came from the embarrassment he felt concerning the institution’s buildings and grounds. He described the cracked and crumbling sidewalks as a dangerous eyesore. The main area of the campus flooded year after year because of the institution’s drainage problem. Buildings were falling apart, Adam said, in large part because the NDUS was neglecting to fund restoration projects on this particular campus. Adam was embarrassed to give campus tours to prospective students due to the poor aesthetics of the campus. He saw the state of the facilities and grounds as symbolic of how the faculty felt. He noted that people saw the buildings as decrepit and deteriorating and that is exactly how he felt as a faculty member as well.
Adam’s third negative experience stemmed from the low enrollment. The institution was not only struggling financially, but failing to find ways to increase student enrollment and hence tuition dollars. Adam and his fellow faculty members were nervous about the future of the institution; it seemed like nothing was being done to address this situation. People were scared for their jobs and their futures because they did not know how long the institution could continue to operate this way.

**Turnaround experience.** One turnaround experience for Adam came with the implementation of distance learning. The department was finally reaching out beyond its walls to find students who wanted to take courses but who for whatever reason were unable to physically be on campus. Adam credited this expansion and change in modality as one of the reasons why he was able to overcome his negative attitude and move toward a more positive one. Adam found a certain degree of satisfaction in being instrumental in taking students with associate degrees and helping them obtain four-year degrees, which helped them in their professions with pay raises and promotions.

Another turnaround experience for Adam was renewed support from colleagues and administration. With the change in the university presidency, the campus became more transparent and open to suggestions. Adam had known the person who replaced the prior president as a coworker prior to his promotion, so they were able to speak candidly about the negative feelings in Adam’s career and the changes that would help.

Adam’s third turnaround experience was not directed at Adam himself. When the state finally pumped some money into the campus, the buildings and grounds were improved dramatically, which helped Adam overcome his negativity. Campus morale experienced upswing as the facilities began to look better and better. Adam credited the
aesthetic improvement, along with distance learning, as part of the reason student enrollment began to rise.

A fourth turnaround experience was Adam’s involvement in several committees. As a veteran educator, he felt that his involvement sometimes came as a default because people knew he had been around for a long time and trusted his knowledge. Even so, Adam believed that being active in faculty senate and other committees was helpful in his moving toward a positive outlook. He enjoys having a voice and believes that, working together, the university community can get things done for the overall success of the institution.

**Positive experience.** Adam noted that his positivity stems from his open relationship with the current administration. He feels welcome to speak his mind and offer suggestions when things are not going as planned. Adam said that he appreciates this relationship and attributes much of his positive outlook to the healthier climate that has been established. He feels as though he can verbalize his frustrations and his opinions and that both will be taken seriously.

Adam also described his relationships with all of the people that work at the institution as contributing to his positive state of mind. He noted that all the arrows seem to be pointed in the right direction from the administration, faculty, custodians, and staff. People really care for one another at Adam’s institution, and that is a huge positive. Adam said that he enjoys coming to work every day because of the people and the relationships he has built.
Participant 6: “Stephen”

Introduction. Stephen has been a professor for 18 years. His story is unique from the other participants in that his health, both physical and mental, played a major role in his negative state. He began his interview by telling me that his journey started when he was working as a professor in a different, more research-oriented institution. He had a tragic hunting event. One hunting season, Stephen, an avid deer hunter, was out with his father when they shot and killed a white-tailed deer. In the process of cleaning and transporting the deer, Stephen had an allergic reaction to the deer dander. He went into anaphylactic shock and was near death. After his recovery, Stephen returned to work, but found himself struggling with his ability to carry out certain components of his work. Specifically, he found it difficult to write and conduct his research. This struggle cost him his future at the research university; because of the decline in his performance, Stephen was issued a terminal contract. In the aftermath, Stephen disclosed that the relationships he had built at the university with coworkers were not what they seemed. Those relationships, which appeared to be collegial, truly were not. According to Stephen, moving from a negative outlook to one that is much more positive was not easy. He has continued to struggle with relationships and trusting people. He described himself as a broken man who lacked self-confidence. The factors that helped Stephen rebound included publishing with colleagues and landing an interview with his current employer. Stephen said the fact that his current institution showed belief in him and deemed him worthy an interview did wonders for his feelings of self-worth and confidence.

Negative encounters. Stephen said that he became very negative about his ability to carry out his duties mostly because of a hunting tragedy that sent him into anaphylactic shock.
shock and nearly cost him his life. Because of his allergic reaction to deer dander, he almost died in the field. The event was not only extremely stressful and scary at the time; there were after-effects as well. Stephen notes the event affected his memory. He hinted that his negativity toward his career could be attributed in part to his inability to stand up to the cognitive demands of his profession. He said that it did not take long before he knew there was a problem, but that he had a hard time accepting that fact.

Stephen experienced more negative encounters in the form of some working relationships. He had hit it off with a new colleague, and they began a consulting relationship together. Stephen felt that the best professors, especially in business, had to have their hand in the business sector to stay current and advance student learning. Stephen was working at an institution where research was expected. He noticed very early on that the health problems caused by his near-fatal accident affected his ability to research, write, and eventually publish. For a time Stephen believed—wrongly, as it happened—that this consulting colleague wanted to help him get published. But the colleague, as described by Stephen, really did not have his best interest in mind and targeted him for elimination. This broken relationship, Stephen says, sent him into a clinical depression.

**Turnaround experience.** Before Stephen could even begin to move toward a more positive outlook, he pointed out that he had to come to terms with the fact that he was truly depressed. Once this idea settled in his mind, he said that he could move forward toward recovery. Stephen credited his counseling sessions as the beginning of this transformation. Seeing a regular counselor; however, was not enough. Stephen believed that the counselor was able to help his mental and emotional well being;
however, a critical piece was missing. Stephen made a decision to see a Christian counselor to help with his spiritual side. He believed that to truly get better, he needed to address the entire person.

Another turnaround experience came when Stephen was able to pull himself together and apply for a different job once his previous one was terminated. For some time, Stephen described himself as someone who did not feel valued; with the help of counseling, though, he mustered the courage to see if anyone could see value in him. Stephen shared that applying for another job was very difficult, given his mental state. He underwent a lot of anguish and felt that he could not be of any more value to anyone. Stephen believed his new institution’s offer of an interview was instrumental to his recovery and eventual positive outlook. The interview meant so much more to him than simply the prospect of employment; to Stephen, the interview truly meant that someone believed in him enough to bring him in and find out who he was and what he could offer. It made him realize that he was worth something again.

Lastly, Stephen noted that to move toward a more positive outlook and out of his negative state of mind, he needed to try to trust people again. Although he still claimed to have an issue in that area, he thought he was improving in his ability to trust people. Stephen verified that he knows that people can be genuinely good but, because of his past experiences, he struggles to see people that way. Stephen asserted that it is important to surround oneself with people, allow them to help, and to trust them.

**Positive experience.** Stephen has found positivity in the content of his work. He conveyed that he really enjoys working with students and seeing them grasp new ideas. Stephen has always enjoyed explaining new things to people, and confirmed that teaching
is his calling. Stephen remarked that it was the students that have helped him find positivity because he cares for them and wants to see them succeed down the road.

Another positive experience described by Stephen is that he enjoys coming to work. He no longer dreads human interaction. Stephen credited the positive work environment at his institution with helping him overcome his anxieties and trust issues. He believed that the collegiality is of great benefit and is definitely a reason he has been able to move to a more positive state rather than the dark, negative place in which he was earlier.

Finally, Stephen reported that he has finally come to a place in his life and career where he truly feels valued. He often receives verbal praise or other shows of appreciation from both colleagues and students. For a long time, Stephen said that he felt attacked and did not know who had his best interest in mind. Now, he feels as though he is a part of something bigger and the arrows are pointing in the same direction—toward student success.

**Common Themes**

As the themes emerged from the transcripts, it became increasingly evident that moving from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality is a developmental process. The themes should be interpreted in such a way that the reader understands that there is a sequential order among them. The data not only affirmed the transition from a state of disillusionment to vitality as a process but also illuminated emergent themes to explain the underlying experiences of these faculty members in progressing through the stages toward vitality. The first theme, *Great Expectations*, identifies the underlying conditions that contribute to the faculty member’s disillusioned state. The second theme, *Lean on*
Me, identifies the sources of support that enabled the transition from disillusionment to vitality. The final theme, *Long Look in the Mirror*, elaborates on the characteristics the faculty members found within themselves as they reached the vital state. The three primary themes together represent how the subjects in my study, all higher education faculty members, experience the phenomenon of moving from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality.

**Theme 1: Great Expectations**

Participants expressed frustration and disappointment that their perception of higher education and how it functions in society were much different in reality. As the name of the theme suggests, participants entered the education profession with a sense of anticipation and hope. They thought of this career as being elevated and refined. Faculty members describe a great disconnect between the perception and the reality. Specifically, participants struggled with discovering how they imagined their role in the learning process as compared to how it actually operates. One of the participants, Stephen, disclosed, “I was very disillusioned with my understanding of what higher education was.” Stephen thought higher education was something more, something better. To explain the theme Great Expectations, I discuss three subthemes that contribute to our understanding of this primary theme. The subthemes are bureaucracy, teaching vs. research, and preparedness.

**Bureaucracy.** *Participants in this study noted deep levels of frustration over their incapacity to gain control over a situation.* Far too often, decision-making in higher education bogs down due to the number of individuals involved. As faculty members attempted to make decisions to improve their careers, they were often met with a certain
level of bureaucracy. In this study, bureaucracy was defined in two distinct ways. One example was the seemingly unnecessary steps needed to achieve a given end. Some of the participants expressed the opinion that things should be simplified in this regard. Several leaders typically need to give approval before any initiatives are allowed to move forward. Along with cumbersome decision making, bureaucracy entails the inflexibility of colleagues and leaders. This inflexibility often comes at a price for the participant who wants to promote growth or change. This frustration with bureaucracy in higher education was palpable in some of the participants. Some of the nonverbal cues that participants gave me when speaking about it included deep breaths, sighs, and head shaking. I could not help but feel empathy as the participants described how bureaucracy often takes the place of common sense. Although all parties might know what is needed and how it would make a positive impact, participants expressed that gaining approval often requires several steps delaying the process. Sometimes the frustration builds to the point where participants take matters into their own hands and do not wait for decision makers to move. Mary, one of the participants, accentuated that point:

My colleague and I do so much in academia behind the scenes because of the bureaucracy and the ridiculous hierarchy.

Her voice resonated with sheer disgust with how things normally operate. She was very emotional when she talked about her agony she feels going through a painstaking series of steps to see progress. It was evident that she knew that the only way to truly get things done and in a timely fashion was to bypass decision-makers altogether and do what is in the best interest of the department, herself, and her students.
Another participant, Bob, summarized the second type of bureaucracy as inflexibility. As he was speaking, he leaned forward, gripping his hands together to the point of white knuckles, passion audible in his voice. Bob indicated that a large percentage of faculty at his institution do not accept change. The status quo has deep roots in higher education as educators continue to work the same way as they always have. Because Bob considers himself a forward thinker, it is no wonder that this inflexibility causes him great distress.

In higher education, there is so much momentum that is working against you. Well, we’ve always done it that way or we have to get approval from all these different people like all of your peers and the whole department has to buy in. This was very frustrating.

After delivering that telling description, Bob slumped back in his chair, rolling his shoulders forward in what appeared to be a sign of giving up. It appeared to take an undue amount of energy just to talk about the political red tape that goes on in higher education. Bob described this bureaucracy as having a paralyzing effect on an institution. He reported that it thwarts creativity and progress. Because Bob came initially from the business sector, he admitted to having a very difficult time understanding this inflexibility in higher education. In business, Bob said, a person had an idea and went for it. In higher education, there is a sequential process to change and so much of it is received with skepticism because it does not fit the mold of what has been done in the past. Bob was extremely frustrated by the disconnect between the norms of the business world and his experience in higher education.

A third participant, Adam, encapsulated his frustration with bureaucracy as well. Adam was fairly calm during much of the interview; however, relating the sorry state of
the facilities and grounds and of the bureaucracy that kept them from being improved agitated him. He explained that he was extremely frustrated with the State Board of Higher Education, who had held funds from this institution for years in spite of the great need to improve upon facilities. Adam explained that the political hoops, lobbying, and general bureaucracy in allocating funds made for a depressing time on campus.

. . . the grounds and everything were really deteriorating and it was not a friendly place as far as even walking in the winter, you were bound to get your feet wet. Nothing seemed drain. Part of the problem was the hoops that our people had to jump through to get some money. The state board of higher education finally spent some money here, thank goodness.

**Competing self-interests.** Faculty members suggested cognitive dissonance as the academic priorities tugged at each participant’s core. Specifically, the faculty recognized the dissonance between furthering one’s career and focusing on teaching and student learning. The participants raised concerns about their obligation to facilitate student learning and working with students while attempting to advance in their careers. Across the board, there was a common refrain that a certain degree of pressure existed to conduct research to advance in one’s career. Although almost every participant placed their highest priority on working with students, it appeared as though teaching was not given as much weight in career advancement as other components of their job.

Upon listening to the participants discuss their careers, it became evident that there was a clear distinction between teaching and other requirements of the profession. To advance and gain tenure, one must learn how to coexist and work with other faculty members. According to some of the participants, simply focusing on being a great teacher was not enough. Stephen stated, “. . . you couldn’t actually be an assistant professor and not get published.” He made this statement almost as if someone from the institutional
leadership were listening. His voice lowered and he glanced at his half-opened door as if to make sure what he said would remain between the two of us.

Mary was not the least bit shy when she acknowledged the difference between teaching and academe, nor was she going to apologize for her strong opinion.

There are two types of people in academia. There are the dedicated, devoted teachers who are here because they love their jobs. And I count myself in that area. The other people who stay in academia because they have obviously gotten through school, gotten their degree, gotten their next degree and over and over again. They have reached the pinnacle of education by having very little teamwork skills, by having perseverance and being able to work hard. They also have the ability to sit in the corner of the room and research and do their little work. They are deeply dysfunctional personalities, often, because they have never had to work and play nice in the real world.

As Mary told her story, you could sense the anger in her voice. She appears to have been hurt because her passion for teaching does not hold weight with the expectations of career advancement. She referred to factions within the university setting. Mary explained that there are those who value teaching in a higher regard than others, while those who look toward research and sit on various committees to earn clout form a different group. Mary reported a huge division between these two groups, with the lack of common values making it very difficult to work together. Teaching and working with students is the very component that drives Mary in her career. Having said that, she discussed the disconnect that exists between those who value teaching and those that do not in higher education. She framed those faculty members who are more interested in academe as compared to teaching as what is wrong with higher education today.

A third participant, Cheri, did not enter higher education with a firm grasp of what it took to fulfill all of the components of the job. Cheri’s passion was not teaching; she entered the field because it was a quicker way to become employed as compared to her
original career aspiration, to become a lawyer. Because she was a collegiate athlete, she
was drawn to coaching. When she began her career as a faculty member, she was given
coaching duties as well as working in the athletic training department. For a long time,
Cheri did not even know why she was unhappy. It was her decision to take a year
sabbatical to truly step away and rethink what she needed to do to continue her career in a
productive fashion.

It was back in 1991, I took a year off because I was just not happy in my job. And
I didn’t know if it was that I was not happy teaching, was I not happy coaching,
was it a combination of both.

**Preparedness.** *Faculty members in this study entered the profession as academic
frauds that were not satisfactorily prepared to fulfill their duties as college professors.*

Some cited a lack of pedagogical skills and experience as the reason for this
unpreparedness. Although participants noted lack of teaching experience as one source of
unpreparedness, there were other sources as well. Participants indicated that they were
not sufficiently prepared to work on committees, nor for the emphasis placed on
publication through research. A lack of adequate preparation for the higher education
faculty career started some of the participants on the path toward disillusionment.

One participant, Terry, recounted that he was not prepared to take on the duties of
a faculty member when he started his career. He cited how stressful it was to be one step
in front of his students as he was asked to build several courses from scratch. As he
spoke, Terry wore a half-hearted grin that appeared to signify that he was simply happy
to have survived those days. He told his story with his elbow on the desk and an open
hand holding the weight of his head. It gave an impression of disbelief that he was ever at
that place of disillusionment.

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I had some pedagogy courses from my graduate school; however, I lacked teaching experience. It (sic) was putting together three or four classes a day for basically the first year from scratch. I really didn’t know what I was doing. The reception I got from students was kind of lukewarm at first. They were like, ‘He’s trying a bunch of new things, we’re not sure we like this.’

Another participant, Mary, acknowledged her own lack of preparation as she entered higher education as a new faculty member. She claimed that all the way up to obtaining the position, she felt as though she would be successful in this career. Then, right before the start of her first year, the reality of being a faculty member hit her. Holding out her hands and shaking them to show nervousness, she replied:

Oh, I was scared out of my mind. I was not sure I could do this. I do not know if I can do this. Because I had no experience and I was competing against people who were like I am a highfalutin faculty member and I have been teaching for thirty years. That was what I was coming up against . . . I was young and inexperienced.

A third participant, Cheri, reported that she chose a faculty position in higher education because she wanted to coach. In fact, Cheri started her career as a faculty member and head coach, a position that lasted for 23 years of her career. The coaching, for her, was the top priority; she was not prepared for the attention and hard work it took to become an effective faculty member. She described her lack of passion for teaching as she entered the field.

I didn’t really have a passion for education when I chose it. I chose it because it was a safe outlet for me and I was going to be a coach. I was a coach for 23 years . . . also a faculty member at the same time. But I had no passion for it.

Adam, a fourth participant, described himself as being unprepared to serve on committees until he gained valuable experience. His career path led him to become the eventual division chair and, through this position, he felt as though he gained the knowledge and experience to effectively serve the institution through committee work.
I really wasn’t ready to serve on committees fully until I moved into the division chair. Only now do I feel comfortable giving a lot of input. Before, I wasn’t really active at all! Now I feel like I contribute on the curriculum committee and one of my biggest achievements was approving the online program . . . it all has to go through there.

Finally, a fifth participant divulged his inability to publish during his period of disillusionment. Stephen reported that, in his position, he was expected to publish. In his case, Stephen once was able to publish but a life-changing accident caused lingering health issues that interfered with his research abilities. He recalls the time in which he could no longer carry out the duty of publication in his job.

I had gotten tenure but I hadn’t published for a long time because I just couldn’t even though I was trying. My boss, who said he was going to try and help me, really wasn’t interested in that but targeted me for elimination instead.

Overall, it was evident that participants lacked the preparation to effectively enter higher education as faculty members. Reasons for this lack of preparation differed, however. Terry said that his pedagogical skills were deficient and teaching for student learning was extremely difficult. He described himself as being no more than one day ahead of his students as he designed his classes from scratch. Mary cited a lack of experience that turned into anxiety. She did not believe that she could carry out the duties of an effective faculty member. Finally, Cheri reported having a lack of passion for the profession upon entering the field. She put her energy and passion into coaching but her lack of passion for teaching left her unprepared to do so.

Summary

It can be a letdown for someone who feels that he or she knows what to expect only to find out that this is not so. In some ways, one could make the argument that the participants experienced shattered dreams. Participants in this study attributed the
disconnect they experienced to three factors. One of those factors was bureaucracy. They felt, at times, that the political red tape and inflexibility of faculty in the face of change were so detrimental to getting things done that they made a decision to go behind the scenes to see things through rather than go through the proper channels.

In addition to bureaucracy, another factor that contributed to this disconnect was the conflict of teaching vs. research. Participants expressed the desire to focus on teaching and work with students; however, to advance their careers, they had to give teaching lower priority than other components of the job (e.g., research). This perceived conflict between teaching and career advancement caused major strife for some of the participants. Their internal motivation and desire to teach caused them to make a decision to place their focus there rather than on career advancement, where the academy wanted it.

The final factor contributing to this disconnect was Preparedness. Due to a lack of pedagogical skills, experience, or passion for the field, some participants did not feel adequately prepared to take on the role of a college faculty member. They needed to make a decision to enter the field as-is or to receive additional training or professional development to help with this. Although this was a struggle for some participants early in their careers, the decision to drive on and show perseverance paid dividends in the future.

Theme 2: Lean on Me

The faculty members drew on multiple support mechanisms as interdependent agents toward this life journey change. Participants were very clear that their individual journeys from disillusionment to vitality were arduous. In fact, every person identified the need for support to make the transition from disillusionment to vitality. One
participant, Cheri, mentioned her colleagues as helping her through her struggles. Her eyes lit up and she said through a wide smile, “I work with a great team of professionals . . . I know that is what helped me through the process.” Although all participants reported support as being integral to their journeys, the differences lay in where they found that support. Participants declared that there were specific events during their careers that prompted the need for some level of support. Interestingly, the various forms of human support mechanisms they cited included just about every kind of human relationship except students, the very group which they served! Three subthemes emerged from the data under Lean on Me: administrative support, collegiality, and family/faith. This particular theme falls under the “Life Course” component of the conceptual framework used in this study.

**Support from administrative leaders.** The faculty members proclaimed an unwavering support from a school leader. In my study, school leaders included the university president, vice president of academic affairs, and department chair. Participants reported that the leader’s willingness to communicate openly and honestly was integral in their journey from disillusionment to vitality. Servant leaders who are deemed approachable appeared to assist these participants in moving from disillusionment to vitality. Participants expressed a deep level of appreciation for leaders who listened were there during their time of need. When the participants discussed administrative support, it became evident that there was an important distinction to be made. Some support came from a leader who, at one time, worked as a colleague and was promoted from within to the leadership role. Other leaders were brought in from other
institutions but were able to communicate a servant leadership style that was received well by the participant.

One participant, Adam, proclaimed his relationship with his president as a positive one in which the two can talk openly and honestly. He mentioned that the president hired him when he was a department chair prior to receiving the title of university president. In his description of this relationship, Adam spoke with heightened energy. His tone of voice got a little louder as he leaned forward. His body language made me believe that he was trying to convince me that this was not the norm and that he was extremely thankful. Adam described specific events in which he needed support from the administration, such as a time he was asked to give tours to prospective students. Adam was embarrassed to do so due to the deterioration of the campus buildings and grounds. The aesthetics of the campus bothered Adam to such a degree that he disliked coming to work. Adam communicated this issue with the president and he listened. Although things did not change for a few years, Adam said that he appreciated how the president allowed him to vent and was supportive. Adam felt as though the president listened.

[Chris] hired me, the president now. He hired me when he was the division chair and I can still go in and talk to him even when I’m mad about stuff. I can just be honest with him and I don’t fear retaliation at all. He may not agree with me but we have a pretty open dialogue . . . and the same thing with our vice president of academic affairs. I can tell him what I’m thinking. We can disagree but we do that very well and he listens so that is the best thing, I think. He listens to me.

Another event that happened in Adam’s career was a car accident in which he broke his neck, making it very difficult to work. He described his administration’s support as integral in his rehabilitation and coming back to work.
I had a visit with my president this morning. It was the first time he’d seen me for a while since I had the accident. He wanted to know how I was doing and we were talking about stuff. We were talking about how things were proceeding and I told him my problem now was sleeping. He said that he’s had that too but it’s small compared to other things that are going on being president. I told him he’d done well . . .

A second participant, Cheri, cited administrative support as a breath of fresh air for her. For Cheri, her administrative support came from the vice president of academic affairs (VPAA). Cheri reported that the VPAA encouraged risk-taking and incorporating new ideas into the classroom.

We had a change in vice president of academic affairs leadership. She has, I think, been a breath of fresh air for all of us in academia. I think academic leadership plays a big role because she doesn’t discourage you from trying new things. She encourages you and supports you.

A third participant, Bob, had an equally close relationship to the president of his institution. We met for his interviews in a conference room in which hung portraits of all the past presidents as well as the current one. At one point in the interview, when he was discussing the support he had received throughout his journey from disillusionment to vitality, Bob pointed to the wall toward the portraits of the current president and his predecessor. His voice appeared to crack with emotion and his appreciation was evident as he talked about each of them. The main event that had affected Bob was being charged with increasing enrollment in his department. He revealed that he was under a lot of stress during this time. The support he received from the last two presidents at his institution was instrumental in his journey from disillusionment to vitality. He said that he needed and received their blessing to add resources for him to grow the department.

I would go into his office and we talked about hierarchy. A faculty member does not walk into the president’s office. You’d have to go to your chair and your dean
and the vice president but that guy . . . I could walk into his office anytime. I have that same relationship with the current president. I have his full confidence.

Participants cited administrative support as integral in the journey from disillusionment to vitality. The reasons why participants identified this support as important differed, however. Some acknowledged that they appreciated that the school leader used to be a faculty member at one time. Others said that they felt that the leader had an honest open-door policy with them to talk through issues.

**Collegiality.** The faculty members identified collegial support as crucial in making the movement from disillusionment to vitality. The support that faculty members drew upon was reported as coming from both inside and outside their departments. In addition to collegial support, participants reported that they also formed relationships extending beyond the duties of the faculty member. Building friendships served as a catalyst to move participants from a disillusioned state to one of vitality.

One account that stressed collegiality as a support mechanism came from Terry. He described one colleague as the driving force behind his vitality. It is important to understand that Terry was the most soft-spoken participant in this study. For the most part, he kept his voice just above a whisper and did not make much eye contact. It was evident to me that his colleague was very important to him because his voice rose in volume and he looked me in the eyes when speaking of him. It was as if he wanted to drive home the impact that his colleague had made on him. The specific event that Terry noted was when a colleague invited him to partake in a research project. Research is not given high priority at Terry’s institution; however, he had made it known that research is what he enjoys the most. Terry said, “A previous colleague . . . he was important for me
getting research going here. He’s probably the most important in terms of my professional vitality.”

Another participant, Bob, reported collegiality that stems from outside of his department. He recognized those faculty members in other departments as understanding his situation and offering support along the way. Bob described this collegiality with not only his words, but also his body language. As he was talking about those outside his department, he opened his arms with his palms facing me. His posture seemed to symbolize a greater area than just his department. He made me feel as though it was important to know that support can come from places where you may not expect it.

We have the official and the unofficial collegiality. Within our department, we might not be very beneficial to each other at times. But around this campus, there is a group of hard chargers that support each other. Those people really look out for each other and support each other. But, for me, it’s been the unofficial that I think is much more beneficial than the official.

Bob did not stop there. He continued to recognize the support that is needed to make the journey from disillusionment to vitality. Appreciation rang in his voice. He praised the environment in which he works as critical for his journey.

Environment has so much to do with it. If you are around people that are supportive and people that are encouraging, it makes such a difference. And it doesn’t necessarily have to be your boss or your chain of command. It can be somebody right in the department that says, ‘Hey, you are doing a good job!’

Mary’s account emphasized how important relationships outside of work can be if one is to move from disillusionment to vitality. Mary valued her colleague’s friendship outside of work and used that friendship to help deal with her disillusionment and to work to move past it. Mary was highly emotional during this particular portion of her interview. Tears welled up in her eyes as she spoke of her colleague, mentor, and friend.
Mary narrated a specific event in which her colleague and friend supported her during a time in which a different faculty member was trying to have her terminated.

For me, it is definitely my colleague, friend, and mentor. We are doing this program together. I am incredibly blessed that he has found value in me, stuck by me, and protected me. We formed a friendship through fire because there was a person who was extremely unbalanced as well as another trying to fire me. I don’t know how many times I called him crying . . . bawling. He was always there for me.

Collegiality was one of the things that the participants in this study mentioned unanimously. Collegial support ranked very high on the list of important factors in moving from a state of disillusionment to vitality. The type of support that participants drew from colleagues varied, however. Support could be found from within the department as well as outside of the department. One account reported of a participant forming a working relationship with his colleague in a research endeavor. Another account identified the support received from outside the department as being the most beneficial. According to this participant, colleagues from outside the department recognized his effort to improve upon his state of mind and supported that effort. A third participant described the personal relationship from a colleague as the support needed to overcome disillusionment.

**Family/faith.** The faculty members sought out important people in their lives, as well as a higher power, in the hope of overcoming disillusionment. As one might expect, participants made known that the support of family members helped them in their journey from disillusionment to vitality. In addition to family, several cited God as a source they relied upon for support as they transitioned from disillusionment to vitality.
One participant, Mary, recounted a particular department meeting in which she voiced her opinion about how the faculty should discontinue complaining about issues unless they brought up potential solutions. She stated that one of her colleagues called her out, stating that she had “wrong thinking” and that she “should get out.” Mary expressed the pain she felt after that meeting. Her description of how she leaned on her father was telling. She shook her head and bit her lower lip before proceeding with the story. The emotions were still raw for her to this day.

I went out of the meeting, drove home, and called my dad. I immediately started to cry. He said, “What’s wrong with you?” He then proceeded to tell me it was time to ramp up my skin a little bit and decide that what I am doing here for my students is more important than their destructive behaviors.

Mary was not alone in citing family as a support structure in the journey from disillusionment to vitality. A second participant, Cheri, also reported that she leaned on her parents through her transition as well. According to Cheri, her parents were integral in her being able to overcome her disillusioned state. Cheri was the most matter-of-fact participant in the study, rarely showing much emotion during her interview; however, her disposition changed slightly when talking about her parents. I could sense that Cheri understood the importance that her parents had in her journey. It appeared from the conversation that Cheri’s parents were traditional, “old school” parents. Cheri said, “My parents told me to quit complaining. Somebody in the world has it worse than you do. If something is wrong, figure out a solution.”

In addition to family, some participants cited God as a support structure used to move from disillusionment to vitality. Stephen identified his Christianity as an integral component of his ability to make the transition from disillusionment to vitality. Several
times throughout his interview, Stephen revealed that his faith in God allowed him to continue to trust that he would be able to move away from his disillusioned state. Stephen had a very lively and energetic demeanor. I found it interesting that he slowed down and talked in a more calm, deliberate way when he mentioned his belief in God. He seemed very comfortable talking about his faith. In addition, his tone made me feel as though he was trying to convince me, or teach me, about his beliefs.

I’m a Christian and I don’t subscribe to the idea of fate. The right question, from my perspective, is to look up and say, ‘Okay, what am I supposed to learn here? What are we doing?’ But also to look up and say, ‘This is really hard. Are you sure that you are doing what you ought to be doing with me?’

A fourth participant, Terry, cited both his wife and faith in God as being integral in his journey away from disillusionment and toward vitality. He said, “I think maybe an important part of this is you know there are important people that come up in your life. For me, it was my wife. It was also my faith in God that helped along the way as well.” My interpretation of Terry’s comments based on his posture and the tone of his voice was that he needed to give credit to his spouse and faith. It felt like this statement was the defining moment of his story, almost to say that he would have no shot at moving to vitality without these two things.

As could be expected, participants cited their families and as beliefs as sources of support in their movement from disillusionment to vitality. In relation to family support, participants identified two different types of support. Some families consistently offered warm, loving support to the participants. Others provided a different type of support sometimes referred to as ‘tough love.’ In addition to family, participants divulged that
relying upon their faith in God was extremely important in their journey from disillusionment to vitality.

**Summary**

Moving from a dark, disillusioned place to a more vibrant, vital one can be an arduous journey. The participants in this study reported that support mechanisms are often needed to see this transition to fruition. There are also certain career events that necessitated some level of support. There were three main support mechanisms described in the interviews. One area identified by faculty members as a mechanism of support was support from administrative leaders. Participants divulged that leaders such as presidents and vice presidents of academic affairs had open and trusting relationships with them. They believed that they could communicate with their administrators and not fear any retaliation. Leaders were described as good listeners who genuinely wanted the participants to work through their issues and overcome their disillusionment.

Another support mechanism was collegiality. Participants cited collegiality as support stemming from inside as well as outside of their own departments. Another tier of collegiality reported by participants was friendship that extended beyond the work environment. Being friends with fellow faculty members outside of work was reported as one means of support that allowed the transition from disillusionment to vitality.

The final support mechanism was family/faith. Participants often communicated the need to lean on family members to get through the difficult times of disillusionment as they moved toward vitality. It was not surprising to hear them characterize family as integral to their transformation. The support that participants received from their families differed; however, with some receiving unconditional love and attention while others got
the “tough love” treatment. Either way, participants agreed that support from family was essential in making the journey from disillusionment to vitality. Along with family, participants also expressed their faith as paramount in making the transition. Believing that their life was under the control of God allowed some participants to put their hope of overcoming disillusionment in Him.

**Theme 3: Long Look in the Mirror**

Reframing their identities and roles, the faculty members transformed their state of being into one in which self-respect, social appreciation, and self-appreciation became formative aspects of how they saw themselves and their work. Self-respect, social appreciation, and self-appreciation are the subthemes of the theme *Long Look in the Mirror*. These feelings of respect and appreciation contributed to their overall positive outlook toward their careers. This particular theme falls under the “Job Satisfaction” component of the conceptual framework used in this study.

**Self-worth.** The faculty members rediscovered value in their careers and institutions after going through a difficult time where they described themselves as disillusioned. Some used the metaphor of “turning the corner” to describe this particular theme. At some point during the journey from disillusionment to vitality, participants reported that they rediscovered their own importance. Throughout the interview process, it appeared to me that participants stressed that feeling that one matters is critical to completing the transition from disillusionment to vitality.

One participant, Stephen, described his situation with a sullen, low voice. He looked down toward the floor as he spoke. During his darkest time, he said, he believed that he could not contribute to anyone. He was in an extremely bad mental state when his
former institution issued him a terminal contract. Stephen acknowledged that it was extremely difficult for him to think about other positions because he believed he had little to offer. He indicated that his belief took a turn for the better when he applied for and secured a position with his current institution.

A job came open here and I knew somebody who worked here. I contacted that person and I said, “What will you tell me about the job?” He said that the people are nice and the focus is on the students. I proceeded to tell him about who I was and asked him if I should apply. He told me that I should and that was huge. I ended up getting the job. It actually was good for me to have somebody hire me because it answered at least one question. Could someone else look at me and think I am worth hiring? It gave me a boost.

Another participant, Adam, noted that his turnaround moment came when he was given more responsibility as a division chair. He noted that his voice was being heard as regards the movement to online and distance learning. Adam felt self-worth in that he was asked for his input in some major initiatives for the institution moving forward.

I do get to give a lot of input. Being the division chair, you are really active with the curriculum committee so that, you know, approving the online program. It had to go through here. It gives me a sense of importance.

Bob recognized that he needed to make a conscious effort to pull away from disillusionment. He reported that his feeling that something positive was happening from his efforts led him down the journey from disillusionment to vitality. Bob appeared to be the most blue-collar of all the participants; his demeanor and his matter-of-fact approach to my questioning led me to believe this. Bob reported feeling good because his hard work on his program was paying dividends.

I think the harder you work, the more rewarding it is, potentially . . . here we are getting things done and working our butts off. I don’t mind putting in the hours, so I’m putting in a lot of them and it appears to be vitality.
Overall, self-worth was reported as something participants needed to feel to obtain vitality in their careers. Self-worth, in this study, was illustrated in a number of different ways. Stephen explained that his self-worth grew when he was granted an interview. He reported feeling worthless and of no use to anyone; his interview and eventual hiring proved to him that he could be of some importance once again. Another way that participants experienced self-worth was through serving in leadership positions, such as division chair. Sitting on curriculum committees, for example, was instrumental to Adam as he felt as though he had a real part in the movement to distance and online learning at his institution.

**Recognition.** The faculty members revealed their need to feel noticed and recognized for their efforts. Recognition can come in many forms. These may be formal, such as a banquet or award, or in more informal ways, such as getting a pat on the back or a compliment. One of the participants, Bob, mentioned how he needs to feel as though he is doing a good job. Bob’s voice was direct. He appeared to really want to emphasize this point of being recognized in his interview. During this portion of the interview, Bob used his hands and nonverbal cues more than at any other time. I could sense his passion for being recognized as someone who comes to work and gets the job done.

Little plaques, awards, and pats on the back . . . those matter but I still have to feel like I’m really doing the job. And it doesn’t necessarily have to be your boss or your chain of command. It can be somebody who says, ‘Hey, you are doing a good job.’

A second participant, Terry, reiterated Bob’s sentiment about recognition. He smiled during this portion of the interview and spoke with a calm demeanor. His body posture changed as well. Terry sat back in his chair and put his fingertips together on
both hands. Terry’s posture made me feel like he was putting some serious thought into this topic. His description was very similar to what Bob had to say.

So, in terms of thriving right now . . . I feel appreciated here. People are saying, ‘Hey, this guy is doing some new things. Some of it may not work, some of it will work but we really need that here.’ I feel like the effort that I’m putting forth is being recognized and appreciated.

Stephen, a third participant, claimed to have a need for recognition as well. He raised the tone of his voice a little and I could sense some renewed energy in his voice. Stephen went on to report some of the good work he had done at various conferences as well as a general article that had been published. I could sense his pride that some of his work had not only been recognized by his peers but rewarded as well.

I got a chance to work with a couple of other guys and write a general article that got published which, I thought, was a lot of fun . . . I also got to write a lot of conference papers. I won some awards for best paper as well as the best paper for an entire conference! In addition, I ended up getting another article published in what would be considered a B+ journal, I would say . . . and that felt good.

Overall, participants said that there is a need to feel recognized in his or her career to obtain vitality. In this study, participants noted the need to feel as though they matter. Recognition comes in formal ways such as awards, plaques, and banquets to informal ways as simple as a pat on the back or being told he or she is doing a good job.

**Stated vs. real interest.** Although all efforts were framed as being for the benefit of students, the reality is that it was for themselves. As one might expect, participants mentioned students during their interviews in regard to the journeys they had made from disillusionment to vitality. Superficially, one may ascertain that students are the driving force in this movement or journey. After deep analysis, I realized that although students were listed as one of the main reason for job satisfaction, participants appeared more
interested in themselves and what would make them happy. One participant, Cheri, exemplified this more than any other. During her interview, she identified a change in student responsibility from the beginning of her career to now. Her claim was that students at the beginning of her career were more apt to follow directives without question as compared to current students. Her voice and demeanor betrayed her irritation. Cheri’s voice exuded disgust as she talked about modern students and their attitudes. She claimed that students today have a consumerist approach to their education. Although Cheri mentioned that she changed modality from the traditional environment to a 100% online one, her change in modality actually had more to do with her introverted personality than with the needs of the students.

It took a few years and the transition I started making is from the face-to-face environment to the online environment. Right now, I only teach online. And so I think that was the turning point for me. Because I think, for some reason, I was maybe getting cynical with the students I was having on a daily basis. I didn’t feel that I was as challenged in the classroom as I am in the online classroom. It is a hard thing to explain but I know that the turning point with me was when I became totally online . . . perhaps the introvert is happier in the online environment and that might be why this was such a tipping point for me because it feeds my personality structure better.

Another participant, Adam, described the change in students that he has seen over the years. His description echoed Cheri’s sentiments. Adam stated that he believes students are more self-centered than ever before. According to him, students are demanding more of what they get from their educational experience.

The students have changed. They are much more “me-me.” They are driven more by their desires. They don’t want to work as hard. They don’t want to read so we are more challenged.

Adam continued to describe the changes that he was able to lead and that helped him become vital again in his career. The movement to online and distance learning was
critical for him. Adam cited distance and online learning as a way to reach more students but also reengage his own interest. He reported needing a spark and changing modality was a real benefit to him.

A third participant, Terry, acknowledged that he began his journey toward vitality once he fully understood his students. He described not knowing that his own education was not anything like that of the students in his classes. This lack of understanding led to student resistance and, in turn, Terry’s disillusionment. When speaking about what he felt in control of in his journey, he reported that he knew he needed to deal those types of students.

The things that were in my control were how I decided to deal with the students who were resistant. I knew I wanted my students to learn and, ultimately, like how I did my job. Once I knew that students were not even close to working from the same level playing field did I know how to move toward a better frame of mind in my own job.

Overall, participants reported their vitality as student-centered; however, there was an undercurrent of self-centered intention. Across participants, the mention of the change in students was prevalent. Past students were described as being more responsible, learning-focused, hard-working. Participants described a need to change the way material was delivered to work with the new student type. In essence, it appeared that the participants needed something different and the result was online and distance learning. This move away from the traditional modality gave participants a renewed energy for their careers.

**Summary**

The journey for the participants in this study followed a string of events and decisions made either by them or for them by other people. Although this journey was
unique for each participant, the resulting vitality was the same. It became apparent in the
data that certain commonalities existed. The subthemes emerged from the data and fell
under the main theme “long look in the mirror,” which included self-worth, recognition,
and stated vs. real interest.

One subtheme emerging from the data was self-worth. Participants revealed that
after a period of feeling unimportant and useless, some event occurred that allowed them
to realize self-importance again. Participants reported that it was a rediscovery of the
ability to positively contribute to his or her work that led to a renewal or feeling of self-
worth.

In addition to self-worth, another subtheme emerging from the data was
recognition. This particular subtheme indicated that participants not only want to feel as
though they are doing a good job, they also want to be recognized for it. Stated another
way, participants proclaimed that moving toward and eventually reaching a vital state
involved feeling recognized for a job well done. Appreciation for effort was integral for
some participants and their vitality. Participants reported that the sentiment of
appreciation could come from a variety of sources, including but not limited to
coworkers, students, and school leaders.

The final subtheme emerging from the data was stated vs. real interest. It
appeared that although the participants described the need to work with and help students,
it was their own personal need to help themselves that drove them to find vitality.
Participants noted superficially that students were often at the forefront of what made
them reenergize; however, the data indicated that the true end goal was finding what
made them satisfied in their own careers.
Connecting Themes—Response to Research Questions

The overarching research question in my study is: What experiences do higher education faculty have when going from a state of career disillusionment to one of vitality? From this main question, several sub-questions, which connect to the conceptual framework (presented in Chapter I), also follow. I present the findings of my study in regard to the three sub-questions in the following paragraphs.

What Are Aspects of Their Work and Profession that Would Be Associated with Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction?

Given that the participants in this study experienced disillusionment as a precondition, I will address this question by describing aspects of the professors’ work that contributed to their job dissatisfaction. Then, I will articulate the aspects that led to their satisfaction, which fed into their experiencing of vitality.

Job dissatisfaction. One contributor to job dissatisfaction amongst participants emerged from complaints about bureaucracy. Participants identified different forms of bureaucracy that developed into dissatisfaction. One form of bureaucracy was the seemingly endless and unnecessary steps involved in decision making. According to some participants, initiatives often stalled because of the sheer amount of political red tape surrounding the decision making process. Many different people at various levels were reported as having a role in the process and this only seemed to negatively affect the situation. Participants expressed the frustration this bureaucracy caused them when they tried to get something done.

Another form of bureaucracy was the inflexibility found amongst faculty members in higher education. Often times, change is impugned in higher education.
Sticking with the status quo lends itself to complacency. Participants confessed that inflexibility served as a serious vexation in their careers.

Another contributor to job dissatisfaction manifested itself in the form of competing self-interests. Across participants, there was an undertone revealed that teaching was given less priority than research and getting published to advance one’s career. Participants made it known that a clear division exists between those who put a priority on student learning compared to those who put research and publication first.

Finally, a third contributor to job dissatisfaction identified by participants was preparedness. Participants expressed a lack of preparation when beginning their careers as educators. The reason for a lack of preparedness varied across participants. Being unprepared from the beginning caused participants to become stressed, disappointed, and eventually disillusioned. Participants identified a lack of pedagogical skills as one of the major reasons for a lack of preparedness. Not having a clear understanding of the correct methodology in teaching leads to frustration on behalf of the students as well as the faculty member. Another reason reported by participants was a lack of experience. Some of the participants reported that it was difficult to teach while developing courses or not having had adequate experience.

**Job satisfaction.** The participants appreciated changes in their lives. Overall, participants disclosed that self-worth, recognition, and stated vs. real interests were aspects that nurtured job satisfaction. Participants claimed that feeling good about their own abilities and feeling important to others were key components to job satisfaction. Further, a commonality among participants is that they needed to feel appreciated and recognized for a job well-done. Finally, participants reported that their students were very
important to their job satisfaction; however, the data also showed that they framed their job satisfaction around their personal happiness even though their stated reasons consistently voiced students as their primary basis for satisfaction.

Participants noted that the individual recognition of self-worth played a large role in their job satisfaction. As previously stated, participants announced a rediscovering of value that they add to the institution. Participants believed that a renewed sense of self-worth followed a period of disillusionment in his or her career.

Building off the self-worth, participants also acknowledged that recognition served as a critical aspect to their job satisfaction. Participants expressed the need to feel as though their efforts are being noticed. According to participants, recognition can come in a variety of ways. Plaques and awards are a way to formally recognize a job well done. Although formal recognition was noted as being welcomed by participants, informal ways of recognizing effort are important as well. Some informal methods of recognition may be a simple pat on the back or telling someone that he or she is doing a good job.

Another aspect of job satisfaction moved beyond their stated rationale to the participants’ real, underlying interests (i.e., stated vs. real interest). The participants in this study often would express their need to work with students and see them succeed. Although it appeared that students were one of the main reasons why faculty members felt satisfied, the data showed that this was superficial at best. Participants framed their satisfaction around their own personal needs. That is, the job satisfaction included serving their needs and interests—not just the students, whom they expressed was the primary interest in their actions.
What Events Were Critical Within the Phenomenon of Being Disillusioned, Vital, and the Transformation From One to the Other?

Specific events, or triggers, had profound effects on participants at every phase during the transformation of disillusionment to vitality. These events caused participants to spring into action and solicit different mechanisms of support. Participants identified various mechanisms of support that were required during times of disillusionment, vitality, and the transformation from one to the other. It appeared that support was required during all three phases of the journey. Interestingly, the data became clear that the participants described different types of support depending on where they considered themselves in the journey.

Family/faith. When participants had the moment of acknowledging disillusionment, they reported a tendency to solicit support from family/faith. One could understand that when a person is most vulnerable or in need, it seems most obvious that support would be drawn from these areas. Whether it came from spirituality, faith, or family, participants described the need to lean on this mechanism of support during their most disillusioned times.

Support garnered from family/faith during disillusionment moved participants toward another event or trigger. At some point, participants came to a point where they wanted to change. Stated another way, they started the journey toward vitality. Once a participant began the journey away from disillusionment and toward vitality, he or she admitted that support was needed; however, that support materialized from different sources. Some participants solicited support from colleagues and school leaders rather than family and faith. It appeared that support sought from family and faith started the
momentum away from disillusionment, but collegial and school leader support continued this momentum during the transformation stage of this phenomenon. The type of collegial support mentioned by participants when making the transformation included support from both inside and outside their departments. Support can come in many forms, as well. Participants described inclusion in collaborative research projects as one example of collegial support. Others discussed collegial support in the form of friendships and being there to help and guide them on their way from disillusionment to vitality.

**Support from administrative leaders.** Another form of support often helpful during the transformation from disillusionment to vitality is support from administrative leaders. As previously discussed, school leaders in this study include a university president, vice president of academic affairs, and department chair. Faculty members disclosed that leaders often had open-door policies to listen to and support faculty members with concerns. Across the board, participants reported that school leaders often lent support to those who solicited it.

**Collegiality.** Finally, the last phase of the journey from disillusionment to vitality in which participants solicited support was vitality itself. Participants noted that recognizing disillusionment and finding a way to make the journey is one thing, but it is quite another to stay vital. Support during this phase came from the participant’s ability to understand what it felt like to be vital in his or her career and utilize the support needed to remain there. Across the board, participants cited collegiality as a critical component of the support needed to remain vital. Collegiality often came from faculty members inside their own departments; however, it was not constrained there. Support from
colleagues was also evident from those faculty members working outside of the department.

**How Do These Faculty Describe the Key Decision Points Through Their Encounters of Disillusionment, Vitality, and the Transformation From One to the Other?**

**Realization.** Across the board, participants discussed a time when they made the decision to accept the fact that disillusionment had set in. Coming to an understanding and realization that one is disillusioned is not easy. Participants described coming to this acceptance in different ways. Some needed outside sources, such as professional help, to see the truth about their disillusionment. Others simply came to grips with their disillusionment on their own. From acceptance, participants needed to make a decision that they no longer wanted to remain disillusioned. Making a conscious decision that they wanted better for their careers was the initial step in the journey from disillusionment to vitality.

**Course of action.** Another key decision point occurred when participants were making the transformation from disillusionment to vitality. This decision involved developing a course of action. As mentioned earlier, participants recounted admitting that they were disillusioned. To move beyond this negative state, participants detailed making conscious decisions to make a change. It is important to note that not all of these decisions were successful in transforming participants from disillusionment to vitality. The key is that participants recognized the need to change and made a conscious effort to do so. Across the board, participants identified the need to make a change in their careers. Although the need was consistent amongst the participants, the difference lay with what needed to happen for each one. The plans of action differed from changing modality to
rebuilding the program itself to taking a year-long sabbatical. Participants all experienced a level of disillusionment; however, each had a different method in moving away from it and toward vitality.

**Communication.** Across the board, the journey from disillusionment to vitality is an arduous one. Participants reported that their decisions did not stop once the transformation from disillusionment to vitality started to take place. Once participants reached vitality, there were decisions that needed to be made to remain vital, as well. Communication and keeping the focus on student success were overarching themes from the participants in regard to maintaining vitality. Overall, there was a need to have an openness as well as transparency with school leaders to maintain some level of success. Communication was an integral factor to make sure things continued to go in the right direction.

In addition to communication with school leaders, there was a need to open doors with colleagues in regard to collaborative projects. Letting colleagues know that one is willing to work with them on different projects is important. Communication and willingness to work with others served participants well in regard to vitality.

**Working with students.** Finally, several participants also identified student success as critical to maintaining vitality. There was an indication that some faculty members felt the need to protect his or her students from the outside world and its dysfunction. A visual representation displaying the connectedness of the research questions to the three themes is shown in Figure 2.
Chapter Summary

Analysis of the data revealed three main themes as well as several subthemes.

Theme 1: Great Expectations frames the idea that the participants in this study entered the field of higher education with a preconceived notion of what it entailed. They were greatly disappointed when they realized that their perception was not met with reality. Participants reported almost a shattering of dreams when they realized that higher education was not like it appeared in the beginning. Theme 2: Lean on Me was the second concept that emerged from the data analysis. Participants described various mechanisms of support needed throughout their journey. The difference in the type of support required depended upon at which stage they found themselves in at the time. For example, support solicited when a participant was disillusioned usually stemmed from family or faith. As participants transformed from disillusionment and worked toward vitality, support was
garnered from administrative leaders as well as colleagues. Finally, those who sought support to remain in a vitalized state reported collegiality as the primary source required. In Theme 3: Long Look in the Mirror, participants recounted a reframing or re-identification of their roles and performance. Participants noted that they needed to self-reflect on themselves and focus on the positive things about their careers. Self-worth, recognition, and stated vs. real interest are the subthemes chronicled under the third theme.

Direct interview quotes are used to add clarity and make sense of the data. The quotes, in some cases, have been edited for grammatical purposes. Descriptions of the participants were provided to offer depth and contextual meaning regarding the data analysis. Chapter V interprets the findings, poses implications for my study findings in light of the interpretation, provides a summary and conclusion of the study, and imparts recommendations for future study.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Introduction

Chapter V builds on the findings presented in Chapter IV. Specifically, in this chapter, I interpret my research findings, identify implications based on interpretations, recommend areas for future study, and present my study’s conclusion.

The overriding purpose of this study examines the experiences of higher education faculty members who move from a state of disillusionment to vitality. The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) used in the study investigates job satisfaction, agency, and life course as it relates to vitality. As discussed in Chapter I, job satisfaction includes factors allowing the participants to feel engaged and productive in his or her profession. Conversely, job dissatisfaction includes factors allowing the participants to feel disillusioned or disengaged in his or her profession. Secondly, agency was depicted as the decisions either made by or for the participants deemed influential in his or her movement from disillusionment to vitality. Finally, life course was interpreted as the critical events happening in the participant’s life that contributed to the journey from disillusionment to vitality.
Interpretation and Discussion

Theme 1: Great Expectations

Bureaucracy, competing self-interests, and preparedness, which represented the subthemes of *Great Expectations*, draw attention to a significant research observation. Specifically, faculty members who undergo a transformation from disillusionment to vitality experience cognitive dissonance in which their values and beliefs appear misaligned from the professional encounters. According to Hawkins and Weiss (2012), “Cognitive dissonance has been defined as discomfort experienced by persons trying to meet two or more conflicting demands at the same time” (p. 506). In this study, these events were manifested by the inflexibility of educational institutions (i.e., bureaucracy), weighted activities for organizational priorities (i.e., competing self-interests), and individual standards (i.e., preparedness). Stated another way, the performance disconnect for the faculty members were observed in terms of internal system operations, organizational priorities, and individual achievement.

My findings are similar to the literature as both consider role expectations as a reason for disillusionment. In the literature, several studies explain the need for faculty members to truly understand how the three components of their work (teaching, research, and service) interact with one another (Austin et al., 2008; Bloomgarden & O’Meara, 2007; Colbeck, 1998, 2002). Consequently, faculty members were reported in the literature as having an understanding of their duties as a faculty member; however, the struggle remained that faculty members were not certain of how they were to carry them out in his or her day-to-day operations.
The research findings add to the literature concerning role expectations. The findings offer a sense of participant confusion as well as cognitive dissonance. Participants differed from the previous studies in that there was obvious confusion as to what their roles were. Specifically, participants were misunderstanding the roles he or she was to carry out. Lack of preparation for the position of higher education faculty member was cited as one of the reasons for the confusion.

Cognitive dissonance set in for the participants once role expectations were established. Participants described having a perception of what it meant to be a faculty member and the work it entailed only to have his or her perception in direct conflict with reality. Participants experienced bureaucracy, competing self-interests, and preparedness issues that were in direct conflict with how they perceived his or her position as a higher education faculty member.

**Bureaucracy.** My research findings supported the notion that faculty members distress with the bureaucracy often found in higher education. As Czech and Forward (2010) explained, bureaucracy employs a one-way approach to leadership in which faculty must conform to a preconceived set of goals or guidelines with little flexibility or creative thinking. Faculty members who are asked to move their department forward in a continuous improvement mindset are often stifled by this bureaucratic leadership style. Carlson (2014) suggested that the regulation found in higher education is more complex than anything seen in the corporate world. The results of my study indicate that faculty members generally struggle with the unnecessary steps needed to make decisions and incorporate change. Another source of frustration in regard to bureaucracy found in
higher education is the inflexibility or attitude that things have always been done in a specific way.

**Competing self-interests.** My research findings supported past studies indicating that faculty members experience stress between facilitating student learning and advancing one’s career. Studies have determined that faculty members have shifted their workload from teaching and service toward research due to the pressure of advancement and tenure (Gabbidon et. al, 2011; Miller, 2012; Waltman et. al, 2012). To advance, faculty members must devote time to research and publication. In addition, faculty members are pulled from teaching because research is the primary way in which faculty members communicate with one another (Harley et al., 2010). It is apparent that teaching, although important and time intensive, does not carry the same weight in regard to career advancement. The stress that faculty members feel is the result of being pulled in different directions between the two. Hagedorn (2000) stated that “assistant professors dwell on advancing in the profession” (p. 11). Waltman et al. (2012) mentioned that professors are being forced to spend more time conducting research as advancement and tenure is dependent upon it.

**Preparedness.** Consistent with previous literature, my research findings also recognize that faculty members are not adequately prepared to fulfill expected duties as they enter higher education. According to Whitfield and Hickerson (2013), faculty members are expected to invest a great deal of their time and energy into the teaching component of their job. Having said that, faculty members reported a lack of preparedness due to inadequate pedagogical skills as well as inexperience. Adams (2002) stated that although teaching is such an integral part of a new faculty member’s job,
graduate students have a varied degree of teaching experience. In fact, some enter the profession with no experience at all. New faculty members are often required to step foot onto his or her campus and have a basic understanding of what the role of faculty member entails. According to Austin and McDaniels (2006), “Doctoral students typically do not complete their degrees with a comprehensive understanding of what the faculty career entails or an adequate understanding of the history of higher education” (p. 54).

**Theme 2: Lean on Me**

Support from administrative leaders, collegiality, and family/faith, which represented the subthemes of *Lean on Me*, place emphasis on another significant research observation. Specifically, faculty members who undergo a transformation from disillusionment to vitality experience the need to solicit support from multiple support mechanisms. As stated in Chapter IV, these mechanisms served as interdependent agents toward this life journey change. In this study, such mechanisms included supervisory care (i.e., support from administrative leaders), interdepartmental and intradepartmental backing (i.e., collegiality), and familial/religious comfort (i.e., family/faith). Stated another way, the support solicited for the faculty members were observed in terms of school leadership, collegial, and family/faith.

The study’s findings confirm the notion that faculty members often rely on support mechanisms when making a transition from a disillusioned state to vitality. The literature describes collegiality as one of main factors that move faculty toward vitality (Baldwin, 1990; Bland et al., 2002; Dankowski et al., 2012; Huston et al., 2007). Collegiality is defined as one’s willingness and ability to work collaboratively with others within a department to reach common goals (Cipriano & Buller, 2012).
Participants divulged the need to rely on support from colleagues when making the transition from a disillusioned state to vitality. They reported soliciting the collegial support in differing types. One type was coworkers inside the department offering guidance and support during a time period in which a faculty member is experiencing disillusionment. Another type was collegial support outside of the department. Participants cited that they would sometimes solicit support from a fresh lens or someone outside of the toxic environment of his or her department. Collegial support from outside the department was noted as being critical to some of the participant’s journey from disillusionment to vitality. A third type of collegial support was friendship outside of the workplace. Colleagues who spent time together outside of their work environment and befriended each other found that the support offered in this manner was critical in the movement from disillusionment to vitality. In addition to collegiality, another support mechanism reported in the literature and supported by the study’s findings was support from administrative leaders. The findings add to the literature that support also comes from family/faith.

**Support from administrative leaders.** The research findings substantiate that faculty members accost administrative school leaders for support when making the transformation from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality. Administrative school leaders include but are not limited to university presidents, vice presidents of academic affairs, and department chairs. According to Ambrose et al. (2007), administrators need to “help see faculty through potentially difficult transitions and making their initial experiences positive ones” (p. 12). Evelyn-Dorsey (2007) reiterated the need for
administrative support. In her dissertation, the author divulged that college leaders are called to support and help faculty members maintain his or her vitality.

**Collegiality.** My research findings support past literature by making clear that faculty members take counsel with colleagues when making the transformation from a state of disillusionment toward vitality. When faculty members experience disillusionment and begin the arduous journey toward vitality, it is critical to solicit support from colleagues. Abundant literature speaks to the importance of collegiality and relationships within the department as instrumental to job satisfaction (Ambrose et al., 2005; Castillo & Cano, 2004; Hagedorn, 2000). In agreement with the research findings, Layman and Guyden (2000) suggested that faculty members seek social support and advice from colleagues when going through career renewal.

**Family/faith.** My study’s findings substantiate past literature in regard to support solicited through family or faith during disillusioned times. Specifically, faculty members who move from disillusionment to vitality find support from their faith as well as their family during the transformation. The findings indicate that faculty members tend to lean on family and faith during his or her most disillusioned moments as compared to other forms of support. Previous literature emphasized family support. For instance, according to Layman and Guyden (2000), college faculty members solicit support from family during career renewal. The extant literature concerning college faculty members seeking some form of professional renewal or satisfaction studies relying on his or her faith to make the transformation from disillusionment to vitality.
Theme 3: Long Look in the Mirror

Self-worth, recognition, and stated vs. real interest, which represented the subthemes of *Long Look in the Mirror*, emphasize another significant research observation. Specifically, faculty members who undergo a transformation from disillusionment to vitality experience the need to place the focus inward and reflect to make the transformation from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality. Stated another way, faculty members must feel valuable that they are fulfilling a role at the institution in which they work. Not only do faculty members need to feel a sense of self-worth, they must also be acknowledged for a job well-done. Finally, faculty members must focus on what truly makes them satisfied in their careers. The findings suggest that faculty members tend to mention serving students; however, it was evident that the underlying truth was that the faculty members chose to meet their own needs to make the transformation.

The study’s findings support the literature in that faculty members value feeling as though they are doing a good job. Studies have shown that achievement is a factor that lends itself to job satisfaction and vitality (Lane et al., 2010; Nandan & Krishna, 2013;). In addition to achievement, the findings also support the literature in regard to recognition. Faculty members not only want to achieve in his or her profession, they want to be recognized for their effort (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Castillo & Cano, 2004). In contrast to achievement and recognition; however, the study’s findings rebutted the literature in regard to working with students (Milosheff, 1990). Several participants mentioned the importance of their students; however, the analysis of data indicated that the transformation from disillusionment to vitality stemmed from outside support and
personal reflection instead. Although participants in this study said that students were important to them, it became evident that personal satisfaction was considered above and beyond them in this study. The experience of moving from disillusionment to vitality for college faculty members greatly relied on personal well-being and finding internal happiness in his or her own career.

**Self-worth.** The research findings flesh out that faculty members need to feel valuable to him or herself to make the transformation from disillusionment to vitality. Faculty members, in their state of disillusionment, lose self-worth or self-esteem. These findings contribute to a gap in the literature that does not explore the phenomenon of moving from a state of disillusionment to vitality.

**Recognition.** The research findings confirmed that faculty members seek acknowledgement for his or her accomplishments. Feeling appreciated for the time, effort, and success is an important part of vitality. According to Baldwin (1990), “A sizeable number of participants identified various forms of encouragement and recognition that had enhanced their careers in some manner. A supportive comment or thoughtful note from a dean, encouragement from outside colleagues, and awards or citations for significant achievements seem to provide some faculty members with additional incentive to produce high-quality work” (p. 171). Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) and Castillo and Cano (2004) also substantiated the research findings by their claim of faculty seeking recognition from multiple sources. The sources have not been found to be limited to supervisors or colleagues.

**Stated vs. real interest.** My study’s findings refute that faculty members reach job satisfaction through his or her facilitation of student learning. Stated another way,
literature has found that faculty members attribute career vitality due working with his or her students (Milosheff, 1990). However, the research findings tell a different story. Faculty members, although interested in student success, are seeking job satisfaction by looking within. It is important that he or she feels important and that he or she is making a difference. Although working with students for their learning and advancement to the real world was mentioned across the board, it was apparent that the true transformation from disillusionment to vitality was centered on their own personal feelings of oneself.

Summary

My research findings illuminate something new from previous research. Studies in the past have determined the factors for job satisfaction. Those factors included collegiality, working with students, achievement, recognition, work itself, and responsibility. In addition, other studies have cited factors for job dissatisfaction as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Although some of my study’s findings were aligned with past research and literature, this study fills a gap in the literature. Before this study, no research exists that explores the experience that higher education faculty members have when moving from a state of disillusionment to vitality. The findings of this study articulate that faculty members often experience cognitive dissonance when they enter higher education. When there is a disconnection between perception and reality of how a faculty member’s career should be, disillusionment can set in. To move away from disillusionment, support from various sources is required. With support, it is possible for a faculty member to transform from disillusionment to vitality. To remain vital, he or she must embark on self-reflection. Feeling self-worth, recognition, and investing in one’s personal interests to be satisfied
are all essential in maintaining vitality. This study is important because it illustrates the journey from disillusionment to vitality and how the experience unfolds.

**Rethinking the Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework used in this study (Figure. 1) was a Venn diagram in which life course, agency, and job satisfaction intersect with each other, with the product being vitality. Stated another way, it was believed that specific events as well as important decisions along with job satisfaction were critical for a higher education faculty member to move from disillusionment to vitality. After much deliberation and analysis of the data, it has become evident that this framework was substantiated. Having said that, these three components unearthed some underlying lessons as well. Most notably, although it was apparent that life course, agency, and job satisfaction are important in a faculty member’s quest for vitality, there needed to be some complexifying of the conceptual framework based on the research findings.

Originally, my study focused on the space where the original conceptual framework intersected, which I originally named “vitality.” Upon further analysis, through my data, I recognized that this journey occurred in stages. Simply put, the path a faculty member takes from disillusionment to vitality is developmental in nature. The first stage is named in my study specifically as *Great Expectations*. Faculty members entering the field of higher education do so without clear direction as to satisfactorily carry out his or her job. The subthemes indicate that faculty members often feel discouraged by the bureaucracy that permeates higher education, lack of preparedness in different areas essential to the career, and competing self-interests. The study indicated that higher education faculty members experience a cognitive dissonance upon entering
the field. Due to a lack of understanding on either the roles one must carry out in the position or how to mesh them together to be effective, the cognitive dissonance often leads to a level or state of disillusionment. Only until faculty members realize the expectations of higher education and what roles are to be carried out (and how) can one move from disillusionment to vitality.

The second stage recognizes that moving away from disillusionment toward vitality is an arduous task and journey. Faculty members stated that this journey is not one to be made alone. Different levels of support mechanisms need to be in place to truly make the transition. The support comes from various places from family/faith, colleagues, and administrative leaders. The appropriate source of support depends upon the stage of the journey. Initially, and during the most disillusioned time, faculty members rely on faith and/or family. As they progress through the transformation, support is garnered from colleagues as well as school leaders.

The third and final stage of the transformation from disillusionment to vitality occurs through self-reflection. Faculty members must find self-worth. Feeling incapable of carrying out his or her expected duties was common for those participants in this study during the reported time of disillusionment. Self-worth was an important piece to the puzzle in reaching as well as sustaining vitality. In addition to self-worth, participants reported being recognized for a job well done was also critical in his or her ability to sustain vitality. Finally, it became apparent that although participants recognized the importance of working with students, the need to find personal satisfaction was of greater importance than student success.
Once a faculty member reaches vitality, he or she must continue to self-reflect to maintain it. Feeling as though he or she is not only working hard but is recognized for hard work proves critical to remaining vital. For the reasons of overcoming cognitive dissonance, soliciting support, and applying self-reflection, the conceptual framework should be adjusted. The figure below (Figure. 3) shows the phenomenon of transforming from disillusionment to vitality in a different way than originally indicated.

**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

**Figure 3. Disillusionment to Vitality in Stages**

Therefore, while the conceptual framework indicated the three concepts as intersecting, my study illustrates a slightly different approach in which the three concepts interact. Based on my six participants, the career disillusionment to vitality state is more
process-based. That is, the participants encountered aspects of exercising individual agency, developing job satisfaction, in conjunction with life course events, but these experiences took place in a patterned sequence in the form of overcoming cognitive dissonance, soliciting support from various levels, and engaging upon self-reflection. It is possible that these elements may not be reflective of other faculty members’ experiences in this lock-step manner of stages; however, these sequenced stages were represented in my participants. Put simply, my study illuminates one version of this conceptual model in practice of the phenol for my six participants.

**Implications**

As with any study, there are certain implications that should be gleaned from the findings. Studying the experience that higher education faculty members have when moving from a state of disillusionment to vitality opens several doors to improve programming, professional development, individual departments, and more. This section will address several implications in light of my study’s findings and interpretations. The first implication is to revamp doctorate programs that produce new faculty members. According to the literature and this study, faculty members do not understand what is expected of them when entering the field. Departmental operations as well as other policies and procedures are often left for the faculty member to figure out on his or her own without much orientation. My recommendation would be for professional development, or orientation, to take place to educate new faculty members on common policies and practices within his or her department. Another expectation that institutions have of their incoming faculty members is how to teach. Based on my study’s findings, one of the reasons was a lack of pedagogical skills. Graduate students need a solid
pedagogical foundation to effective teaching methodology at the higher education level. Knowing one’s content is a step in the right direction; however, this knowledge alone will not produce an effective faculty member. To build this foundation in graduate students, doctoral programs must incorporate more courses on pedagogy. For instance, participants cited a lack of preparedness when entering his or her career. Along with these additional courses, more readings should be incorporated that allow the graduate student an inside view of what it is truly like to work in the field. In addition, learning how to teach in addition to what to teach should be a primary focus. Group activities in which graduate students are given higher education topics and are asked to teach to the rest of the cohort should be incorporated. Far too often, faculty members are experts in their field but lack the proper training to teach effectively for student learning. The second reason for a lack of preparedness was inexperience. One way to add experience to students aspiring to become faculty members would be to incorporate a field experience where they work in the university setting under a mentor. They would not only see the duties fulfilled but would work in that capacity as well.

A second implication would be to introduce more professional development for faculty members currently working in higher education. Based on the research findings, increasing self-worth and recognition would serve positive dividends. Offering professional development opportunities aimed to enrich faculty and increase awareness of these two factors would be extremely beneficial. Faculty members need to understand what helps move toward vitality and what it looks like to be vital so they can reach it themselves.
A third implication would call for different organizations and associations to take an active role in the development of future and current faculty members. One such association, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), could do much more in this regard. Although their primary mission is focused on academic freedom and shared governance, it may be time for this association to lead the way in identifying and moving faculty members who are in a current state of disillusionment to a state of vitality. These research findings could provide the foundation to which training could be developed and implemented nationwide. The AAUP could be the organization that supervisors look toward when they identify someone under their leadership who is struggling with disillusionment. In addition to the AAUP, several other associations could serve in a similar fashion. Some of those associations include but are not limited to the American Psychological Association (APA), American Sociological Association (ASA), American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), and the American Educational Research Association (AERA).

**Recommendations for Future Study**

The results of the study break down a wall for future research to address the phenomenon of moving from disillusionment to vitality. One aspect of future research would be to look across different geographical regions as well as college types as defined by the Carnegie classification system. For example, future research on this phenomenon could diversify the participants being studied and study different parts of the country. The fact that all the participants came from one state and from similar sized institutions opens the door to expand this particular study.
Another aspect of future research could involve studying the experience of faculty members who have maintained vitality. Understanding the factors involved in sustaining vitality would serve a valuable purpose. Professional development could be geared to addressing those factors and faculty members could move toward and sustain their vitality. Another study could research the phenomenon of faculty members who reach vitality only to fall back into disillusionment. Understanding those factors would be equally as beneficial because if the factors attributed to slipping back to disillusionment were known, measures could be taken to try and avoid that relapse.

Another avenue for future research could be to narrow the scope to a specific discipline or position. For example, it might be interesting to look specifically at those faculty members in education or psychology. Finally, this study could be applied beyond faculty and include staff members and/or administration. For example, it could prove interesting to see via meta-analysis how vice presidents of student affairs experience the phenomenon as compared to vice presidents of academic affairs.

**Conclusion**

This study examined the experiences of higher education faculty members who moved from a state of disillusionment to a state of vitality. The participants’ unique experiences with this phenomenon run the gantlet of emotions, perceptions, and interpretations. It is with a great deal of gratitude that this research has been completed due to the participants’ honesty and willingness to share their stories.

The results of this study suggest that the phenomenon of moving from a state of disillusionment to one of vitality should continue to be explored in future research. The journey is often a difficult one in which participants need to garner support from many
different people in many different positions and facets of their lives. The results of this
study offer insights for transferability of concepts and connections to others, so the
experiences captured here should not be dismissed. Six participants who experienced
disillusionment found a way to overcome it and move to a state of vitality. Their stories
may be applicable to someone out there struggling with a similar disillusioned state.
APPENDICES
Appendix A

Participant Recruitment/Selection

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<thead>
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<th>Disillusionment to Vitality</th>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Demographic Information
   - Name
   - Job Title
   - Email Address
   - Phone Number

2. Evaluate the following statements.

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<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earlier in my career, I was disillusioned by or disengaged from my work.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am no longer in a state of disillusionment or disengaged from my work.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I am flourishing in my career.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have felt a sense of rejuvenation for at least three years.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Would you be willing to participate in my dissertation study concerning the experience of U.S. higher education faculty moving from disillusionment to vitality?
   - ☐ YES
   - ☐ NO
Appendix B

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

The application form and all included documentation for the above-referenced project have been reviewed and approved via the procedures of the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

Attached is your original consent form that has been stamped with the UND IRB approval and expiration dates. Please maintain this original on file. You must use this original, stamped consent form to make copies for participant enrollment. No other consent form should be used. It must be signed by each participant prior to initiation of any research procedures. In addition, each participant must be given a copy of the consent form.

Prior to implementation, submit any changes to or departures from the protocol or consent form to the IRB for approval. No changes to approved research may take place without prior IRB approval.

You have approval for this project through the above-listed expiration date. When this research is completed, please submit a termination form to the IRB. If the research will last longer than one year, an annual review and progress report must be submitted to the IRB prior to the submission deadline to ensure adequate time for IRB review.

The forms to assist you in filing your project termination, annual review and progress report, adverse event/unanticipated problem, protocol change, etc. may be accessed on the IRB website: http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/

Sincerely,

Michelle L. Bowles, M.P.A., CIP
IRB Coordinator

MLBiJle

Enclosures

Cc: Dr. Jeffrey Sun
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE: Turn that Frown Upside Down: The experience of U.S. higher education faculty moving from disillusionment to vitality

PROJECT DIRECTOR: Robert J. Martin

PHONE #: 701-721-2498

DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

You are invited to be in a research study about the experiences of U.S. higher education faculty moving from disillusionment to vitality because you work in a U.S. institution and have noted your perception as to having moved from disillusionment to vitality in your career.

The purpose of this research study is to inform decision makers and/or leaders in higher education institutions. This study will outline some of the commonalities that a small sample of participants went through to find vitality after a period of disillusionment. This knowledge can be used in a host of ways including but not limited to mentoring decisions as well as professional development opportunities.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?

Approximately 6-10 people will take part in this study. Participants will be sought from three similar institutions according to size and Carnegie classification. Those institutions include Dickinson State University, Mayville State University, and Valley City State University.

Approval Date: JUL 30 2014
Expiration Date: JUL 29 2015
University of North Dakota IRB

Date:
Subject Initials:
HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in the study involves a two-part interview process that will focus on distinct phases of your career and possibly a third, if follow-up is deemed necessary. The first interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes and the second interview will take approximately 60 minutes. If a third interview is warranted, it will not take longer than 30 minutes.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

The first step in this study is participant selection and recruitment. During this process, Subjects will be recruited by myself as the primary researcher. I will rely on contacts of individuals I know who will nominate others for referral. After receiving those contacts, I will try and make contact with them first via phone call and next by electronic mail. If additional subjects are needed, I will contact individuals who, through publically accessible resources such as the web or media articles, have been recognized for revitalization yet contain some signal of prior disillusionment in their career. The recruitment will continue until at least 6-10 participants have been secured.

The second step will be the data collection phase. During this process, the semi-structured interviews will be conducted in a two-part manner and at a location of the participant’s choosing. Giving the participant the choice of location adds trust that they’ll be able to select a place where the public cannot hear the conversation and the participant will feel the most comfortable. In order to develop trust and rapport, the interviews will be held face to face rather than over telephone or other technological means. The transcriptionist, under a signed confidentiality agreement, will turn the audio recorded interviews into a manuscript at her office. The researcher will conduct the analysis at his home office where all materials will remain in a locked file cabinet.

The third step will be data analysis. The researcher will look to triangulate the data to form themes and make sense of the experience that faculty have when moving from a state of disillusionment to vitality.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

Although there are no foreseeable risks to this study, you will be revisiting a time in your career where you now consider yourself disillusioned. Anytime a participant talks about a negative experience, there is a risk of an uncomfortable feeling.
WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

You will not benefit personally from being in this study. However, we hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study because they may realize how a small group of faculty moved from disillusionment to vitality and may be looking to make the same transition.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You will not have any costs for being in this research study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

WHO IS FUNDING THE STUDY?

The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. Your study record may be reviewed by Government agencies, the UND Research Development and Compliance office, and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child, or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of creating aliases for both participant and institution. Additional information may be altered as well. Subject characteristics may be modified in the study write up if they don't significantly alter or generalize the results. For instance, I may change a participant's gender from male to female or generalize someone in the Biology Department to science. Data will be reported in aggregate form to further protect identity.

If we write a report or article about this study, we will describe the study results in a summarized manner so that you cannot be identified.
Since the interviews will be audio recorded, you will have a right to review/edit the recordings following the interview if you deem appropriate. The only people with access to the audiotapes will be the transcriptionist as well as the researcher. Following the study and a time lapse of three years, the tapes will be destroyed.

IS THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS?

The researcher conducting this study is Robert Martin. You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Robert Martin at 701-721-2498. You may also contact the researcher’s advisor, Jeff Sun, at 701-777-4255.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact The University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279.

- You may also call this number about any problems, complaints, or concerns you have about this research study.
- You may also call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone who is independent of the research team.
- General information about being a research subject can be found by clicking “Information for Research Participants” on the web site: http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.cfm

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.

Please initial: ___ Yes  ___ No

I give consent for my quotes to be used in the research; however I will not be identified.

Please initial: ___ Yes  ___ No

| Approval Date: JUL 30 2014 |
| Expiration Date: JUL 29 2015 |
| University of North Dakota IRB |

Date: ____________________
Subject Initials: __________
Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subjects Name: ____________________________

Signature of Subject ____________________________ Date __________

I have discussed the above points with the subject or, where appropriate, with the subject’s legally authorized representative.

Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent ____________________________ Date __________

Approval Date: JUL 30 2014
Expiration Date: JUL 29 2015
University of North Dakota IRB

Date: __________
Subject Initials: __________
Appendix D

Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT
Transcription Services

Turn that Frown Upside Down: The experience of U.S. higher education faculty moving from disillusionment to vitality

I, Andrea Hammer, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Robert Martin related to his doctoral study on Turn that Frown Upside Down: The experience of U.S. higher education faculty moving from disillusionment to vitality. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents;

2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Robert Martin;

3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;

4. To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to Robert Martin in a complete and timely manner.

5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber’s name (printed) Andrea Hammer

Transcriber’s signature ________________________________

Date August 28, 2014
## Appendix E

### Audit Trail

#### Timeline

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 3, 2014</td>
<td>Stephen (Central State University) – Interview 4</td>
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<td>Sept 3, 2014</td>
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<td>Oct 9, 2014</td>
<td>Received Interview Transcripts for Interviews 7-10</td>
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</table>
Oct 10, 2014   Adam (Central State University) – Interview #11
Oct 13, 2014   Received Interview Transcript – Interview #11
Oct 14, 2014   Terry (Great Plains University) – Interview #12
Oct 16, 2014   Received interview transcript – Interview #12
Oct 17-Nov 1, 2014   Continued to listen to audiotapes and read manuscripts
Nov 2-Dec 7, 2014   Data analysis and writing
Dec 8, 2014   Final draft of dissertation sent to advisor
Dec 2014-Mar 2015   Revisions and meetings with Dr. Jeff Sun, advisor
Mar 19, 2015   Preliminary approval meeting – Final recommendations

*Revisions were made throughout this time period for Chapters I-V specifically noted by committee’s feedback
Appendix F

Interview Protocol

First Interview

1. What brought you to the professoriate?
   a. How long have you been a college professor?
   b. Before you started, what attracted you to the profession? What did you like about it?
   c. What concerns, if any, did you have before entering the profession?

2. What does faculty disillusionment mean to you?

3. Explain the time you were not doing so well in your job. What did that feel like?

4. Were there any specific events that led to or caused this? If so, explain.

5. What significant decisions were made either by you or someone for you that caused this?

6. Did you have a “rock bottom” moment? If so, what was it?

7. How did you decide that you wanted to make your job better and move toward becoming productive? Do you attribute that decision to anyone or any particular moment? If so, who and/or what?

8. Is there anything else you would like to share in terms of your experience that you haven’t already shared with me?

Second Interview

1. What does faculty vitality mean to you?

2. Tell me why you consider yourself as vital or flourishing in your job right now.

3. How would you explain any significant event(s) that have caused this vitality?
4. Describe any significant people that you feel are responsible for your vitality.

5. What decisions were made either by you or someone else that helped move you toward this current state of vitality?

6. What do you attribute to your ability to stay engaged or maintain vitality in your job? Why do you feel like you won’t have a setback and find yourself disillusioned again?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share in terms of your experience that you haven’t already shared with me?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>“My colleague and I do so much in academia behind the scenes because of the bureaucracy and the ridiculous hierarchy!”</td>
<td>Bureaucracy/Hierarchy</td>
<td>Bureaucracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>“In higher education, there is so much momentum that is working against you. Well, we've always done it that way or we have to get approval from all these different people like all of your peers and the whole department has to buy in. This was very frustrating!”</td>
<td>Momentum working against you</td>
<td>Bureaucracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>“. . . the grounds and everything were really deteriorating and it was not a friendly place as far as even walking in the winter, you were bound to get your feet wet. Nothing seemed drain. Part of the problem was the hoops that our people had to jump through to get some money. The state board of higher education finally spent some money here, thank goodness.”</td>
<td>Hoops to jump through</td>
<td>Bureaucracy</td>
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REFERENCES


doi:10.1111/j.1471-6712.2012.00978.x


doi:10.1007/s11162-004-6226-6


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Evelyn-Dorsey, J. (2007). *What are the perspectives of community college chief academic officers regarding faculty vitality and to what degree do these leaders support the phenomenon?* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Proquest (3274761)


