THE EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS
IN THE PROCESS OF ATTAINING A BACHELOR’S DEGREE
AT A REGIONAL PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Students who transfer from a community college to a four-year university have a singular path to travel. Researchers have studied this population for several decades. This research dissertation has built on the findings of these pioneers in the field of transfer student persistence. As a result of this study, two additional pieces of the transfer process have fallen into place. Transfer students are motivated by negative experiences as well as positive experiences. Transfer students who persist to graduation possess the capacity to make crucial adjustments which enable them to overcome numerous obstacles which stand in their way.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my wife Candice and my two children. Unfortunately, I missed out on a lot of special moments in their lives when I was in college, performing my research, and writing this document. I hope to make up for the time I lost with each of you. Luckily, all of this work was for our family, to make the future better for us all. I am excited about our future together and look forward to seeing you boys grow.
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I would like to thank my family and friends for putting up with all of my ramblings, belly aching, and for offering me so much support and encouragement throughout this process. If you are still around after all of this, I know I can count on you as a real friend.

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Finally, I would like to thank my students and coworkers who knew me well enough to ask me about my progress. I started where you are now, took the hard route, fell more times than I care to admit, and now I am at the top of the mountain. Never stop believing in yourself.
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CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

The United States first two-year college was established in 1901 in Joliet, Illinois, for two specific purposes. The initial purpose of this and other junior colleges was to provide a higher education opportunity for students who were unable to gain admission to a university. A second purpose of the original junior college was to lessen the four-year institution’s burden of orienting first and second year students to the climate of higher education. As a result, universities were able to engage in conducting research and teaching higher-level classes (Cohen & Brawer, 2013).

The primary mission of the early junior college was transfer education. As such, the original curriculum was designed to mirror the first two-years of the curriculum offered at most four-year colleges and universities. This arrangement allowed junior college students to transfer from a two-year institution of higher learning to a four-year college or university (Cohen & Brawer, 2013).

Between the years of 1920 and 1960, a number of developments took place that affected the original mission of the junior college (Young, 1996). These developments included an increasing number of high school graduates who desired a college education and an increasing demand for a technically proficient labor force. Other improvements included an increase in taxable income from local communities with a desire to support a junior college and a growing number of individuals who yearned to see their children enjoy the fruits of a college education (Cohen & Brawer, 2013). These progresses drastically changed the junior college.
An important development to affect the change junior college mission occurred at the end of the Second World War. There was a pressing need for retraining of the massive number of service men to and have their work skills updated. This need gave rise to the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the G.I. Bill (Lucas, 1994). The impact of the G.I. Bill was a large upsurge in enrollment for higher education. Many veterans were not interested in completing a four-year degree. They only desired training for a new occupation. The primary objectives of most servicemen were to advance job competencies and increase employment skills. In alignment with these objectives, a preponderance of these new students enrolled in junior colleges. This development brought about a substantial shift in junior college curricula. The result was a decrease in liberal arts and transfer programs coupled with an increase in vocational and terminal occupation degrees and certificate programs (Eaton, 1994).

Another development occurred in 1947 with the President’s Commission on Higher Education, known as the Truman Commission. One of the recommendations of the Truman Commission was the so-called “open access” policy which expanded the number of students who, in turn, increased the junior college enrollments. This policy suggested that institutions provide remedial classes for students who were not prepared for higher-level classes (Cohen & Brawer, 2013). This development resulted in a drastic increase in the number of students who would find transfer to a four-year institution of higher learning extremely difficult.

During the decades of the 1970s and the 1980s, student demographics had a major change. Junior colleges, now known as community colleges, experienced a fundamental shift from a student body of predominantly full-time students to a student body of predominantly part-time students who held full-time jobs (Clotfelter, 1991). Community college refers to a public or private two-year institution that contains a wide range of services, from a place for students to try...
out postsecondary education, to a structured vocational certificate, or associate’s degree program (Grubb, 1991). The “open access” policy recommended by the Truman Commission also increased ethnic and social class diversity in community colleges (Pusser & Levin, 2009).

Over a century has passed and the community college has experienced a number of shifts in its purpose, mission, and emphasis. Transfer started out as the predominant purpose in 1901 and slowly changed because of government policies, social transformations, and educational expectations. An educational expectation is whether a student anticipated earning at least a baccalaureate degree or not when they began college (Wang, 2009). For example, successful performance in any activity relies on how well the participant anticipated they would perform (Wang, 2012). In the 1950s, the national transfer rate hovered at 70% because of the G.I. Bill and the Truman Commission’s “open access” policy. The G.I. Bill helped by increasing educational opportunities for veterans, women, and low-income individuals by providing education and training, loan guaranty for homes, farms, or businesses; and unemployment pay (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2013). Community colleges across the nation developed a series of terminal degrees to meet the increasingly industrialized nation’s needs. By the end of the 1960s, the transfer rate had dropped to 60%. The transfer rate dropped to 57% in the 1970s and then to 28% by the 1980s as a result in a shift from full-time to part-time students. In the 1990s, noncredit offerings further eroded the transfer rate. As of 2013, the national community college to university transfer rate stood at 22% (Cohen & Brawer, 2013).

According to the 2010 National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey in the academic year 2003-2004, 8,425 (44%) students chose to start their career in higher education at a two-year institution. After six years, 1,011 (12%) had received a bachelor’s degree. During that same academic year, 7,733 (41%) students chose to start their career in higher education at a four-year
institution of higher learning. In this cohort of students, 4,185 (58%) had received a bachelor’s degree after six years (Radford, Berkner, Wheeless, & Shepherd, 2010).

In light of this large divergence between the persistence rates of transfer students and students who began their academic careers at four-year institutions (native students), a copious amount of research has been conducted regarding both of these groups. Persistence is the commitment to and movement toward the goal of completing college (Tinto, 1975). The term transfer students refers to undergraduates initiating studies at a four-year institution whose previous college attendance includes attendance at or completion of a degree at a two-year institution (D’Amico et al., 2014). A rather large number of quantitative studies have been devoted to uncovering the factors that contribute to community college transfer persistence. Authors reported approximately twelve variables that exert a significant contribution to community college transfer persistence. Those variables, grouped into four categories, include personal factors, academic factors, demographic factors, and social factors (Kuh et al., 2006).

The personal factors include the student’s socioeconomic status, perceived locus of control, and the student’s motivation to finish a bachelor’s degree. The academic factors include the student’s grade point average (GPA), an earned associate’s degree, and the extent of interaction with faculty. Grade point average generally presented as student scores earned in high school and community colleges and is one of the strongest predictors in degree attainment (Wang, 2009). The demographic factors include race, ethnicity, age, and gender. The social factors include social integration, participation in clubs, and participation in athletics. Social integration refers to participation in school life; for instance, interactions with peers and school personnel and involvement with student organizations (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) or to relationships with peers, friendships and social acceptance (Stinson & Antia, 1999).
Statement of the Problem

Trying to make sense of or understand an experience or event in the way that people bring meaning to them is the essence of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Quantitative studies have addressed the what question; in this case, the what question contributes to student persistence. Qualitative researchers will not usually test for the cause and effect but, rather, seek to learn why. Many of the past quantitative studies conducted uncover the factors that contribute to community college transfer students’ persistence to a bachelor’s degree. However, few qualitative studies conducted, explore the community college students’ experience of the process of persistence to a bachelor’s degree. Even fewer studies have addressed the how question and the why question. In this case, the how and why questions generally speculate as to how these factors helped this student to persist to graduation. We know many of the influences that contribute to community college transfer persistence. The what, why, and how questions, asked time and again by past researchers, utilized quantitative methods to answer them (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). It is unknown why these factors are important and how these factors contribute to or explain community college transfer students’ experiences in persistence to graduation.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this research was to better understand the processes behind personal, academic, demographic, and social factors and why they interact with the experiences of community college transfer students. This how question will offer a proximate cause that is closest to causing the detected result. A secondary purpose of this study was to explore the reasons and seek to find a meaning in why the personal, academic, demographic, and social factors interact with community college transfer student persistence to graduation. Both of these
questions seek to find meaning and address an underlying mechanism. The interviewed students supplied their meaning as to why personal, academic, demographic, and social factors contributed to their success (Creswell, 2013; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

**Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study holds significance for five distinct groups. The results of this study makes a valuable contribution to community colleges in general and transfer issues in particular. Institutions involved in the transfer process, both two-year and four-year, benefit from the conclusions of this research. These institutions can increase retention and completion rates if they implemented the identified factors and recommendations based on the findings to the *how* and *why* questions. Faculty members who prepare community college students for transfer as well as university professors who teach transfer students may gain valid insights from the results of this study. Faculty members can benefit from this research because they can learn how to make the best of their limited non-teaching exchanges with students as well as help to encourage interaction that is more social. Academic counselors such as transfer advisors may benefit greatly from the findings of this research. Academic advisors can benefit from this research because they can utilize the results to make the best of their limited interactions with students. Finally, students who are preparing to transfer could find the information produced by this study to be extremely helpful. Students can see if they have the personal factors that they may need to complete. Students can ensure they acquire the academic factors the study participants identify as beneficial. Lastly, students can make sure they interact with their instructors, with students in class, and participate in social activities at the college.
Research Questions

This research study addressed the four following research questions:

1. How do community college transfer students experience personal factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree;
2. How do community college transfer students experience academic factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree;
3. How do community college transfer students experience demographic factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree; and
4. How do community college transfer students experience social factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree?

Conclusion

Transfer student persistence is a fascinating topic which has received a substantial amount of scholarly attention. Previous studies have addressed the what question and isolated four areas that play a role in producing transfer student persistence. There has been little scholarly attention given to the how and the why questions. This study sought to answer those questions by better understanding the processes behind how personal, academic, demographic, and social factors and why they interact with the experiences of community college transfer students (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In this chapter, I introduced the history of the community college, the firm establishment of the community college, the primary mission of the community college, and how the community college has changed throughout the years. The ways that the community college’s mission changed started at the end of WWII when the returning service men found need for more occupational training. Another way the mission of the community college changed was with the introduction of
remedial classes with the open access policy recommended by the Truman Commission (U.S.
Department of Veteran Affairs, 2013). In the 1950s, the community college emphasized
university transfer. Transfer rates rose to around 70% in the 1950s, but has steadily dropped to
around 40% in the 2010s (Cohen & Brawer, 2013). I introduced the statement of the problem, in
that we know which factors contribute to persistence to graduation of community college transfer
students, these factors have been identified by previous researchers. The purpose of this
dissertation was to better understand the processes behind how personal, academic, demographic,
and social factors and how they relate to the experiences of community college transfer students.
This study could potentially influence five different groups: researchers in community college
issues, institutions, faculty, transfer advisors, and the students themselves. In this chapter, I
discussed the research questions and the philosophical assumptions.

In the next chapter, I will introduce the reviewed literature utilized to instill a firm base
from which the researcher increased his understanding of the researched factors. The chapter
will review the elements involved in the four identified factors: personal, academic,
demographic, and social, that contribute to persistence.
CHAPTER II:
LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of transfer students has a rich history. A large cache of literature has been devoted to the process by which a community college student transfers to a four-year institution of higher learning. A slightly smaller but substantial body of literature has been devoted to the study of students after they have transferred to a four-year college or university. Within this category of literature, a significant number of studies have focused on transfer student persistence. A very limited number of studies have devoted themselves to transfer persistence through graduation. Of the transfer persistence studies, the overwhelming majority used a quantitative methodology. In this literature review, attention was paid to those quantitative studies that have explored which independent variables make noteworthy contributions to transfer student persistence onto graduation (Wang, 2009; D’Amico et al., 2014; Adelman, Daniel, Berkovits, & Owings, 2003).

Some authors have conducted studies regarding multiple factors in a single study and so their placement is in the section that most closely represents their findings. Researchers found a multitude of different personal factors throughout their investigations. The researchers found that the students who performed best had parents who engaged them early, believed in themselves, and were ready for college. Academic factors influenced persistence by a large margin by how well the student performed in high school, the two-year community college, and then the four-year college/university. Unfortunately, demographics seemed to also effect if a student will persist to graduation as many studies stated. Many studies stated that social factors which
included peer and faculty interactions, played a crucial role in the persistence of students (Stewart, Lim, & Kim, 2015; Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993; Wernersbach et al., 2014; Moreira et al., 2013).

**Introduction**

Wang (2009) explored the factors associated with community college transfer persistence. The study involved a sample of 186 cases which were part of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88) and the Postsecondary Educational Transcript Study (PETS). The study used logistic regression in order to determine which factors made a positive contribution to community college transfer persistence. The test employed a single dichotomous dependent variable: completed bachelor’s degree versus did not complete bachelor’s degree (Adelman, Daniel, Berkovits, & Owings 2003).

These studies tested 17 independent variables. Seven of these independent variables made a notable contribution to a transfer student’s persistence to graduation. The study concluded that the likelihood of attaining a bachelor’s degree is significantly associated with gender, socio-economic status (SES), high school curriculum track, baccalaureate aspiration, college involvement, community college grade point average (GPA), and locus of control (Adelman, Daniel, Berkovits, & Owings 2003). Locus of control is a person's sense of their command (internal locus of control) or lack of mastering (external locus of control) over his or her environment (Lefcourt, 1981).

According to the study, in terms of specific effects, the odds ratio (OR) for a female student to attain a bachelor’s degree is 2.459 times that for a male student. Students with higher socio-economic status are 1.278 times more likely to attain a bachelor’s degree when compared to students with a lower economic status (OR = 1.278). Students who completed a higher
academic curriculum are 3.278 times more likely to attain a bachelor’s degree when compared to students who were on a vocational curriculum (OR = 3.278). Students who expected to earn at least a bachelor’s degree when they were in the 12th grade are 3.312 times more likely to attain a bachelor’s degree when compared to students who did not expect to attain at least a bachelor’s degree (OR = 3.312). Students who were involved extracurricular activities in college are 1.941 times more likely to attain a bachelor’s degree when compared to students who are not as immersed in college (OR = 1.941). Students who transferred to a four-year institution with a higher GPA were 3.029 times more likely to attain a bachelor’s degree when compared to students who transferred to a four-year institution with a lower GPA (OR = 3.029). Students with a higher perceived internal locus of control were 1.178 times more likely to persist in postsecondary education when compared to students with a lower perceived internal locus of control (OR = 1.178) (Wang, 2009).

D’Amico, Dika, Elling, Algozinne, and Ginn (2014) investigated two factors derived from Tinto’s Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure. Their study considered the constructs of academic integration and social integration. The study employed logistic regression in order to determine which independent variables interact with significantly contributed to academic persistence for community college transfer students.

The study, confined to a single institution located in the southeastern part of the United States, boasted an enrollment of 26,000 with approximately 2,400 transfer students. Data were collected from a survey which was designed within the institution and administered annually. The data were retrieved from three cohorts who responded to the survey during the years 2008, 2009, and 2010. The authors reported a resulting sample size of 968 cases in the study (D’Amico et al., 2014).
The authors tested twenty-two independent variables for their contribution to the dichotomous dependent variable which was persistence versus non-persistence. The findings isolated two independent variables that exerted a positive influence on academic persistence for community college transfer students. The independent variable “academic integration” produced a 1.51 odds ratio which indicates that a student who feels that his academic institution is a good fit has a 1.51 greater likelihood of persisting than a student who does not feel that his institution is a good fit. The independent variable “class participation” produced an odds ratio of 2.18 which indicates that a student who asks questions in class and participates in class discussions often will have a 2.18 times greater likelihood of persisting than a student who does not ask questions and participate in class discussions.

Fauria and Fuller (2015) tested for educationally purposeful activities which contributed to overall transfer student GPA. The study involved a sample of 346 transfer students enrolled in “a large public institution of higher education in Texas during the 2010-2011 academic year.” (Fauria & Fuller, 2015, p. 43). The data culled from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and tested 19 items in order to determine which independent variables were significant predictors of higher GPA and greater degree completion.

The study employed a repeated hierarchical regression to determine which educationally purposeful activities were significant predictors of higher GPA. The study found four independent variables that were significant predictors of higher GPA and degree completion. Those independent variables were receiving prompt feedback from faculty members concerning performance (t(326) = 2.22, p = .029); tutoring other students (t(326) = 3.80, p = .001); asking questions in class (t(326) = 2.68, p = .008); perception of working harder than they thought they could to exceed an instructor’s expectations (t(326) = 5.57, p = .047) (Fauria & Fuller, 2015).
Wang (2012) examined a set of psychological, sociodemographic, and educational variables to determine their influence on academic performance measured by transfer student GPA. The advantage of this study is that the data were retrieved from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS 88/2000) and the Postsecondary Educational Transcript Study (PETS), both of which are nationally representative data sets. The study incorporated a sample of approximately 790 students.

The study utilized an ordinary least square regression model to predict transfer student GPA at a four-year institution based on a set of predictor variables. The following variables were registered as predictors of a higher GPA and were significant at $p < .01$: gender (female), positive self-concept, simultaneous enrollment, and community college GPA. The only variable which was significant at the $p < .05$ level was college involvement (Wang, 2012). Self-concept is an individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to self (Rosenberg, 1986).

Wang and Wickersham (2014) investigated the impact of vertical co-enrollment (attending a four- and a two-year institution simultaneously) and lateral co-enrollment (attending two institutions of the same level simultaneously). Data for this study were drawn from the Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study (BPS: 04/09) and the Postsecondary Educational Transcript Study (PETS 09). The study employed a multinomial logistic regression analysis. The dependent dichotomous variable was baccalaureate attainment versus no baccalaureate attainment. The study concluded that a student who was vertically co-enrolled had approximately a three times greater likelihood of baccalaureate attainment than a student not vertically co-enrolled (four-year attainment, OR = 2.986; six-year attainment, OR = 2.913).
Personal Factors

Webb, Dantzler, and Hardy (2015) investigated the factors that influence the transfer advising process. The study noted that the transfer rate from community college to four-year colleges or universities has decreased over the past 70 years. This study looked at the transfer process through the experiences of nine transfer advisors. Grounded theory was employed in the study because it was constructed to go “beyond the general parameters of qualitative research and explain the mechanics of a phenomenon” (Webb, Dantzler, & Hardy, 2015, p. 623).

The nine transfer advisors who were interviewed by the authors served students in 11 rural community colleges located in rural counties in Alabama. Data collection in this study consisted predominantly of interviews, conducted on four separate occasions with each of the nine participants in their offices. Data analyses were conducted on any correspondence from the participants. The nine advisors were recent University of Alabama graduates working in the Alabama College Transfer Advising Corps (ACTAC), the main focus of which was to assist and encourage low-income community college students to successfully transfer to a four-year college or university (Webb, Dantzler, & Hardy, 2015).

This study identified several personal factors called “properties” and placed them into five categorical factors. The five factors this study utilized included institutional, cultural, contextual, advisor, and student. Webb et al. noted that that even though they broke the factors down into five separate categories, all of them were student factors. The properties that were identified that pertained to personal factors were: economic perceptions, ties to location, ties to the past, fears, personal perceptions, and perceptions of outsiders, educational support, educational preparedness, and educational affordability, first generation college student, academic background, personal belief system, family background, home town, emotional
investment, training, near peer advising, goal formation, personal characteristics, and background. Many properties “did not exert a positive or a negative influence on the transfer advising process” (Webb, Dantzler, & Hardy, 2015, p. 630). In this study, one participant said the “lack of confidence in their own self, is the single greatest obstacle that students from rural communities have to overcome in order to negotiate the transfer process successfully” (Webb, Dantzler, & Hardy, 2015, p. 631).

Cejda and Kaylor (2001) investigated why community college students transfer before completing an associate’s degree. They utilized a case study approach, interviewing students who had transferred from a public community college to a public state university before they had completed an associate’s degree. The study utilized a case-study approach to “reduce the chance that varying institutional cultures or characteristics would result in differing answers regarding factors influencing time of transfer” (Cejda & Kaylor, 2001).

The authors confined the study to a single university and public community college in a Midwestern state. The enrollment of the community college was approximately 5,300 full time students. The university had 12,750 students enrolled full time. The authors studied 886 current students that classified as transfer students from the public community college and fit the study’s criteria of having more than 12 credit hours. In addition, the participants could not have attained an associate’s degree previously and were of traditional age. They utilized a “general interview guide approach,” which allows the interviewer to develop questions spontaneously and to establish a conversational style during the interview, as long as the emphasis remains on the already determined subject areas. Of the 886 students who fit the predetermined criteria, only 103 completed the interviews used in the study (Cejda & Kaylor, 2001).
The study examined several personal factors including marriage, divorce, birth, illness, death, and relocation and a very broadly defined term family support. The explanation of family support encompassed “understanding that time was needed to study and attend classes or pursue actions that were deemed above and beyond the ordinary” (Cejda & Kaylor, 2001, p. 630). Most of the 103 transfer students interviewed stated that their family members were supportive of their need for time to study and this support helped to influence their decision to transfer earlier than the student had originally intended. The study found that personal factors did attribute to time of transfer from community college to university. If a student had a change in their family status, they showed either this could be a hindrance or it would help them to transfer earlier. If community college students suffered negative changes in family status and a lack of a supportive and caring environment within the family but found one at the community college, the study found that the student would stay longer at the community college before transferring. The study recommends that community colleges continue to foster and develop such positive environments (Cejda & Kaylor, 2001).

The purpose of the study written by Davidson (2015) was to examine leading indicators as predictive factors of associate degree completion and transfer to a four-year institution. Davidson states that graduation and transfer rates vary based on precollege factors like race, ethnicity, gender, SES, and college readiness. The study proposed that, with “performance based funding models” incentivizing a college’s increase in graduation rates, the precollege factors necessitate consideration when determining specific “funding formulas” (Davidson, 2015). He warned that if not taken into consideration, they could adversely affect graduation rates for certain students.
The author utilized two models to frame this research, Tinto’s (1975) model of student dropout and Bean and Metzner’s (1985) extensive literature review which noted significant differences in traditional and nontraditional students. Many authors have extensively applied Tinto’s model in their work since its creation in 1975. The study noted that Tinto’s model includes many components including family background, individual attributes, goal and institutional commitment, and academic and social integration. Davidson noted that Tinto’s study stated that traditional age students attend college for both social and academic reasons, whereas Bean and Metzner noted that nontraditional students’ reasons for attending were strictly academic (Davidson, 2015).

The data in the Davidson study were collected from the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education in Frankfort, Kentucky. The sample was limited to first-time, full-time associate degree-seeking and undecided students at all public two-year institutions in Kentucky in 2008. The total number of students was 4,764. When Davidson removed some for missing data, the number dropped to 2,850 (Davidson, 2015).

This study found that two precollege factors, being low-income and being underprepared, are negatively correlated with completing an associate’s degree or transferring to a four-year university. The Davidson study also found that achieving certain “leading indicators” has a greater positive effect on associate degree completion or transferring to a four-year institution. This study describes the leading indicators as academic behaviors that increase a student’s likelihood of completion, but are not necessarily compulsory in order to complete an academic program. The personal factor that had the greatest negative correlation to degree completion and transfer was being underprepared. Such students would be required to take developmental courses which do not count for academic credit. An underprepared student going to college
needs a nurturing environment with an abundant familial and friend support to allow the student to become acclimatized to a hectic collegiate environment (Davidson, 2015).

Walsh and Kurpius (2015) conducted a study of persistence decisions; among these were precollege/background, residential status, and self-belief variables. They wanted to test these variables to see if the factors would account for the change in the persistence decisions of first-semester college freshmen. Walsh and Kurpius noted freshman students are most at risk for dropping out (p. 52). The study utilized Tinto’s model of academic persistence. Tinto’s theory of academic persistence is a highly regarded theory that attempts to explain why students voluntarily drop out of or do not persist in college.

The study, conducted at a large public university in a metropolitan area, studied students who were first-semester freshmen enrolled into a 100 level course, designed to promote “academic success.” The study utilized hierarchical regression with 378 students who were between the ages of 18 or 19 and provided a completed survey and had the correct factors the authors were screening for which was the previously noted age restriction. The authors gave the survey to the students during the class. The authors stated that the students gave consent when they returned the survey (Walsh & Kurpius, 2015).

Positive academic persistence decisions in this study included: residential status (living on-campus) and self-beliefs, specifically greater educational self-efficacy, self-esteem, and personal valuing of education. The study’s four hypotheses were tested by utilizing hierarchical multiple regression. Walsh and Kurpius found that students who greatly valued their education were more likely to make any adjustments needed to navigate college successfully and they are more likely to have positive persistence decisions. The primary predictors of more positive academic persistence decisions were living on-campus, higher self-esteem, greater educational
self-efficacy, and more personal valuing of education, with academic self-expectancy having a less powerful effect (Walsh & Kurpius, 2015).

Academic Factors

Stewart, Lim, and Kim (2015) conducted a study to find which factors influenced college persistence in first time college students. This study examined the relationship between ACT scores, high school GPA, first-semester college grade point averages, and persistence. The researchers were interested in finding out the extent to which mandatory placement in remedial courses predict persistence at a public research institution. This study utilized Tinto’s (1993) longitudinal model of institutional departure. The study suggests that support services such as tutoring, mentoring, counseling services, early intervention systems, and financial aid assistance will help mend study participants’ academic deficiencies and increase persistence beyond the first year.

Stewart et al. administered the study at a large four-year public research institution located in a non-urban environment with a total student population over 27,000. The subjects were 3,213 first-time, full-time and part-time, degree-seeking freshmen between 17 and 21 years of age who enrolled nonstop during the fall 2006 semester through the fall 2008 semester. The people being studied were subdivided into two groups: 332 fall 2006 freshmen who were placed in at least one remedial course and 2,881 fall 2006 freshmen who were not placed in any remedial courses. The academic factors that this study examined included pre-college academic performance as demonstrated by high school GPA and ACT composite scores, and college academic performance, represented by college cumulative GPA and remedial status.

The data for the study were analyzed using factorial ANOVA to test group differences in means on persistence between students placed in remedial courses and students not placed in
remedial courses. The results of this analysis revealed that high school GPA and the first semester college cumulative GPA together explain 26% of persistence in college. The authors found that high school GPA and the first-semester college GPA as significant predictors of persistence. The results indicate that first-semester college cumulative GPA had a statistically significant positive effect on persistence at $p < .01$. High school GPA had a statistically significant inverse effect on persistence at $p < .01$. Results from this study show that an inverse relationship exists between high school GPA and persistence, where an increase in high school GPA is related to a decrease in persistence at the same institution, meaning that the student may transfer out earlier than needed. The study suggests that high academic performance in high school may not predict persistence at the same post-secondary institution beyond the first year. The study concluded that traditional aged college students who were academically prepared to take college-level coursework at a selective public college were more likely to persist beyond the first year at the same institution than students who placed in mandatory remedial coursework (Stewart, Lim, & Kim, 2015). The authors noted that it was imperative that students resolve academic and transition issues early during the first year to help underprepared students be successful in higher education. Interventions, such as tutoring programs, academic advising, and counseling programs help under prepared students succeed in college (Stewart, Lim, & Kim, 2015).

Cabrera, Nora, and Castañeda (1993) investigated two theories used to explain the college persistence process. These two theories are Tinto's Student Integration Model and Bean's Student Attrition Model. According to the authors, the two theories share many commonalities and overlaps. Cabrera et al. hoped their research would help to merge the two theories. The study employed PRELIS and LISREL VII to help estimate parameters, provide a confirmatory
assessment of convergent and discriminant validity, and enable an assenting valuation of construct validity. The authors employed a longitudinal research design for this study.

The study utilized the student population of the freshman class of 1988 at a large southern urban institution. The number of students who met the criteria for use in this study equaled 2,459. Data were gathered, by means of two survey questionnaires which were given at two points during the spring 1989 and fall 1989 academic year. The questionnaires yielded 466 useable surveys total. The researchers noted that they had slightly underestimated the student attrition rate which actually was 17% versus the estimated 15.5% (Cabrera, Nora, & Castañeda, 1993).

The authors examined many different variables and among these were; three items for academic integration, one item for academic performance, and another two for goal commitment. Academic integration looked at the students’ satisfaction with the how well they performed, curriculum, and their academic experience. This study measured academic performance by utilizing cumulative grade point average in the spring 1989 semester. Goal commitment looked at how important for the student to get a college degree and to finish his or her program of study. The study found that the largest total effect on persistence was accounted by intent to persist (0.485), followed by GPA (0.463), institutional commitment (0.273), encouragement from friends and family (0.217), goal commitment (0.133), academic integration (0.083), finance attitudes (0.054), and social integration (0.046). Finance attitudes included student satisfaction of the financial support they received in the form of grants, loans, family assistance, and working jobs (p. 130). The authors noted, “Intervention strategies must address those variables that can be manipulated and which have been found to be the strongest predictors of predispositions to leave” (Cabrera, Nora, & Castañeda, 1993).
Townsend and Wilson (2006) investigated the factors which affected academic and social integration of community college students after they had transferred to a four-year institution of higher learning. In this qualitative study, the researchers interviewed 19 transfer students in order to understand what specific issues cause them to struggle with the transfer process. The study produced three major findings. The first finding was that students receive a greater amount of personal attention at the community college than at the university. The second finding was that university officials expect community college transfer students to function in a more proactive and autonomous manner than community college officials expected. The third finding was the academic culture of a university was less accommodating for students than community colleges were. The conclusions of this study was that these three primary findings were instrumental in causing problems for students who were seeking to navigate the transfer process from a community college to a four-year institution of higher learning.

Wernersbach, Crowley, Bates, and Rosenthal (2014) investigated whether or not study skills courses improve student retention, and the impact of study skill courses on students’ academic self-efficacy. This study examined the pre- and post-test levels of academic self-efficacy of students who enrolled in a study skill course. The authors hoped that, by increasing a student’s study skills, it would enable the college to better retain the student, and allow the student to have a better chance to persist to graduation. The authors stated that academic self-efficacy should be included in academic factors that help students persist like other academic indicators such as ACT/SAT scores and GPA. Students, enrolled in the study skill courses had a lower initial self-efficacy and, because of the study skill classes, increased greater than students in general education courses.
The study, administered at a large, Carnegie Doctoral Research state university in the West with an enrollment of approximately 28,000 students. The study used a sample of undergraduate students from a course designed for study skill intervention as well as a sample of comparison students from general education courses, but not enrolled in any study skills courses. The authors sought to answer three research questions: 1) was there a statistically significant difference in the students from the study skill class versus the general education students; 2) did the students in the study skill class demonstrate a greater change in self-efficacy; and 3) could the authors use self-efficacy scores and GPA to determine student retention? The authors recruited students at two points in the semester and asked them to complete the survey individually and at their convenience online via Survey Monkey (Wernersbach et al., 2014).

Study skill classes that some universities offer are created to improve effective note taking skills, time management skills, and preparing for and taking exams, among other things. Academically underprepared students initially had lower levels of both study skills ability and academic self-efficacy on many of the variables tested. Results from the series of independent sample t tests, indicated that there was a significant difference between groups regarding age, ACT composite score, and high school grade point average. The authors found that underprepared students tended to be older than comparison group students. They found that underprepared students had lower ACT composite scores and high school GPAs. Interestingly, academically underprepared student scores increased at the end of the study, reflecting their anxiety, motivation, and testing strategy skills compared to students in the general education classes. The researchers found that, academically underprepared students increased their self-reported skill ability and their feelings of confidence in using those skills which is their academic
self-efficacy. Interestingly, the gains the students in the study skill class had were greater than the general education classes (Wernersbach et al., 2014).

Moreira et al. (2013) performed a study to find out if academic related skills, like study skills, academic goals, and academic related skills, increased educational persistence. The authors noted that there is a growing pool of evidence of the correlation between educational persistence models and motivational theories which include developmental contexts, study skills, and academic objectives. They argue that academic-related skills should be included in “integrative approaches to academic performance.” The main goal of this study was to evaluate the predictors of academic performance, integrating educational persistence, motivational, and study skill indicators.

The study examined 384 Portuguese secondary school students that were between the ages of 16 and 21. The authors utilized ANOVA and found that differences between the four “clusters” they tested were statistically significant. The four different clusters were groups of students who presented with: the highest academic performance, the second highest academic performance, the third highest academic performance, and the lowest academic performance. The authors collected information about several indicators from theories of persistence and motivation. The authors noted the factors they tested were significant in both college and high school students in several previous studies (Moreira et al., 2013).

Indicators of educational persistence (SES, parental involvement in the school and teachers’ behaviors) and of motivational models (academic goals and academic-related skills) were the stronger predictors of secondary students' academic performance. The writers found that the profiles with the greatest values in all the measurements presented higher academic performance and profiles with the lowest values in all the dimensions showed the lowest
academic performance. The authors noted that their study “supports the inclusion of the study skills in the integration of indicators from educational persistence theories” (Moreira et al., 2013, p. 123). Lastly, the study suggests that schools need to incorporate study skills as a relevant domain of students’ engagement with school, rather than use them as an unapplied factor (Moreira et al., 2013).

**Demographic Factors**

Takako Nomi (2005) described first generation college students (FGCS) and some of their demographic characteristics. A FGCS is defined by this article as students whose parents who have not received any postsecondary education. This report brings together findings related to the demographic characteristics, goals, and college experiences of FGCS currently enrolled in credit bearing courses.

This representation of FGCS is drawn from responses on a survey received from 49,893 students enrolled in credit-bearing courses at 158 community colleges between fall 2001 and fall 2003. The students took the Faces of the Future Survey, administered by the American Association of Community Colleges and ACT. ACT’s selected Nomi for their Summer Internship Program; this brief was conducted during her tenure at ACT. The different demographic characteristics, goals, and college experiences that were reported on were for FGCS and their peers were; gender distribution, distribution of white and minority students, race/ethnicity, and others (Nomi, 2005).

First-generation college students (FGCS) are less likely to be of traditional college age which is 17 to 21, Nomi noted that FGCS were had a median age of 24. FGCS are more likely to be women at approximately 67%. FGCS are generally more satisfied with attending community college to develop career skills, obtaining an associate’s degree, and transferring to a four-year
college versus non-FGCS. Nomi stated that FGCS were more racially and ethnically diverse than their peers, with 36% being members of minority groups. These students were most likely to work full time, be the primary wage earners, and support dependents (Nomi, 2005).

Mitchell and Hughes (2014) examined the relationship between community college student demographics and instructor interactions as they relate to intention to persist in college. The authors looked at eight characteristics: instructor-student interaction, student-instructor interaction, age, sex, generation status, children, employment, and enrollment status. Mitchell and Hughes utilized logistic regression analysis to examine data from the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE). Their theoretical framework utilized Tinto’s model of student integration, Astin’s student involvement theory, and Bean and Metzner’s model of student attrition. The purpose of the study was to study the connection between the student demographic characteristics of age, sex, generation status, time-commitment characteristics, children, employment, and college enrollment status on community college students’ intent to persist to graduation.

The authors analyzed data from the SENSE study of community college students’ demographics and instructor interactions as they relate to persisting in college. All data for the study were archival data from the SENSE dataset administered at 120 community colleges from 30 states provided by The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE). The total enrollment of the colleges the authors used was 789,012 students with the survey generating 50,000 usable surveys. The authors administered the survey in courses selected from the student population of all first level English, math, and developmental education courses. The authors utilized logistic regression analysis to examine the relationship between a community college
students’ intent to persist and the predictor variables of age, sex, generation status, children, employment, enrollment status, and others (Mitchell & Hughes, 2014).

The study indicated that all eight predictors made statistically significant contributions. The “age” factor showed that nontraditional students were 1.49 times more likely to persist than traditionally aged students. Female students were 1.30 times more likely to persist than male students. Non first-generation students were 1.21 times more likely to persist than first generation students. College students who already had children were 0.82 times more likely to persist than students who did not have children. Interestingly, students who worked more than 30 hours a week were 1.11 times more likely to persist than those who worked less than 30 hours a week. The authors stated that they could not find an explanation for this finding but hypothesized that students who worked full time recognized the value of attaining a college degree. Students who were taking full-time classes were 1.34 times more likely to persist than students enrolled less than full-time. When considered together, all eight predictor variables were statistically consistent in distinguishing among students who persist and those who do not (Mitchell & Hughes, 2014).

Markle (2015) investigated the factors that influence persistence among nontraditional students. The author noted that nontraditional students have a much lower graduation rate than traditional students and consisted of one third of American undergraduate students enrolled in 2011. The author defined nontraditional students as being aged 25 years or older. This mixed-methods study, examined the factors that influenced the persistence among a sample of 494 nontraditional men and women undergraduate students attending a large public university in the southeastern United States.
The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the factors that influenced persistence over a three-year period among a sample of nontraditional students from a large public university in the southeastern United States. Markle defined nontraditional students as students who were 25 years old or older, had a five-year gap between high school and college, were employed either full or part time, or were serving as a caretaker, partner, parent, or spouse. This definition varied from the definition she stated earlier in the study. The author stated that she was unable to locate much evidence that the demographic factors she was studying directly influence persistence among nontraditional students. She stated that only age had a small negative impact, but only for men, not women. The author used independent sample t tests to discover gender variances in persistence and logistic regression were used men and women separately (Markle, 2015).

In the results, the independent variables Markle studied included the demographic characteristics of gender, race/ethnicity, age, and household income. The author used these demographic factors to see if a student was to persist and if the student considered withdrawing. Markle found that in gender, persistence differed in nontraditional students; males were more concerned with finances and if persisting was worth their efforts, while females found difficulty handling their different roles. The positive findings were that males saw persistence to completion as a means to an end or for increased earning potential. Women found persisting to graduation a transformative, a degree would show that they were deserving of respect and capable of achievement. Markle did not find anything important to report regarding race/ethnicity and did not mention them in the qualitative data section. She found that age “intensified concern” in both men and women. Men thought that, because of their age, they should just keep their regular job, whereas women considered withdrawing because of their
family and work role conflicts. Markle reported that household income was a concern for both sexes. Both genders noted that college took time away from their regular jobs decreasing their desire to persist. The cost of college was another concern as the female subjects saw college as spending money that they did not have. Males had concerns with the pressure of being a good provider (Markle, 2015).

Fairlie, Hoffman, and Oreopoulos (2014) authored an article that explored how race and ethnicity factors mattered between faculty and student interactions and how these related to persistence. The authors noted that African-American achievement gaps appear in elementary school and persist throughout primary and secondary education. Their concern was that over the last two decades the achievement gap has not decreased for those involved. The authors note that there is a lack of minority instructors at the collegiate level. Less than 10% of all full-time instructional faculty at colleges are black, Latino or Native American, while the students who belong to these groups make-up close to one-third of college students.

Fairlie, Hoffman, and Oreopoulos (2014) stated that they “offer the first systematic empirical study of minority interactions between students and instructors at the postsecondary education level (p. 2568).” They utilized data gathered from De Anza College which has around 22,000 students per year, and a larger share of minority students than the national average. Their data covered grades received, student dropout behaviors, and credits received, for every student enrolled from 2002 until 2007. They were able to match the courses with the instructor data and the students’ race/ethnicity, age, and gender.

The authors found that there was a minority effect in the area of dropout behavior. Interestingly, the authors found that if a minority instructor taught the class, dropout of minority students decreased between two and three percentage points. The college in which the data were
taken required the student to drop within the first three weeks of the term which is well before the final grades are due. The authors found that interaction with faculty and students of the same race held long-reaching consequences. These included “subsequent courses in the same subject, major choice, retention, and degree receipt” (p. 2584). The minority instructors did not have any sway with the students’ grades or progress other than possibly serving as role models or to help generate interest in a field of study. The authors also found negative effects when white students took classes from minority instructors. African American students who took classes from instructors of the same race incurred high gains across all areas the authors studied. According to the study, race and ethnicity of instructors do appear to exert long-term outcomes and short-term effects on grades and other outcomes (Fairlie, Hoffman, & Oreopoulos, 2014).

Social Factors

Kelly et al. (2012) developed a study to determine college students' perceptions of selected social factors that influence student persistence. They noted that college enrollments have steadily increased throughout the years but graduation rates have dropped. They noted the National Center for Education Statistics (2002) found that only 31% of students who began as “first-year full-time undergraduates at four-year institutions” completed a Bachelor’s degree in six years. Sadly, the study noted that graduation rates are similar at private not for profit institutions (35%) and even lower (13%) at for profit institutions. The authors report that almost 70% of high school graduates enroll in a post-secondary institution.

The study followed three research objectives to ascertain how college students perceived selected social factors. The three objectives are describing personal characteristics, what social factors encourage student persistence, and what social factors discourage student persistence. This study utilized a survey and utilized a modified Delphi technique “because of its ability to
achieve a convergence of opinions regarding real-world knowledge” (p. 656). There were 320 students selected for the study. The researchers used a series of emails from a welcoming email to reminder emails sent each week until the study concluded. The study utilized t-tests and received an 87.5% response rate (Kelly et al., 2012).

Several social factors were reported to have a positive impact on influencing student persistence including a positive relationship with professors, positive course experience, recreational facilities, desired social status, positive peer encouragement, and the university's athletic teams. The authors concluded that the identified social factors helped make up the social structure for the students who responded at the tested university. There were some factors that this study identified as “social” that other studies identified as personal factors, these were family encouragement and positive peer encouragement (Webb, Dantzler, & Hardy, 2015; Cejda & Kaylor, 2001; Davidson, 2015). They note that university personnel should actively seek feedback from students to assist the student in achieving their social needs. Students are more likely to persist at an institution when they find themselves in sympathetic social groups (Kelly et al., 2012).

Bowman and Dodge (2011) studied the reasons for persistence to graduation in athletic training education programs. The authors stated that there have been previous studies that have explored some of the negative aspects of student retention. Luckily, they focused on the positive. They utilized qualitative methods to gain a more holistic look and so they could gain a better understanding of what the interviewed students were meaning with their responses. To accomplish this, the authors employed semi-structured interviews, with follow-up questions that allowed the answers to bring more clarity to the interview questions.
The study utilized 14 students who met the criterion for testing and were in post-professional program work. The students represented six research institutions, six master’s institutions, and two baccalaureate colleges based on the Carnegie Classifications. The students involved in the study represented eleven different states, and six of the ten different districts within the national athletic association. With the represented geographic diversity, the participants were thought to bring different perspectives than if they were from one university. The authors used grounded theory and utilized Axial coding to help explain patterns of behavior for those involved (Bowman & Dodge, 2011).

The finding of this study included that the perceived interactions with faculty and classmates had a significant impact on the persistence of the student. The faculty interactions assisted the student by improving the students’ willingness and eagerness them to learn on their own. The counseling of students by the faculty also assisted the students by helping them make the transition to college athletic training culture. The participants noted that the organized and interconnected manner in which athletic training education programs function, as well as the small “family like” atmosphere, played a significant role in how many persisted. The authors noted a student’s successful integration into the college athletic training culture benefitted the participants and their decisions to persist to graduation. A prominent feature reported was the family like atmosphere. The authors stated it was present in small programs with only a few students, as well as large programs with a large number of students. The authors urged program directors to ensure that they were bringing in high quality students and to retain the family-like ambiance for students to prosper (Bowman & Dodge, 2011).

Martha Ellis (2011) authored an article that explored the attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge achieved by successful community college transfer students. The study makes note of
how more than 80% of Texas baccalaureate degree recipients enrolled at more than one college or university. Also reported was that community college students who completed at least 30 credit hours before transferring did as well as native university students in grade point average and graduation rates.

This study conducted focus groups at each of the University of Texas campuses in 2009. The focus groups consisted of between six and twelve students who recently transferred from a community college to one of the universities which is also the only criterion to be eligible for the study. The total number of student respondents was 68. The authors asked the students in the focus group to describe their own personal experiences in response to the questions being asked (Ellis, 2011).

Students noted themselves, a personal factor, as the most influential person in “encouraging transfer,” then family, and lastly friends. The students shared some shocking stories about community college and university advising and how important peer advising was for them. The students noted that orientation exclusively for transfer students was beneficial; this can assist with socializing students to the university and each other. The participants noted that most faculty members appreciated interaction with students. In this study (Ellis, 2011), the students in the focus groups stated that they did not have much interaction with faculty during or after class. This is a stark contrast to other studies (Bowman & Dodge, 2011). They mentioned supplemental instruction as an addition that encourages a fair amount of social interaction with other students. Sadly, the students mentioned that the universities they were attending made “minimal effort” to unite students. The study made note that successful transfer students would discover “champions” on the community college and university campus and they would return to seek help from or celebrate success with them throughout their time on the campus (Ellis, 2011).
Kuh et al. (2008) studied whether the relationships between student behaviors and institutional practices and conditions foster student success. They utilized two research questions for this study. The first research question, does student engagement during the first year of college have an impact on a students’ grade point average, their chances on returning to college for the second year? The second research question they utilized was, are the effects of engagement general or conditional? Student engagement represents both time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities and how much effort institutions devote to using educational practices.

Kuh et al. (2008) utilized data from 18 baccalaureate colleges that completed the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) at least once between 2000 and 2003. The NSSE utilized five benchmarks in part developed by Kuh; these are to measure the level of academic challenge, enriching educational experiences, active and collaborative learning, supportive campus environment, and student–faculty interaction. Eleven of the colleges served mostly White students, four held the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) designation, and three were Hispanic-serving colleges. This study utilized data from 6,193 students, as these were the only students that had complete data for all of the variables of interest. This study utilized the data from some colleges’ ACT/SAT score reports. This data included background characteristics and high school experiences.

The Kuh et al. (2008) study found that pre-college characteristics and experiences influenced the first year grades and persistence. Interestingly, when quality collegiate experiences occurred, they replaced both pre-college characteristics and experiences. When their engagement reached the average amount, African American students were more likely to return than their White counterparts were for a second year. The study suggested that in order to
increase persistence to graduation, colleges should employ well designed and executed orientation, first year seminars, learning communities, and theme-based campus housing, among others. It was noted that students who were required to take responsibility for activities that required daily choices and responsibilities became devoted in the activity, more dedicated to the college, and hence their studies.

**Theoretical Framework**

There are a number of definitions of what a theory is. Kerlinger (1986) defines theory as “a set of interrelated constructs, definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting phenomena” (p. 9). Argyris and Schon define theory as “a set of interconnected propositions that have the same referent” (pp. 4-5). From a qualitative perspective, Strauss (1995) describes theory as a model or a map of why the world is the way it is. More specifically, Strauss describes theory as a clarification or an explanation of some aspect of the way the world works. This research study will simplify the definition set forth by Strauss and consider theory as an explanation of a phenomenon.

There are a number of descriptions of what a theoretical framework is and how such a framework functions in research. For example, Merriam (2015) views theory as a *guide* by which the research can be governed and controlled. Anfara and Mertz (2015) described a theoretical framework as a *vehicle* which drives the research in the direction it needs to go. Another way to describe a theoretical framework is as a *lens* to focus the proposal (Harris, 2015; Hemstrand, 2015). Fowler (2015) utilizes the metaphor of a *giant sieve* by which extraneous data is separated and filtered out from the data to make it more appropriate for the study. Mutch (2015) established a *broken mirror* as a metaphor to describe how research deconstructs data and then
reconstructs that data in new and formative ways. This research project will utilize the theoretical framework as a fence which places parameters around the research. In other words, this research does not look to theory as a control or a governor, or a road map but to casually guide the research which to keep the focus of the study within the designated boundaries of the research topic.

This study utilized the student retention framework established by Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011). This theoretical framework sets forth 13 propositions to explain the phenomenon of student retention. The 13 propositions use a strategic approach to increase retention by bringing attention to the factors students display. The propositions conveniently break down into the four factors studied in this proposal: personal, academic, demographic, and social.

Six propositions fit into the personal factors: financing college, attribution theory, value theory, goal-setting theory, self-efficacy beliefs, and optimism. The first proposition, financing college, means the student is working while attending college, paying tuition through loans or grants, and being financially dependent or independent are factors related to undergraduate retention (Tinto, 2004). Attribution theory, or the second proposition, means students are likely to persist in their efforts at learning when they feel they are in control and when their outcomes are viewed as internal, stable, and controllable (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2006). The third proposition is value theory – this is the value students’ assign to their coursework and how it influences their continued enrollment (Bong, 2001). The fourth proposition is the goal-setting theory. Individuals who set goals are more likely to perform at higher levels versus individuals who do not set goals (Locke & Latham, 1990). The fifth proposition is self-efficacy beliefs. When students believe they are efficacious and competent, they will persist on tasks and develop
higher goals for tasks (Bandura, 1977; Bean & Eaton, 2000). Finally, optimism is the sixth proposition - academic and dispositional optimism are associated with higher levels of motivation and judgment, as well as with a lower rate of college dropout (Nes, Evans, & Segerstrom, 2009).

Four propositions fit into the academic factors: academic preparation, academic engagement, expectancy theory, and academic self-concept. Academic preparation is the quality of a student’s prior instruction and his or her preparedness for college level work can significantly influence whether or not a student will succeed at an institution of higher education (Bean, 1980). This is different from the second proposition, academic engagement which sees positive faculty-student interactions and taking advantage of resources that promote academic success as being been demonstrated to positively influence retention (Wycoff, 1998; Habley, 2004). The past academic experiences of academic success and failure influence current perceptions and decisions are part of the third proposition known as expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964). The final proposition is academic self-concept and states that, when students believe they are academically competent, they will perform well in the academic realm (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985).

The authors combine all the demographic characteristics into one proposition and do not expound much on them. Two propositions into the social factors section which are social engagement and motivational orientation. Demographic characteristics are all factors in the retention puzzle and include the Parent’s level of education, gender, ethnicity, family income and distance of hometown from the institution (Choy, 2001). Social engagement is one of the two social factor propositions – it means the act of socially integrating into a campus community shows as a cumulative process, so it is essential for students to connect to campus culture early
on in their academic experience (Swail, 2004). The second social factor proposition is motivational orientation. Students with a balance of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation tend to perform best in college level coursework (Lin & McKeachie, 1999).

**Gap in the Literature**

The analysis of the quantitative studies, coupled with information from the theoretical framework, suggest that 12 independent variables exert a significant influence on the outcome of transfer persistence to graduation. Those 12 independent variables neatly categorize under four headings: personal factors (perceived locus of control, motivation); academic factors (GPA, associate’s degree, course involvement); demographic factors (race, ethnicity, age, gender); and social factors (campus activities, club participation, athletics).

The gap in the literature consists of a lack of specificity concerning these independent variables and how they contribute to transfer persistence to graduation. The quantitative studies have answered the *what* question by telling us which factors contribute to transfer persistence in this case, *what* contributes to a student’s persistence. What is lacking is a study that will address the *why* and the *how* questions. *How* and *why* do personal, academic, demographic, and social factors contribute to persistence to graduation? A study needs to fill this gap in the literature. The qualitative study will work towards determining the significance of the independent variables in predicting transfer success and how each of these variables contributes to transfer success.

**Conclusion**

A significant number of quantitative studies tried to determine which factors play a significant role in predicting transfer student persistence. The gap in the literature is that only a few qualitative studies show understanding of why these factors are significant in predicting transfer student persistence or how these factors contribute to transfer student persistence. This
study will seek to strengthen this insufficient amount of available literature by focusing on the four factors. The retention framework set forth by Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) is utilized to set boundaries around the study to ensure the focus remains on better gaining a better understanding of how personal, academic, demographic, and social factors contribute to the phenomenon of transfer persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree.

In the next chapter, I give clarification to which methods I utilize to investigate the reasons why the factors are significant in predicting transfer student persistence to graduation. The chapter provides an in-depth review of the university that provides participants for the study. The other sections explored include participant selection, the data collection techniques, means of data analysis, the philosophical assumptions, timeline of the study, the ethical considerations, researcher positionality, validity, the limitations, and lastly the delimitations.
CHAPTER III:

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings. They attempt to make sense of things as individuals see them. By using this collection of data from a natural setting, it allows for the input of the participants, the reflection by the researcher, and a complex description of the problem to propose a call for change or to demonstrate its impact on literature (Creswell, 2013). While a specific definition of qualitative research is difficult to find, much of the literature has some of the same themes included in their descriptions of qualitative research. Creswell (2013) says that qualitative research:

1) is always completed in a natural setting; 2) usually involves multiple methods; 3) always involves complex reasoning varying from Inductive to deductive; 4) usually focuses on the participants’ meanings, their perspectives and their multiple subjective views; 5) usually presents a holistic picture; 6) sometimes it is reflective of the researcher’s thought process; and 7) usually involves an emergent and evolving design rather than tightly prefigured design. Qualitative research refers to the meanings, theories, explanations, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and depiction of most things (Berg, 2007).

Method

Qualitative research is designed to focus on the how and the why questions of research. According to Creswell (2013), one of the primary uses of qualitative research is to deepen the findings of quantitative research. The what question is substantially acknowledged in higher education research of transfer student persistence to graduation. I chronicled in the literature review and the theoretical framework sections of the previous chapter, the quantitative studies
which addressed this issue. I categorized which variables exerted a significant influence on transfer student persistence to graduation under the following designations: personal, demographic, academic, and social. Qualitative research is best employed to investigate the reasons why these variables are significant in predicting transfer student persistence to graduation as well as how these independent variables exert a significant influence on transfer persistence to graduation (Mack et al., 2005).

Merriam (2009) describes the method that will be employed in this research as a “generic qualitative study,” (p. 22) while Savin-Baden and Major (2013) portray it as “pragmatic qualitative research” (p. 172). The study was not attempting to generate a theory to explain a phenomenon as a grounded theory. The study was not attempting to view a phenomenon through a cultural lens as ethnography. The study was not seeking to explore a group’s experience or meaning-making process as a phenomenology. The study was not intending to focus on a single individual with a unique story as a narrative inquiry or bound by time and space as a case study. This is an informational study which seeks to enhance the findings of previous quantitative and qualitative studies. As such, the pragmatic qualitative research design was the most appropriate method for answering the research questions and fulfilling the purpose of the research project.

**Restatement of the Research Questions**

This research study addressed the four following research questions:

1. How do community college transfer students experience personal factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree;
2. How do community college transfer students experience academic factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree;
3. How do community college transfer students experience demographic factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree; and
4. How do community college transfer students experience social factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree?

**Setting of the Research**

The interviews took place at the university in which the students were currently enrolled, the students’ natural setting. Permitting the student to stay in their natural setting allowed the students to be more relaxed and more apt to furnish adequate and truthful information. The interview area enabled no distractions, no interruptions, and successful recording of the interviews, permitted the student the opportunity to pick the interview spot. Sometimes the student was unable to suggest or find a place for the interview, so I offered a pre-selected and agreed on location via the college gatekeeper, mainly the lounge area of the library. I conducted the interview in a relaxed face-to-face manner. Viewing the students in the natural setting of the university allowed a sense of how the transfer student fits in their university (Creswell, 2013).

In the early 1880s, the small regional university opened. It is located in the southeast United States, and nestled in a rural area. According to the university’s website, the campus is made up of close to 80 buildings spread across just over 450 acres, as well as off-site locations in the surrounding areas. The university was first established as a normal school and was known as and operated as a teacher preparatory school for students of the town and surrounding areas. The college changed in the 1930s when it increased its role in higher education. In the 1950s, the first graduate program started at the college, the Master’s Degree in elementary education, and caused the name of the college to change again. In 1960s, the college earned university status and later started conveying a Doctorate Degree.
The college boasts an enrollment of over 8,500 students and includes undergraduate and graduate pupils. The faculty consists of over 300 full-time and nearly 200 part-time employees. The college offers over 45 degree programs at the bachelor's, master's, post-baccalaureate, and doctoral levels, as well as advanced certificate programs. The college asserts over 40% males, almost 60% females, nearly 6,000 full time and 2,000 part-time students.

The mission of the college is to deliver distinctive educational, cultural, and social experiences for a diverse student population. As a learning-centered university, they strive to challenge students academically in a responsive environment, meeting students' educational, career and personal goals. As an academic institution, they seek to produce broadly educated graduates prepared for global engagement. As a public, comprehensive university, they promote excellence in scholarly and service activities consistent with its academic and professional strengths.

**Participant Selection**

This study employed purposeful sampling which involves selecting particular individuals who are especially knowledgeable about or possess unique experiences regarding the research problem (Creswell, 2013). Many types of purposeful sampling exist. The specific type of purposeful sampling used in this study is maximum variation sampling. According to Creswell, maximum variation sampling is the researcher striving to maximize the differences between the interviewed students. This will increase the likelihood of differences and perspectives. Maximum variation sampling is a type of purposeful sampling in which I attempted to expand the types of participants in the study to the greatest number of differences available (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). In this study, participants were distributed along the lines of gender, age, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic status. With this in mind, out of the interviewed transfer
students: 1) 12 were male and 8 were female; 2) 19 were close to traditional age; and 3) 1 was a non-traditional age student. Out of the 20, a mixture was taken from students who are white, black, other nationalities, or ethnicities, and a mixture was taken from students who are receiving school loans like university aid or federal subsidized loans, receiving financial aid like federal Pell grant, federal work study, receiving scholarship, or payed for their classes themselves.

This study employed three sampling criteria. In order to be a participant in the study, an individual was required to be a transfer student who had completed at least 110 semester hours and intent to persist. The study relied on a gatekeeper to gain access to the participants. An employee of the college acted as gatekeeper for this study in the admissions office of the university and had ready access to students and their academic records (Creswell, 2013). The gatekeeper helped with suggesting a quiet setting for the interviews once they were scheduled. Lastly, the gatekeeper assisted with the navigation of the campus and ensured that security was aware of my acceptable presence on campus.

**Description of Participants**

The final participant selection rendered a total of 20 participants. The age range of the participants was 20-24 years of age, accompanied by one participant who was 43 years old. Eight participants were female and 12 participants were male. The races of the participants included two Latina, five African American, and 13 Caucasian. Nine participants were first generation college students. Fifteen of the participants required some type of financial adjustment in order to continue their studies. A listing of the participants and their demographic characteristics is presented in Appendix B.
Recruitment Process

The gatekeeper obtained a list of transfer students. The gatekeeper checked the transcripts of transfer students to assure they had completed at least 110 credit hours and met the participant selection criteria as outlined in that section. The only needed contact information for each participant was email address and telephone number. An email, sent to each of the suggested participants, gained their willingness to sit for an interview. A second email, sent one week after initial email, attempted to contact the participant again, and contained the same information as the first with the additional note that this is the second email attempt. Once the participant expressed interest, a phone call transpired with each transfer student to set a time for the interview, further explain the study, and answer his or her questions.

Data Collection

This study involved one primary form of data. This data source came from interviews. Data collections occurred in 20 semi-structured interviews of approximately 1.5 hours each. Semi-structured interviews give the interviewee basic considerations which need to be addressed, like keeping the interview focused on the topics previously defined, refrain from suggesting answers and be careful not to ask leading or closed ended questions, but allow the respondent a measure of flexibility in responding to questions (Brinkman & Kvale, 2014; Cohen, 2006). Twelve specific interview questions (see Appendix A) derived from the four research questions for use in collecting data assist the researcher in answering the research questions. One interview took place with each participant in the study. This resulted in at least 30 total hours of fieldwork. A brief post interview helped to review any field notes taken during the interview process.
Data Analysis

This study employed a two-cycle approach to data analysis (Saldana, 2016). Once an interview was completed, transcription occurred shortly thereafter. The first cycle of data analysis incorporated holistic coding. Holistic coding (Dey, 1993) helps capture the essence of the communication the participant conveyed in the interview. Holistic coding gave me the ability to take sections of interview text and put them in broad categories that defined the basic parameters of the research (Saldana, 2016).

The second cycle of data analysis employed in vivo coding of the data. In vivo coding (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) incorporates the actual words of the participants. Applying in vivo coding accomplishes three goals. The very word of the participants gives explanatory vigor to the holistic codes discovered in the initial cycle of coding. Additionally, in vivo codes enable the reader to experience the phenomenon of transfer success through the lens of the participants. Finally, the in vivo codes give voice to the sentiments of a group of transfer students (Saldana, 2016).

The actual analysis of the data was accomplished by the following six steps. The initial step involved a thorough reading of each transcript in order to become familiar with the data. The second step consisted of holistic coding. The transcript was printed on the right side of the page which left the left side of the document blank, because I am left handed. The holistic codes consisted of the essence of what was being communicated in the transcript. Each holistic code was written on the left side of the transcript. A holistic code consisted of one to five words.

The third step in data analysis consisted of accumulating all of the holistic codes. There were 126 holistic codes listed in the transcripts. All 126 codes were written on a 36- by 48-inch artist sketch pad. Each code received a number which corresponded to the number of times the
code was mentioned in the holistic coding exercise. The fourth step involved in categorizing the holistic codes under a higher order of language called themes. Each theme corresponded to a specific research question. Research Question 1 accumulated three themes. Research Question 2 accumulated four themes. Research Question 3 accumulated three themes. Research Question 4 accumulated three themes.

The fifth step in data analysis was in vivo coding. Each transcript was read a third time with attention given to salient quotations, anecdotes, and stories told by the participants. These in vivo materials were indexed to the specific themes which they would explain in the document of evidentiary findings. The sixth step involved producing an analytic outline which would guide the writing of chapter four. The highest level of each section which governed the chapter was the research questions. The second level of each chapter consisted of the themes which answered the research questions. The third level of the outline consisted of the holistic codes which explained the themes. The fourth level of the analytic outline included the in vivo materials which illustrated the holistic codes and the themes.

Confidentiality and Data Storage

According to The University of Alabama’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), confidentiality is an agreement between the investigator and the participant about how the gathered data are disclosed, managed, and stored (http://osp.ua.edu/site/irb.html). A pseudonym was developed for each participant and any data connected to the participant was held in a file under that pseudonym. The files were kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office. All electronic voice recordings, emails, documents, etcetera were kept in a password-protected file on my work computer, as well as, a locked and encrypted USB drive in a fire proof safe located at my office. No one has access to the paper files or the electronic files without my consent. The students
being interviewed were asked to sign an informed consent form that detailed the goals and processes of the research study and how any information being provided was utilized in this dissertation. Shortly after successful completion of the dissertation, all personal data will be destroyed.

**Philosophical Assumptions**

The philosophical assumptions of pragmatism inform this research study. Pragmatism rejects the incompatibility thesis which is a disagreement about how quantitative and qualitative research are incompatible with each other, established by the metaphysical paradigms, a set of basic beliefs or model which were set forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Pragmatism does not view the paradigms of post-positivism and constructivism as mutually exclusive. Pragmatism bypasses the questions of ontology, epistemology, and axiology in favor of methodology, understood from the perspective of research questions, goals, and practices (Morgan, 2007).

A pragmatic approach allows for encouraging methodological relevance to enable researchers to increase their methodological flexibility and adaptability (Cameron, 2011). Simply stated, pragmatism focuses on the topic of the research, utilizing whichever methods or research techniques considered appropriate in order to achieve consistent findings. From a practical perspective, this means that the researcher focused on the practical implications of research while ensuring that the study addressed the research problem (Creswell, 2007).

Appropriate research questions coupled with consistent methods of data collection and analysis place emphasis on the execution of the research design. The research design implemented the pragmatic qualitative research format. The ultimate objective was to achieve findings that are realistic, valid, and credible.
Timeline of the Study

The study proposal defense occurred in June of 2017. IRB approval was received during the summer 2017 semester. Data collection took place between July and October 2017. Data analysis was conducted from July through November 2017. The writing of the document transpired between November 2017 and early February 2018. Defense of the dissertation was scheduled for March 2018.

Ethical Considerations

This study encountered two known ethical issues. The first concerns anonymity. In order to overcome this obstacle, the names of the participants in the study were masked by pseudonyms. The institution where the participants are enrolled were be masked by a pseudonym (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

The second ethical issue confronted in this study involves the ethical obstacle of privacy. In order to overcome the ethical challenge of privacy, the following three measures ensure safety. All documents and recordings of data are currently kept in a locked filing cabinet in the office of the researcher. The only person with access to the data is the researcher. The researcher will not discuss the personal details of any participant with any other individual. Finally, after the conclusion of the study, the researcher will destroy all data collected in the study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Researcher Positionality

A positionality statement will clarify the researcher’s interest in the topic and identify any biases that the researcher brings to the study (Charmaz, 2014). The positionality statement will allow the reader of the research to determine how much credibility to attach to the findings of the research. Researcher positionality encompasses an individual’s world-view and which position
they have selected to adapt in relation to research tasks (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). According to Savin-Baden and Major, there are three ways researchers acknowledge positionality: 1) by tracing themselves in relation to the subject and acknowledging personal positions that have the possibility to influence the research; 2) by discovering themselves in relation to the students being interviewed, or how the researcher views themselves, as well as, how others see them, while the researcher acknowledges how the students being interviewed may be unaware of how they created their identities; and 3) by finding themselves in relation to the research context and process, admitting that study will unavoidably be influenced and will be prejudiced by the researcher’s background.

I am interested in the issue of transfer student persistence to graduation for a number of reasons. Personally, I was a transfer student who successfully transferred and persisted to graduation with a bachelor’s degree. For the past eleven years, I have been a community college instructor in a department of Health and Physical Education, specializing in athletic training. In this capacity, I have worked with a large number of students who have transferred from community colleges to four-year institutions of higher learning. Some of these students have persisted to graduation and some have not. In light of these experiences, it is natural that I would be interested in the factors that exert a significant influence which contribute to transfer persistence to graduation. I made every possible attempt to stay neutral while interviewing, deciphering, and coding the information provided by the participants.

**Validity**

This study incorporated the following strategy in an effort to increase the validity of the study and control for bias in the findings. The validating strategy used in this study is expert analysis (Creswell, 2013). In expert analysis, the researcher consulted an expert in the field of
methodology to review the findings of the study and the methodological procedures that produced those findings (Merriam, 2009). The approval of a methodological expert, as well as, the dissertation committee lent credibility to the findings and enhanced the overall validity of the research.

Limitations

There were two limitations identified in this study. The first limitation concerned the veracity of the data. Simply stated, the researcher has no guarantee that the participants in the study answered the interview questions truthfully. This limitation was addressed by “negative case” analysis which is when the researcher refines a hypothesis until it addresses all findings within the data (Merriam, 2009). In a group of 20 participants, if one participant is not answering the interview questions truthfully, that individual should emerge at some point as a negative case.

The second limitation this study faced was the confusion between race and ethnicity. Many studies have lumped these two different attributes into one category. This is because it is not common practice for colleges to gather data on different ethnicities, only races. Students may not know what ethnicity they identify with or they run the risk of a classification error by the researcher. Just because a person looks like they belong to a certain race does not mean they identify with the stereotypes associated with that race. For example, someone adopted at an early age from a one country and moved to another may not know much about the culture he or she were born into but only the culture they were raised in.

Delimitations

This study takes place at a regional university located in the southeast United States. The study was further delimited to 20 community college transfer students, from various community colleges, in the final semester of their baccalaureate degree.
IRB Approval

After the dissertation proposal was approved unanimously by the dissertation committee, IRB approval was sought. The process of IRB approval involved the following activities: A recruitment letter was requested and approved (see Appendix C). A copy of the consent form was requested and approved (see Appendix D). The University of Alabama IRB approved the research proposal (see Appendix E). The site University IRB also approved the research proposal (see Appendix F).

Conclusion

In order to answer the research questions, fill the gap in the literature, and fulfill the purpose statement this research study employed a qualitative methodology. The research method utilized was pragmatic qualitative research. The study utilized a research design that was flexible and emergent. This research design guided the collection of data by means of interviews. Data were analyzed through a two-cycle strategy. The first cycle employed holistic coding. The second cycle employed in vivo coding.
CHAPTER IV: 

FINDINGS

Introduction

To begin, an explanation of how the study findings are presented in this chapter is in order. First, the major headings of this chapter will correspond to the four research questions: personal factors, academic factors, demographic factors, and social factors. Second, the subheadings will correspond to the themes which emerged from the data analysis. Each sub-section contains a thematic construct which contributes to answering each specific research question. Third, while analyzing the data collected in the study, it became apparent each participant made a unique contribution to answering the research questions. There were several occasions when a group of participants contributed to the development of a theme. I present specific data from specific participants that, in many cases, are representative of the common or similar experiences of multiple people interviewed. The goal here is to be illustrative of the perspectives of the participants, rather than to exhaustively catalogue each person’s responses to every question in the interview protocol. In cases where there are contradictory viewpoints, every effort is made to ensure that those positions are also given voice.

Research Question One

How do community college transfer students experience personal factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree? In response to the initial research question, three specific themes emerged from the data. The students who participated in this research study characterized themselves as individuals who want to succeed. One participant stated, “Failure is
not an option.” Another participant stated, “Success is not the primary goal. It is the only goal.” The personal factors which characterized students who persisted to graduation with a bachelor’s degree, were motivation to succeed, self-efficacy (confidence) to succeed, and plans to succeed.

Theme 1: Motivation to Succeed

As a general rule, the participants in this study could be characterized as self-starters, somewhat aggressive personalities, and driven to accomplish. Certain words and phrases surfaced throughout the interviews. Phrases such as give it 110%, take pride in everything you do, and never give up were repeated in what seemed like every interview in some way. The participants had strong feelings about working hard, accomplishing goals and never settling for less than their best. Motivation for these students was a top priority. They considered motivation to be the starting point of their academic success and accomplishments in life.

The first example of motivation was set against the backdrop of parental example. This participant, Hunter Freeman, grew up in a moderately sized rural community. He excelled in high school and is set to graduate with a major in finance and business. He is currently carrying a 3.70 grade point average. When asked about the source of his motivation, this participant told a very interesting story.

Mr. Freeman had a very close relationship with his parents. He mentioned his father retired young as a manager from Goodyear tire and rubber, with an excellent pension. His mother recently retired as a schoolteacher, again, with an excellent pension. He commented, “They are on easy street, they have it made, they are just cruising, and I want that for myself.” This young man had a number of pictures on his phone. He pulled them up and said, “These are my parents at Mount Rushmore, and here they are at Yellowstone National Park.” For this
participant, freedom to move, freedom to travel, and freedom to not worry about financial considerations were strong influences which motivated him to succeed academically.

Hunter Freeman was an example of a student who had the advantage of parental motivation. Both of his parents had at least bachelor’s degrees and were economically advantaged. As a result, Hunter had the advantage of moral as well as financial support. Hunter also had a model to follow. His parents were academically and economically successful and hunter had the privilege of observing the means for which his parents used to achieve their success in life.

The second example of motivation was set against the backdrop of collateral encouragement. This participant, Candice Pestis, also grew up in a rural community. She did well in high school although she did not excel. She admitted being “scattered” as a teenager. She was not certain about what she wanted to do with her life. As a result, she described herself as “unfocused.” All this came to a screeching halt when she was a freshman in college. During the Christmas holidays she received a jolting message from the university she was attending. The message informed her of her first semester grades, they were below the acceptable standard and she was no longer a student at the University. She confessed, the most common factor was spending too much time in her sorority and not enough time studying.

This young lady had to recover from the shock of this message. She knew she had to “pick up the pieces of her life, buckle down, grit her teeth, and start doing something about her situation.” Ms. Pestis enrolled at the local community college and commenced to work on a degree in business marketing. Four years later and Candice stands on the apex of realizing her dream of receiving a bachelor’s degree. When asked about the source of her motivation, Ms. Pestis had a very interesting tale to tell.
Candice confided she was a first generation college student (FGCS). She related her parents were encouraging with respect to her academic desires, but were unable to offer substantive advice or support. Her parents also were unable to offer her any monetary support. Candice was required to support herself throughout college. Ms. Pestis related she had as many as three part time jobs while taking a full load. Candice’s venues of employment included an auto parts store, work as a marshal at a motorcycle track, a motorcycle repair shop, and waitress at a chain restaurant. When asked about the source of her motivation, Candice had a unique experience.

According to Ms. Pestis, she received encouragement from the customers she served in the part time and full time jobs she held. She remarked,

On many occasions, customers would notice my books and ask if I was taking classes in college. They would always seem impressed, offer me kind encouraging words, or tell me how impressed they were to see a young person working their way through college.

There was one specific customer who would come and find Candice anytime she worked at the motorcycle park. “I worked as a marshal at the park and she would come up and ask how my classes were progressing and make sure I was on track, I feel like she would be heartbroken if I did not finish.” For this participant, collateral encouragement formed the bedrock of her motivation to succeed academically.

Candice Pestis did not have the advantages of parental motivation which were evident in Hunter Freeman’s account. As a FGCS, Candice did not have parents who could provide a model for her to follow. In addition, Candice did not have the luxury of economic support. Without a model for her to follow, Candice had to learn many lessons the hard way. Lacking a model to follow, Candice encountered failure and had to come to grips with her personal situation. Candice is an example of personal motivation. After experiencing failure, Candice took a long
look in the mirror and motivated herself to learn from her mistakes and move forward toward her
goal in life.

The third example of motivation was set against the backdrop of negative feedback. This
participant, Ashandra Ketchum, was a FGCS whose parents immigrated to the United States
from Mexico. Ashandra was a small child when she arrived in this country. Ashandra stated,

I have never been to Mexico. I have no idea what it is like there. My culture is American
because this is where I grew up, although, I do enjoy the Latino culture. I am completely
different from my parents. They grew up in a culture where they were lower class
economically and they had to accept this position as their lot in life. I grew up believing if
you have dreams and you work hard you could improve your lot in life. As a result, I was
never content to just say, ‘I am poor so I just need to accept my station in life and be
content.’ That never set well with me.

There was an obvious difference of cultures between Ms. Ketchum and her parents. From
a collectivist culture, her parents believed everyone has their position in life and it is important
for people to accept it and make their own unique contribution to the collectivist whole. On the
other hand, Ms. Ketchum displayed the mentality which is characteristic of an individualist
culture which sees a reality that says, “Your potential is just as big as your desire is.”

A day came when these cultures clashed. During her senior year in high school, Ashandra
was eating lunch with some of her friends in high school. Her friends were talking about where
they would be going to college. Some were going to a southeastern regional university, some to a
west central university, and several to a variety of community colleges. Later in the evening,
Ashandra asked her parents where she was going to college. Her parents responded to her,
“Ashandra, Get your head out of the clouds. We cannot afford to send you to college, you will
have to get a job as a waitress at a Mexican restaurant.” When asked about the source of her
motivation, Ms. Ketchum said, “A lot of people come to mind but the main person who pushes
me to achieve is myself. I took this source of negativity as a challenge to prove my parents wrong.”

Ashandra Ketchum exemplifies the phenomenon of negative motivation. Ashandra was told that she was not capable of pursuing a bachelor’s degree. There were so many obstacles in front of her. She was told that she would never be able to accomplish this goal. She was encouraged to settle for something less than what she truly desired. In addition, she was chided for wanting to rise above her station in life. Instead of crumbling under the negative pressure, this participant used the negativity as a motivation to succeed. The literature did not acknowledge negative motivation as an important factor in student success. However, in this study negative motivation was an important factor which several participants acknowledged as contributing to their academic success.

**Theme 2: Self-Efficacy (Confidence)**

A second theme which emerged from the data, was self-efficacy. Confidence and belief in one’s self are character traits which permeate the data; all participants in this study professed to have a high degree of self-efficacy. One participant said, “If you don’t believe in yourself, how can you expect anyone else to believe in you.” Another participant commented, “At some point in your life you have to look yourself in the mirror and say, I can do this, otherwise, you are going to be sentenced to being a loser for the rest of your life.” Two participants manifested a very high degree of self-efficacy.

Alexander Marshall, an African-American football player, grew up in an extremely economically deprived area in the largest city of the state. He was the product of a single parent family. At a young age Alexander’s mother attempted to commit suicide. Alexander recalled coming into his mother’s room and finding her unresponsive; at first he thought she was just
taking a nap. He wanted to tell her some good news about school. He shook her and she did not awaken. Then Alexander noticed a pill bottle next to the bed. Most of the pills were missing from the bottle; he saw two on the floor next to the bed. There was a half empty glass of water on the nightstand. Alexander said,

> At that point I knew something was bad wrong. I had always heard that if you had an emergency you were supposed to call 911, so I dialed the number and told them my mama was asleep and I couldn’t wake her up. I don’t remember much after that. All I remember was pushing down on my mama’s chest and saying over and over, ‘Mama don’t leave me! Mama please don’t leave me all by myself.’ It seemed like ten seconds but I imagine it was at least ten minutes when I felt a hand on the back of my shoulders. I looked up and saw two men in the white uniforms. They told me I had done a good job and they would take over. They unfolded one of those beds with wheels on it. They put my mama on that bed and rolled her over to the ambulance. They put my mom in that ambulance and drove away. I remember standing in the driveway praying, ‘Dear God, please don’t let this be the last time I ever see my mama.’

This event was an obvious traumatic and life-changing event in the life of a small child. Alexander commented his mother had been severely depressed and had come to the conclusion he would have a better life if she were not in the picture. Alexander confided his mother did make it through the “rough patch” in her life. Alexander related most of his experiences through this traumatic event in his early life. When asked where his confidence came from Alexander said,

> Standing there, pushing on my mother’s chest, I will never forget those words from the man in the uniform, ‘Son, you’ve done a good job.’ From that point in my life I have always had this little voice in the back of my head telling me that I could handle anything that life through at me. On many occasions we have faced adversity on the football field. Mentally I go back to that day when I had to keep my mother alive until the paramedics arrived. Then everything else looks trivial. I just say to my teammates, ‘this is a piece of cake, just follow my lead.’

Alexander Marshall is an example of self-efficacy through crisis. A few participants in the study grew up in less than ideal situations. These participants were products of broken homes, raised in single parent families, in crime infested neighborhoods. As a result, these
students encountered tragic situations at an early age. These encounters with danger and death produced a large measure of self-efficacy in these participants at a young age in life. Alexander Marshall is an example of the type of individual who had to mature and acquire the skills of crisis management at an early time in his life. These participants were able to navigate their way through difficult academic waters because they had experience in dealing with crises which went far beyond a bad grade.

Mason Cooper is a bi-racial student from a state in the Midwest. He is also the product of a single-parent family. Mason is a first-generation college student. When asked, “Mason how does an 18-year-old guy from a state in the Midwest end up at a community college in this state?” He responded,

I have always been a fan of college football and as long as I can remember I have wanted to be a part of a collegiate football team. My dream has always been to be involved in the athletic department at a certain university. So, I packed up my car and moved to this state. I found a pre-athletic training program at a northeastern community college. I figured I could start working on the associate’s degree and transfer to my dream college.

Mason confided things had not gone as planned. He completed his associate’s degree and transferred to the Athletic Training Program at a south western university in the state. Unfortunately, Mason did not excel at the university and was forced to leave after the first year. Devastated by these events, Mason was left to pick up the pieces of his life. All alone in a strange place, 900 miles away from home with no family or friends to support him, Mason had hit rock bottom.

Mason was asked, “How did you dig yourself out of this hole?” Mason responded,

I did not dig myself out of the hole, I was sitting in my room one day with the lights out and feeling sorry for myself. I was reflecting on how big a loser I was and in the darkness I heard a strange noise. It was my phone telling me, I had received as text message. I looked at the text and it was from one of the former instructors who had taught me when I was working on my associate’s degree.
Mason said,

I read this text message and realized my former instructor was not aware that I had failed out of the program. The first thing that came to my mind was ‘This is so cool! At least one person on the face of the earth actually gives a damn about me!’ He had simply written to see how things were going. No one else had written me to see how I was, I thought about telling him that everything was great. Then I thought to myself, it would just be a matter of time before he discovered I had lied to him. Then, I thought why not just be honest and tell him the truth. However, I felt so ashamed and did not want him to be disappointed with me. After much personal debate I decided, as long as I was being a loser at everything else I might as well go ahead and tell him what was really going on.

Mason then recounted a noteworthy story which transpired over a two-year period.

Mason drew inspiration and self-efficacy from this former instructor. This individual helped Mason dig himself out of the well of despair which held him captive. Mason shared three valuable lessons which this former instructor gave to him. Mason said,

The first lesson my mentor taught me was I was putting way too much pressure on myself and I was attaching my self-worth to my academic and career accomplishments. My mentor helped me get everything in perspective. A second lesson was to be open to other possibilities. I remember him telling me if I was not meant to be an athletic trainer I was meant to be something else. That caused me to start thinking about possibilities. I eventually landed on sports psychology. I transferred to [this university] and enrolled in a program which would lead me in the proper direction. The third lesson my mentor taught me was to enjoy the ride. I remember him telling me over and over something that completely changed my mindset. Rather than look at life as a chore to be endured, I look at life as an adventure to be explored. When I made this adjustment in my thinking everything seemed to fall in place. When I ran into academic difficulties I viewed them as challenges and instead of crumbling before them I decided to enjoy them. When I adopted this mindset I never ran into an issue I could not handle. In one more semester, I will graduate with a bachelor’s degree and can continue to pursue a degree in Sports Psychology.

Mason Cooper exemplifies the concept of self-efficacy through mentoring. Mentoring was a concept which every student in this study considered to be an important factor in their academic success. There was always some important adult figure who gave advice and encouragement to these participants. The lack of confidence or a low self-efficacy can be an important factor which proves to be an obstacle which blocks the path to academic success.
Often, a mentor functions as a role model and a coach who infuses confidence into those students who are feeling like failures. Mason Cooper was a powerful example of a student who benefitted from a mentor who went the second and third mile to ensure that he believed in himself.

**Theme 3: Plans to Succeed**

Another theme which surfaced during the research was "plans to succeed." All the participants in the study exhibited strong characteristics of organization, time management, and planning. Two participants demonstrated a usual focus on their future goals in life. These two participants demonstrated remarkable skills in formally mapping out their future. These two participants are Chris Sanford and Chase Carmichael.

Chris Sanford, is a 43-year-old military veteran who did two tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. He was in the Coast Guard and the Navy. He served 15 years and retired with an honorable discharge. Chris is single with no children. He lives alone and is a full-time student. Chris is a first generation college student who has only slight ties to family and relatives.

Chris' story begins approximately 20 years ago. Out of high school, Chris enrolled in his local community college as a general studies major. As a naïve teenager Chris followed whatever advice he was given. Unfortunately, Chris was not given sage advice. He ended up taking the wrong classes and became very frustrated when he discovered he had "spent the better part of the year wasting his time." In a dejected frame of mind, Chris decided it was time to quit school and join the military.

Chris' first experience in post-secondary education was not an enjoyable one, but it was nonetheless an informative one. Chris said,

I learned a very valuable lesson from my brief time in academics. I learned I needed to educate myself, figure out what I needed to do, and go after it. I learned not to depend on other people to tell me what to do. I learned it was my responsibility to become the master of my own fate and captain of my own destiny. I learned it was my responsibility
to be proactive and not sit around waiting on some benevolent ‘master’ to float down from the sky and point me in the direction I needed to take. The military taught me not only that I needed to be a ‘take charge’ type of person, but also how to become that type of person.

Chris ties the unique ability to plan for success back to his military experience. Chris said,

In the military we learned very quickly if you failed to plan then you planned to fail. When you have an enemy you have to fight you need to have a battle plan. You need to know as much about your enemy as you can, his strengths and his weaknesses. You also need to know your own strengths and weaknesses. You need to devise a plan to maximize your enemies’ weaknesses and minimize his strengths. Your plan will also need to maximize your strengths and minimize your weaknesses.

When Chris was asked how he planned for success, he answered in the following manner.

I find out what classes I need to take. I have them mapped out for each semester until I graduate. My GI and Pell Grants will run out at the end of 2017. I will be left with one semester and a summer session in order to graduate. I will have to take advantage of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) loans to cover those tuition payments. I know exactly how much money I will need to live on. I have it all figured out down to the penny. Once I finish, I will have a Bachelor’s Degree in Computer Science. I will get a job working for the Government. I will work for 15 years and then retire with two pensions.

Chris Sanford presents an example of planning developed through discipline. A common characteristic of every participant in this study was a planning mentality. Planning involves discipline, self-dependence, and self-knowledge. Chris Sanford represents a number of participants in the study who stumbled coming out of the blocks. These participants failed initially because they lacked discipline and focus in their lives. Each participant in this group realized they had to become proactive and learn the skills in mapping out their future. Chris developed these skills while he was in the military. Other participants took initiative to develop these skills through some other form of suitable discipline.
Chase Carmichael is a first generation college student from a rural community. True to his rural roots, Chase wants to stay close to where he grew up. Chase describes himself as a "dreamer" and an "achiever." Chase said,

I can't put my finger on it but I have always thought outside of the box. I have always had one goal in life and that was to enjoy life. Everyone has always told me that I am an optimistic person; maybe it is because I am he youngest in my family. Growing up I had an older sister. She always worried about everything and scolded me about not being more serious. I remember every time she told me to be more serious I would start acting silly just to annoy her. Maybe that is here I got my carefree, happy-go-lucky, attitude.

When asked how he planned for his future Chase responded in the following manner.

My sister has a friend who is an accountant. One day I asked her why she chose an accounting major. She told me the pay was good and she did not get hassled while she did her job. Then I met a guy who was a finance major. I asked him why he majored in finance. He told me his job was a lot of fun and he made a lot of money. I thought this sounded good so I decided to major in accounting and minor in finance. Ultimately, I want to be an entrepreneur. I like to eat and my two favorite types of food are Italian food and steak. It occurred to me one day; everyone seems to like steak and Italian cuisine. Then I asked myself ‘have I ever seen an Italian steakhouse?’ I drew a blank which is how I came up with my dream. I plan to open up an Italian steakhouse in my hometown.

Chase has given a lot of thought to how he's going to realize this dream. He said he had an eight-step plan for opening his Italian steakhouse. According to Chase,

I have already done some research on the Internet to find out if there are any Italian steak houses. I could only find a few and they were located in places like New York City, Miami, and Las Vegas.

This information tells me I have a fairly unique plan. I am taking all the ‘entrepreneur’ classes at [the University]. I am learning a lot about what it takes to start a business. I plan to enroll in an Italian cooking class over in Atlanta. Then I am going to experiment until I create a signature Italian steak. There is a building in my hometown. It used to be a restaurant. The man who owns the building likes my idea and is willing to let me use the building if he can be a minority shareholder. I have a friend who is majoring in marketing. He is going to be my partner. He will handle the marketing side of the business. I have solicited a number of ‘angel investors’ and have already received some favorable responses. My ultimate goal is to develop this restaurant into a casual dining chain. I know there are a lot of things to take into consideration, but I think I have made a good start.
Chase Carmichael represents the concept of planning through dreams. Chase was one of those individuals who had the unique combinations of creativity mixed with self-discipline. Chase was able to think outside the box, be open to events surrounding him, and creatively integrate those elements into a dream of something which he desired to accomplish in life. Like Chris Sanford and every other participant, Chase Carmichael realized that he needed to be proactive in accomplishing a plan that would make his dreams a reality. The uniqueness of Chase’s experience was that his dream was the catalyst which produced a proactive nature which prompted him to take initiate to acquire the skills of planning.

**Research Question Two**

*How do community college transfer students experience academic factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree?* The data collected in response to the second research question fell naturally into two specific categories. The participants in the study compared and contrasted their community college experiences with their university experiences. There were specific experiences that were negative and other experiences which were positive. Both institutions had their strengths and their weaknesses.

**Theme 1: Negative Community College Experiences**

There were two negative community college experiences which surfaced throughout the data. One negative experience related to advising and another related to the curriculum. Not every participant had bad experiences in these areas. In fact, some participants acknowledged having positive experiences with respect to advising and with respect to the curriculum. However, a number of students expressed stronger feelings with respect to these two areas.

**Ineffective advising.** Alyssa Tudisco is a first-generation college student who was raised in a single parent household. Her father died when she was three years old. Alyssa mentioned she
could not remember him other than a few recollections. She was severely bullied in high school and learned to put on a happy face so her mother would not worry about her. Alyssa said she wanted to attend the community college so she could reinvent herself. Alyssa commented, “I want to become the person I wanted to be and not the person the bullies tried to force me to be. I thought this would be a good way to gain confidence in myself.”

This intention went southward quickly when Alyssa received some ineffective advice during her first semester at community college. According to Alyssa, she received bad advice from an academic adviser. Alyssa said,

I was assigned to a woman in the admissions department. She was supposed to be my academic advisor but she did not seem to know very much about what she was doing. She did not give me the impression she cared about me much or my course of study. She had a list of courses on a sheet of paper. She picked five of the classes and wrote them on my registration form. Next, she typed them into the computer and I was registered for the first semester of classes. It wasn’t until the end of the first semester that I realized I had just taken two classes which were not in my field of the study. I had just wasted 40% of my time, energy, and money.

When asked how she felt about this event, Alyssa said,

I felt horrible. I felt miserable. I felt like I was back in high school being bullied all over again. I felt like I just could not catch a break. I felt helpless and hopeless. It seemed like bad things just kept happening to me and there was nothing I could do to stop them or make them go away.

Alyssa was asked if there was any lesson she learned from this experience and she said,

Absolutely! I learned I had to grow up, get tough, and take care of my own business. Actually, this was a pivotal moment in my life. From then on, I made it my business to make sure that I knew what classes I needed to take and I registered myself from that point forward. I completely bypassed the academic advisor. I learned a valuable lesson which applied to every area of life. Don’t just give people power over you! Look out for yourself. If you don’t, no one else will.

Alyssa Tudisco is an example of how ineffective academic advising leads to demoralization. A small number of students in this study encountered this experience. The majority of students who received ineffective advising were FGCS. These students did not have
the background or the experience to understand which courses were required for their degree and which classes would transfer to the four-year institution of higher learning. These participants simply trusted their academic advisors to lead them in the proper direction. It should be injected at this point that some of these problems did not relate back to the community college advisors. On some occasions the non-transferability of courses resulted from inaccurate information from the university. It is also important to mention that experience of ineffective advising translated into empowerment in the lives of these students. In a previous section, Chris Sanford experienced academic failure which led him to become more proactive about academic planning. Alyssa Tudisco and other members of this group allowed the disappointment of ineffective academic advising to function as a positive in their lives. These students decided to become proactive in developing their own schedules from semester to semester. These students developed an intense form of self-sufficiency as a result of ineffective academic advising.

Nicholas Looney is a biracial male who is from a traditional two-parent family. Nick, as his friends call him, plays on the university basketball team. Nicholas was a standout athlete at his community college. Mr. Looney was a class representative in the student government of his community college. Nicholas had a mildly negative experience with academic advising at the community college level. This was an experience shared by seven of the participants in this study. When asked about his academic advising experience Nicholas responded,

What experience? What academic advisor? I didn’t know I had one. No one ever told me ‘Hey Nick, you have an academic advisor and you need to go see him.’ I wish I had known I had an academic advisor. I didn’t know we had someone who was supposed to help us figure everything out. I guess I just thought we were supposed to do this on our own.

I asked Nicholas if there were any negative consequences from doing his own advising. He responded,
Not too much. When I transferred, I think there were two or three of my classes which would not transfer, I did not consider that too big of a deal. Once I got to [the University] and discovered we had academic advisors I asked some of the other students about their academic advisors in community college. I was surprised that most of those students who had academic advisors in community colleges also had to take two or three extra classes because some of their courses did not transfer. So, in the end I reckon I didn’t too bad a job.

Nicholas Looney is exemplary of the concept of ineffective advising as a non-factor. A number of students in this study had one or more parents who had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Many of these students had attended a high school where they received good college predatory classes taught by knowledgeable counselors. These students knew which courses they needed to take, which courses would transfer to which universities, and where to look if they needed any additional information. Nicholas Looney was a prize example of a student from this group of participants. These participants already knew how to navigate the waters of academic advising and many of these participants by-passed the academic advisor altogether.

Ineffective curriculum. The students in this purposeful sample were classic overachievers. Thus far, I discovered as a general rule, the students were highly motivated, self-confident, goal-oriented, highly organized, and focused individuals. Therefore, it will not surprise the reader of the somewhat cynical view the students have of the community college curriculum. During the interviews, I heard comments like "these courses were too easy," "I felt like I was in grade 13, not in a real college," and "the teachers were extremely boring."

One dramatic example of a student who is not enchanted with the community college curriculum was Abraham Bolah. Mr. Bolah, an African-American student, was offered a baseball scholarship to a university but he tore the labrum in his right shoulder and was unable to continue in his baseball career. Abraham enrolled in the local community college and began studying electrical technology. Abraham was an exceptional student who graduated with an
associate’s degree in electrical technology from his community college. Mr. Bollah was awarded an academic transfer scholarship to the university where he presently studies industrial safety and has desires to pursue a master’s degree and perhaps a doctorate.

Abraham Bolah had very specific ideas about his academic experience at the community college level. Abraham made the comment,

I found the community college to be way too easy. For example, I was shocked on the first day when I discovered the students were not required to attend class. I attended the first few classes and came to the conclusion my time could be better spent doing other things. The instructors were boring for the most part and most of them gave you a syllabus on the first day which told you everything you needed to know for the midterm and the final exam. I found that to be quite convenient because A's came easy, and there wasn't a lot of stress. However, once I got to [the University], I discovered that I was in a different ball game. I was in class with junior level students who knew a lot more than I knew. It dawned on me that all those easy classes had not prepared me for the real university.

Abraham Bolah is a sterling example of the concept of non-challenging curriculum based on academic level. A small number of participants possessed a high level of academic expectations as well as academic aspirations. These participants had high GPA’s from high schools and the possibilities for academic scholarships. Many of these participants aspired to be professionals in their chosen field. It was not surprising to them that community college classes did not challenge them. They felt as if they were not properly prepared at the community college level to enter the university. These students may have been better advised to enroll as freshmen at the university than their community college if their financial constraints did not prohibit them from doing so.

A second example of a student whose academic experience was not enthusiastic at the community college level was Madison Shelby. Madison is 23 years old and the mother of one. She attended community college immediately after high school. She graduated with an associate’s degree in general studies. Ms. Shelby transferred to the university to pursue a degree
in exercise science. Madison dropped out of the university after one year. After a two-year hiatus, Madison returned to the university and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in exercise science at the end of summer 2017.

Madison traveled a tumultuous road on her academic journey. When asked about her experience, she made the following remarks,

I started out at the community college. I had been told to start out at the community college in order to pad my GPA. I found that to be good advice for the most part. Some of the classes I took were challenging, but most of them were very simple. I sailed through the community college without having to put forth much effort. Little did I know but that was about to change drastically. When I transferred, I discovered that the real university was a lot more difficult than I anticipated. I discovered that the classes I have taken in the community college left me inadequate for the task which lay ahead of me at [the University]. At the end of my first semester I was so overwhelmed, I simply could not take it anymore. I dropped out of school and did not want to look back. A year and a half later, I found myself pregnant with no man. I knew right then, if my baby boy was ever going to have any kind of future, his mama was going to have to get her act together and get back in school to finish her degree. While I was in labor, I was on the phone registering for classes at [the University]. The nurses asked me what I was doing and I told them I was making sure my baby had a future.

Madison Shelby is an example of a student who encountered the community college as a non-challenging curriculum based on life expectations. Most of the participants who fell into this category were non-traditional students. These participants had children or held down full-time or more than one part-time job in order to pay their bills, provide for their family, and pay their tuition. These participants were not interested in becoming side-tracked by what they considered trivial teenage issues. The stakes for these individuals were high. These students were looking to get a bachelor’s degree in order to enhance their lives both economically and socially. For these students, there were no second chances. There were focused, down to business, and serious students. They had tendencies to find community college classes less than challenging.

Negative case. One negative case surfaced from the data. One participant’s academic experience at the community college was diametrically opposed with all the other participants in
the study. This participant’s name is David Finlayson, a white male, 24 years old, pursuing a degree in marketing. David did not find the community college curriculum to be easy. In fact, Mr. Finlayson was of the opinion his community college classes were much more difficult than his university classes.

David was asked to explain this anomaly and he responded in the following manner,

I am a pretty focused person. I am also a fairly impatient person. When I finished high school I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a salesman. I met a man who was a car salesman when I was in the 10th grade. He told me he could set his own hours and work as much or as little as he wanted. He told me his salary was based on his own motivation. If he wanted to make a lot of money he had to hustle and convince people to buy a car. I thought to myself, ‘that is my kind of life.’ My guidance counselor in high school told me if I wanted to be a salesman I needed to get a major in marketing. At the community college I took all of my general studies courses. I really wanted to be taking marketing courses. I mentioned that I was impatient. The general studies courses were not that interesting to me. It was hard for me to get motivated to study for them. I guess that was why they seemed so difficult.

David Finlayson was an anomaly for this group of participants. He actually found the community college classes more challenging than his university classes. One possible reason for his experience might have been related to interest. He mentioned that he only took the general education classes at the community college and that he found them boring and that he did not learn much. Because of this his grades suffered. At the university, his marketing classes were fascinating to him and he performed well in them. Ultimately, the community college classes may not have been more difficult than his university classes. For this participant, his interest level may have been the reason he considered the community college classes more difficult than the university classes.

Theme 2: Positive Community College Experiences

Participants in the study had a number of positive experiences with respect to their community college. The positive experiences revolved around a favorite professor and a friendly
environment. Many of the students in the study reminisced about the good old days when they took classes under their favorite professor. He was like a father figure or she was like a mother figure. The participants also recollected fondly of their classmates with whom they used to study for exams.

Caleb Campbell had a typical experience which several participants had with faculty members. Caleb is a white male, 24 years old, and a self-described loner. Caleb confided that he was not an extrovert. He mentioned that he did not have a lot of friends and he was not that good at making friends. Caleb took general studies at the community college and is majoring in sports information at the university. Caleb is a very studious young man who is focused on “making something out of himself.”

Caleb had a very close relationship with one of his community college instructors. Caleb described this relationship as a "unique mentoring opportunity." Caleb's mentor was Mr. Johnson who taught physical education. Caleb discussed his relationship with Mr. Johnson in the following way,

Mr. Johnson was a pretty cool guy. He was always available. I remember him always moving around in the facilities. He was setting up weight training equipment, CPR mannequins, aerobic steps, and things like that. He also went to area high schools where he talked to students about all-around fitness. The thing I remember the most about Mr. Johnson was that he always had time for students. I could go by his facilities and he would put me to work setting up the equipment. I could talk to him and not worry about him laughing at me or judging me. I could be myself around him. He was just an all-around good guy. He had a way of making students feel better about their situation. I remember those days when I felt a lot of anxieties about life. I reckon that is a common thing with college students. Whenever I started feeling this way I would always go over to the physical education building and talk with Mr. Johnson. Usually, when I walked through the door there would be at least a half dozen guys discussing their problems with Mr. Johnson. I would see a student with anxiety all over their face. Thirty minutes later I would see the same guy leaving the building laughing and cutting up. And you know something? It has been nearly 2 years since I left the community college and hardly a month goes by that I do not receive a text or an email from Mr. Johnson just wanting to check up on me or see how I am doing.
Caleb Campbell is an example of mentoring for loners. There were a small number of participants in this study who were self-described loners. These students were introverted, socially awkward, and unsure of themselves. These participants described themselves as “in need of direction.” Caleb Campbell shared a lot in common with Mason Cooper, who was mentioned earlier in this document. For students with this profile, the community college can be a restful haven. Later in this document we will hear a complaint against university professors. That complaint will register that they are always having to do research, publish studies, or go to meetings. As a result, they do not have time for students. An advantage for community college instructors is that they have time to mentor students and there is a group of students who find this mentoring experience to be an integral factor in their academic success.

Another participant who had a similar relationship with the community college instructor is Cecilia Cruz. Cecilia moved to the United States from Cuba with her parents and two brothers when she was 10 years old. Not being a native English speaker, Cecilia struggled in school for the first few years. Cecilia confided a life-changing experience. Shortly after she arrived in the United States she encountered a white male in her school who said to her, ”You stupid Mexican, why don't you go back to Mexico?” This made Cecilia feel like she did not belong in the United States. She went home and told her parents about the incident. Her parents explained to her that there were some people who did not like people like her being in this country.

Cecilia determined in her heart that she did belong in this country and set out to prove this to herself and anyone else who doubted her. Cecilia acknowledged that she carried a “chip on her shoulder.” She recounted that she immediately took a confrontational stance toward every new person she met especially those who were in Anglo-Americans. This all changed one day
when she encountered a woman who was an English instructor at the community college where

Cecilia attended.

Cecilia recounted,

When I left high school I was pretty edgy toward people in general, and white people in particular. I could not quit thinking about that white boy, all those years ago, who called me stupid and told me I did not belong here. From that day forward, I felt like I had to prove myself, and I had a distrust for white people. Then one day I had my stereotypes of white people shattered. I took an English class under a woman named Joan Batson. She treated me with respect. She did not talk down to me or address me like I was some kid who did not know anything. I became very close to her. I learned a valuable lesson from her. She treated me like a daughter. She invited me to her house for Thanksgiving and Christmas. She was like a mother figure to me. She was the one person who truly understood me. Even though we were very close she gave me a B in the class I was taking from her. I learned that if you want something in life you have to work for it. No one is just going to give it to you. I also learned from Mrs. Batson that not all white people hate you, not all white people are evil, and not all white people are out to get you. I think that was a valuable lesson for me to learn at that stage in my life.

Cecilia Cruz exemplifies the concept of *mentoring repairs attitudes*. Young people are very impressionable. A negative experience can color a young person for the rest of their lives. Young people can develop stereotypes and negative attitudes toward an entire group of people. These negative attitudes can be harmful in many ways. Young people can miss out on a lot of profitable and beneficial relations because of stereotypes they formed from one negative encounter. Young people can experience frustrations and encounter difficult circumstances because of negative attitudes they have developed. A few participants in this study credited an older, more mature adult at the community college for assisting them in repairing certain harmful attitudes which they harbored against groups of people because of one earlier bad encounter.

A second positive experience from the community college level related to what many of participants called a "family environment." When asked about this family environment, participants said things like, "everyone is on your side," "everyone wants to see you succeed," and "everyone is pulling for you to be a winner in life." This theme was one of the most
dominant themes which emerged from the data. Virtually every participant mentioned the family environment as the most positive experience of his or her community college journey.

**Family environment.** One participant in this study recounted the major point of this positive experience. Other participants alluded to various aspects of the family environment but Eric Beardsley was the participant who connected most of the dots when it came to this theme. Eric was a white male, 22 years old of age. His father did not have a college degree but his mother had an associate’s degree in paralegal studies. Eric is a highly motivated student who is pursuing a degree in biology. After finishing his bachelor’s degree Eric plans to get a master’s degree in Marine biology. Eric's ultimate goal is to work for a conservation agency that helps to protect endangered aquatic species.

Eric described his academic experience at the community college in the following words,

> When I finished high school I was a good student. I had good grades but I did not have a lot of confidence in myself. I was good at "following orders." In other words, as long as a teacher told me what to do and how to do it I was okay. If it was left up to me to decide what to do and figure out how to do it I was not sure if I could be successful. I had heard nightmare stories about in high school, students who had made good grades, went off to college, and failed out. My mother told me I ought to start out in a community college, get my feet wet, find out what college was all about, and then ease my way into a university. That was probably the smartest decision I ever made. The community college was a step up from high school but it was not a quantum leap. The community college instructors told you what you needed to study for the test and if you made a bad grade they would let you do the extra work to bring your grade up. That part was like high school, however, the assignments and the workload was a lot more than we had to do in high school. My favorite part about the community college was that everyone was pulling for you. It was the ‘all for one and one for all’ spirit. Instructors were on your side. Their door was always open and they were always willing to spend their personal time helping you to understand something you did not get in class.

A second positive experience Eric recounted, related to the other students in the community college,

> there was not this cutthroat environment you get in universities. We used to have study groups with five or six of us. If there was something you did not understand there would
always be someone in the study group who would explain it to you. I thought this was one of the truly valuable things which the community college had to offer.

Eric Beardsley is the quintessential example of *the community college as a family environment*. More often than not, researchers have juxtaposed the community college as a family environment. Research draws attention to the cultural shock which a community college student encounters when they transfer to a four-year institution of higher learning. It is pointed out that when community college students go from a family environment at the community college, to an individualist environment at the university, the transition can cause a lot of problems for the student who is transferring. However, for this participant the family environment functioned as a welcome and somewhat buffered transition to the university.

**Theme 3: Negative University Experiences**

The negative experiences at the university level fell along three lines. The participants in the study thought that the university had an impersonal touch. It was not unusual to hear participants say things like "I felt like a number and not a real person." A second negative experience at the university was expressed as a lack of attention. Phrases such as “no one pays attention to what they are doing” occurred throughout the transcripts. The participants expressed a third type of negative experience at the university as a "lack of concern." Phrases such as "nobody really cares," "I can't find anyone to help me," and "I had second thoughts about doing this" were quotes I found throughout the transcripts. Three participants tell stories which elaborate on these disappointments at the university level.

Becky Abernathy, a 22-year-old white female, is majoring in elementary education and intends to be a kindergarten teacher when she graduates in the spring of 2018. Becky had a very interesting story to tell which was not uncommon among the participants in the study. Becky related the following account,
When I arrived to campus I was very happy and optimistic. I was raring to go. I wanted to get started learning about educational theory and how to apply it to my field. Unfortunately, no one else seemed to share my enthusiasm. I had no idea where anything was. I tried to find out where things were but no one seemed to know, nor did anyone seem interested in telling me. I was stuck in a dorm with a roommate who had been there for two years already. She knew where to go and what to do but I felt like I was putting her out every time I asked her to help me. I went to the admissions office to ask about an orientation for transfer students. I was told simply that there was no orientation specifically for transfer students. I had to ask why there was no orientation for transfer students. I was told that there were not enough transfer students to justify spending the resources. I learned that being a university student required a lot of autonomy. I learned the lesson, made the adjustments, and by the time I reached my senior year I had learned how to manage living in an impersonal environment where people treated you like a number and not a person.

Becky Abernathy produced an example of the concept of *impersonal touch*. In a previous section of this document, I drew attention to some of the problems which a community college student experienced when they transferred to a four-year institution. One of those problems revolved around the impersonal touch which one encounters at a university. Going from a caring family-like environment to an impersonal environment can cause feelings of disappointment and isolation. These were the feelings expressed by Becky Abernathy and several other participants in the study. It is important to mention that these students, like Becky, took a proactive stance toward this obstacle and made the necessary adjustments to acclimate themselves to an environment with an impersonal touch and eventually to thrive in such an environment.

A second participant told a story which related to attention or perhaps, better stated, a lack of attention from the university. Kiamisha Jones is a 21-year-old African-American female from a town in the southwestern part of the state. Kiamisha’s father is a high school principal, and her mother is an accountant. Keke, as her friends call her, is majoring in computer science, and is set to graduate in the spring of 2018 with a 3.80 GPA. When Keke first enrolled in the university she encountered some of the same issues which Becky Abernathy encountered. There
was a lack of assistance and a feeling of coldness. Keke also mentioned that she felt like she was being treated as a number and not a person.

Kiamisha added another piece to this impersonal puzzle. When asked about her academic experience Kiamisha told the following story,

The first semester I took five classes. Three of these classes were in my major which is computer science. I was very enthusiastic and eager to learn more about programming and the other aspects of my major. After the first week, I was very depressed and defeated. I discovered that not everyone shared my enthusiasm and eagerness. My instructors were good at what they did and seemed to really know their stuff. However, they did not seem very passionate about what they were doing. At my community college the teachers were very student-friendly. They seemed to be pleased when we made advances in our understanding and they were always there to help us with whatever we needed. The university professors were different. Whenever they finished their classes they were out the door as fast as their feet could carry them. I managed to catch all three professors before they could get away. That seemed to annoy them. I simply wanted to ask one brief question. One professor told me to send an email to him. A second professor told me to call his secretary and set up an appointment. The third professor told me to consult the syllabus which was something I had already done. I must admit this was a good bit unnerving at first but I got used to it and it is no longer a problem. In fact, I think it taught me a valuable lesson. Life is not like the community college. There is not always going to be someone there to help you and show you how to do things. In fact in life, you are going to have to take initiative, figure out things for yourself, and make your own way in life. So I am glad I learned this lesson sooner rather than later.

Kiamisha Jones exemplifies the concept of lack of attention. Earlier, I mentioned that university professors are pressed for time. They are required to conduct research, publish articles, and serve on numerous committees. As such, they do not have much time left over to spend with students. University professors do not usually mentor students or spend time answering students’ questions. This type of treatment can prove extremely frustrating for community college students who have come from an environment in which community college instructors have spent copious amounts of time addressing their concerns. It is important to observe that this participant along with many other students involved in this study made the necessary adjustments to translate this negative into a positive. Kiamisha and the other participants learned how to function
autonomously in an environment which they characterized as having a lack of concern for their success.

A third participant in the study gave depth to this theme. Ellis Marshall is a 20-year-old Caucasian male; Ellis is the oldest of four children in his family. Ellis came from a “very traditional family.” His father is a pharmacist and his mother is a “stay-at-home” mom. Ellis’ father extolled the values of hard work, discipline, and integrity. Ellis seeks to conduct his life based on these principles. Ellis has taken summer classes for three consecutive years and is set to graduate one semester early. Ellis is majoring in chemistry and plans to attend Pharmacy School when he graduates.

Ellis encountered the impersonal nature of the university in much the same way as Becky Abernathy and Kiamisha Jones. However, Ellis had to clear an additional hurdle in his academic experience, Ellis said,

I am a very disciplined and motivated person. I have always been industrious. I am always in a hurry. I hate to waste time and energy. That is why I attended classes in the summer. I wanted to go ahead and finish my bachelor’s degree as quickly as I could. I wanted to get on to the next phase of my life which is either getting a master’s degree in chemistry or going to pharmacy school. Maybe you can understand why I was a little disappointed when I first transferred. The most important chemistry class I took during my junior year was not even taught by my professor. A graduate student taught the lab for the class. He was not that bad but I felt cheated by having to take a junior level class which was taught by someone who did not have a doctorate. This guy was from Korea and it was impossible to understand what he was saying. After the first week I went home and told my father about the class. He reminded me that the best education is self-education. That struck a note with me. It caused me to realize that it was up to me to get an education. Since that moment I have told myself that even if the teacher and the lab instructors are not up to par I can still educate myself by reading the text books and doing my own private investigations. For the past year that attitude has worked well for me.

Ellis Marshall had an experience that epitomized the concept of lack of concern. Once again, students who are accustomed to living in a family-like environment are perplexed when they transfer into an environment which seems to be lacking concern. Ellis was perplexed
because he could not understand why a university would assign an upper level course to be taught by a graduate assistant who did not have an earned doctorate in the field. However, when he reflected on the situation, he came to a very important conclusion. This was an emblematic characteristic of every participant in this study. The conclusion was to seek a positive out of a negative. Instead of complaining, these participants sought to learn a deeper lesson from the situation in which they found themselves. The lesson was that real life, outside of the community college, was going to be a lot different in the real world. Life in the real world is going to closely resemble life in a university. The lesson is to learn how to function and thrive in an environment that more closely resembles the environment you are going to live in for the rest of your life.

**Theme 4: Positive University Experiences**

There was an interesting phenomenon which took place in the lives of the participants in this study. Most of the participants encountered the negative experiences during the first semester of their junior year. The participants made adjustments and learned how to adapt to new circumstances. By the beginning of their senior year most of the participants in this study recorded their positive university experiences. The positive university experiences fell along three lines. A number of participants had good curricular experiences, another group of participants had enjoyable experiences which related to professors, and a third group of participants registered positive experiences with respect to the culture of the university.

Savannah Brown is a 21-year-old woman who ran on the cross-country team at her community college. Savannah, a fitness enthusiast, is majoring in elementary education. When she finishes her bachelor’s degree, Savannah plans to work with special needs children. When asked about positive experiences from the university, Ms. Brown commented about the curriculum she was taking,
When I was attending the community college I took mostly general education courses. English 101, 102, History 201, 202, Speech 101, Math 112, and Psychology 102 are pretty much my life story for two years. That wasn't so bad but it was starting to get old by the time I finished my sophomore year. I was really itching to get into classes that were interesting for me. When I got to the university my engagement level really increased. Learning about Vygotsky and Piaget was so interesting. I learned so much and I had such a good time in those classes. Then when I started taking my special education classes everything moved to the next level. I have to say that I have really enjoyed my university classes more than my community college classes.

Savannah Brown’s experience exhibits the concept of a positive curricular experience. This experience closely resembles the case of David Finlayson who considered the classes at the university to be less difficult than the classes at the community college because he was more interested in the classes which correspond to his major. Savannah Brown represents people who share this sentiment. Many students who are successful transfer students have a laser focus on their academic and life goals. Many of these students have been waiting anxiously for the day when they can begin taking classes in the subjects which they are passionate about. They want to utilize the class material and gain the skills they will use for their career.

Marty Belanger is a 22-year-old male who is a first generation college student. Marty is majoring in criminal justice and would like to be involved in forensic science when he graduates. Marty grew up watching forensics and detective television shows. He has wanted to be involved in crime scene investigations for "as long as he can remember.” When asked about his university experience Marty told the following story.

When I was in community college the instructors were good. I really enjoyed the courses and learned a lot. When I got to the university I was completely blown away. I was amazed by the knowledge of the professors. My biology and chemistry professors were great. They prepared me for the special classes I would take in the criminal justice curriculum. This is the first semester of my senior year and I'm taking classes called Criminal Investigations. I am learning about "tool marks" which is extremely interesting. The professor has been showing us the marks which could be made by over 200 crowbars. For example we can look at a door which was pried open and based on the marks left on the wood we could identify where the crowbar was manufactured and the place where it was purchased. Needless to say, I'm pretty fired about what I'm learning.
Mason Cooper, who was mentioned previously, had a very interesting experience to recount with reference to the culture and the environment which surrounded the university.

Mason, a native of a Midwest state, had a unique vantage point from which he viewed the culture of the southeastern United States. Mason made the following comments with respect to his university experience.

I am from [a state in the Midwest] and I had always heard about ‘southern hospitality,’ but I really didn’t know what to expect. There was something about this place. It was not a gigantic university and the campus was rather small. People were really nice and very accepting. Everyone seems to be your friend and they act like they know you. Shortly after I arrived on campus I remember an experience. I was finishing up my lunch one day at the cafeteria when a guy came by and told me I needed to go to the Admissions Office to sign some papers. After I finished my lunch I headed toward [the Admissions Office] which is about 100 yards from the cafeteria. On the way to the Admissions Office, I encountered 25 people who were walking towards me. At least 23 of them said, ‘Hello, how are you doing?’ They all acted like they knew me and were my friends. In reality none of them actually knew me. It gave me a strange but good feeling; I fell in love with this city and this university. I can guarantee that if you polled 100 people on campus at least 99 of them would say ‘Yes, this place is definitely the friendliest campus in the south.’

Mason Cooper exemplified the concept of a person with a positive cultural experience. When a person comes from a different culture, one of two possibilities exist. The person may have a positive experience with the new culture. The new culture may seem exotic and pleasant to the person experiencing this culture thereby allowing them a great opportunity for them to learn. The other possibility is that the person experiencing the new culture will have a negative experience. The new culture may have elements which the visitor, Mason Cooper, finds unappealing. Mason was the only participant who came from a state that was outside the south eastern part of the United States. History, television, and movies, can color a person’s views of the deep-south. Luckily, Mason Cooper found the culture and people of the state to be pleasant and he encountered a positive experience. Since he was the only person in this study from a different culture, a lot should not be made of his positive experience.
Research Question Three

How do community college transfer students experience demographic factors in the persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree? The important demographic factors which emerged from the data were age, race/ethnicity, and gender. I analyzed the data and developed findings along the following lines. I will present one emblematic participant for nontraditional age and a second participant for traditional age. One exemplary participant will be presented for each ethnicity in the study.

Theme 1: Age

Perhaps I should begin with Chris Sanford who was the only nontraditional age student in the study. Chris found that being older than other students gave rise to two specific experiences. The first experience, involved leadership, Chris related,

In nearly every class when we were assigned group projects the younger students just assumed I would be the leader of the group. I assume this had to do with the fact that I was so much older than the rest of them. I considered this to be an advantage. If I were the leader of the project I could control the project and move it in a direction that was more advantageous toward me. Also, as the leader of the group, I was in a position to make sure everyone in the group pulls their own weight, to ensure that I didn’t have any free loaders, or anyone who tried to coast to a good grade on the back of other people’s hard work.

Chris related a second experience which revolved around “maturity.” Chris commented,

When I got to campus I saw so many of the younger kids doing so much silly stuff. They seemed to be experts at procrastination and completely efficient at reinventing the wheel. I watched them and laughed. They wasted so much time, did some of the dumbest things, waited till the night before the test, and then pulled an all-nighter in hopes of passing the exam. Then it dawned on me; if I had been in college 20 years ago I would have been doing some of the same stupid things. I am in my final semester and I have a 4.0 GPA. I can guarantee you if I had been in college 20 years ago my GPA would not have been anywhere near a 4.0. I attribute my greater focus to details and ability to minimize redundancies to my time in the military and to the fact that at 43 years of age I have a much greater life experience than the average 20 year old has.
The traditional age students remarkably had a view similar to the view of Chris. Many of the participants saw their young age and lack of experience as a deficit. We must remember that the participants in this study were of higher level when it came to analyzing reality and assessing their experiences. One participant captured this ability to self-assess. Hunter Freeman made the following comment, “I think we all make dumb decisions, but you have to learn from them. After all, you have to think, you could always be doing something dumber.”

Chris Sanford demonstrated an example of the advantage of a non-traditional age student. Chris exhibited the advantages of maturity and leadership. Chris was not married, did not have children, he did not have a full or part-time job, and was a full time student. In light of these anomalies, and the fact that Chris was the only student over 40 years of age, a lot of weight should not be given to his experience.

**Theme 2: Race**

Three distinct ethnicities were represented in this study. Two participants were of Latin origin. There was a noticeable difference between the ways in which these two participants experienced their ethnicity. One participant identified herself as “American” and did not embrace her Latino heritage. The other participant embraced her Latino heritage and was proud of her Latin culture.

Ashandra Ketchum was mentioned earlier in the study. Ashandra came to the United States at an early age. Her parents were native to Mexico. Ashandra stated that she did not remember anything about Mexico. She regarded her culture to be American. She was not opposed to Mexico or Latin culture, she simply had no first-hand knowledge of her culture. Ashandra stated,

My parents expected me to be a ‘Mexican senorita,’ but I really had no idea what that meant. My parents wanted me to be a ‘Latina’ but that was not my experience. I grew up
in America as an American. Most of my friends were Americans. I talk like an American and I behave like an American. I have some friends who are Mexican-Americans and some of them wanted to carry on the traditions are not my traditions. They never have been and never will be. As I say, I respect their traditions, but they do not wear well with me. It would be like wearing a set of clothes that do not fit. If I tried to be like them I would feel like such a phony. I can’t go there. I have to be me and I have to be real.

The other Latina student in the study was Cecilia Cruz. Earlier it was mentioned that Cecilia came to the United States when she was ten years old. A white male student told her, “Stupid Mexican, why don’t you go back to Mexico?” As a result of this encounter, Cecilia developed an antipathy toward Americans, especially white Americans. This antagonism calcified until she met a white lady who was her English instructor in community college. From this instructor, whose name was Joan Baston, Cecilia learned that not all white people were out to get her. She also learned that it was possible to be American and not give up her native culture. Cecilia expressed how she came to this realization in the following manner.

I have lived an interesting life. I arrived in a new country at an early age. I did not look like many of the people who lived around me. I had a very negative experience with one of the native people shortly after my arrival. As a twelve-year-old, I allowed that one experience to color my attitude toward an entire ethnic group. That was not a good thing to do but I guess it is understandable if not excusable. For ten years, I isolated myself. My parents were fleeing from a country they had grown up in. They were pushing me to integrate into the American culture. I was pushing back against their desires, because of the negative experience with the American white boy. I was steadfastly determined to resist ‘all things American.’ Combined with my parents pushing me to become ‘Americanized’ I did not acquire a lot of my Cuban culture. Now, after meeting Mrs. Batson, I am learning that it is okay to be American. I am celebrating the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving. At the same time, I feel a liberty to explore my Cuban roots. I am learning more about Cuban food. I am learning how to cook some of the traditional dishes such as Moros y Cristianos (Moors and Christians). It is a delicious dish with rice, black beans, garlic, onion, tomatoes, chicken, and beef. This newfound interest has drawn me closer to my mother. I have also begun a study of Cuban music. My favorite styles of Cuban music are the mambo and the cha-cha-cha. It just so happens that these were the favorite styles of my father and this has opened up new avenues of communication with him. I realize that I have gotten a little off track but in answer to your original question. I feel very comfortable and very much at home in my American culture and also in my Cuban culture. Unlike many of the contemporaries, I do not see a need for a conflict between the two.
Cecilia Cruz and Ashandra Ketchum exhibited the characteristics of two participants who were caught between cultures. Both individuals came from a Latin culture which neither had actually known. Neither participant could remember much about when their family lived in their home cultures. Both participants had grown up in an American culture and this American culture had shaped their world views. Unfortunately, both of these participants received push-back from members of the American culture because they didn’t look like Americans. On the other hand, these participants received pressure from parents and family to embrace their Latin culture which was in reality, a culture which they did not understand. This struggle to fit into an American culture while respecting their native culture produces some internal, as well as, external conflicts. The two Latina participants in this study managed to overcome these conflicts and should successfully complete their bachelor’s degree.

Now let us turn our attention to the African-American participants in the study. There were five African-Americans in a sample of twenty. There were two female African-American participants and three male African-American participants in the study.

Madison Shelby did not see race as a very powerful or influential factor in her experience. She said,

My race does not affect me in any way that I can think of. I do not see it as a liability or an advantage. However, I would say being African-American has motivated me but not helped me succeed, mostly because you do not see a lot of African-Americans getting degrees, especially in my family. So, I am going to be the first in my family to graduate. I will get to say that I did something for my people and that gives me a good feeling. It makes me feel special.

Kiamisha Jones was of a similar perspective when it came to race. She said,

I really don’t think that much about race. I may be black in the sense that black is the color of my skin, but I don’t identify myself as black, African-American, or any other ethnic label. When I’m driving down the road I listen to country or gospel or rap or even pop music. I like all types of music and I hang out with everyone.
Kiamisha Jones and Madison Shelby represent *race as a non-factor*. Both participants spoke of race as though it was not an important factor in their academic success. However, after asserting that race was not an important factor, the participants noted that race was a motivating factor. In reality, race did play a role in their academic success. Perhaps these participants did or did not recognize the role which race played in their success. Perhaps they did not want to acknowledge the role which race played in their academic achievement.

Two African American males had some interesting comments to make with respect to race and how it influenced their experience. Alexander Marshall had a very interesting perspective on race and the role it played in academic success. Alexander focused on the influence of stereotyping. Mason Cooper also had some astute comments to make on the notion of race and the influence it had on academic success. Mason felt that nullifying race was the proper action to take.

When asked how race influenced his college experience Alexander Marshall responded,

> In my experience, I have discovered that a lot of people make the assumption that because I am black I cannot do something. At the end of the day, I am human, and I know I can do anything; but I am black I am going to do it. People will judge you, but you have control over the judging. If you try to make someone realize that their pre-judgment is not true, you are going to have a difficult life ahead of you because everyone is going to judge you in some way.

When asked how race had influenced his college experience Mason Cooper responding in a manner similar to Alexander Marshall. Mason said,

> I do not believe race should have anything to do with that. You make your own luck. You ‘pave’ your own way to success. I am here to get an education just like the thousands of other students here, black, white, blue, or purple; a person’s color does not matter to me. If I fail, it’s because I did not do everything in my power to succeed. Perception is 9/10 reality so the color of my skin should have nothing to do with my success.

Alexander Marshall and Mason Cooper represented the *African American male perspective with regard to race*. The two African American male participants in the study were
more cognizant about the influence of race than the African American females in the study. Both participants acknowledged the influence of race on their academic careers. Racial stereotyping was a strong motivating force behind their efforts to succeed. I sensed a frustration in both participants. Both stated that race should not be a factor in education but reluctantly acknowledged that they felt that it was.

In this study thirteen of the twenty participants were Caucasian. Most of the Caucasian participants in the study were relatively neutral when it came to race. Statements such as, “race has not affected me,” “it is not about race, it is about hard work,” and “I hang out with a wide variety of people.” Hunter Freeman commented, “Most of the people I hang out with are my race. I don’t mean anything by it, but 90% of the campus is made up of my race. I can get along with anyone, but I do not interact with people who throw out racial jokes.” Eric Beardsley drew attention to how race affected him. He commented, “I believe in treating everyone equally and fairly. I hear things about white privilege, but I have not experienced how being white has given me any special advantage. In fact, my experience has been just the opposite. For example, I don’t see a scholarship marked ‘whites only.’” Chris Sanford had a slightly different perspective on race. His comments were, “Race doesn’t portray anything. It’s about what you put into it. Either you are going to do this or you’re not. I feel like I have a leg up, but don’t like it. Whites have always had a leg up because of the history.”

The Caucasian participants seemed tone deaf to the issue of race. The majority of Caucasian participants saw race as a non-factor in their academic success. One participant exhibited “white guilt.” He felt that being white had given him an academic advantage, he was ashamed he felt that way, but he could not articulate how he had any advantage. Another
participant resented being told that his whiteness had given him any type of privilege. In his experience he felt that he had been punished for being white.

**Theme 3: Gender**

The sample of this study was composed of twelve males and eight females. For most of the participants gender was not an important issue. Two females had interesting comments about their experience. Ashandra Ketchum made the following observation, “It all adds up like brownie points. Females can get their way easier than males can. All females have to do is give you that look which says, ‘my life is really hard right now.’ Girls can just give ‘that face’ to get what they want.” Madison Shelby commented concerning how gender is related to her major,

There are not a lot of females in my major which is kinesiology. I do not know a lot of females who want to go into this field. That really motivated me. Gender had an impact on me as a girl who was interested in sports. I see a lot of male football players in my classes. They thought kinesiology would be easy. I feel like I am taken a lot more seriously because I am taking this course of study.

The male participants in the study did not make noteworthy comments with the respect to gender. Abraham Bolah was the only male participant who made a comment about gender. He said, “My gender is very similar to my race. It goes back in history everything has been male dominated. So, I guess I have an edge up on a lot of things. I do not agree with it, but there is nothing I can do to change it.”

The females in the study noted how they could use gender to their advantage. One male in the study noted that historically male students had been privileged in academia. Once again, participants indicated that gender, in their experience, had not played a prominent role in their success. However, when they recounted their experiences they made several comments that indicated that gender had contributed to their success.
Research Question Four

*How do community college transfer students experience social factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree?* Three specific items emerged from the data with respect to social factors which exert an influence on community college students. Those three items were athletic involvement, club involvement, and work involvement. The athletic involvement is broken down into entertainment and fitness related activities. The club involvement system is subdivided into the Greek system and academic related activities.

**Theme 1: Athletic Involvement**

Three of the twenty participants in the study indicated they had no athletic involvement whatsoever. Ashandra Ketchum stated that she did not attend any of the sporting events at the college and was not involved in fitness training because her time was limited. Ashandra indicated, “I get my stress release from the arts. I enjoy going to the theatre. I have attended every drama production since I have been at the university.” Chris Sanford commented, “I am focused on one thing and one thing only; that is getting my degree as quickly as possible. I do not see that athletic involvement will play a role in helping me achieve that objective.” Candice Pestis said, “I have never seen the football field. I am an academic person, I am a full time student, and I work a full-time job so I have no time for sports.”

The majority of participants went to athletic and sporting events, but did not describe themselves as avid fans. Most of the participants were aware of the fact that the university’s football team played well last season and is undefeated so far in the current season. There were two diverse opinions on athletics as entertainment and its value as a factor contributing to academic success.
**Academic involvement for entertainment.** Abraham Bolah was involved in attending sporting events, but did not see them as advantages for academic success. In fact, Abraham stated,

> I have not missed any football games at [the] University. I have attended several baseball and basketball games. However, I do not feel that attending sporting events contributes to academic success. It is like junk food for the brain. Some people eat junk food. It looks attractive, tastes good, and gives them a sugar high. Ultimately, it is just empty calories that add fat to their waist and clogs their arteries. Attending sporting events are my junk food. It is fun, exciting, and gives you an adrenaline high especially when it is a close game and your team wins in the final seconds. Then you crash and are exhausted and cannot do anything productive for the rest of the day. I wish I could give it up. I could get a lot more accomplished and it would be much more beneficial for my academic success.

David Finlayson had a different perspective on the value of athletic entertainment as a positive contributor for academic success. David recognized that attending sporting events had two primary benefits: relieving stress and producing comradery among his friends. David said, “It’s just the whole feel of it. It is all [the University]. Having friends and going to football games together has kept me pumped and motivated.” When asked to explain his comments, David mentioned that when he thought about going to the football game on Saturday it motivated him to work strenuously for the first five days of the week. After putting in a good week of studying, David rewarded himself by allowing himself to “cut loose” for 24 hours. He saw this as a healthy way of dealing with the stress which accompanies a rigorous academic life. David indicated that he had a group of friends he studied with and then attended the sporting events with them. David felt like this produced a bond among them which exerted a positive effect on their academic progress.

Abraham Bolah and David Finlayson represented two poles on the spectrum of athletic involvement for entertainment. Both participants enjoyed attending the athletic events sponsored by the university. Abraham did not find this involvement to be a useful activity. This type of
athletic involvement was enjoyable, but not worth the time and energy it consumed. David Finlayson, on the other hand, perceived athletic involvement for entertainment purposes to be a positive influence for his academic success. This group of participants were of the opinion that athletic involvement for entertainment could provide a pressure valve for stress relief, as well as, functioning as a positive motivator for study.

**Athletic participation for health.** Most of the participants in the study indicated that they exercised periodically or from time to time. Eight of the participants mentioned that they were engaged in some form of “regular fitness regimen.” Three participants had thought through the positive influence which physical fitness and exercise could have on academic accomplishment. Alexander Marshall, a football player, Madison Shelby, an athletic training major, and Mason Cooper, a sports psychology major, all made specific contributions to this theme.

Alexander Marshall made the following comments with respect to the role athletics had contributed to his academic success.

There are several major ways in which athletics have given me an advantage in life. Without athletics I would not be here. It created opportunities for me. It helped me mature. It helped me through a lot of tough times. Life is like a double-edged sword. It has both positive and negative outcomes. It just depends on how you swing it. That is how football is. Football contributed greatly because I feel it took care of me. Football has opened a lot of doors for me. It has put me in front of a lot of important people like athletic trainers, coaches, and speakers. Football has enabled me to go places I otherwise could never have gone. Most importantly, football has taught me how to live life. When you play football, there are a lot of times when you have to play injured, play when you are tired and your lungs are burning. In life you have times when things don’t go your way. I have found that learning how to overcome adversity on the football field gives me something to draw on when things don’t go well in my personal life.

Alexander Marshall offered a unique insight into how organized sports enables a person to be successful in life. Sport participation teaches an individual many of the essential lessons which will enable them to navigate their way through difficult circumstances they will encounter
in life. One characteristic mentioned by Alexander was proactivity, a characteristic which surfaced throughout the data analysis.

Madison Shelby is a single mother with a two-year-old son. Madison is on a tight schedule and has to be extremely disciplined in order to maintain a fitness regime. Madison is dedicated to her fitness training and has to be creative in order to make sure she accomplishes her fitness goals. As an athletic training major, Madison understands the science behind physical fitness and how it contributes to academic achievement. Madison explained her fitness experience in the following manner.

I am a full-time student. I work full-time at a sporting goods store at the local mall, and I have a two-year-old rambunctious son that I need to spend time with. I take him to the park. While he is on the swings or playing on the merry-go-round I do push-ups, chin-ups, crunches, and other types of calisthenics. Three days a week I put him in the jogger-stroller and do a three-mile jog with him in front. I am a firm believer in exercise. I am certain that it contributes to academic success. I know that if I miss two or three days of exercise my mind just doesn't work the way it ought to.

Madison Shelby represents those participants in the study who see a close association athletic involvement for health and the pursuit of academic success. These students believed that regular athletic exercise helped improve their discipline in academic matters. Academic discipline and goal formation were assisted by the discipline which these participants learned from their exercise regime.

Mason Cooper, who aspires to be a sports psychologist, understands some of the biochemical mechanisms which explain the ways in which exercise contributes to academic attainment. When asked about the connection between his exercise regimen and his academic progress Mason responded with the following information: "I play basketball regularly with some friends. When I go to the gym it is a social event as well as a stress reliever. I get a chance to interact with fellow students and get a good workout. I felt like I deserved a break from school
for an hour or two. When I do this I'm always able to come back to the books full speed ahead."

Mason shared some interesting information about how the exercise enabled him to return “to the books full speed ahead.” He said,

In one of my exercise science classes we learned about what is popularly known as 'the runner's high.' When you work out at your aerobic threshold which is approximately 70 to 80% of your maximum heart rate, cortisol increases in the body which brings about an increase of chemicals called endorphins. When endorphins accumulate in the bloodstream, they work their way to the brain, and produce a sense of euphoria which gives a student more energy and a heightened sense of reality. That is a biochemical explanation of how exercise contributes to academic accomplishments and it is great.

Mason Cooper offered a unique insight into the benefits which exercise has for social, psychological, and physical benefits. As a student who desires to be a sports psychologist, Mason was able to explain the benefits of exercise from a scientific perspective. What many of us have experienced physically and psychologically this participant was able to explain scientifically in a simple and easy to understand way.

**Theme 2: Club Involvement**

Three participants were involved in Greek life. Caleb Campbell is a member of XY Fraternity. He currently holds the position of Internal Vice President. David Finlayson is a member of the same fraternity. David holds the office of Treasurer. Madison Shelby is the only participant who is a member of a sorority. She graduates in the spring of 2017. Madison was a member of XX sorority. Unfortunately, Madison’s experience with Greek life was limited. Madison recounted her experience of Greek life with the following comment, “Oh goodness, I did not have much of a social life. We had a sorority, but we did not get approval until about two weeks before graduation.”
Fraternity involvement. Caleb Campbell and David Finlayson shared a similar perspective on how their involvement in Greek life assisted them in their academic success.

Caleb stated,

There was a requirement in our fraternity that each member had to maintain a 3.0 GPA. That kept me motivated and held me accountable. I also enjoyed the comradery I had with my fellow fraternity brothers. We encouraged each other and kept each other moving in the right direction.

David Finlayson had a deep sense of the way in which the social involvement of his fraternity contributed to his academic achievement. David said,

I really love being in a fraternity. I have brothers I can count on. There are three guys I will be close to for the rest of my life. We started out together. We pledged the same fraternity. We went through initiation together. I am getting an engineering degree and my friends are getting their degrees in related fields. I can envision us working for the same company once we graduate and then maybe start our own business together later in life. We see ourselves as ‘fellow travelers’ along the academic journey. We see ourselves kind of like Indiana Jones as we discover more and more about our academic fields. We also see ourselves as ‘fellow sufferers.’ I like to compare us to that movie with Mark Wahlberg. I think the name of the movie was Lone Survivor. I remember the main guy who made it out alive had a broken leg but he was carrying his buddy in his shoulder up a steep mountain. Our group is like that. When one of us gets down the others are there to pick him up and make sure he doesn’t fall by the wayside.

Caleb Campbell and David Finlayson presented the academic advantages of being in a fraternity. Due to Hollywood movies and other media sources, a popular myth has arisen. That myth presents fraternities as a host of undisciplined and unchaperoned youths who are perpetually getting drunk and breaking things. Caleb Campbell and David Finlayson were careful to dispel that myth. These two participants painted a picture of academic accountability, encouragement, and comradery. Based on their experience, these two participants were of the opinion that their fraternity played a large role in their academic success.

More participants were involved in academic clubs. A sizeable number of them shared the sentiments of Alexander Marshall who said, “No clubs for me. I don’t need them. I spend my
time reading books and focusing on getting my degree.” The participants who were involved in academic clubs saw them as adjunct to their field of study. Many of the participants were active in honor societies which were attached to their curriculum.

**Academic societies.** Chase Carmichael, an accounting major shared the following information concerning a study club of which he was a member.

I am a member of a study club for accounting majors. We meet every Thursday night. Thursday night is usually a party night at [the University]. We have our weekly accounting quiz on Friday mornings so that kind of knocks us out of partying on Thursday. To make up for this missed opportunity we study for about an hour and a half. Then we take a thirty-minute break and drink a six pack of beer. That makes us feel like we didn’t miss out on partying. Having gotten that out of our system, we go back to studying for another hour and a half.

Chase added, “Once you start making friends with people who are on the same path you are on, it makes you take your classes more seriously. I do better in a study group because I know I will get sidetracked if I try to study on my own.”

A blunt and straightforward response came from Nicholas Looney. Many of the participants noted that the affiliation with academic clubs and honor societies were advantageous for career building. However, Nicholas Looney made the comment,

Academic clubs and honor societies are good for a primary reason, ‘to pad your resume.’ I have joined a number of clubs and a number of honor societies, but I have not participated in many of them. I have them all stacked into the third page of my resume. I assume that I will apply for a job in a few years and some guy will open my resume, he will see I was a member of all these clubs and societies, and he will be impressed.

Chase Carmichael and Nicholas Looney presented the primary advantages of academic societies. Membership in an academic society places a student in the framework of accountability. Working alongside a group of like-minded souls produces a comradery which keeps a student focused, disciplined, and organized. In addition to these present benefits the
membership in an academic society will prove beneficial to the student beyond his or her academic years.

**Theme 3: Work Involvement**

A number of participants in this study worked to support their academic endeavors. Of the twenty participants involved in this study, thirteen were engaged in some form of off-campus employment. Four participants held full time jobs, four participants had more than one part-time job, and five participants were engaged in one part-time employment occupation. Three participants, Alyssa Tudisco, Candice Pestis, and Ashandra Ketchum, exemplified the model participant in the study and one participant, Hunter Freeman, presented a negative case.

Alyssa Tudisco is a human resources management major. She is a 24-year-old student who lives in a nearby city and takes all her classes online. Alyssa works full time as a bank teller. Alyssa desires to pursue a career in human resource management and believes her employment at the bank is advantageous in helping her reach that goal. When asked concerning how her work environment contributed to her academic achievement, Alyssa responded with the following words,

> At [the] bank, I interact with very professional people when I work. Most people have at least a four-year degree. People who have specialized work skills surround me daily. I work around these people every day and I try to soak up their knowledge like a sponge. I have a strong motivation to excel and realize these people have a lot to teach me. I have a number of people who have taken me under their wing and have become my mentors. I am learning a vast amount in my online classes, but being involved in the workforce helps me gain valuable experience I would never get from taking a class or reading a book. So, I would say that being employed in a bank is a massive contribution to my academic advancement.

Ashandra Ketchum is a 22-year-old major in communications and public relations. She works in the student center at a nearby community college. Her ultimate goal is to work in public
relations at a community college. Ashandra was well versed in the way her job would then advance her career. She shared the following information,

I get to work with the event planner and gain lots of valuable experience. She comes up with a lot with a lot of good ideas and we make them happen. It is helpful and educational to see an event go from paper to planning to implementation. These are the type of things we learn about in class but do not get the opportunity to become involved in the actual process. My job gives me the opportunity to see what works and what does not work. I think my experience in my job makes me a much better employment candidate than I would be if all I had was academic experience.

Candice Pestis shared an experience which related to a helpful manager who assisted in her academic persistence. Candace was mentioned earlier in this chapter. Candace works three part-time jobs. One job was a waitress, a second job was at a motorcycle repair shop, and the third job was at an auto parts store. Candace shared the following account about her employment experience,

Once I transferred to [the University] I began looking for part-time employment. I quickly accumulated three or four jobs. Being a full-time student and scurrying back and forth among jobs and classes, I quickly became very stressed out. Tom the manager at the auto parts store, offered me a full-time job which enabled me to quit the other two part-time jobs. He allows me to establish my own working hours if I have a class to attend or a project that needs my attention; I can adjust my work hours to accommodate my schoolwork. I also have a full-time job with benefits waiting on me when I graduate. I would never have bumped into this opportunity if I were just a full-time student.

Alyssa Tudisco, Ashandra Ketchum, and Candice Pestis share three things in common in regards to career preparation. First, they all have jobs which closely align with their major. Second, they are receiving on the job training which compliments the academic courses which they are taking. Third, they are being mentored in their jobs by individuals who have years of experience in the field they are entering. These three participants are nontraditional students who are in their early twenties. They have managed to find jobs which pay them money to work in the field of their major. These participants were of the opinion that work involvement contributed immensely to their academic success.
Hunter Freeman shared a slightly different story. If you remember from earlier in the chapter, Hunter is an entrepreneur who wants to establish a chain of Italian steak houses. Hunter considered getting a job in a local restaurant as a good idea for advancing his ultimate career objectives. Hunter found employment as a waiter at a local chain, seafood restaurant. Hunter found his employment advantageous for his academic achievement, but in a slightly different manner from the previous participants. Hunter exclaimed,

I like working at the restaurant most of the time. Unfortunately, there was a chain of events which made my experience not a good one. The managers did not treat the employees well at times. The cooks, the waiters, the waitresses, and the busboys felt like the managers did not respect them. The managers made us work hours that we did not sign up for and extra hours that we did not get paid for. There were two or three employees who were the ‘favorite children.’ They received more favorable treatment than the rest of us. This produced a bad atmosphere among the employees. Many of us were at each other’s throats. When you are upset with the manager because he does not respect you and you are upset with your co-workers because they are upset with the situation in general, you take your frustrations out on the customers. That is never a good thing because the customer is the one who keeps the restaurant in business. The customer is the reason you have a job. This experience has motivated me to become more disciplined, more focused, and more determined to finish my degree, get out of this bad work situation and start my own restaurant.

Hunter Freeman presented an experience which was quite different from the three previous participants. In fact, Hunter Freeman’s experience was the polar opposite of the experiences recounted by Alyssa Tudisco, Ashandra Ketchum, and Candice Pestis. These three participants had very positive work related experiences whereas Hunter Freeman had a very negative work related experience. Like the previously mentioned participants, Hunter Freeman found a job which was aligned with his major and paid him money to gain on the job experience which corresponded to his career aspirations. Unfortunately, Hunter did not receive mentoring from individuals who had years of valuable in the field he had chosen. Instead, Hunter Freeman learned what not to do. This participant was astute and discovered valuable lessons from his
experience. Hunter discovered that in order to run a successful enterprise it was essential to create a positive culture with a positive work environment.

Conclusion

This chapter has answered the four research questions: How do community college transfer students experience personal factors, academic factors, demographic factors, and social factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree? Each research question was answered by themes that were developed by means of holistic and in vivo data analysis. Validity of the findings was enhanced by means of expert analysis, data audit, participant triangulation, thick rich description, and negative case analysis. The answers to these research questions and the findings of this study will be united with the findings and conclusions of previous research in order to construct a narrative which will include discussion, conclusions, and recommendations in the following chapter.
CHAPTER V:
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter, divided into three sections includes: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations. The discussion section compares and contrasts the findings of this study with the findings of previous research studies. The discussion will present the manner in which the findings of this study agree, complement, and build on the findings discovered in previous research. The conclusion section contains those discoveries which are not prominently displayed in previous research. Three original contributions to scholarship are explained, described, and discussed in the conclusion section of this chapter. The recommendations section incorporates the findings of previous research and blends them with the unique contributions of this study. I make recommendations for future research, for practitioners, and for the institution involved in the study.

Discussion

Research Question One

*How do community college transfer students experience personal factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor's degree?* The theme *motivation to succeed* corresponded with the findings of the literature. The participants in the study drew support from parents and other family members (Cabrera et al., 1993; Cejda & Kaylor, 2001; Davidson, 2015). The students in this study listed the primary motivator as themselves (Ellis, 2011). However, the participants enumerated two additional sources of motivation not found in the literature. Two participants
were motivated by negative feedback. Being told they could not do something motivated these two participants to *prove them wrong*. A second unique motivator was tied to employment and was characterized as *collateral encouragement*. Participants in this study reported customers from their places of employment as substantial sources of motivation.

The theme of *self-efficacy to succeed* was prominent in both the research literature as well as the data collected from the participants in this study. The participants reinforced the literature findings, which stated self-efficacy was one of the most important factors in academic success (Ellis, 2011; Webb et al., 2015). The data collected in this study confirmed the literature, finding students with a highly internal locus of control more likely to persist to graduation (Wang, 2009). The participants in this study also demonstrated a high level of self-confidence which contributed to academic and career success (Walsh & Kurpius, 2015). A substantial finding from this research was the source of self-efficacy. Some students develop self-efficacy in the cauldron of adversity. Mentors engineered another contributor to self-efficacy; two participants in this study fit this mold. They encountered traumatic events in their lives. They drew strength and gained wisdom from older, more experienced individuals who taught them how to overcome adversity and believe in themselves.

The theme “expectation of success” was one of the strongest themes which emerged from the data. The expectancy theory, states that past experiences of academic success influence current perceptions of academic success (Vroom, 1964). From the researcher’s vantage point, the expectation to be successful was one of the most obvious characteristics which distinguished this group of students. The students simply expected to succeed and would not accept an alternative.

The theme of *planning to succeed* was a prominent finding in this research. However, this theme was scarce in the literature. Two studies found the construct *intent to persist* as a
significant variable which predicted persistence to graduation (Mitchell & Hughes, 2013; Moreira et al., 2013). The findings in this study confirmed intent to persist as a positive influence on persistence to graduation. However, the research conducted in this study placed the notion of intent to persist within the broader theme of planning to succeed. Intent was an important component of planning but there were other additional components to the construct “planning to succeed.” A further contribution from the study was a logical underpinning of the process which leads to persistence. This study discovered a logical nexus which connects the personal factors of successful students who persist to graduation. Students who persist are motivated to do what is necessary to persist. Motivated students have confidence in themselves they are going to be successful in persisting (self-efficacy). Motivated students with a high level of self-efficacy expect to succeed. Motivated students with a high level of self-efficacy who expect to persist plan to succeed.

Research Question Two

How do community college transfer students experience academic factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree? The initial theme of orientation was prominent in both literature and data. The literature found orientation a positive influence in academic success (Ellis, 2011). However, the participants in this study did not give high marks on this theme. That the university did not offer orientation for transfer students registered one of the most negative experiences for this group of students.

A second theme, which is prominent in the literature as well as the data was academic advising. In the literature, authors found academic advising a positive influence on academic success (Wernersbach et al., 2014). Most students in this study shared some type of horror story about receiving incorrect or bad advice from academic advisors which cost them time, energy,
and money. One participant was not aware he had an academic advisor at his community college. He mapped out his own academic schedule. When he arrived at the university he had two classes which would not transfer which was equivalent with the number of disallowed classes for most students who had received academic advising. This participant, along with several others, did not see that academic advising added much value to their experience.

Mentoring was a third theme which surfaced in the literature as well as the data in this study. According to the literature, mentoring exerted a positive influence on academic success (Stewart, Lim, & Kim, 2015). Mentoring was a theme which resonated strongly with the participants in this study. Mentoring was a strong advantage at the community college level but not as much at the university level. Every participant in this study mentioned a fond recollection of some community college individual who had taken them under their wing and helped them find their way in life. Not one participant mentioned a university individual who had befriended them. Most participants stated that university personnel were, as a rule, aloof and impersonal.

A fourth theme which emerged in the literature and the data was curriculum. The literature draws attention to differences between the academic requirements at the community college level and at the university level (Townsend, 2006). Most community college transfer students struggle academically during their first year at the university. The participants in this study verified this finding from the literature. The overwhelming majority of participants in this study agreed that the curriculum at the community college they attended was easy and did not adequately prepare them for the more rigorous requirements which they encountered at the university level.

A fifth theme which was encountered in the literature and in the data concerned the culture of the institution. The literature discovered that a welcoming environment was one of the
most powerful influences for academic success (Ellis, 2011). In this study, the participants discovered a welcoming environment at the community college level but not at the university level. This finding aligned with the literature (Townsend, 2006). The unique finding produced in this study was that those students who persisted to graduation were those students who made the necessary adjustments. Students who persisted made mental, emotional, and psychological adjustments which enabled them to overcome the lack of attention and the impersonal nature of the university environment.

**Research Question Three**

*How do community college transfer students experience demographic factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree?* The first demographic theme, considered in the research literature, concluded that nontraditional age students had an advantage over traditional age students in two areas. According to research studies, nontraditional age students are more prepared for the responsibilities of pursuing a bachelor’s degree (Cejda & Kaylor, 2001; Stewart, Lim, & Kim, 2015). A second advantage which nontraditional students have over traditional age students is a heightened maturity (Wernersbach et al., 2014; Mitchell & Hughes, 2014). There was only one nontraditional student involved in this study and he confirmed the findings of previous research. He felt that he was more mature and better prepared to take on the rigors and responsibilities of college. Remarkably, the traditional age students in this study also confirmed the findings of previous research. A sizeable number of the participants had come to grips with the fact that their age, their lack of experience, and their lower level of maturity produced a deficit which worked against them in their efforts to persist to graduation.

The second demographic theme considered in the research was race/ethnicity. The literature in the field concluded that race/ethnicity played a role in a student’s academic success.
(Davidson, 2015). The previous research focused predominantly on detrimental effects which race/ethnicity has exerted on minority students (Fairle, Hoffman, & Oreopolas, 2014). The participants in this study did not speak with a unified voice. Two students were Latina; one asserted that race/ethnicity played a minor role in their academic experience with minor negative consequences; whereas the other Latina student expressed a major problem with majority individuals which was resolved with the assistance of a mentor. There were also five African American students in the study. The two female student registered that race/ethnicity had been a non-factor in their academic experience. Two of the African American male participants expressed their opinion that race/ethnicity had been a hurdle they had to overcome. Both students acknowledged that being black put them in a position where they felt they had to overcome certain stereotypes in order to establish their credibility. Twelve of the thirteen Caucasian students were of the opinion race/ethnicity had little or no impact on their academic process. However, there was one Caucasian student who registered the complaint that he felt like his race put him at a disadvantage when it came to scholarships and a variety of awards.

The third academic theme considered in the research was gender. Previous research found that female students have a significantly higher likelihood of completing a bachelor’s degree than male students (Davidson, 2015; Wang, 2009; Wang 2012). The participants in this study were mute when it came to the subject of gender. Two female participants commented on gender. One participant found gender to be a benefit if used as an advantage. She suggested that female students could engender sympathy from instructors in a way that male students could not. Another female student found gender a hurdle to overcome in a major which was male-dominated. One male student suggested that males had an advantage over females in academia but he was not satisfied with such an arrangement.
Research Question Four

How do community college transfer students experience social factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree? The previous research in the area of academic achievement has found that academic involvement and social integration are two factors which contribute to academic success (Cabrera et al., 1993; Kelly, 2014). These factors, categorized as athletic involvement (Kelly, 2014), club involvement (Wang, 2009), and work (Cabrera et al., 1993). The participants in this study did not speak with a unified voice. The participants spoke of athletics in two ways. The first type of athletic involvement was athletics for entertainment. Several participants considered athletics for entertainment as a waste of time. Other participants viewed athletics for entertainment as a way to break stress, freshen the mind, and return to study with a rejuvenated spirit. Another group of participants felt that attending sporting events helped them to bond with other students which produced a social integration with the institution. The second type of athletic involvement related to fitness training. Two participants were involved in varsity athletics and two other participants were majoring in fields that will lead to a sports psychology and athletic training degrees. These four participants were involved in regular fitness programs and saw the value of physical fitness. One participant understood the science which explained the way in which regular aerobic exercise contributed to the mental process which improved study. Another group of participants engaged in a regular regimen of physical fitness but did not connect this activity to academic pursuits. A small minority of participants did not engage in physical fitness. One participant worked three jobs in addition to attending university as a full time student. Another participant preferred the arts and felt it accomplished the same objectives physical fitness deigned to accomplish. A final participant declined to participate in
athletics because he felt like time not devoted to accomplishing his goal of attaining his bachelor’s degree was time squandered.

The participants addressed the activity of club involvement. The type of club involvement divided into Greek life and academic. Only three of the twenty participants were involved in Greek life. One of the participants did not get a chance to participate in Greek life because her sorority did not receive their charter until two weeks before she graduated. The other two participants were in agreement that the structure of the fraternity assisted them in accomplishing their academic goals by holding them accountable, providing them structure, and giving them discipline.

Surprisingly, there were only a small number of participants involved in academic clubs or honor societies. The presumption would have been that highly motivated, self-confident students would be actively involved in many academic clubs and societies. A small number of the participants viewed study clubs as a way of getting them focused and not sidetracked. Several of the participants said they knew themselves and realized, when left to their own devices, they would procrastinate. For that reason, they found study clubs helpful in advancing their academic careers. A number of participants saw academic honor societies as a resume builder. They were not actively involved in the workings of the society but joined because the prestige of the honor society. A sizeable number of participants in this study simply did not have time for clubs of societies. They were of the opinion they were disciplined and self-sufficient, in which case a club or society was not necessary.

There is one possible reason why many of the participants were not involved in athletics or clubs. They simply did not have time. Two of the participants were scholarship athletes. Thirteen of the participants were working either a full-time or a part-time job. This is an anomaly
because previous research has indicated that students who engage in greater than 19 hours employment off campus have a significantly lower probability of persisting to graduation (Tinto, 2004). The participants in the study do not fit this mold. One group of participants works in full-time jobs which align with their course of study. Everything they do in class corresponds with some activity they do in their job. They work in an office with a group of experts who can assist them with any problem they might encounter in class. Finally, some of the participants have found employers who give them flexible work schedules and allow them to study during down times. There is another reason which contributes to the success of these particular students. For the most part, all of the participants seem highly motivated, self-confident who expect to succeed and plan to succeed.

**Theoretical Considerations**

The theoretical framework for this study consisted of 13 propositions which explained the phenomenon of student success. The demographic factors took five propositions and combined them into one. When I break these five propositions out of demographic factors the result is 17 propositions (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011).

The initial proposition, financing college, stated that the student was working while attending college, paying tuitions through loans or grants (Tinto, 2004). The findings of the study aligned with the theoretical framework. Thirteen of the twenty participants worked at least one part-time job, two participants were on athletic scholarship, and fifteen participants had some sort of grant or loan.

The second attribute, attribution theory, indicated that successful students feel they are in control of their academic destinies (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2006). The participants in this study
were in alignment with this position. This is exhibited by the quote from Alexander Marshall who said, “At the end of the day I am human and I can do anything.”

The third proposition, value theory, affirms that students assign value to their coursework and that value influences their success (Bong, 2001). The participants in this study were more focused on the end goal of getting a good job and bettering their lives. They did place value on the courses they were taking but view them more as a means to an end.

The fourth proposition, goal setting, was validated in this study by the participants (Locke & Latham, 1990). Every student exhibited goal-oriented behaviors to a large extent. Emblematic of this characteristic was Chris Sanford who had mapped out the next two years of his life within weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly goals.

The fifth proposition, self-efficacy, delineated as students who believe they are competent (Bandura, 1977; Bean & Eaton, 2000). The participants in this study confirmed this proposition of the theoretical framework. In fact, self-efficacy, explained as confidence, was one of the strongest characteristics of this group of participants.

The sixth proposition was optimism (Nes, Evans, & Segerstrom, 2009). In this group of participants, optimism was a common characteristic. Most participants felt like good things would happen to them. However, two participants expected bad things to happen and then used this pessimism as motivation to become proactive and “make lemonade out of lemons” as one participant stated.

The seventh proposition, academic preparation, is defined as the quality of a student’s prior instruction and his or her preparedness for college level work (Bean, 1980). This was one area in which the participants in this study were out of accord with the theoretical framework. With the exception of one participant there was universal agreement among the participants that
they were not academically prepared for college level work when they transferred to the university.

The eighth proposition, academic engagement, involved positive faculty student interactions and taking advantage of resources which promote academic success (Wycoff, 1998; Habley, 2004). The initial portion of this proposition was not a part of the experience of the participants in this study. The participants in this study were universal in their comments as a general rule, of how faculty members tried to keep interactions with students to a minimum. There was a relatively equal split on the second portion of this position. A number of participants saw the value of academic resources such as study groups and tutoring sessions. This group of participants readily availed themselves of these resources. A second group of participants in this study did not see the value of these resources and did not avail themselves of them. Members of this group felt their time, energy, and resources were used most efficiently when they approached their study life in autonomous fashion.

The ninth proposition, expectancy theory, stated that past experiences of academic success influence current perceptions of academic success (Vroom, 1964). This group of participants affirmed the expectancy theory. In fact, the theme expectation of success was one of the strongest themes which emerged from the data. From the researcher’s vantage point, the expectation to be successful was one of the most obvious characteristics with distinguished this group of students.

The tenth proposition, academic self-concept, says that when students believe they are academically competent they will perform well in the academic realm (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). This facet of the theoretical framework was a process in this study. When the students in this study initially transferred they were, for the most part, overwhelmed. They did not feel
academically prepared for college level work. They had difficulties with the impersonal tone of the university culture and what they perceived as a lack of concern from the university community. Each participant began with a low academic self-image. However, the participants in this study made the necessary adjustments and slowly but surely they developed a robust academic self-image by the conclusion of their junior year.

The eleventh proposition was demographics. This proposition was composed of five parts: parent’s level of education, gender, ethnicity, family income, and distance from the institution (Choy, 2001). Nine of the students in this study were FGCS. Three participants had one parent with a bachelor’s degree. One student had one parent with a master’s degree. The participants in this study did not see parental level of education as an advantage or a disadvantage with respect to their educational experience.

There were twelve male participants and eight female participants in this study. One female participant considered being female as an advantage for academic success. One male participant felt being male was an advantage to his academic success. The remaining participants in the study considered gender as a non-factor.

In this study, there were two Latina participants, five African-American participants, and thirteen Caucasian participants. One of the Latina participants viewed race and ethnicity as an important factor in her educational experience. Two African-American males understood race and ethnicity as an influential factor in their educational experience. Two white male participants considered race and ethnicity as an influential factor in their educational experience. One white male participant considered race and ethnicity as a positive advantage. The other white male considered race and ethnicity as a negative influence. One Latina participant, two female
African-American participants, and eleven white participants considered race and ethnicity to be a non-factor in their educational experience.

There was only one participant who mentioned that his parents were financially wealthy. This participant, Hunter Freeman, worked part-time as a waiter in a restaurant; however, his motivation for working was to gather experience for his future career aspiration which was to be a restaurant owner. In the study, 19 of the 20 participants were either on scholarship, had taken out student loans, and/or paying for school with some type of grant. The students in this study did not comment about their lack of funds or financial support for college. Working and attending college was considered a given for these students.

Other than the one out of state student in this study, 18 of the 20 participants were from the same state with hometowns within a 100 miles radius of the institution. One student was from the southwestern part of the state, approximately 350 miles from campus. Other than the two outliers, the participants in the study view close proximity to home as an advantage for their educational success.

The twelfth proposition was social engagement which stated that socially integrating into the college campus communities was an influential factor in student success (Swail, 2014). A small segment of this group of students viewed social engagement as a helpful ingredient for their success. Another group of students acknowledged that social integration would have been a welcome addition to their college experience. Unfortunately for this group of students, their class schedule did not leave any time for social activities. A third group of students did not value the benefits of social integration. The mindset of this group of students was that social activities were a diversion from their ultimate goal of finishing their degree. Therefore, social integration was a low priority for this group of students.
The thirteenth proposition was a motivational orientation which was understood as a balance of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Lin & McKeachie, 1999). The participants in this study were pristine examples of this theoretical principle. In fact, motivation to succeed was one of the most powerful themes to emerge in this study. The participants exhibited highly extrinsic motivation. Virtually every participant registered that they wanted to get a good job, make a lot of money, and buy things which would enable them to enjoy the finer things in life. This strong sense of extrinsic motivation was accompanied by an equally strong sense of intrinsic motivation. Virtually every participant in this study voiced the sentiment that they wanted to make something out of themselves or be someone important. The participants considered education as the vehicle which would allow them to realize these objectives.

**Conclusions**

There were a number of places where the findings of this study confirmed, aligned with, and enhanced the findings of previous research. For example, participants in this study exhibited a balance level of intrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The participants in this study had a strong sense of self-efficacy. Participants in this study commented how a close mentoring relationship enhanced their college experience. Finally, participants in this study noted how challenged they felt by the dramatic difference between the culture of the community college and the culture of the university. In this study, however, there were two substantial conclusions, not prominently featured, in previous research. These conclusions concern the influence of traumatic events in a student’s experience, and an ability to make adjustments, all of which explains transfer student success.
Conclusion 1: Traumatic Experiences Enhance Motivation

Previous research has focused on student motivation. The primary findings asserted that positive experiences, contribute to the enhancement of a student’s intrinsic, as well as, extrinsic motivation. In this study, various participants indicated that certain traumatic, jolting, and negative experiences enhanced their motivation. One student marked a monumental shift in his motivation to excel when his mother attempted suicide. Another participant marked the turning point in her motivation when she found herself pregnant with no husband and no future. Two participants marked the event of failing out as the event that motivated them to succeed. Three participants also noted their awareness of racial stereotypes as the catalyst that motivated them to excel academically. Finally, two participants motivated themselves with the endeavor to prove everybody wrong. From the findings of this study, it is apparent that certain traumatic, jolting, and negative experiences motivate certain students to excel academically.

Conclusion 2: Successful Transfer Students Make Adjustments

Each of the participants in this study confronted some type of monumental difficulty which presented a major hurdle in their path to academic achievement. Two students, mentioned previously, encountered academic failure during their pursuit to a bachelor’s degree. Both students realized that they had to make some changes in their lives and their lifestyles. These students were successful in making the necessary changes. Several participants in this study felt as if they were victims of bad academic advising. A number of participants discovered some of their courses would not transfer from their previous community colleges. A second group of participants were advised to take classes at the university which did not count toward their degree. In both situations, the students in this study took a proactive stance and took control of scheduling their classes. Finally, every participant in this study endured the consternation that
occurs when a student moves from a family like environment which characterizes most community colleges to an impersonal environment which characterizes many university settings. Those students who persisted were able to make the necessary academic, personal, emotional, and social adjustments which were required of them.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

A recommendation is made to expand the study to include multiple institutions and multiple types of four-year universities to see if these findings are common in other universities. A mixed methods study could be utilized to gather large amounts of survey data then utilize focus groups of participants to have them share their stories with their small group of participants. In doing so, the participants may show commonalities in their pursuit. Another recommendation with creating a longitudinal study that tracks students from the start of community college throughout their baccalaureate attainment could show if gaining self-confidence is instilled through friends and family, adversity, or through maturity. The study could focus on the experiences the students have and how they overcame the obstacles they encounter.

**Recommendation for Practitioners**

Many studies have been conducted on transfer students and transfer student persistence. To date there are few comprehensive manuals which explain the transfer to persistence process in a practical fashion which would inform students of the issues which await them as they embark on their journey toward a bachelor’s degree. It is recommended that a comprehensive manual be developed and provided to each transfer student who enrolls at the four-year institution. The first part of the manual should present the challenges which are going to confront most transfer students. The second part of the manual should present the solutions to the challenges which were presented in the initial part of the manual. This selection should provide a
road map which will assist transfer students in navigating the rough academic, emotional, and social terrain which they will encounter once they arrive on the four-year institution campus. Finally, the material will assist the student in understanding how a student successfully navigates the process of persistence to graduation. Examples of how students made crucial adjustments in the process should also be included in this final section of the manual.

**Recommendation for the Institution**

When asked what they needed most for a smoother transition from community college to university the participants in this study spoke with a unified voice. They said, “We need an orientation for transfer students.” The university did not offer an orientation for transfer students. An advisor told one student there were not enough transfer students to justify the resources necessary to conduct a transfer student orientation. In this age of social media, it is possible to develop orientations at a relatively low cost. A recommendation is made to the university in this study develop transfer orientation using the following instruments. A transfer app which contains pertinent information concerning transfer students would be a helpful. A transfer student Facebook or other social media page would be a useful social media instrument which would assist students in understanding the nature of the university. Likewise, a university transfer club would provide a useful social avenue for other students to become acquainted with other students who are encountering similar issues. Also, a transfer page on the university website would provide an additional resource by which transfer students could access pertinent information. Finally, a “Transfer Students with Children Club” would provide a welcome networking opportunity for a segment of the nontraditional transfer student population.
Conclusion

This research study has built on the foundation that was laid out by previous researchers in the field of transfer student persistence. The data from this study will serve to increase retention rates in transfer students and enable them to persist to graduation. The research conducted in this study verified the obstacles which confront most transfer students when they progress from a community college to a four-year institution. Moving from a family like environment to an impersonal environment proved to be a monumental obstacle for the participants in this study. This study uncovered the capacity to make adjustments as a characteristic which distinguishes students who persist to graduation. Previous research has uncovered positive experiences as a motivator for transfer students who persist to graduation. This study uncovered the notion that negative experiences can also provide an effective motivating factor in transfer students who persist to graduation. The primary result of this research was the development of a model which explained the process by which transfer students persist to graduation.

A disturbing amount of students who start at community colleges never complete a bachelor’s degree. This complicates their lives by the large amount of wasted time, energy, and incurred stress. Many students are not prepared for college level work and may not acquire the help and support they need from family, friends, or college employees. By focusing on the experiences the 20 participants had in this study it was my hope to find out why these students are special. The findings showed many different and varied reasons students persist, and having a better understanding of these reasons can help individuals and institutions improve the likelihood of graduation with all of the benefits that completing a college degree can provide.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Date:

Place:

Time:

Participant information:

Name (Print): ___________________________  Pseudonym: ___________________________

Phone: _________________________________  Email: ________________________________

Age: _________________________________  Sex: ________________________________

Race: _________________________________  Ethnicity: ______________________________

Degree: _______________________________  Major: ________________________________

Overarching Interview question:

Now that you are about to graduate with a bachelor’s degree, would you reflect back on the last few years and tell me what the experience was like?

Research Question 1: How do community college transfer students experience personal factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree?

Tell me about the greatest motivator you have to complete your bachelor’s degree?
Sub questions:

How do you think your own internal motivators contributed to your success as a student?

Tell me what motivators you have in your life for you to complete a bachelor’s degree?

How did financial status or received aid factor into your success? (SES)

*Research Question 2: How do community college transfer students experience academic factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree?*

How has academic advising or other counseling influenced which classes you took?

Sub questions:

How do you feel about the grades you received at Community College versus those attained at University (GPA)?

How did successfully completing classes at and then transferring from a Community College reassure you about your abilities to persist?

Describe the after class (or outside of class) interactions you had with your professors (faculty involvement)?

*Research Question 3: How do community college transfer students experience demographic factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree?*

Tell me about the people that you interact with on a daily basis?

Sub questions:

Tell me how your race affected you in your effort to attain a bachelor’s degree?
Tell me how your ethnicity affected you in your effort to attain a bachelor’s degree?

How did your age impact your ability to complete a bachelor’s degree?

How did your gender influence your success as a student?

**Research Question 4:** How do community college transfer students experience social factors in persistence to graduation with a bachelor’s degree?

How do you feel that social gatherings at your university, or other places, have kept you engaged?

**Sub questions:**

How did your social activities contribute to your academic success?

What role did participation in student organizations play in your ability to attain a bachelor’s degree?

Did athletics contribute to your academic success? How?
## APPENDIX B:

### PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTION

Conducted interviews

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<th>Pseudonym</th>
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**Race**

- B  Black
- L  Latino
- W  White
APPENDIX C:

RECRUITMENT LETTERS

Recruitment Letter Number One

Greetings:

My name is Lance Gilliland. I am a graduate student at the University of Alabama enrolled in the Higher Education Administration program. I am currently writing my dissertation for a doctorate degree and I am looking for participants who would like to be interviewed. I received your contact information from [University Registrar], who works at [the University], she said you may meet the criteria, and may want to be interviewed.

The goal of my dissertation is to find out what experiences a community college transfer student has at college that helps them persist to graduation. The student will have to be near the end of their coursework (completed 110 credit hours) or recently graduated. I would like to tell your story as well as help colleges offer memorable experiences for transfer students so the students will be more likely to complete.

Would you be willing to meet with me in order to discuss your experiences that you encountered in the pursuit of your baccalaureate degree? The interview would include a standard set of questions and would last at least 90 minutes.

Your participation will be strictly confidential. I will not share any identifiable information about your identity with anyone except my dissertation chair. The information that you provide will be kept confidential and stored in a locked cabinet. This being said, no questions that will be asked are of a sensitive nature. You will be asked to sign a waiver form before we start. If you would like to discuss the interview questions before you sign the form, they will be provided to you.

Are you willing to participate? Can we schedule a place and time now? If possible I would prefer to meet at [the University]. The interview will take place in an open/public setting of your choosing or one will be provided.

Please, respond to this email, call, or text me at 256-452-XXXX. We will set up a place and time that you would like to meet. I do very well with emails or texts as I can answer them easier than phone messages at times because I have two kids.

If you have any questions or concerns about this request or the interview, feel free to contact me via email or phone.

Many thanks,

Lance Gilliland
Second Email:

Hello, you may have received an email from me during the summer semester. I still need more students to complete my research and I would like your help. I wanted to wait until the fall semester to email you a second time. I am planning to start performing interviews starting next week (8/28) and continue them throughout September if needed. I just started my semester as well. If you have already emailed me and I have interviewed you, I would like to say thank you. I have gathered some great information, heard some great stories, and really enjoyed meeting each one of you. If you have declined an interview, I appreciate you emailing me back and letting me know, please disregard this email.

If possible, email me back with your willingness to be interviewed. If you do not use your [the University] email address often, please let me know the email address or phone number you want me to contact you at. Lastly, please add your name in the subject line so I can easily reference your email (for example; possible interview Lance Gilliland). I have included the original email below for reference and refresher.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Greetings:

My name is Lance Gilliland. I am a graduate student at the University of Alabama enrolled in the Higher Education Administration program. I am currently writing my dissertation for a doctorate degree and I am looking for participants who would like to be interviewed. I received your contact information from [University Registrar], who works at [the University], she said you may meet the criteria, and may want to be interviewed.

The goal of my dissertation is to find out what experiences a community college transfer student has at college that helps them persist to graduation. The student will have to be near the end of their coursework (completed 110 credit hours) or recently graduated. I would like to tell your story as well as help colleges offer memorable experiences for transfer students so the students will be more likely to complete.

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Please, respond to this email, call, or text me at 256-452-XXXX. We will set up a place and time that you would like to meet. I do very well with emails or texts as I can answer them easier than phone messages at times because I have two kids.

If you have any questions or concerns about this request or the interview, feel free to contact me via email or phone.

Many thanks,

Lance Gilliland
APPENDIX D:

CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM
CONSENT FORM FOR NONMEDICAL INTERVIEW STUDY

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

Individual's Consent to be in a Research Study

You are being asked to be in a research study, this study is called “The Experience of Community College Transfer Students in the Process of Attaining a Bachelor’s Degree at a Regional Public University.” This study is being done by Mr. Lance Gilliland. He is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Higher Education Administration at the University of Alabama. Mr. Gilliland is being supervised by Dr. David E. Hardy, Associate Dean for Research and Service and Associate Professor of Higher Education in the College of Education at the University of Alabama. Because this study is a partial fulfillment of degree Mr. Gilliland is not receiving any monetary compensation or salary for completing this project.

What is this study about?

The intent of this qualitative study is to seek to understand the factors and experience’s students receive from community college and university that assist them to persist to graduation. Currently, there is much research detailing what factors help students succeed but virtually no studies that explain these factors. Therefore the significant factors are listed, but not explained. The purpose of this study is to give voice to those individuals who transferred from community college to university and the experience’s they had that helped them to succeed.

Why is this study important – What good will the results do?

An intensive examination of community college transfer students who are about to graduate with a bachelor’s degree will provide insight into ways which community colleges and universities may increase students’ persistence and help ensure their success. The emphasis on experiences from a students’ perspective may be of value to practitioners and advisors when determining what experiences they should provide to students.

Why have I been asked to take part in this study?

You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a community college transfer student, who completed 110 credit hours of course work, and seem to be intent on persisting to graduation. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 7-18-17
EXPIRATION DATE: 7-17-18
How many people will be in this study?

The investigator will interview 30 students. The participants will be selected in an attempt to mirror the institution's diversity.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, Mr. Gilliland will ask you some interview questions, in a single interview with you at a mutually agreed upon time and location. The interview will last for about 60 minutes but may go over a few minutes. Mr. Gilliland will use a semi-structured interview question protocol as a guide for the interview. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Every effort will be made to protect your privacy. Your name will not be used in any publications that result from the study. Any potentially identifying comments will be masked as much as possible without distorting the meaning of your responses.

How much time will I spend in this study?

The interview should last between 60 and 90 minutes, this depends on how much information about your experiences you choose to share.

Will being in this study cost me anything?

The only cost to you is your time.

Will I be compensated for being in this study?

There will be no financial remuneration for participating in this study.

What are the risks (problems or dangers) of being in this study?

There are no foreseeable risks.

What are the benefits of being in this study?

There are no direct benefits to you. However, the researcher will attempt to learn which factors you experienced while persisting to where you currently are. These insights may lead to useful recommendations to current and future administrators, as well as, faculty members who seek to enhance the experiences of students at community colleges and universities.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your identity and participation in the study will be known only to the researcher and you. You are free to decide where and when the researcher will conduct the private, one-on-
one interviews so you may talk without being overheard. When the researcher reports findings and/or publishes any articles using the data, he will use pseudonyms to endure participants’ anonymity.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**

All data collected for this study— the audio recordings, transcripts of the interviews, and incidents— will be kept on a password encrypted hard drive, locked in Mr. Gilliland’s office at his work office. He will be the only person who has access to this information. The data will be retained on the hard drive for a period of five years after the study is completed. At the end of the five-year period, all information will be shredded and or incinerated. When the researcher reports findings and/or publishes any articles using this data, he will use pseudonyms to ensure participants’ anonymity.

**What are the alternatives to being in this study?**

The only alternative is not to participate.

**What are my rights as a participant?**

Being in this study is voluntary. It is your prerogative to participate or not. You may choose not to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. Not participating or stopping participating will have no effect on your relationship with the researcher.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board is a committee that looks out for the ethical treatment of people in research studies. They may review the study if they wish. This is to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

**Who do I call if I have questions or problems?**

If you have questions about this study, please ask them. I will enjoy talking to you about them. Please contact me by phone at (256) 452-5069 or email me at lgilliland@gadsdenstate.edu.

You may also contact the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. David E. Hardy, director of Research at the Education Policy Center at the University of Alabama and Assistant Professor in the Higher Education Administration Program, via phone (205) 348-8038 or through mail at the following address:

Dr. David E. Hardy  
College of Education  
The University of Alabama  
207 Carmichael Hall  
Box 870231  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0231
If you have questions about your rights as a study participant or at any time become dissatisfied with any aspect of the study, you may anonymously contact Ms. Tanta Myles, The University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer, at (205) 348-8461 or toll free at (877) 820-3066. You may ask questions, make a suggestion, or file complaints or concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_welcome.html. After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the online survey for research participants, which is located at the website above. If you prefer, you may ask Mr. Kelly for a hard copy of the transcript. Should you have further questions, you may send an email to participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

____ Yes, you have my permission to audio record the interview.

____ No, I do not want my interview recorded.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 7-18-17
EXPIRATION DATE: 7-17-18
APPENDIX E:

IRB APPROVAL

July 18, 2017

Michael Gilliland
College of Education
The University of Alabama
Box 870231

Re: IRB # 17-06-234, “The Experience of Community College Transfer Students in the Process of Attaining a Bachelor’s Degree at a Regional Public University”

Dear Mr. Gilliland:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on July 17, 2018. If your research will continue beyond this date, please complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent forms to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office for Research Compliance
July 11, 2017

Dear Lance Gilliland:

Your proposal submitted for full review by the Human Participants Review Protocol for the project titled: "The Experience of Community College Transfer Students in the Process of Attaining a Bachelor's Degree at a Regional Public University", has been reviewed and approved as exempt. If the project is still in process one year from now, you are asked to provide the IRB with a renewal application and a report on the progress of the research project.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Redacted Information]