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DEGREE PURSUIT BY VERY-AT-RISK STUDENTS:
EXAMINING CHARACTERISTIC FACTORS LEADING TO DEGREE COMPLETION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Marian E. Yoder

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Title: Degree Pursuit by Very-at-risk Students: Examining Characteristic Factors Leading to
Degree Completion

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This qualitative research study examines factors found in very-at-risk students contributing to degree or diploma completion. The purpose of this study was to locate the areas of their college program that contributed to their success, and to identify internal factors that were not readily apparent. Personal interviews provided an open-ended, in-depth exploration of the participant's journey through their educational program.

The analysis of the data indicates that the academic programs and support services offered by the community college under study extensively contributed to the success of these graduates. Participants identified aspects of the college program that are valuable to the success of the students and provided details that can inform initiatives for improvement. The findings in this part of the study support Vincent Tinto's (1993) integration theory that student motivation and academic ability aligned with institutional academic and social characteristics lead to degree achievement and Bean's (1990) attrition model in identifying the contributing role of external factors to student retention and, ultimately, degree achievement.

Non-academic factors that emerged from the data include: faculty relationships; other persons of support such as parents, extended family members, and friends; goals and faith; and personal qualities including determination, perseverance, and self-efficacy. Parents and faculty members emerged as highly significant to student success.

Through cross-referencing, four themes emerged which include: dealing with failure, relationship with instructors, inner drives, and functionalism. Bernard Weiner's Attribution

Theory formed the framework for explaining persistence through failure found throughout interview transcriptions. Participants strongly affirmed faculty and named “heroes” who significantly affected their college experience and life as a whole. Prevalent also was the sense of something within that drove them and would not let them quit. The imagery of the fourth theme, functionalism, is that of a well-oiled machine (structure) that works (functions) well.

Interviewees in this study described their experience at the community college as a supportive system working well on their behalf. This research offers insights to community college leaders and faculty directly from very at-risk students and delineates strengths and weaknesses useful for program evaluation.

Acknowledgements

My journey through this doctoral program paralleled the story of the very-at-risk graduates that I studied. The factors leading to persistence were similar: my professors, my husband, my faith in Christ and His plan for my life, and the desire to fulfill a life-long dream. I could not have achieved this on my own any more than could the graduates of this study who crossed the finish line. Therefore, I acknowledge, thank, and bless all those who encouraged, aided, and believed in me when I could not.

At the top of my list – way at the top – is my husband, Keith, who supported and encouraged me from the day I put out that tentative e-mail to Susan Boser, director of the doctoral program at IUP at that time. That support included reading this dissertation countless times, editing, and offering suggestions.

Many people cheered from the sidelines—too numerous to mention here, but all very important to me. Thank you for asking about my progress even when I didn't want to think or talk about it.

A special thank-you to Charlene Leaman, who remained my faithful intercessor in prayer throughout the seven years of study. Thank you for arranging to meet for updates and prayer encouragement.

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Further, my dissertation committee has been phenomenal. Even they were chosen by God. John, you moved from professor, to chair, to friend in the process. Val, your expertise in the field of qualitative research was invaluable to me—even more, you led me to enjoy it. Beth, I didn't even know you when I asked you to be on my committee, but I did know that in prayer,

you emerged strong in my mind, and wow, was that the right choice. I feel so privileged to have had you as a mentor—you are one astute lady!

Finally, I must pass along to the world the names of those who were the “heroes” named by the participants in this study. These instructors and many others that the graduates could no longer name, but are not forgotten, changed the lives of these twenty participants. They represent the instructors in community colleges everywhere in the United States of America who give their lives daily that life may be different for these very-at-risk students. Know you are remembered for your efforts. They are listed here in the order the participants spoke of them.

Dr. Susan Bangs
Jason Nielson
Lawrence Rupert
Connie Kondravy
Cindy Rose
Marian Yoder
Anna, librarian at York Campus
Library lady
Shelly Blanship
Pauline Chow
Miss Conway, math
Ann Burns
Marty Wise
Carol Martin

Brad Fisher
Professor Holfledge, speech
Linda Mininger
Beth Ann, music
David Petkosh
Lisa Wolf
Marie Ulmen
Mrs. Murphey, now retired
Larry Daren
Rick Orange
Heather Burns
Geri Gutwein
Edward Omolo

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Prologue	1
Personal Background	2
Background of the Problem	3
Problem Statement.....	4
Statement of Purpose and Research Questions	5
Research Design	6
Significance of the Study	8
Assumptions	10
Definition of Terms	11
Delimitations	13
Chapter Two: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE	14
Population	14
Historical Background	16
Controversy	21
Educational.....	21
Economic.....	24
Political	25
Recent Research	28
Developmental Programs	29
College Success Courses.....	30
Advising	31
Faculty.....	31
At-risk Student Characteristics	33

Attrition/Retention	37
Conceptual and Theoretical Framework.....	40
Theoretical Base	42
Constructivist Theory within the Confines of this Study.....	42
Critical Theory within the Confines of this Study.....	43
Retention Theories within the Confines of this Study.....	45
Summary and Conclusion	46
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	48
Research Design	48
Research Site and Participant Selection	49
Participant Demographics	50
Data Collection.....	51
Data Description and Analysis.....	54
Credibility and Trustworthiness	55
Transferability	55
Summary and Conclusion	56
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA DESCRIPTION	57
Academic Program Factors.....	59
Developmental Courses	59
Learning Center – Tutoring Program.....	63
College Success Courses.....	66
Advising	69
Library Assistance	73
Financial Aid	76
Teaching Methods	78

Non-academic Factors	83
Faculty Relationships.....	84
Negative indicators	89
Other Persons of Support	89
Sources of Support.....	91
Faith	92
Goals	96
Personal Character Qualities	101
Determination	101
Perseverance	105
Self-efficacy.....	109
Obstacles	114
Summary and Conclusion	120
CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	123
Theme 1 – Dealing with Failure.....	124
Theme 2 – Relationships with Faculty	128
Heroes	131
Theme 3 – Inner Drives	137
Theme 4 – Structural Functionalism as seen in Student Active Pursuit of Degree ..	139
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION	146
Summary of the Study	146
Summary of the Findings.....	149
Academic Factors	150
Developmental courses	150
Learning center-tutoring.....	151

College success courses	151
Advising	153
Library assistance.....	154
Financial aid	156
Teaching methods	157
Non-academic Factors	158
Faculty relationships	159
Other persons of support	160
Sources of support.....	160
Personal character qualities	161
Recommendations for College Personnel and Administrators	163
Recommendations for Future Research.....	164
Conclusion	165
References.....	167
Appendix A Interview Questions	180
Appendix B Profiles of Participants	182
Appendix C Factors Leading to Degree Completion	184
Appendix D Teaching Methods	193
Appendix E Teaching Methods Summary.....	200
Appendix F Teacher Evaluation.....	201

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Demographic Data Reflecting Diversity.....	15
2	Teaching Methods Preferred by Graduates.....	80
3	Why Colleagues Don't Succeed.....	119
4	Failure Theme	124
5	Causes of Success and Failure, Classified According to Locus, Stability, and Controllability	126
6	Evidence of Inner Drives	137

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
1 Occupations of Successful Remedial Education Students.....	9
2 Percentage of Students Academically Deficient and Seriously Deficient by Ethnicity .	37
3 Percentage of each Ethnic Group Seriously Deficient	37

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Prologue

The twenty-something woman entered my college classroom in time to organize her books and materials for the opening of class. It was about six weeks into the semester. As I returned graded papers, I had a perception that something was different – she had an unusually large stash on the floor by her side under her coat. Then it dawned on me. “Is that a baby under there?” I asked. She nodded reluctantly, realizing she was in violation of classroom protocol. Desperately, she explained, “I am a single mother who just moved here from New York. I brought my mother along as a babysitter so I could go to college and get my education. My mother was sick today, I know no one in this community to ask for help, and I have no money to pay for a sitter. I have to get my education. So I brought him along with me.” She waited with head bowed for the verdict.

I had been in community college work long enough to know the dilemma faced by many of our students. How does a single mother, who desperately needs an education to attain a better life for herself and her children, get that education with little support and no money? These challenges, along with limited educational background, result in overwhelming odds for many community college students. Mandatory entrance test results place many at-risk in-coming students into developmental courses designed to remediate underprepared students. This necessary practice results in even more time and money required to achieve the desired education.

Incidentally, I bypassed protocol; consequently, that baby came to college for most of the first two months of his life. I could not deny a young woman, who had that kind of persistence, her education. Besides, I thought I might be able to instill a desire for a college education early in the young child’s life.

Personal Background

I am an assistant professor of developmental reading at the community college under study. I teach sections of both the very-at-risk, i.e., the lowest scoring students enrolled in the college (score of 50 or below on the Accuplacer reading assessment test), as well as those who just missed the cut-off (those who score above 78 on the Accuplacer reading assessment test are not required to enroll in developmental reading).

Since my early elementary school years, I have been drawn to the students who exhibited learning challenges. As early as third grade, I can remember requesting permission of the teacher to help other students. After I acquired a bachelor's degree in elementary education, I taught first grade for five years but quickly realized that I felt compelled to spend time with those who struggled to learn to read and was far less drawn to work with the accelerated learners. I acquired a master's degree in elementary education with certification in reading instruction so that I could more knowledgeably help those with reading challenges.

During this time period, the field of learning disabilities came to the forefront. I then went back to school for a second master's degree in special education with an emphasis in learning disabilities and took a position working with this population. Eventually I helped to start a new school in our area for the express purpose of providing a rich and wholesome learning environment for special needs students including the mentally handicapped, learning disabled, and for those with no particular diagnosis who found school to be a challenge. These last two populations partly comprise the at-risk and very-at-risk population who go on to attempt a college education.

As delineated above, most of my life focus has centered on this population. I have observed and worked with nearly every type of at-risk student both when a student myself and later as a teacher. I bring to this study much experience and certainly some preconceived notions about what types of qualities correlate with success. I know that what seems apparent on the

surface does not always correspond with what is really happening behind the scenes. At the time I began the study, I had not felt drawn to any particular conclusion; however, I had a strong desire to discover information from the students themselves who did know the factors contributing to their success and could subsequently contribute to the literature in the field of developmental education.

Throughout the literature, at-risk students credit instructors, librarians, certain teaching methods, tutors, developmental courses, college success courses, as well as outside sources such as parents and significant others, for their success. The purpose of this study was to identify to what extent each has contributed to the individual's college experience, to locate the areas of the college program that also contributed to their success, and to uncover underlying, hidden factors that were not readily apparent.

Preliminary secondary data released from the college under study shows that 2200 students have been enrolled in English 001 (the lowest level reading course) between Fall 2000 and Spring 2010. Of these students, 61 have achieved an associate's degree to date. A graduation rate of 2.7% is too low to be considered acceptable; yet high enough to indicate that completion is possible. Therefore, I was interested, both as a professor and as assistant chair of the reading program, in determining what factors have made success possible for those who have graduated.

This study presents information that may also be particularly helpful to professors and guidance counselors at the community college under study and possibly in other similar settings. Interview data may be used to enhance or change developmental programs to better facilitate student needs.

Background of the Problem

This research study explores the factors that led to the successful completion of an associate's degree or diploma by very-at-risk students at a community college. Statistics reporting the success rates of community college students present as rather dismal. The

population addressed by this study were among the approximately 58% of all students who leave high school incapable of college level work. They were also among the 33% applying to colleges who lack the necessary skills to achieve success (McCabe, 2000).

Community colleges enroll these students in developmental courses designed to prepare them for college level work based on a placement test score. The lower the test scores, the more developmental courses these students must successfully complete before beginning college-credit courses. The amount of time and cost involved in this process drives many of these students to drop out, consequently creating the category “at-risk students.” This study defines the very-at-risk student as one who scores on the lowest end of the scale in the reading assessment which ultimately requires three reading courses and often one writing course before the student can take college-credit courses.

Unsurprising, at this particular community college under study, the very-at-risk population achieved degree or diploma-completion over the last decade at the minimal rate of 2.7%. This percentage suggests that more students could attain degrees given greater insight into the factors of success.

Problem Statement

The community college open-enrollment policy permits the enrollment of underprepared students. Despite significant effort on the part of these colleges to ensure success for these students, retention remains a major challenge. Specifically, the developmental education department at the college under study provides an array of supportive services for the underprepared students. Services include two writing, three reading, and five math courses classified as zero-level courses designed to prepare students for college level work. The college also offers human development courses used to train students to use productive study skills that lead to college success. Assigned guidance counselors assist students that score on admission tests at the most basic level. Students have access to the learning center where they can receive

free tutoring as often and for as long a period of time as they wish. Developmental students, especially single parents and minorities, can also access tuition assistance. Despite the support services and multiple options for developmental students at the college under study, an attrition rate of approximately 65-70% exists among the developmental population and 97% among the very-at-risk population.

The study of the approximately 3% of those who achieved success assumes that success is a viable option for a larger percentage of the very-at-risk population. Boylan cites research in his 1999 review of the literature supporting the notion that when colleges provide appropriate support, underprepared students achieve success similar to their better-prepared colleagues. McCabe (2000), in his national study of community college remediation, also reports that nearly half of the developmental students in the nation do complete their developmental studies and once completed, show commensurate performance in college-level classes equaling their counterparts. With this evidence as a backdrop, this research study attempts to first isolate, then highlight those factors identified by the successful graduates themselves, which led to their success. Finally, this research hopes to contribute knowledge for the purpose of increasing future retention rates of the very-at-risk population.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that led very-at-risk students to graduation. Using qualitative research methods, I explored these factors, which led to the successful completion of an associate's degree or program diploma by very-at-risk students. I anticipate that the analysis of and conclusions drawn from this data will help the college under study and others to understand the internal dynamics of the developmental program so that the college can make decisions accordingly.

Following are the research questions for this study:

1. What factors do very-at-risk student graduates (i.e. students scoring less than 50 in the ACCUPLACER Test) identify as leading to success?
2. Which aspects of the developmental education program at the college under study do very-at-risk graduates identify as contributing to their academic success?

Research Design

While there are numerous quantitative research studies conducted on college attrition rates, few engage in qualitative study from a constructivist perspective. To bring a more in-depth understanding to the research question exploring the factors that led to the successful completion of a degree or diploma by very-at-risk students, I chose to use qualitative research methods based on a constructivist paradigm. I located the study within social constructivist theory and to a certain extent, critical theory. I introduce them here; however, a more in-depth discussion of these two theories will take place near the end of the literature review (Chapter 2).

Briefly, Mertens (2005) describes social constructivism as looking for the emergence of socially constructed realities that are time and context dependent. I attempted to construct meaning from the realities as seen through the lens of the participants, as each shared his or her journey through difficult college experiences. Social constructivism provided a strong framework from which to address my research questions.

Critical theory includes the historical aspect of reality in addition to social construction. It is the theoretical framework most often associated with those of the population who are subjugated or oppressed. For that reason it is also considered the most influential theoretical framework (Patton, 2002). It is explicitly political and is used to drive change in organizations or people groups.

This study assumes that the very-at-risk student population at this particular community college who have completed a degree or diploma hold within themselves the multiple realities or various factors that have led to their success. To assure this assumption, I used a purposeful

sampling approach. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to choose participants for the purpose of gaining information-rich sources of data (Patton, 2002). Researchers choose these participants to learn from their experience and motivation, and gain valuable characteristics for insight into a phenomenon (Gulbriem & Holstein, 2002).

To access this sample, at my request and with IRB approval, the college identified the sixty-one students who graduated from the college under study with an associate's degree who began at the most basic level. In order to comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, the names and contact information of these students were forwarded to a college employee who contacted each one asking their permission for me to know who they are and to contact them. The employee personally talked to approximately thirty of the sixty graduates and obtained permission from twenty-five students. I was then able to schedule interviews with twenty of those students.

The cross-section of students in the study population included minorities, international students, high school graduates who did not pass the college entrance exam, single parents, workers requiring a career change, and two high school drop-outs returning to school after attaining a GED.

The methodology of social constructivists is naturalistic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In the natural world, the researcher constructs reality generally using interviews, observations, and/or document reviews (Mertens, 2005). I interviewed the participants beginning with a list of questions derived from the literature review and from personal interest through an open-ended, in-depth exploration of the participant's journey through their educational program.

My thinking for this qualitative study was informed by the phenomenological focus on experience, which according to Patton (2002) is a "focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning" (p. 104). The phenomenon researched was the successful attainment of an associate's

degree or program diploma in spite of significant odds which caused the majority of their counterparts to drop-out. In the interview, I asked each graduate to reflect on his or her college experience, capturing and describing what they experienced, how he/she felt about it, and explain how they worked through the challenges that kept many others from achieving their goal. All but one interview was conducted face-to-face. One graduate was out-of-state; I interviewed her by telephone. Every participant granted me permission to tape record them. I hired a transcriptionist to transcribe all tapes except the first one which I completed.

Significance of the Study

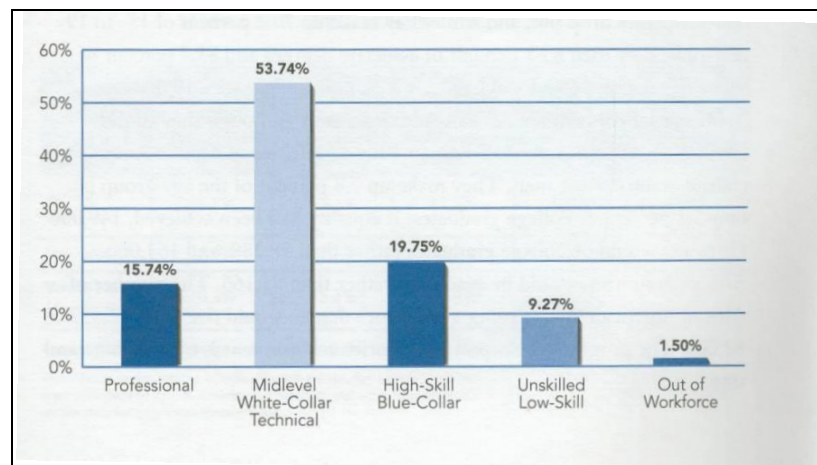
This study informs both the macro level of society and at the individual level. At the macro level, higher education strengthens a nation's economic development and international competition in business. Boylan (2008) reports that even beyond the United States, a global concern exists for having educationally prepared populations that can meet the challenges facing them in this next decade.

Leaders in the industrial field observe that 20-40% of applicants are under-skilled (McCabe, 2000). Shaffer & Gee (2005) observe that American society better prepares young people for "commodity" jobs than for "innovative" jobs (p. 1). Additionally, an increasing number of American businesses relocated their commodity production overseas. America needs to increase its competitive edge in knowledge, innovation, and creativity in the global job market—the outcome of post-secondary education. To achieve this, open-enrollment community colleges provide an opportunity for all to pursue a college education in America. Consequently, a large population of underprepared students enrolls in our community colleges.

Regardless of who is to blame for the under-preparedness both for college and for the workplace in our nation, the issue at hand is—these underprepared students need and desire a post-secondary education. At the college under study, the very-at-risk population achieves degree-completion at the minimal rate of 2.7%. This percentage suggests that more students

could attain degrees given greater insight into the factors of success. A tremendous amount of potential lies within this population and failure to achieve a degree further results in tragic loss to this nation.

The graph below confirms a finding by the National Study of Community College Remediation (McCabe, 2005). McCabe reports that the successfully remediated include teachers, lawyers, and physicians. Only 1.5% remained unemployed.



Source: McCabe, 2000, p.33

Figure 1. Occupations of successful remedial education students. Used with permission of the publisher.

At the individual level, attaining career certification or an Associate's degree offers individuals an enriched life usually through access to a more fulfilling career and a higher economic level. It provides a gateway to education beyond the Associate's degree. When I read the above graph depicting the difference education has made in the lives of developmental students, my desire increases to find ways to greatly increase the percentage of successful students.

In conclusion, this study identifies factors found in very-at-risk students contributing to degree or diploma attainment. The cross-section of students in the study population of this research project includes minorities, international students, recent high school graduates who did not pass the college entrance exam, single parents, workers requiring a career change, and an

occasional high school drop-out returning to school after attaining a GED. Potentially, the findings of this research will inform the faculty at this community college of program modifications that may increase the proportion of students attaining an associate's degree and beyond. While some of the findings may apply to this college alone, other factors identified by students may generalize to similar populations across the United States. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the literature vis-à-vis the needs of very-at-risk students and how colleges everywhere can increase their success rates. Consequently, I have approached this research study with hope and a sense of mission on behalf of the students and of my colleagues, those who give their academic lives for this deserving population.

Assumptions

Four assumptions underlie this study. First, I assume that the scope of supportive services for developmental education at the college, i.e., number of developmental courses, guidance counseling, human development courses, tuition assistance, and tutoring availability, is roughly commensurate with those found among community colleges across the United States. Numerous studies covered in the literature review confirmed the presence of these same services. Consequently, the results of this study may benefit similar community college developmental programs in achieving degree attainment for very-at-risk students.

Second, also based on the research studies discussed in the literature review chapter, I assume that success, defined as degree-attainment, depends upon an array of contingencies. To address these contingencies, I chose to use the exploratory, socially-constructive nature of qualitative methods that accommodate the capacity that humans have to construct multiple realities (Patton, 2002).

Third, I assume that the students responded to interview questions honestly and as best as they can recall. I, the researcher, conducted the interviews. Based on past experience as an instructor of very-at-risk students, I was able to quickly build rapport and trust in the context of a

similar authoritative relationship. In both numeric and anecdotal responses to student evaluations over a period of five years, the respondents identified responsiveness and transparency as mutual characteristics in the relationships I formed with them. Similarly, I assume reactivity, commonly understood as the influence of the researcher on the participant (Maxwell, 2005). The interpretation and explanation of the qualitative data shows how influence may have occurred; it does not seek to deny influence.

Fourth, I assume the information provided by the college research center is accurate. This college has a research center, with a full range of data for the purpose of program evaluation and improvement. The research center director, who has a Ph.D. and 23 years of research experience, provides data and interpretation to college deans and department heads as requested for these purposes. The director and his assistants also willingly provide data to others for research purposes assuming the research could ultimately benefit the college.

Definition of Terms

Following are the definitions of key terms used in this study:

Developmental education. Developmental education as used in this study is derived from the National Association of Developmental Education (2008) and includes:

Developmental education is a field of practice and research within higher education with a theoretical foundation in developmental psychology and learning theory. It promotes the cognitive and affective growth of all postsecondary learners, at all levels of the learning continuum. Developmental education is sensitive and responsive to individual differences and special needs among learners. Developmental education programs and services commonly address academic preparedness, diagnostic assessment and placement, development of general and discipline-specific learning strategies, and affective barriers to learning. Developmental education includes, but is not limited to: all forms of learning assistance, such as tutoring, mentoring, and supplemental instruction;

personal, academic, and career counseling; academic advisement; and coursework. (para. 1)

Inherent in the preceding definition is the practice of providing courses and services to the student apart from the usual college-level, credit coursework. Courses available generally include reading, writing, math, English as a Second Language, and to a lesser degree, the sciences while additional services include learning support such as various forms of labs and tutoring (Neuburger, 1999).

Underprepared or developmental students. Developmental students are those who apply to college but are found through admissions testing to have deficiencies in basic academic skills such as reading, writing, and/or math. Specifically, Boylan (2002) describes them as those who have exhibited underdeveloped cognitive and affective abilities necessary to achieve college-level work. Underpreparation also manifests in non-academic arenas such as poor study skills, lack of vision and goals, and/or time management skills (Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Calcagone, 2007).

At-risk students. At-risk students, sometimes referred to as high-risk students, comprise the major portion of students found in developmental programs. In some settings, students are categorized as at-risk simply if they are enrolled in two or more developmental courses as determined by placement testing (Galligan, 2001). Once characterized mostly by race and class, they now are defined by other characteristics in addition to underpreparedness. Broadly defined as a student who will most likely fail at school, these students rarely complete their educational program whether high school or college (Kaufman & Bradbury, 1992). Bulger & Watson (2006) describe at-risk students as placing in one or more of the following categories: low-income, single parents, displaced workers, immigrants, first generation students, older than 24, and high school dropouts.

Very-at-risk developmental reading students. For the purposes of this research, these students are those who placed in the lowest reading course the college offers entitled English 001 – Strategy-based Reading I. These students tested below a score of 50 (out of 120 on the Accuplacer Reading Assessment test) are required to pass three reading courses (English 001, 002, and 003) before matriculating as a degree candidate.

Delimitations

This study seeks to give voice to the minimally-researched underprivileged population of very-at-risk students (see definition section) who have achieved associate degree or diploma completion at the college under study. Because it allows unique access to the graduates and corresponding data from one community college, this study may not be generalizable to students in developmental programs in all community colleges. This study approach, however, provides a unique avenue for gathering rich insights into very-at-risk student success. This study does not look for causes of attrition; instead, it seeks to determine factors that are associated with persistence only, ultimately leading to modifications of targeted educational programs.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The American public typically views developmental education as a more recent phenomenon. While often associated with the decline in American public education, American colleges have included developmental education from the outset. Yearly, American colleges and universities enroll approximately one million students in remedial courses. (Callan, 2000; Boylan & Saxon, 1999).

While there is much literature written about developmental education and surrounding issues, this literature review focuses on three main areas for the purpose of providing a backdrop to understand the nature of the research problem. First, I identify from the literature characteristics and demographics of the research population from which this sample is drawn. Next, I provide a background of the history of development education and delineate the controversy surrounding developmental education. Finally, I conclude with a review of the research surrounding high-risk developmental students, related retention statistics, and consequent findings and recommendations pertinent to this population. I will also include a review of research studies throughout the additional chapters of this dissertation when pertinent to specific findings of this study.

Population

The traditional stereotypical image of a first-year college student is that of an 18-22 year old full-time residential student who is a recent high-school graduate. The diversity more recently found at colleges and universities across America invalidates this description. The community college developmental student population, more commonly known for their differences rather than their sameness, reflects this diversity to an even greater extent.

Boylan, Bonham, and Bliss (1994) conducted a comprehensive review of the demographics of developmental students in colleges across the nation and found a heterogeneous

group with a wide range of characteristics. Typically they include the “non-traditional” student, a term summing up characteristics such as post-teen freshman, lower socio-economic status, ethnic minorities, and/or underpreparedness. A cross-section of the demographic data found by Boylan, Bonham, and Bliss (1994) follows:

Table 1
Demographic Data Reflecting Diversity

Developmental students in U.S. colleges and universities	At two-year colleges (n =2,369)	At four-year colleges (n =3,287)
Mean age (years)	23	19
Population Proportion:		
Females	53%	54%
African Americans	23%	30%
American Indians/ Alaskan Natives	1%	2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3%	2%
Latino	6%	7%
White (Non-Latino)	67%	59%
Married students	22%	6%
Special admits	7%	43%
Degree-seeking Students	77%	98%
Part-time students	32%	8%
Students receiving financial aid	40%	75%
Resident students	6%	65%

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This table highlights the diversity that characterizes the developmental population in American higher education today. With a range of 16 to 55 years of age among the developmental population, the mean age is 23 years of age at community colleges and 19 years of age at 4-year colleges (Boylan, Bonham, & Bliss, 1994). While white students comprise the majority of developmental students, the African American population remains the largest minority population. The table reflects economically disadvantaged populations. Low SAT scores and high school grades characterize some of the population while above average scores characterize others. In addition, first-generation students comprise part of the cross-section.

Historical Background

While a focus on developmental education is not just a recent trend, education historians have generally not reported its evolution. Personal monographs, articles, and dissertations by those more deeply involved in developmental education have provided the information available throughout the last century (Arendale, 2002a). Below I provide an historical overview, which sets the stage for understanding the controversies and more recent research surrounding developmental education.

Developmental education, known in the past as remedial education, is frequently associated with community colleges; ironically, the first college to engage remedial education was Harvard College, established in 1636 (Boylan & White, 1987; Brier, 1984). The first developmental education program, however, was established in 1849 at the University of Wisconsin (Arendale, 2002b; Neuburger, 1999), followed shortly thereafter by Vassar College (Brier, 1984). The 1991 report from the National Center for Education Statistics indicates that today over 90% of all public colleges and universities offer at least one developmental course.

The growth and development of developmental education in America reflects the social history of the times. Wars, both home and abroad, migrations of immigrants, economic trends, and federal legislation all played a part in shaping developmental education (Arendale, 2002a).

The first historical period of higher education in America, the mid 1600s to the 1820s, mainly involved white males from the privileged class; high costs excluded nearly all others. Of this population, most needed tutoring primarily as students underprepared in Latin and Greek, a language requirement of post-secondary institutions at that time. Yale added a proficiency requirement in mathematics to their entrance requirements in the 1700s; other postsecondary institutions readily followed suit. Consequently, during this first period of American education, Arendale (2000a) reports that nearly all students received some type of tutoring or remediation in order to gain admittance or to achieve competency while enrolled in postsecondary education institutions.

By the 1800s, postsecondary institutions added a proficiency in history, geography, and English to their entrance requirements (Broome, as cited in Arendale, 2002c). As the number of colleges grew in the 1800's, so did the need for remediation. During this historical time period, remedial education moved from the more individual style of tutoring to that of departments or even preparatory colleges. The expansion of the western frontier in this country created a need for more postsecondary institutions; however, the poorer and sometimes non-existent primary and secondary educational systems in the new frontier regions adversely affected the quality of these colleges. While no statistical records exist for the developmental population during the 1800's, sources that decry the inadequate preparedness of incoming students imply the prevalence of underpreparedness (Brier, 1984).

The 19th century saw a concurrent movement to keep postsecondary education standards high by eliminating underprepared students, yet simultaneously adopting an attitude of equalitarianism (Brier, 1984). Anecdotal records show that even prestigious colleges such as Cornell University, while projecting high standards and no departments for the underprepared, accepted and provided services for the underprepared (Brier).

During this period of time, open-enrollment colleges abounded and with them came developmental programs. Boylan found that by the end of the 1800s, 80% of the colleges and universities included preparatory courses for college students in their curriculum, a statistic which has changed very little since that time (as cited in Neuburger, 1999). Also during this same time period, colleges followed through with a simultaneous effort to improve college-bound curricula in secondary educational programs with the stated purpose of eliminating preparatory programs (Arendale, 2002c). Interestingly, this effort was duplicated a century later, but as Arendale notes, this assumption proved erroneous—improved secondary education programs do not necessarily promise preparedness in newly-admitted college students.

A compilation of factors explains the significant increase in developmental educational programs in America during the 1800's (Arendale, 2002c): poor secondary schools; increased college entrance requirements and academic rigor; increase in texts, resources, and requirements to read large amounts of printed material; and finally, colleges needed the student enrollment to be cost efficient. Interestingly, not only were developmental educational programs increasing during this time out of necessity, but during the Civil War, colleges pursued underprepared students, particularly those too young to go to war.

New federal legislation marked the period of time from the 1860s to the 1940s (Arendale, 2002c). This legislation included The First Morrill Act and the Second Morrill Act, both instituted for the purpose of building colleges that added the agricultural and mechanical sciences to the college curriculum. As a result, the industrial population increased college enrollments. Various financial support bills for African American colleges and the GI bill that offered returning World War II soldiers the opportunity to attend college also added diversity to the college populations (McCabe, 2000).

In the 1960s, the growth of community colleges in America proliferated at the rate of one new college per week (O'Banion, 1997). The increase both in numbers of colleges and

population of students resulted in the social concern and focus of this time period—the belief in equal opportunity and worth of every human regardless of race or nationality (Boylan & Saxon, 1998; McCabe, 2000; Roueche & Kirk, 1973). The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965 led to greater diversity in student populations which in turn led to the need to offer services for those students less prepared for the rigor of college studies (Payne & Lyman, 1998). Consequently, the 1970 report by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (established by The Carnegie Foundation to study major issues confronting U.S. education) called for the commuting accessibility of a public community college for every potential student (Roueche & Kirk, 1973).

Since then, a number of factors led to an increase in need for developmental education. First, in the 1970s, a major shift in the job market required higher-level skills, necessitating college training for those who never aspired to be college students (Casazza & Silverman, 1996). Also, in the mid 1900s, the opportunity to acquire a high school education increased. The resulting increase in the number of high school graduates naturally created a larger pool of students interested in a college education. Further, these graduates comprised a wider socioeconomic level and came from multi-cultural and multi-ethnic populations. More recently, single mothers and older adults training for competitive jobs also entered colleges; both populations typically require support services in order to succeed in college-level work.

The final factor, the passing of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, granted access to college and provided tuition assistance to students with disabilities (Casazza & Silverman). Consequently, developmental programs have increased to the point where 99% of the community colleges in America today offer non-credit preparatory/remedial courses (Boylan & Saxon, 1999). Also, in four-year colleges throughout the last century, students in developmental education programs at times outnumbered those not enrolled in these courses (Arendale, 2002a).

Seemingly, societal trends and changes have more significantly affected developmental education than any other department in our colleges. A literature review of the history of developmental education showcases it as a significant postsecondary education phenomenon. Forces opposing this phenomenon include a lack of ownership of the problem and resolution, a dearth of research, controversy on numerous sides including causes, solutions, philosophy, and future; even the nomenclature such as remedial vs. developmental is debated. Proponents of developmental education articulate a positive philosophy of confidence, support, and belief in the underprepared student, fully understanding the formidable task of combining instructional techniques, program components, and financial means to reach this deserving population.

Martha Cassaza (1999) summarizes the historical progression of developmental education by noting that the government initiated opening the doors of higher education and broadening the curriculum for our diverse and sometimes underprepared populations while the business leaders called for better preparation of their future employees. As a result, national leaders looked to the colleges to find ways to better educate this underprepared population who come in greater numbers. Out of this phenomenon came developmental education.

A research study provides one way to examine the effectiveness of historical change. This study explores the factors leading to degree achievement by the very-at-risk developmental population—one group targeted by the creation of community colleges and developmental programs. The mere fact that some of this very-at-risk population have achieved degree completion already demonstrates the capabilities of this American cultural phenomenon—community colleges with developmental programs. This study seeks to find data that will provide ways to increase student success and improve college developmental programs, so that underprepared students can also experience the benefits of a college education.

Controversy

Intermittently throughout American public education, the practice of remedial studies in postsecondary education presents controversy (Grubb, 1999; Arendale, 2002a; Rouche, Rouche, & Ely, 2001; Cassaza & Silverman, 1996; Shields, 2005). Opposing points of view found among congressional and state legislators (Arendale, 1998; Ignash, 1997), college and university board rooms (Damashek, 1999; Moses, 1999), and among the faculty and administrators of both four-year and community colleges (Guffey, Rampp, & Masters, 1998) continue to plague the field of developmental education.

I felt it important to include a literature review of this controversy to highlight that a substantial segment of those in the field of education resent and resist the notion of educating underprepared students. In the face of controversy, research studies become necessary to refute or confirm the arguments for or against the phenomenon.

Three general contexts categorize the opposing views found throughout the literature: political, educational, and economic. While certain studies or writings reflect more than one context, I assigned each to the respective context based on the major point of the study.

Educational

The educational argument involves those who feel the terms remedial education and college are a contradiction in terms (traditionalists) and others (reformists) who feel that preparing students to achieve degree competency is central to the mission of the college (Grubb, 1999; Cassaza & Silverman, 1996; Bueschel, A. C., 2003). For example, Charles William Eliot, in his 1869 presidential inaugural address at Harvard College, said, “The American college is obliged to supplement the American school. Whatever elementary instruction the schools fail to give, the college must supply” (as cited in Brier, 1984).

The open-door community college in response to the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (1970) promises the opportunity for all to receive a college education. This distinctive

mission draws both criticism and approbation for the attempt to achieve the near impossible (Roueche & Kirk, 1973). During the prolific years of growth in numbers of community colleges, Lynes (1966) writes, "...it has been looked down upon by holders of B.S. degrees as a refuge for the stupid, and it has been avoided as a place to teach by most serious scholars" (p. 60). During this time period various writers including Jennings (1970) challenged the junior college to make good on its promise by making "its only viable mission the matching of its pretensions with performance" (p. 24).

The education controversy extends to four-year colleges and universities vs. community colleges—who should provide remediation? While community colleges are well-equipped to provide for the developmental students with appropriate programs and support systems in addition to cost-effectiveness and convenience of location, four-year colleges and universities have a role to play in educating these students as well (Ignash, 1997). Monk-Turner (1995) reports that underprepared students entering four-year colleges show a higher rate of attaining a B. A. or B. S. than those who enroll in community colleges.

One study supporting this premise and conducted by Alba and Lavin (1981) at the City University of New York (CUNY) compared students enrolled in their four-year colleges with those enrolled in their community college system. They found that students enrolled in the community colleges earned fewer credits, dropped out earlier, and were less likely to attain a baccalaureate degree than those students who enrolled in a four-year college for their freshman year. There were no differences in socio-economic background—variables were controlled for family income and parental education. Alba and Lavin had no explanation for the difference in success rates. While they suspect a "community college effect," i.e., attitudes of faculty as well as students themselves towards a community colleges education, they could not cite systematic evidence to support this (p. 236).

In a multivariate analysis study to determine the probability of bachelor degree attainment by high school students, Valez (1985) found that where students start college drastically affects their chances of completing a four-year degree. Valez confirms that the odds are against students who start in two-year programs. Consequently, four-year colleges/universities play an important role in providing education for all students, particularly the developmental student population whose greater proportion includes minority students.

Others, however, feel remediation belongs outside of the colleges entirely (Grubb, 1999). Legislators, in addition to two and four-year college administrators, have periodically proposed eliminating “remedial” education from the colleges and relegating it to adult education programs or voluntary programs sponsored by non-profits or businesses (Grubb, 1999).

Still others feel that remediation is a poor investment and students should pay to remediate themselves (McCabe & Day, 1998). Conversely, Byron McClenney, project director for Achieving the Dream at the University of Texas – Austin, in a recent interview stated “...it is time to make developmental education ‘Job One’. The nation needs for community colleges to step up to the challenge because there is no other viable option” (Boylan, 2008, p. 17).

Supporters of developmental education note the overrepresentation of students enrolled in community colleges from lower socio-economic classes, students of color, and international students in the process of learning English in developmental courses (Boylan, Bonham, & Bliss, 1994). Eliminating remedial programs, as at times proposed by legislators, would preclude many of these students from obtaining a college degree. As stated above, America needs to educate these students for the good of all.

To do this, rather than engage in controversy over who should educate these students, colleges should make quality teaching the goal in order to meet the needs of the students who have not had opportunity for education or who have not been effectively taught in the past.

Smittle (2003) calls for teaching practices that recognize the learning needs and deficits for a variety of students, so that all who desire it may receive an education.

Student inadequacies have appeared in the literature as early as 1869, particularly in the Cornell University president's report where Andrew White calls the students' ignorance of English "astounding" (Briar, 1984). While favoring the dominant power culture, colleges and universities continue to admit students who are culturally diverse and academically underprepared for the purpose of economic gain, particularly during economically-depressed times (Arendale, 2002b). The university faces the conflict of needing student enrollment versus jeopardizing its reputation for excellence by enrolling underprepared students (2002b).

Economic

Legislators resent remedial education at the college level—they view it as paying twice for the education that underprepared students should have received in high school and therefore see it as an inferior reflection on college standards (McCabe, 2000). Astin (interview, Irvin, 2000) calls this notion preposterous while drawing on a medical model metaphor—we give our greatest efforts and resources to the sickest people. Various critics blame secondary schools for failing to prepare students for college and feel the responsibility for remediation lies there (Kozeracki, 2002).

Astin (interview, Irvin, 2000) avers that research studies repeatedly support the concept that educational growth is the most powerful factor in producing productive citizens. Merisotis and Phipps (2000) affirm the core function that developmental education has served in colleges for hundreds of years and notes that the overall cost is insignificant compared to the benefits to society. The long term benefits of committing resources to our greatest education needs will socially and economically profit the nation for years to come.

McCabe (2000) argues that developmental education programs are critical for the future of America in the 21st century where 80% of the jobs will require postsecondary education. He

cites that the cost for remediation is only 1% of the total cost of education, making it more cost-effective than any other educational measure.

Political

Political controversy within the literature presents in two ways: (1) state and federal legislators debate public policy; and (2) academicians seek to uphold academic reputation within postsecondary education. In some of the following studies, issues in addition to political ones may surface but the political controversy remains the primary focus here. The following literature review outlines the above two subcategories of political controversy.

Merisotis and Phipps' (2000) address those who blame secondary schools for the problem in their summary of studies on developmental education. They found that the majority of the developmental populations are not recent high school graduates. Rather, they exceed 19 years of age, have delayed their entrance into college, or are returning later in life. Adelman's (2004) study of those who do proceed immediately to college from high school found that those assigned to developmental courses in college had lower graduation rates. However, Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, (2006) later observed that the attrition factor was not the placement and involvement in developmental education but the underpreparedness present at college entrance. Such findings lead to the recommendation that since eliminating remediation from higher education is unrealistic and unwise, public policy should focus on the following two goals: (1) implement strategies that lead to greater preparedness of high school graduates, and (2) improve developmental programs in postsecondary education (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000).

On another front, critics point to the research findings of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which show the pattern of the inverse relationship between a student's need of developmental courses and degree completion (Adelman, 1996). For example, NCES statistics showed a degree completion rate of 55% for those who did not take remedial courses, 45% for those took one remedial course, and 24% for those who took three or more

remedial courses. In response to arguments such as these, several state systems including the City University of New York and the California State University system, have transferred developmental education from their four-year colleges to the community colleges (Adelman, 1996; Kozeracki, 2002).

The National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) addressed this problem by drawing up the following resolution approved March 1, 1998:

Whereas, only 43 percent of the students in high school are enrolled in college preparatory classes, while 62 percent of the high school graduates enroll in college; Whereas, many factors limit students' access to and benefit from quality educational experiences; Whereas, a growing proportion of students who need developmental education courses are those who are returning to education after a number of years for whom developmental education provides a transition back into the classroom; Whereas, college graduates earn higher lifetime incomes, pay higher taxes, have a higher rate of home ownership, vote in higher percentages, and serve as community leaders in higher rates than those who do not complete a college degree, it is in society's best interest to support developmental education programs; ***Therefore, be it resolved that the National Association for Developmental Education exhorts policy makers to increase the investment in developmental education programs.***

Smittle (2003) calls for the availability of higher education for all interested citizens regardless of the type of educational institution. Otherwise, our nation's ideals and goals cannot be met. Similarly, Elifson, Pounds, and Stone (1995) affirm the need for the community colleges to provide developmental programs in order to democratize higher education by affording underprepared students the opportunity to overcome barriers to success. The open admissions policies practiced by community colleges require the services of developmental programs to meet the needs of the resulting underserved and diverse populations (Clowes & Levin, 1989).

Yolanda Moses, former president of the City College of the City University of New York and a proponent of developmental education, addresses the standard of upholding academic reputation. She writes that presidents of colleges and universities hesitate to address the issue of remediation because it reflects poorly on their institution or on their region (1999).

Moses (1999) points to the need for educating boards, alumni, and the general public about the history and necessity for developmental education. She feels presidents of institutions should be proactive in evaluation, research, and documentation of successful service found through developmental programs in colleges and universities. While she confirms that community colleges have the greater capacity to serve developmental students, she also calls for four-year colleges and universities to provide at least some type of remedial services.

Boylan and Saxon (1998) observe that developmental students in the past have been welcomed by four-year colleges to swell their numbers only to experience scorn by educators who believe a college education is only for the brightest and best. Amazingly, despite their personal challenges, with support from those who do believe in higher education for all, developmental students have become successful college and university graduates.

Schoenecker, Bollman, and Evens (1996) identify developmental education as “the institutional fulcrum that balances the commitment to access and student success with the commitment to program quality and high academic standards” (p. 4). Consequently, it is imperative that community colleges not only serve the openly-admitted underprepared student, but that they assess and strengthen the programs to adequately prepare students for academic rigor (Schoenecker, Bollman, & Evens).

Arendale (2002a) notes that a factor falsely associated with developmental education is a middle-to-late 20th century decline in academic standards. This fallacy partly explains the academic embarrassment that university leaders feel concerning the presence of “remedial” programs in their institutions. Arendale counters this fallacy by pointing to the presence of

remedial programs found in college since the 1800s. Arendale observes instead that the purpose of developmental education is to enable students to successfully complete college. Repositioning the focus away from the past toward a goal of achieving positive results for this population ultimately benefits the entire nation.

In conclusion, the literature reflects that controversy has plagued the field of developmental education since its inception. Roueche and Roueche (1999) observe that developmental education remains a serious, controversial challenge to community colleges. They lament the little progress made to date by many community colleges in providing viable programs that show success. Research studies highlighting successful programs and methods will address the controversies found in the literature that stand in the way of progress. Our nation willingly allocates funds to organizations that make a difference in our society and economy, our educational systems apportion staff and funding to programs that show educational progress, and our political system will work on the behalf of those who can show positive results. The goal of my research is to this necessary body of data.

Recent Research

The practice of various types of remediation in the college setting covers centuries in American history. However, research mainly involves only the last forty years. Boylan and Saxon (1999) identify John Roueche as one of the earliest researchers in the field. Starting with the decade 1968-1978, research in the developmental education field was mainly conducted by Roueche and his University of Texas colleagues. The focus of their research centered on effectiveness of programs, program models, and instructional methods for remediation. In later research, Roueche and other researchers validated many of the original findings when examining effective developmental programs in community colleges as well as identifying some additional ones (Boylan & Saxon).

Developmental Programs

In their literature review of research in the field within the past decade, White and Harrison (2007) cite several historical studies that address developmental education at the postsecondary level. In one study, Stanley (2003) addressed the remedial writing program at University of California at Berkeley, citing the political role remediation plays in this state and university. The university attempts to meet the democratic ideal of accessing the increased numbers of students who desire a postsecondary education while asserting their standards and increasing remediation to meet them.

In a study that traces the birth, life, and ultimately death of a developmental program at Georgia Southern University, Mills (2002) points to stigmas, prejudices, and a corporate model that values cost-effectiveness over ideology as the determinant in ending the program. Mills noted that this ambiguity towards developmental education could be found throughout the state of Georgia and even the nation.

Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey (2006) note that while much has been written about the effectiveness of developmental education, little empirical research has been done. Grubb (2001) laments the dearth of evaluations of “remedial” programs. The research mainly highlights student outcomes, attrition, and retention, while research-based data to improve developmental programs are relatively few. Grubb (2001) calls for a variety of approaches to evaluate all aspects of developmental programs to determine their overall value.

Studying at-risk student retention as it relates to developmental courses, Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005) report an attrition rate of 70% for at-risk students who place in even one developmental course. The percentage increases as additional courses are required. The most recent research studies on number of developmental courses required for college enrollment show a negative correlation between retention and considerable time spent in developmental education (Akst, 2007; Fike & Fike, 2008).

A review of the literature particularly pertinent to mandatory enrollment in developmental courses, which is the case at the college under study, shows contradictory findings. Richardson, Fisk, and Okun (1983), in their 3-year case study of an open-access community college, found that developmental courses taught in isolation do not make a difference in degree-achievement. Levin and Calcagno (2007) argue that too frequently, developmental courses present skills in isolation with no relevancy apparent to the student and no carry over into college credit courses.

Research studies looking at quantity of developmental courses required find that the greater the number of courses required, the less likely the student is to graduate (Adelman, 1996). According to Adelman, this is especially significant for those requiring reading courses. However, Roueche, Roueche, and Ely (2001) found that developmental students at the Community College of Denver graduated at the same rate as non-developmental students.

Proponents of developmental education, Schoenecker, Bollan, and Evens (1996) found in a study conducted for 21 Minnesota state community colleges that developmental students who took the recommended developmental courses performed significantly higher on assessment measures than did those who did not take the recommended courses. Further, students who completed the developmental course sequence did as well or better in college as students who passed the entrance exam with no remediation required (Schoenecker, Bollan, & Evans, 1996; Dorrity, 2008). This backdrop of contradictory findings forms the backdrop against which I explore the perceptions of how the programs at the college under study impacted the very-at-risk graduates.

College Success Courses

In their study, Karp and Hughes (2008) substantiate the importance of information networks and integration into college life to persistence. Students reported in their study that this frequently occurred for them in their college success courses required at the beginning of their

college career. In this course, students reported meeting faculty and other staff members that became a part of their support network that remained in place throughout their college experience. Also, through class discussions and group work, they found peers with whom to form supportive relationships. In my study, interviewees made strongly affirmed faculty relationships as critical to their success but rarely mentioned colleagues.

O’Gara, Karp, & Hughes (2009), in a study similar to this one that explored student perspectives on college success, found that in the two urban community colleges in which their study took place, students also confirmed the importance of these courses to their success. While neither study was an in-depth exploration of college success courses, my interview data concurs with their conclusion that students perceived that acquiring study skills and experiencing personal relationships with the instructors positively affected their college experience and ultimately contributed to their success.

Advising

Frank DiMaria (2006), in his review of a 2005 Community College Survey of Student Engagement study, points to the need for mandatory academic advising for high-risk students. Many students bypass advisers, the professionals who could most help them set educational goals and find fulfilling careers. Advisors help high-risk students, many of whom are first-generation college students with no models or mentors, understand the work ethic required, the importance of time management, challenges with scheduling classes and work, aspiring to further degrees, and other keys to success understood by traditional college students.

Ashburn, Bartlett, and Wolverston (2006), in a two-year college survey with academic advising as the focus point, found that most students preferred faculty members as advisors.

Faculty

Alexander Astin, in an interview with Irving (2000), highlights the point of view that instructors assigned to teach the underprepared often view it as a low prestige position.

Professors may feel it is a poor reflection on their teaching ability to be assigned to developmental classes. Often, colleges assign instructors with less seniority to these courses. Roueche and Roueche (1999) purport that a professor should exemplify the ability to use a unique set of skills and expertise in order to be assigned to developmental courses. This profile includes a thorough understanding of the at-risk population, the college's goals, the most effective teaching techniques, and a belief that at-risk students can succeed, and a desire and ability to collaborate with others.

Albert (2004), in a mixed-method study of faculty perceptions of developmental students, found a dichotomy that included an ideology of access to higher education for all, yet a belief that too many were admitted to the college system. Albert also noted three faculty characteristics that positively impacted their perception of developmental students: gender, developmental education teaching experience, and developmental education training.

A qualitative study by Kozeracki (2004) of the components contributing to faculty preparation to effectively teach developmental students found that developmental faculty come with a wide range of background and preparation. More graduate programs that include instruction on lesson preparation, presentation, and learning instruction would narrow the gap instructors encounter between their preparation and the requirements for effective teaching. Many developmental educators are part-time adjunct faculty who identify the lack of faculty orientation and mentoring as major obstacles to good instruction.

Kozeracki (2004) studied faculty preparation for teaching developmental English. Faculty identified three areas of deficit in their teacher training experience: grammar instruction, lesson preparation, and cognition of learning disabilities and appropriate instructional methods. Further, she found that faculty teaching developmental courses, especially part-time, received little or no in-service training and very little mentoring.

A study to characterize instructors that currently teach developmental reading by Fabrizio (2001) concurred with prior studies which identified that developmental educators are “patient, approachable, accessible, organized, confident, teach using a multi-modal format, personable, innovative, accepting, and computer literate” (p. viii). Fabrizio views this list as a viable framework for selecting faculty and for instructor-training programs.

Astin (1993) found several significant factors for student success, one involving relationship to faculty, when researching what matters in college. The amount of time a student gives to the learning process has positive outcomes whether it is time spent studying or involved in student activities. Astin found that the peer group is the strongest point of influence in a student’s development both academically and personally. Faculty involved on a personal level with students followed closely as a positive effect on intellectual, personal, and behavioral growth.

A third finding in Astin’s (1993) study affects developmental students. He studied faculty members in terms of their research orientation versus those with student orientation and found that student orientation in faculty members positively correlates to degree achievement, intellectual self-esteem, and overall academic and leadership development. This may help to explain any difference found in success rate of developmental students who attend community colleges as compared with those in four-year research universities.

At-risk Student Characteristics

Lawrenson (2008), in a qualitative comparative case study, examined the experience of Hispanic students in developmental English and identified categories of roadblocks to success and motivators. The motivators included: “family support, positive developmental English experiences, helpful college services, defined career goals, relevant curriculum, positive peer pressure, effective role models and mentors, and caring teachers,” while road blocks were

identified as “financial stress, language difficulty, family stress, late high school graduation, death of family or friends, inappropriate English placement, and irrelevant curriculum” (p. i).

Roueché and Roueché (1999) found the following descriptive characteristics for at-risk students: difficulty perceiving alternatives to present situations, learned helplessness, inability to set realistic goals, and limited perceptions of pay-offs for getting an education.

Clifford Adelman, a prominent research educator most known for his *Toolbox* study of postsecondary attendance and success, found three patterns for predicting student success (interview, Akst, 2007). A positive indicator of college success was a student’s high school grade point average (GPA) while a negative indicator was a delay in entering college after high school. His third indicator, positive, and unique in the literature, was the attainment of 20 college credits within the first year of postsecondary education. Adelman cited two factors that nearly always lead to attrition: stopping out of college for more than one semester and withdrawal from courses or repeating 20% of their courses.

While Adelman’s study focused on all students entering college, it reveals significant insights for developmental students. Adelman found that while neither the number nor the timing of required developmental courses was significant, the inability of part-time students to complete 20 college credits within a year does affect them adversely (interview, Akst, 2007).

In a mixed-methods study to determine if student success could be predicted through interviews and an inventory, Wenger (2002) found that successful students characterized themselves as self-disciplined and help-seekers, whereas unsuccessful students identified themselves as lacking self-discipline, procrastinators, and resistant to seeking help. Galligan (2002) expanded this list with her study of the needs and beliefs of at-risk students. She found that at-risk students show a high reliance on supportive staff and instructors as well as fail to take personal responsibility for their learning or lack of it, whereas successful students demonstrate personal coping skills and autonomy.

Thomas (2002) conducted a descriptive study of factors that both contributed to and hindered student persistence. The subjects were non-traditional African-American students in a learning community context. He identified fourteen factors that contribute to and nine factors that hinder student success. The subjects perceived that those factors contributing to success were “student academic relationships, curriculum/course content, campus newspaper, teachers, advisors, computer laboratories, career fair, health fair, tutoring, lectures, group projects, study groups, class assignments, and students’ social relationships” (p. iv). Factors hindering persistence included no credit for developmental courses and failure to include English 101 in the learning community courses. In addition, lack of flexible learning community class options, tutoring time, group projects, student financial aid, contact with advisors, bereavement counseling, and advisor interpersonal communication skills with students were perceived as significant hindrances to success.

Ennis (2006) identified five factors that influenced the success of at-risk students in developmental programs. Her longitudinal analysis located the following as significant to student success: ethnicity (Caucasians more likely to succeed), gender (females persist more than males), income level (poverty correlates to poor academic performance), age (traditional aged students more persistent), and number of developmental courses required before able to take college-credit courses (the more required, the less likely to succeed). This last factor, the number of developmental courses required, parallels Adelman’s (interview, Akst, 2007) findings. These recent studies by Ennis and Adelman were the only two studies found that identify “number of developmental courses required” as significant to student retention and ultimately success.

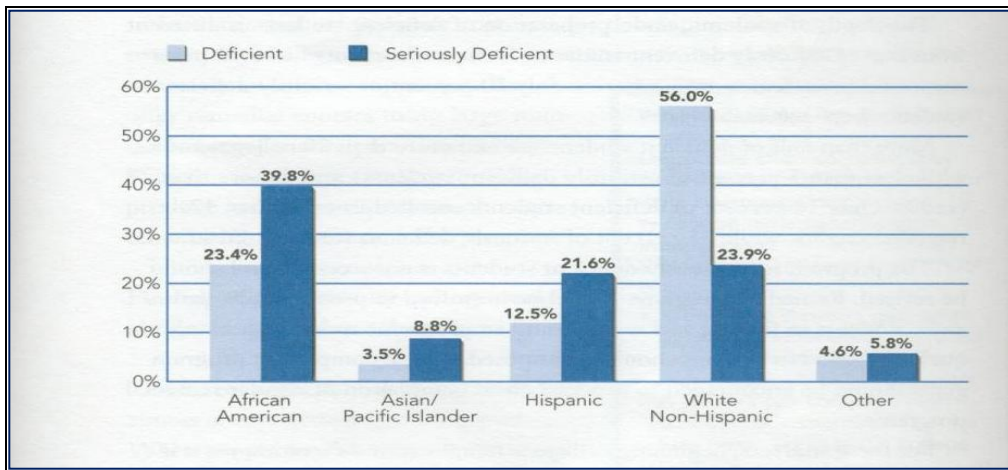
While a significant difference exists between the characteristics of the underprepared college student and the adult (over 25 years of age) community college population, Villalobos (2001) found that those teaching methods that have proven successful for the underprepared will also work for the adult populations found in the developmental programs. Instructors in

developmental programs with a large cross-section of both populations can more confidently prepare and teach based on these findings.

DiMaria (2006) notes in his review of a 2005 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) study that high-risk students were more engaged in the college experience but less likely to persist than their counterparts. Similarly, research commonly shows that the persisters are likely to be engaged in college extra-curricular activities (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Ternezini, 2004; Greene, Marti, & McClenney, 2007).

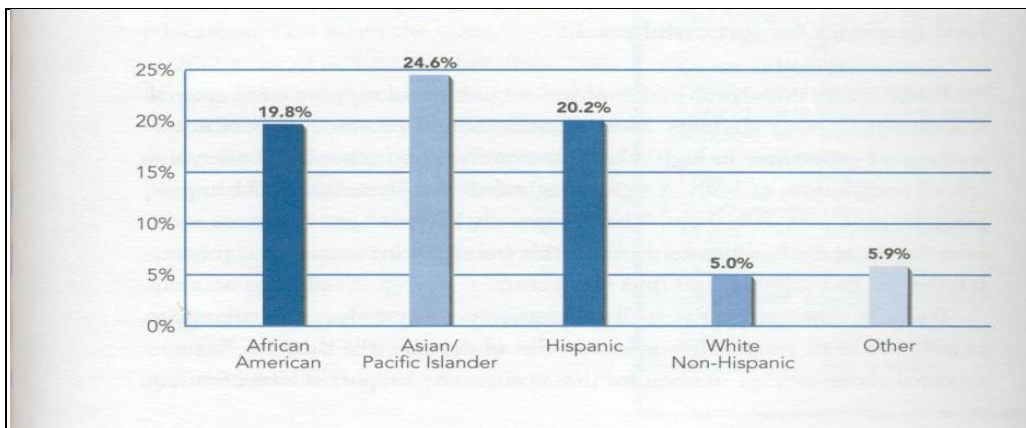
A discrepancy, according to DiMaria (2006), is that the high-risk students in his review used more resources available to them because they were less prepared academically; however, they also exhibited lower expectations and experienced less academic success.

Only one study highlighted the difference between at-risk students and very-at-risk students. McCabe (2000) describes the very-at-risk students as seriously deficient—this concurs with the definition of very-at-risk students—as those assigned to a low-level developmental course. McCabe found that the demographics of the very-at-risk population are noticeably different from those of higher-level developmental students. Specifically, minority populations, while always over-represented in developmental education, were represented to a far greater extent in the very-at-risk population. Below find the graphs delineating these percentage differences:



Source: McCabe, 2000.

Figure 2. Percentage of students academically deficient and seriously deficient by ethnicity. Used with permission of the publisher.



Source: McCabe, 2000.

Figure 3. Percentage of each ethnic group seriously deficient. Used with permission of the publisher.

Attrition/Retention

Studies about attrition bear reviewing as the findings lend insight to retention factors. Understanding factors related to student retention as well as attrition will enable community college leaders to increase the persistent rate among developmental students, particularly the very-at-risk students.

Retention theorists constructing models to explain student retention frequently conduct their research in universities with residential settings; most are therefore based on the traditional

student population (Fike & Fike, 2008). Among the various theories of student retention, two are constructed by well-known retention theorists. First, Vincent Tinto (1993) developed the student integration model that explains the progression of a first-year student through stages that lead to student maturity. Prior to the 1970's, Tinto (2005) observed that the model for explaining student retention/attrition was a psychological model which ultimately blamed the student, not the institution. The factors were individual attributes such as skill and motivation; therefore drop-outs were viewed as incapable, unmotivated, or unwilling to put forth the effort to achieve.

John Bean (1990), another well-known early retention theorist, delineated the student attrition model that explains the effect of background variables on student retention. This psychological model demonstrates how students interact with the institutional systems and staff from their background experiences. Later, Bean included environmental variables and student intention as factors related to retention.

After the 1970's, theorists began to look to the academic and social systems of the institutional environment and to those who put these systems in place for possible factors related to student retention (Tinto, 2005). Consequently, Tinto's model pointed to the interaction between the student and the institutional components and programs during the first-year experience. Well-known researchers, Astin (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1997), later confirmed the significance of student relationships to the institutional programs as well as to individuals such as directors and professors (Tinto).

In the past several decades, with an increase in nontraditional students particularly at the community colleges, researchers have included a broader focus including cultural, social, and institutional forces affecting student retention (Tinto, 2005). More recent studies on retention have shown the importance to some ethnicities of staying connected to their communities and families while beginning college. Another finding is the importance of student connectedness to faculty and each other in community colleges, since most are non-residential (2005). These

findings have led Tinto and others to refine the earlier retention models to include sociological, psychological, and economic explanations of student retention.

Bean and Metzner (1985) found that traditional students are affected by social integration variables while nontraditional students respond more to their Academic environment. Further, Tinto (1975) found that while grade performance is the single most influential factor in predicting persistence in college, the correlation was less strong for part-time and older commuter students than for traditional students.

Fike and Fike (2008), in a recent quantitative study, looked for predictors of retention for community college students. They assumed that community college students differ from their residential university counterparts and found factors unique to this particular population. They took into account that this population has a higher percentage of minority students, more part-time students, more lower-income students, more underprepared students, and a greater number of parents with a lower education level. They found that developmental education and internet-based courses strongly correlated with retention of first-year students (2008). In addition, the following also were found to support retention: “financial aid, parents’ education, the number of semester hours enrolled in and dropped during the first fall semester, and participation in the Student Support Services program” (p. 68).

A research study conducted by Lundquist, Spalding, and Landrum (2002-2003) identifies three areas of faculty relationships that significantly impact student thoughts about dropping-out. The three areas included faculty support for student needs, timely response to students through e-mail and phone calls, and being approachable. Therefore, colleges should specifically train faculty in awareness of behaviors and attitudes that may affect student attrition (Lundquist, Spalding, & Landrum, 2002-2003; Sorey & Duggan (2008).

In a study of 23 persistors (out of 125 developmental students), Valeri-Gold, Kearse, Deming, Errico, and Callahan (2001) found that parental support, self-motivation, and

perseverance led developmental students to persist throughout a four-year college experience. Financial aid services, parking, and course scheduling presented challenges to overcome.

A very recent research study, the one I found most similar to mine, studies a similar population—underprepared, ethnically diverse community college students—but studies them in the context of learning communities. In this study, Peter Barbatis (2005) found factors contributing to persistence that included precollege characteristics, academic college support and community influence, social involvement, and academic integration. Similar to my study, Barbatis’s data suggests ways for colleges to enhance academic programs by including critical pedagogy and increasing student-faculty interaction. He reported one finding I did not find—integrating co-curricular activities with the academic disciplines—most likely because it was not a part of my interviewees’ college experience.

In conclusion, I found no study that assumes as its focus, the very-at-risk population. Historically, higher education providers assumed this population is better suited for careers other than those requiring a college education. Established community colleges with open enrollment policies provided the opportunity for the at-risk population to prove their ability to acquire a college education. The fact that even the very-at-risk population can and are achieving a college education highlights the need for research to find ways to increase the percentages of this happening and to improve our programs to provide the setting for this to occur.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The review of the literature suggests that political, economic, and historical factors intertwine within the model of developmental education. As stated earlier, Martha Cassanza (1999) noted that the government initiated the open-door concept to provide education to all who desired it. In addition, legislation passed by the government such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Higher Education Act of 1965, the 1970 Carnegie Report calling for commuter access to college from anywhere in the United States, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all led to a

dramatic increase in community college enrollment. Along with the growth in enrollment came the increased need for developmental education.

Historically and currently, when the economy tightens or when a political change occurs, budget cuts reflect the governmental mindset of undervaluation and controversy toward developmental education (Chung, 2005). Chung's observation highlights the dichotomy reflected by the political system that appears to rhetorically encourage education for all while simultaneously discouraging it through budget cuts. This ambiguity negatively affects college administrators and faculty, but it also affects students caught between their need and desire for education and their underpreparedness.

The literature underscores the need for developmental education. The literature also reveals uncertainty about the effectiveness of developmental education. Research data that show program effectiveness and student success could silence the critics and point the way to more effective solutions to enable this population to attain a college education. To that end, I designed this research study of the very-at-risk population to find factors that may ultimately lead to a higher success rate within that developmental population.

While one can find much in the literature written about at-risk student characteristics, faculty qualities, attrition, and retention, empirical research on developmental program improvement is relatively scarce (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006). The research studies found in the literature mostly employ a quantitative method of study. I designed this qualitative research study so that those who achieved success could add much useful insight to the field by means of a face-to-face interview. Interview questions elicit valuable, personal insight from the participant's point of view about program components that worked or were deficient in some way. Questions also elicit faculty qualities that contribute to student success. Finally, interviews giving voice to participants identify student characteristics and personal circumstances affecting success and resilience.

Theoretical Base

The theoretical base behind developmental education requires strengthening according to the literature. In support for a greater unification across the field, Chung (2005) postulates that the “paucity of theoretical discussions and the lack of a shared framework among developmental education and learning assistance professionals” is part of the undervaluation and vulnerability issue (p. 2). The professionals in the field have drawn from a variety of theories related to human learning and development. Some argue that the theoretical base can be found in the definition as stated by NADE (see definitions, Chapter 1), which includes the phrase “a theoretical foundation in developmental psychology and learning theory.” But ultimately, the developmental education field needs a stronger and clearer theory base.

Constructivist Theory within the Confines of this Study

I located this qualitative study within the framework of the constructivist paradigm and draw on both critical social theory and structural functionalism to explain the findings. In addition, I draw on Vincent Tinto’s student retention theory and John Bean’s Student Attrition Model to explain findings in Chapter 5. Here, I will clarify my rationale for guiding this study using the above theoretical frameworks.

Constructivist theory focuses on the emergence of socially constructed realities using data from personal interaction between the researcher and participants or by analyzing secondary data (Charmaz, 2006). This theory begins with the premise that while human perception is not synonymous with real in the absolute sense, those same perceptions are real to the humans who perceive and experience them (Patton, 2002). Thomas and Thomas (1928) wrote, “What is defined or perceived by people as real is real in its consequences” (as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 96). The data derived from the perceptions of the graduates in this study contribute to the understanding of persistence in the face of adversity toward achieving a degree. What they shared was real to them. The researcher then analyzes this shared data to formulate theory,

acknowledging meanwhile that the theory generated is researcher interpretation and applies to the context, time, place, and culture (Charmaz).

While a quantitative survey using a Likert scale would contribute certain types of valuable information, this method according to constructivist theory elicits data that have had implications in the lives of these graduates and may have implications for future students (Patton). The dialectical and hermeneutical nature of this more subjective approach provides deeper, richer insight than a more objective, formal approach could provide. Description and analysis of the data, followed by interpretation and theory comprise chapters 4 and 5.

Critical Theory within the Confines of this Study

Researchers studying populations at community colleges frequently locate the study in critical theory (Barbatis, 2019; Jain, 2010, Aragon & Brantmeier, 2009). This is typical because critical social theory provides a framework for exploring power issues and the “ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 281). Critical theory assumes change by nature of the word critical; consequently, researchers who approach their focus of inquiry and their interpretation of results from the framework of critical theory ultimately use the findings to effect change.

Horkheimer viewed the positivist science of research as reducing “valid knowledge to what can be verified statistically, thus robbing experience of its vitality” (1998, p. 131). His desire was to construct a social theory that did not reduce the reality of everyday life to numbers and statistics. He desired a social theory built on dialectic thought that could effect change in one’s everyday life. Consequently, community college educators conduct qualitative research located in critical theory to ultimately effect change in the population they serve.

Critical social research is democratic in nature. The collaborative relationship between researcher and participant is foundational to critical social research. Participants who are in need

of some type of emancipation experience freedom from domination during their involvement in the research process. This gives them an unrestricted voice while participating in the process of constructing realities (Mertens, 2005). The participants' contributions are the data and they assist in the analysis of the data, confirming the researcher's conclusions about the meaning of the data. The researcher is open about how the data is interpreted and all conclusions are supported and can be traced back to the original voice.

Similar to constructivism, critical social research is also characterized by dialectic analysis. This is a process that involves deep thinking, i.e., probing the ideas, notions, theories, and points proffered by the participants and ascertaining their significance and limitations.

The purpose of this study is to identify the components of the developmental program at the college under study that lead to success for the very-at-risk student (degree or diploma attainment). The very-at-risk community college population typically includes those confronting issues of economy, race, class, gender, and other cultural dynamics. Identification of factors that lead to success ultimately informs change in the college programs or in students themselves. My specific research questions require the participant to not only look inside themselves for what contributed to their success, but also to academic factors, such as the program itself, a past program in which they participated, or similar support services. Consequently, this study draws on critical theory to explain the need for change, particularly for this typically subjugated population.

Like constructivism, another component of critical theory foundational to the study of developmental students is that of context. The historical and structural contexts underpinning the program as well as the participants are complex and varied. In addition, the economic, political, and social aspects of the college developmental program as well as those educational programs from which the participants have come would most certainly influence their success.

While the goal of the study was to elicit those factors that led to successful degree achievement, the survey questions were overtly political in that they intended to expose disempowering structures in the lives of the students. Because students were actively involved in the process of identifying what worked for them, a democratic structure was inherent in this study. Guided by critical theory, the researcher partnered together with participants in a nonhierarchical fashion to expose any challenging structures they encountered as well as to identify supportive structures.

Retention Theories within the Confines of this Study

Beyond social theory, two retention theories ground much of the research conducted in college retention efforts. First, Vincent Tinto's (1993) retention theory described by his Student Integration Model posits that students bring personal qualities along with family and educational background characteristics to their college experience. They also come with goals and aspirations; the higher the goal to attain a degree, the greater the likelihood to persist.

Upon enrolling, students encounter an academic and social system into which he or she must integrate. The ability of the student to integrate into the system leads to the attrition or retention of that student. Tinto's model of retention draws from the research of William Spady who portrayed an analogy of Durkheim's suicide theory and school departure. While lack of integration into a social system can lead to suicide, in the college setting, the lack of integration, socially or academically, leads to departure from the institution. This model explains Tinto's Student Integration Theory which argues that student motivation and academic ability paired with an institution's academic and social system lead to college retention and degree achievement (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993).

Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993) observe that studies by a considerable number of other researchers have validated Tinto's model. However, the absence of the role of external

factors in Tinto's theory and research existed. John Bean's research study pursued an examination of the role of external factors in student retention.

Bean's Student Attrition Model, the second theory explaining student departure, differs from Tinto's model in two ways. Bean's model recognizes external factors such as encouragement from significant others and student intentions such as goal commitment as significant to retention (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993). Recognizing the validity of John Bean's research, Tinto added these additional components to his model in subsequent years.

Summary and Conclusion

The review of the literature confirms the need for developmental education in American education. Social and economic issues have always affected student preparedness; those issues have persisted if not increased. Meanwhile expectation levels rise as other developed nations surpass us in academic achievement. In fact, the report of the National Commission on Adult Literacy (2008) calls for immediate action to solve the literacy problem in America. Because our workforce is becoming less educated, along with numerous other negative social effects, our economic and national security is threatened. In response, the report calls for action by Congress to provide "significant support for a national, independent research and development program."

Further, the review of the literature identifies the very-at-risk population as one that has value and potential frequently gone unnoticed and underrepresented in research studies. The research raises more questions than it answers in the minds of educators. Consequently, those questions guide the qualitative portion of this study. In former studies, certain components of developmental education appear to make a difference for developmental students, i.e., instructor characteristics and methods, learning support services, tuition assistance, and advising. Through interviewing, graduates can contemplate and share which of these components along with other identified outside forces contributed to their success.

To bring a more in-depth understanding to the research question exploring the factors that led to the successful completion of a degree by very-at-risk students, I have chosen to use a qualitative research approach. The constructivist theory approach I followed assumes the emergence of theory from the data (Mertens, 2005). I submit that attrition rates among developmental students may be caused as much by social issues as they are by academic deficits, and I believed understanding of attrition rates would profit from the more human face of qualitative research methods. Critical theory along with constructivist theory provides the theoretical framework for studying an oppressed people in order to give them voice and effect change on their behalf. The interviews within this qualitative approach provided an avenue for the inclusion of their personal perspective in the field of developmental education.

Tinto's retention theory and Bean's attrition model also ground this research. This study attempts to identify factors leading to degree or diploma achievement by very-at-risk students. Tinto's and Bean's models explain retention and attrition factors, providing a starting point from which I designed the interview questions.

The following chapter presents the methods used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

To bring a more in-depth understanding to the research question exploring the factors that led to the successful completion of a degree by very-at-risk students, qualitative research methods based on a constructivist paradigm drove the study.

Research Design

I chose to use a qualitative approach because I believe the very-at-risk student population at this particular community college who have completed a two-year degree hold within themselves the multiple realities that have led to their success. I believe that by giving a voice to this population through an interview, I have best elicited these realities. I favored this approach based on the ontology of the constructivist perspective that purports the emergence of socially constructed realities and argues that multiple realities can exist (Mertens, 2005).

From a critical theorist perspective, I also observed that the literature does not represent well the voice of this population and that this study could better serve the colleges by hearing this voice. I undertook this study to address the scarcity of literature on the very-at-risk and their limited success in degree achievement and to provide the college under study with information by which to modify or augment its developmental program.

The epistemology of the constructivist paradigm assumes subjectivity—the researcher and the participant co-create meaning and understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). To constructivists, there is not just one objective reality; perceptions of reality may change through the research process (Mertens, 2005). As I met individually to interview each participant, I believe I had rapport which provided a safe environment for the participant to share his or her story and to develop theory and focus from it. I base this confidence on the excellent rapport I have had for the last eight years of classroom instruction involving this population. Students' Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ) results completed at the college under study by

students from this population support this belief. In the interview setting throughout the research period, that same sense of rapport, openness, and sharing was apparent.

According to the qualitative paradigm, in the natural world, the researcher constructs reality generally using interviews, observations, and/or document reviews (Mertens, 2005). I interviewed the participants beginning with a list of questions derived from the literature review and from there I proceeded with an open-ended, in-depth exploration of the participant's journey through their educational experience. Interview questions targeted the academic program as well as non-academic factors such as motivation, goals, personal qualities, family support, and faculty relationships.

Research Site and Participant Selection

The college under study is a Pennsylvania community college with an enrollment of approximately 21,000 students. Five regional campuses and a virtual campus comprise this institution. The graduate volunteers originally represented all five campuses; however, one volunteer failed to show for the interview. Consequently, this study includes volunteers from four of the five regional campuses.

I interviewed twenty (20) very-at-risk students who achieved degree-completion. These graduates were volunteers from the group of 61 students who graduated from the college under study between 2000-2010, all of whom were invited to participate in this study. Each of the 61 graduates received a packet of information compiled by me but sent from the college. This mailing included a letter of introduction to the study with a request for volunteer participants, a voluntary consent form, an informed consent form, and a response card. I received four responses from this effort. Next, a staff member of the college called each graduate and either talked to or left a message asking for permission to give me their name and contact information. I then called all of those whom I could reach or who returned my call; this effort generated sixteen (16) additional volunteer participants, bringing the total to twenty (20).

After contacting and setting a date, time, and meeting place according to each one's preference, I met with each and conducted the interview face-to-face with one exception. Only one participant responded from out-of-state; the rest of the participants resided near the vicinity of the community college under study. I conducted the out-of-state interview by telephone. While the insights and perceptions were commensurate with those from face-to-face interviews, the telephone experience confirmed my belief that face-to-face interviews elicit richer description when storytellers interview in a warm and personal setting with eye-to-eye contact.

Each participant signed two copies (one to keep for their records) of an informed consent form which delineated the terms of the interview and one copy of a voluntary consent form. Each face-to-face interview lasted approximately one hour; the phone interview lasted one-half hour. Every participant consented to be audiotaped. I transcribed the first tape and hired two transcribers to complete the other nineteen tapes. For the sake of anonymity, the tape recording did not identify the names of the interviewees. I numbered each tape for transcription use; I alone knew the identification of each.

Participant Demographics

The cross-section of volunteer graduates included minorities, immigrants, recent high school graduates who did not pass the college entrance exam, single parents, workers requiring a career change, and two high school drop-outs returning to school after attaining a GED. While race and ethnicity are not variables under study, I include reference to it simply to reflect the diversity among the graduates of this college under study and among the volunteer population. The college under study provides the following demographic data on their website for public knowledge. Reference is not cited here for the purpose of anonymity.

At the time of this writing, this college shows a statistical make-up comprised of 64.9% females; 11.4% African-American; 8.3% Hispanic; and 3% Asian populations. No percentage of international students was recorded. Specifically, I interviewed nine (9) males and eleven (11)

females. At the time of graduation, eleven (11) were in the age range of 20-25 years old; three (3) were in the range of 26-30; three (3) were in the range of 30-35; one (1) was in the range of 36-40; and two (2) fell within the range of 46-50 (See Appendix B for profile of participants).

From this study population of graduates, volunteers included eleven (11) Caucasians; four (4) black Americans; two (2) black Africans (Sudan and Toga); one (1) each from Albania, Vietnam, and India (see Appendix B). Interestingly, there were no volunteers from the Hispanic population of graduates.

Two (2) of the graduates were married while in college; nine (9) were parents. Fourteen (14) graduates had received financial aid. Majors included: Two (2) Business Administration; three (3) Business Studies; two (2) Criminal Justice; two (2) Paralegal Studies; two (2) Surgical Technology; two (2) General Studies; and one (1) each in Accounting; Humanities, Language & Arts; Fire Science; Medical Assistant; Elementary Education. Two (2) received certificates in CNA and Phlebotomy respectively. Twelve (12) graduates indicated they were already in programs to further their education or were planning to continue their education in the near future.

Data Collection

Patton (2002) highlights the increased comprehension that comes when hearing the stories from those in the population experiencing the phenomenon. Further, Patton observes that these stories “capture unintended impacts and ripple effects, and illuminate dimensions of desired outcomes that are difficult to quantify” (p. 152). To elicit stories and data for this study, I interviewed the participants from a list of predetermined questions (see Appendix A). For the interview, I met with them wherever they suggested—their home, public library, restaurant, or at a college—any place of their choice so they would feel comfortable and non-threatened.

I began with the question, “Did you plan to go to college when you were in high school?” This question required the participant to begin their story before the inception of their college

career. This study attempts to identify factors contributing to degree-achievement; the opening question attempts to elude possible motivation for enrolling in college. I followed this question with several questions pertaining to their preconceived notions about a college experience. These included:

- How did you do in high school?
- Before you enrolled in college, what did you think college would be like?
- What did you think it would take to succeed?
- How was your experience different from what you expected?

Following this reflection I asked each volunteer to recall when he or she was a beginning student in college. The next question, “Starting from the very first course (English 001), talk about your experience as a developmental student. To what do you attribute your success as a college graduate?” did not include promptings to suggest certain factors.

I then moved to exploring obstacles that each may have encountered with “What were the obstacles you had to overcome and how did you overcome them?” followed by “What were the primary motivations for you to persist in completing your degree?” This question, designed to corroborate information shared in response to the pre-college questions, drew more specific data from the graduates.

Support systems are an important part of college retention (Bean, 1009). The next several questions were designed to identify support factors in individual student college success:

- Please name any factors other than support from the community college that enabled you to achieve success.
- Of the following components of the developmental program at college, which stand out to you as most instrumental in enabling you to succeed (you may name as many as apply)?

- developmental courses, college success courses, advisors, teaching methods of instructors, relationships with instructors, tutors, financial aid officers, registration officers, librarian assistance.
- To what extent did you receive support from each of the components of the developmental program that you mentioned?
- To what extent, if any, did you receive support from each of the components of the developmental program that you did not mention?
- Give an example of a time when you received help that really made a difference in your college experience.

Finally, the quality of the developmental program itself and how that factored into student success was addressed through the questions “What changes in the program at college do you perceive would help other students be more successful?” and “What parts of the developmental program do you recommend that there be no change since they are effective as they stand?”

I designed the final two questions to bring out corroborative data. I asked “Why do you think the others didn’t make it?” and “Are you interested in further education?” My community college teaching experience informs the notion that students observe other students and are more closely associated with and understand their experience than are the professors. Through reflecting on others’ choices to drop-out, either from intimate knowledge or from observation, the participants frequently and sometimes inadvertently, confirmed their own persistence factors. The final question tended to speak to vision, goals, support, persistence, and other related factors. I looked for confirmation of qualities observed in earlier responses that may have led to degree-completion.

I audiotaped and transcribed the interviews word-for-word in order to capture all responses to the questions as well as any diverse path taken by the participant or researcher. In addition, I took handwritten notes of my observations and extended questions based on the participant response. After the interview, I recorded notes and impressions about the interview and the participant in the form of memos.

Data Description and Analysis

To begin data description and analysis, I read each interview transcription and noted every response to each prompt. I placed these comments in a table so student perceptions of the value of each program became readily apparent (see Appendix C). From the transcribed interviews, I identified the academic factors associated with the college program. I cut out the detailed response to each question by each participant and taped it on post-it paper according to the associated category. I covered a wall in my office with poster paper and attached the labels listed in the paragraph above—both academic and non-academic categories. I then placed the interviewee response taped to the post-it paper under the appropriate category. For example, if in the transcribed interview, the student referenced a particular teaching method, I cut the response from the transcription, taped it to a post-it note, and posted it under the category called teaching method. I did the same for the other academic categories: developmental courses, tutoring (learning center), college success courses, library assistance, and financial aid.

Themes emerged from the participant response to questions which upon thought led them to identify factors that were not within the control of the college itself, but originated from the personal life of each graduate (non-academic). Prominent non-academic categories that emerged from the data included vision and goals, motivations, parents, other supportive people in their lives, faith, relationships to instructors, and the personal qualities of determination, perseverance, and self-efficacy. Chapter 4 delineates these categories and themes in greater detail.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

To address potential researcher bias, I described my personal background experience with this population at the beginning of the dissertation. I stated that while the literature highlights factors leading to failure, very few studies examine factors leading to success. While I expected to find the usual traits that would naturally correlate with success, I noted at the beginning that I had no preconceived notions about what participants might identify as factors leading to success.

Typically, triangulation, an iterative process, uses a variety of procedures to explain the data. Creswell and Miller (2000) identify interviews, observations, and documents as popular sources for corroborating analyses of data. In this study, I engaged the following processes to ensure credibility. To record the interactive process between the participant and me, I used memos, a method used in qualitative research to meticulously record not only procedures and steps, but also thought processes as I worked my way through data interpretation. I also reported how I choose the themes and categories, and how I arrived at my conclusions. I included appendices with actual transcribed data and numerous direct quotes from the participants throughout chapters 4 and 5. The reader can judge my interpretation or create an interpretation more suitable to his or her perceptions.

I engaged in member checks to seek the opinion of experts to give opportunity to add to or disagree with my conclusions. I compared my interpretations with the literature, observing how various studies confirmed or differed from my results. I attempted to use thick description, describing the phenomena in such detail that transferability to other times, settings, situations, and people could become apparent to the reader.

Transferability

Transferability is another criteria used to strengthen credibility. Are the results generalizable to other situations, in this case, community college developmental programs? According to Mertens (2005) only the reader can assess that; however, thick description

increases potential for transferability. Along with quoting from the interview transcription itself, I included thorough and in-depth descriptions of the context and culture, explaining it in light of the developmental population common to nearly all community colleges.

Summary and Conclusion

The literature highlights numerous studies investigating various aspects of developmental programs in community colleges. These studies include program effectiveness, student success, student attrition, and faculty characteristics to name some. Other studies focus on student demographics or teaching methods. I found no study that explores factors leading very-at-risk students to degree completion.

I chose a qualitative study to explore factors leading very-at-risk students to degree completion. Further, I designed interview questions to elicit their perception of developmental program components that contributed to their academic success. I chose a Pennsylvania community college as the research site, and used purposeful sampling to interview twenty (20) very-at-risk students chosen from a pool of 61 very-at-risk students who achieved degree completion.

I collected data through audiotaped one-hour interviews. Two colleagues and I transcribed the twenty interviews word-for-word. In chapter four, I describe the data derived from these transcribed interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA DESCRIPTION

The data for this study derives from the interviews in which twenty (20) graduates with dissimilar backgrounds, motivations, goals, and demographics and who achieved degree-completion volunteered to share their perceptions of the factors that led to their success. All of these graduates began their college experience in the most basic reading course (English 001) offered at the community college under study. Placement into this course requires that the student take two additional reading courses before enrolling in college-credit courses unless the student earns a 95% average in the first or second level reading course. In that case, they are exempt from the next level. While not all students entering this particular community college are required to take courses other than developmental reading, all of these participants needed at least one other developmental courses either in English composition or math; some needed both.

No student that I asked remembered how many of these courses they needed to take (a spontaneous question I asked of nearly all of them); two graduates declared they didn't take English 001 – but college records proved they did. The two were well aware that they needed to take some preliminary courses, but apparently were not impressed with the realization that they started at the very lowest level.

To bring perspective to the interview questions, I reiterate here that the purpose of this study was to address the following research questions:

1. What factors do very-at-risk student graduates (i.e. students scoring less than 50 in the ACCUPLACER Test) identify as leading to success?
2. Which aspects of the developmental education program at the college under study do very-at-risk graduates identify as contributing to their academic success?

I designed interview questions to prompt the graduates to talk about their college experience in order to identify factors that led to their successful degree-completion (see

Appendix A). Invariably, the responses related to personal aspects such as family or personal goals and desires, or to academic factors such as the college program and instructors. As participants reflected on their college experience, their responses took shape in the form of memoirs, stories, and autobiographies. From these, the academic and non-academic categories emerged: academic factors affected by the programs put into place by the college under study and non-academic factors that emerge from within the participant.

Academic factors such as college program components included the learning center where free tutoring is available whenever the college is open, developmental courses including reading, writing, and math, college success courses, advising, library assistance, financial aid, and faculty teaching methods. Since all students had the same access to these programs, I looked for strength of graduate affirmation throughout the discussion of each program. I also noted when graduates referred to weaker college support systems so that the college under study could implement improvements for future students.

Non-academic categories that emerged from the data included vision and goals, motivations, parents, other supportive people in their lives, faith, relationships to instructors, and the personal qualities of determination, perseverance, and self-efficacy.

While there were a number of ways I could have organized the data, I purposefully organized it this way to identify parts of the college program which graduates clearly perceive had made a difference in their success. This is useful information to the college under study as well as to many other colleges who serve this population. Secondly, counselors, advisors, and college success course instructors can use the non-academic factor data to guide this population through the obstacles and challenges they face.

I will address each of the college academic programs in this order: developmental courses, tutoring, college success courses, advising, library assistance, financial aid, and teaching methods.

Academic Program Factors

In this study, I define academic program factors as programs put into place and offered by the college to enable students to achieve degree-completion. All students had the same access to these programs. Non-academic factors include such things as motivations, goals, personal qualities, family support, faculty relationships—those things that vary for each student. The interview questions logically guided responses toward these two groupings: academic and non-academic.

Graduates identified both academic and non-academic (personal values and choices) areas that were important to their success. This information, which came directly from those who demonstrated an ability to succeed, is valuable to the college. As participants shared their stories, critical details about specific academic programs and about choices, beliefs, and values that can lead to success emerged.

The college under study offers the following programs: a learning center where free tutoring is available whenever the college is open, developmental courses including reading, writing, and math, college success courses, advising, library assistance, and financial aid. Additionally, I examined faculty teaching methods from the perspective of the interviewee. I will address each of these categories by outlining the individual participant perception and comparing it both with the perceptions of the other successful graduates and with the literature.

Developmental Courses

The college under study offers ten developmental courses including three levels of reading, two in writing, and five in math. All of the participants needed to take at least two of the reading courses and all needed to take an additional one in either writing or math.

Despite the fact that researchers continue to report questionable benefits of mandatory developmental courses (Collins, 2010), nearly all of the participants in this study commented that the courses were helpful and several stated that they could not have achieved degree completion

without them. Specifically, six of the participants in this study identified this academic component to be the most significant to their success; one reported it as the second most important program. Only two of the graduates verbalized that while they were excellent courses (both were required to take two reading courses), they could have made it without them. Both participants, however, found the courses excellent and did not resent having to take them.

All of these participants placed in the lowest reading course through the Accuplacer reading assessment test. At this college under study, policy dictates that the student then progress to the second and third reading course before enrolling in college-credit courses. In the event that a student earns a 95% average in the first or second level reading course, they are exempt from the next level. Three students reported exemptions; the remainder took all three reading courses. All interviewees confirmed that they experienced at least three developmental courses; the maximum number possible at the college under study is ten courses. The point of inquiry here is not how many courses the student had to take or even which courses were required, but to discern the value of the courses toward student success.

The Academic programs table (see Appendix C) records the perceptions of the interviewees. One graduate verbalized a common accusation made against community colleges for requiring these courses when he said, “When I was first starting, I felt that this was a way for the college to make money.” Community college faculty teaching developmental courses frequently report overhearing students complain about “wasting their time and money” when taking these courses.

What faculty generally have no opportunity to hear is what these students say in retrospect. One graduate said, “If I wouldn’t have had those classes, I would have jumped into some of the more, you know, tougher classes... I think I might have probably maybe given up just because it was too tough.” Another said, “If I wouldn’t have had those classes, I probably would have dropped out. I would have quit and said, ‘That is enough’.”

A graduate who later made the dean's list said, "I needed them drastically because the English and Reading really helped me to become a better reader, especially in the Early Childhood field you need to be a really good reader." This same student said, "Some of the reading classes teach you how to read through text so you'll find out the important information." A student who thought it was only a money-making deal said, "In hindsight, it was a good program with varying levels of competencies. They didn't expect you to go from here to there without preparing you for the next level." Similarly, another said, "...doing all that work – it could start out with just reading a book, doing vocabulary, and that seemed like it was small stuff, but then it led up to writing a paper about the book using those vocabulary words and then that is when it paid off. You got into the deeper stuff and then as you jump into your college level classes it went right into that and you were prepared for that."

These comments speak to the community college dilemma. When community colleges put developmental courses in place, they face accusations on one hand of wasting the students' time and money and therefore contributing to higher drop-out rates. On the other hand, instructors of college-credit courses berate the college for allowing underprepared students to enroll in their courses, forcing them to pass incompetent students or fail most of the class. To function with integrity, the community college puts developmental courses in place to offer students a chance for success by adequately preparing them for their college experience. By doing this, students do not waste time and money and professors of college-credit courses are not forced to compromise. These successful graduates affirmed the value of this effort.

That same integrity appeared in the comments of participants. One said, "Even if I had to go through three of them [reading courses], it was good for me because I don't mind getting extra help." Another affirmed the value to not take short-cuts but to embrace all that is available, since many students coming out of high school have missed so many skills that are needed or useful in college. Addressing the time issue, another interviewee said, "The first day of class

something that bothered me was looking at the list of English classes I had to work up to just to get to college level and I thought this is going to take forever, but it didn't."

Graduates also applauded other features of the developmental courses. One said, "They were small classes and that way the teacher can focus more on you. The bigger the class the harder it is for the teacher to be able to give you that time." Besides small classes, faculty support for the student made a significant difference to the students. One interviewee commented that upon returning to the school environment after quite a few years away from it, he found the professor in his first course so helpful, encouraging, and supportive, that he just wanted to continue.

Only one student verbalized that the courses were unnecessary. She felt like she did not need the reading courses but had placed in the lowest one. She commented, "I enjoyed it though. It wasn't like I dreaded going to class every day." I note here that while it happens minimally, test-taking can result in wrong placement. However, some graduates felt that the developmental courses would benefit anyone, required or not. One said, "Those are something I would recommend to anybody. I even had friends that asked me 'where did you learn that?' Well I learned it in my developmental course." Another observed that the concentration of English skills in both reading and writing classes all within two semesters of time gave him the skills he is still using and needs for his bachelor's program.

In summary, these interviewees strongly support the practice of mandating developmental courses. The developmental courses, the component of the academic category that graduates affirmed most likely led to their successful degree-completion, indeed do play a valuable role in community colleges today. While I found no conclusive research studies to corroborate my theory, from ten years of experience teaching reading courses, I believe that developmental courses prepare students for college-level courses. This occurs not only by providing skill instruction and practice, but also by walking students through effective practices

of college students. Sometimes it is not the increase in content learning that leads to success, but the ability to follow directions, meet assignment deadlines, follow proper formatting of documents, stay in touch with the professor, make class attendance a priority, and similar successful student behaviors. While considered expensive by some, attrition is a more costly phenomenon—efforts made to recruit new students to replace drop-outs require an even more expensive process. For these interviewees and, I would offer, many others like them, developmental courses played a significant role in their retention and ultimate successful degree-completion.

Learning Center – Tutoring Program

The learning center, valuable to college students in general and to these interviewees in particular, typically denotes negative messages to most students. Overcoming this mental barrier is a challenge for developmental students who already feel “stupid” for placing in the developmental program initially. Nevertheless, from a daily, subjective point of view, my community college instructor colleagues and I conclude that the successful developmental students are also those who make use of the learning center. First, accessing the tutoring service indicates extra time spent in academic learning and often results in submitted work of acceptable to high quality. Further, the resolve it takes to go to the learning center despite the stigma indicates strength of character and will to succeed that may set these graduates apart from their counterparts.

Because of the multifaceted nature of college tutoring services, it is difficult to identify to what extent learning centers or one-on-one tutoring in the college setting impact student success, particularly for developmental students (Maxwell, 1994; Perin, 2004). In this study, as in other studies, amount of time spent with tutors, the quality of the tutoring process, the experience and training of the tutors, and the academic ability of the student, vary significantly. In a quantitative research study of developmental student progress, it becomes nearly impossible to validly

quantify grade improvement or college success. However, a study conducted by D. E. Irwin did find that more experienced students of higher-level ability improved their grades significantly in a statistics course when tutored (as cited in Maxwell, 1994).

At the college under study, fifteen interviewees highly lauded the value of the learning center to their success. While not all interviewees ranked the programs, two interviewees named it as the most important program contributing to their success; four others ranked it second most important following development courses. Five interviewees did not make use of this program, but found tutoring elsewhere—at home or from friends or faculty. Only one reported not seeking help; she, however, did benefit from studying with friends before class but also was quite intelligent and academically capable.

Two participants reported preferring family members as tutors and never needing the college tutoring center. A third one found that instructors were readily available to help and that this arrangement was more satisfactory for completing math assignments than using the learning center. Another wanted to prove to herself and to others that she could learn on her own since she had been in learning support classes throughout her previous school experience. A fifth one reported only needing help with chemistry, a subject in which tutoring was not available.

Two of the above students shared that while they did not go to the tutoring center for assistance, they did go to use it as a study area or to use the computers. They found it quiet and comfortable and a good place to focus.

The remainder of the participants spoke of quantity of time spent there, which ranged from attending once or twice a semester to once or twice a week and all the way to several reporting, “I lived there,” or “they knew me by name,” or “they were my family.” Specifically, one graduate recalled, “Daily I would go early [to college] and stay late and go to the learning center. I would ask when I was writing, ‘Does this make sense, and does this comma go here?’ I would go back out to the library and do it in Word version then.”

Another graduate's response to the question of learning center usage was, "Yes, all the time. I used it for English, Math, CIS computer lab, and I will still go there. I got that letter saying I am an alumni and I am going to pay my \$100 so I can access the things that I can in the future."

Several students credited their use of the learning center as a contributing factor to persistence and their early success in college. One student commented, "...it's good to let someone else review it [writing], then help you correct the grammar and the vocabulary and all that stuff. That was so good - tutoring. And then just like my English grades were so good from that office. If I can remember, I think I kept having A's from 001...I just did really, really good because of the tutoring."

Personnel from the learning center report during collegial meetings that their biggest challenge is helping students understand that tutors are there to guide them, not to ensure that they will leave there with a perfect "A" paper or homework assignment. One successful graduate commented, "They are there to help you when you put as much effort as they put in, you know, it pays off. I think a lot of students, the younger ones would just go there thinking they'd just do the work for them, but if you do your part as a student, I found that they were willing and able to help you." This comment suggests that the successful student was one who was willing to work, was open to receiving help, and took a proactive role in their own learning.

Other comments about the usefulness of the tutoring service included, "Excellent. There is no tutoring where I go now—I miss that." Another said, "They helped me a lot. I went once a week and when I didn't go for help, I would get a C on a paper instead of an A or B." Finally, one interviewee confirmed that the learning center was one of the greatest things the college has to offer.

Four participants, all from the same regional campus, reported that while tutoring for English courses were helpful, tutoring services in math were less than stellar. Three commented

that there were too few tutors for the volume of students needing help. One commented on the quality of help by stating, “The people they employ there are students. They are so advanced they don’t care. They just want to talk about how they are so smart and how you are not... When you raised your hand, they would give you a quick answer and walk away and not really explain it to you.” The third student preferred to get help directly from the instructor to avoid wasted time and effort.

In summary, I conclude that accessing the learning center or similar services outside the college is an important factor leading to successful completion of a college program for very-at-risk students. The graduates of the college under study attest to the value that the learning center held for them individually. Indeed, more than half of the interviewees perceived that they could not have achieved their goal to graduate without this college program. Those who used the tutoring center did not have outside sources to access or at least tutoring was not as conveniently available as the college offers. Their responses hold valuable information to the college under study and to similar colleges who may question the importance of this program when program evaluations include cost-cutting. Based on the voice of these successful graduates, the college under study can be confident that for the very-at-risk student, the learning center is highly influential to their success.

College Success Courses

Human Development courses, while not content courses, are designed to help first-year students successfully make the transition to college level courses. An interesting phenomenon occurs here. Very few students would choose these courses on their own. While these courses are not required for degree-attainment, advisors assign or strongly recommend the courses, believing that the student needs it for success. Often the student requires a certain number of credits in order to attain financial aid and has no other options since developmental courses are prerequisite courses, a second reason why students enroll in the course. Yet despite their initial aversion to

these courses, interviewees' reflections indicate a strong affirmation of the role these courses played in their successful degree-completion.

Fourteen interviewees strongly affirmed that at least one of the two courses made a difference in their college experience and could potentially have led to their success. Both of these 100-level courses earn three credits toward degree completion as an elective, but do not transfer. While they are not required courses, developmental students frequently enroll in these courses solely for the purpose of acquiring full-time status for insurance or financial aid purposes. Students are often surprised that the skills acquired in these courses may have ultimately made the difference in their college experience between dropping out or completing their program.

I did not differentiate the two courses in my analysis here because graduates could not remember which course they had. They could recall if they had a college success course and they could talk about the benefits of the course. Also, course content could overlap depending upon the instructor. Regardless, the students confirmed that they learned basic skills necessary for a successful college experience.

One course, College Success I, is a foundational level and practical study skills course including such topics as learning styles, time management, goal setting, test preparation, effective reading, and beginning information literacy skills. The course "Becoming a Master Student" provides an opportunity for students to learn and apply the attitudes and behaviors that lead to success in both college and life. Topics covered in this course include choosing meaningful academic and personal goals, creating effective action plans, building support networks, developing self-esteem, accepting personal responsibility, and maximizing learning.

Quotes from graduates about these two courses include the following:

- They taught you study strategies and how to deal with school and how not to give up.

Looking back, I realize it was helpful.

- It was extremely helpful. That was the class I could not wait to go to. It was taught by three professors and it was a big group. It had a lab with it.
- They taught a lot about me and what I needed to do to get through school. They showed me how to study. I don't remember the course, but I remember two red books. I always found it very interesting. I was always so excited to go to school and I was always there early because I couldn't wait to be at school.
- The professor...was extremely good in teaching how to take tests. Then the librarian came in for the whole class and showed us how to do things. It was a hard class. I think that class should be one of the first classes that students take.
- And then I had this other class...Becoming a Master Student or whatever. It was good. It taught me some good study habits and managing time, you know, between work and school and personal life and everything.
- At first I thought this isn't going to be very useful—this is just eating up time and then when I started to read about it and I learned about the way I learn and the reason why I should carry a note pad with me so I can read something write it down, read something, write it down... After awhile it became a good tool, I still have that book. I still draw from it.
- I know a lot of kids in my class thought that was a waste of time and I did too. It seemed like waste of time but as it went on it did really help you to become a better college student. It taught you note taking and how to read a good bit of chapters and be able to skim out the important part of the information without having to read word for word. It did help out in that sense. It was a class that just didn't help you in college-it helped you out of college. I remember we had to come up with a weekly planner in that class which was part of our passing the class and you know it was

basically about time management. You kind of think this is dumb and it is not worth doing, then you actually look at it and its like wow outside of college managing your time is the only way you are going to succeed. If you don't have things organized at home and at work you are not going to have time for your school work. That was helpful. I found myself on several occasions where I would work an 8 hour day and I would have a paper due the next day and its like, ok when am I going to have enough time. I would have to figure out time when I was going to research the information, write a rough copy, have someone edit it and read over it, so that class helped out a bit.

Based on these comments, positive change in the students is evident not only in their skill sets but in their affect—their feelings about college, about learning, and about attaining something much larger outside of their abilities through the support system offered by the institution. For these students, college credit, time, or money was not the main concern—what happened to them there was the important issue; they embraced a creator attitude of managing the demands of college. It is understandable why all who enrolled in these courses spoke not only positively but with strong affirmation for the benefits they received from these courses.

Advising

The subject of the advising services evoked both positive and negative responses in a way not seen in the other components. Positively, fourteen students affirmed that advisors were very helpful and important to their college success. Two lauded their advisor as their hero—the main key to their success. One student commented that the advisor is the first person you encounter when pursuing college; therefore it is of utmost importance that they be personable, encouraging, and knowledgeable. If you don't get the positive reinforcement you need from them, it can be devastating.

Only one student reported that she did not use the advising service available to her. She used her program director/instructor as her advisor since he could knowledgeably guide her through the program. Two had negative experiences with faculty advisors; one who confused the student with their comments and the other who steered the student down a wrong path, requiring an additional semester before achieving required credits for graduation. Several commented that faculty members tend not to have the essential knowledge about program requirements and transfer credits.

There were varying degrees of importance referenced—some sought guidance every semester, some only once when they enrolled. Several mentioned that once the advisor showed them how to use the website to select courses from a program advising checklist and how to register online, they no longer sought the assistance of an advisor.

During the advising component of the interview, negative, even angry feelings flared. I did not experience this coming from the interviewees during discussion of any other category or college experience. It is important to note that the advisors referenced by the students may be counselors in the counseling office or may be faculty advisors assigned to them by the college. Faculty advisors have minimal training and have access to college counselor assistance when advising students. Some of the comments from students include (the comments in parentheses are mine):

- I took that test and I must say the [advisor] didn't look at me like I was stupid. She just took me and said these are the courses that you will need to take. You will start out with these courses. I also went to [a regional site] because of the courses I was in. I had to go up there and there are some down sides to all of that, too, but to make the story short I followed her guidelines until the last subject that I had. Sometimes from my perspective, with the counselors, when you see them in the different colleges—I

felt that they were not in synch with each other. I felt like they were not communicating together. That frustrated me more than anything.

- I understand the rush part when you are new if the new person comes in and they feel like they are being rushed. I think that would be a negative impact on them. I knew what I needed because I had to get my papers signed because he screwed up with regards to the courses that I needed. I said I am not going to be able to graduate if you don't do something about this. He actually go into the dean and check it off with the regards to the Human Development course that everybody needs to take. When I went in there, I showed him what was missing. I think he was going to college himself, he was teaching and he was advising and I think he had too much on his plate and I realize that but it sounds like I am talking bad about him and I'm not. The one on one attention that my first advisor gave me was great. She had such a demeanor about herself that she did not make me feel rushed whatsoever when I went into her. I did not feel rushed at all. From point A to Z she had everything mapped out that I needed even when I goofed up a bit she caught it.
- My advisor was terrible. (Was he or she?) He was not helpful at all. He did not want to hear what I had to say. He didn't want me to go to the 001 classes. He wanted me to start out at English 101 and just go right up to math. (My goodness, what was his rationale?) He never really came out and said. He just said it was a waste of my time and money. (So apparently you didn't have to take it.) Yeah, but I knew I had to. (He didn't know that.) Yes. He was not supportive and when I went to him my first semester it was the last time I went to him. (You didn't go again?) No. (Did you know how to pick your own courses?) I was determined to teach myself. I don't remember the gentleman's name. I didn't go to anybody else. I just thought I am not going to waste my time. My dad even came along to try and talk to him and he didn't

want to hear it. He made me a schedule and I ended up changing it because I knew it wasn't going to work for me. (Did he give you a paper that told you all of the courses that were required for your major?) Yes.

- (And your advisors who helped you pick your courses – how helpful did you find that?) That area was a little – mmm – I would say that was the only downside with the college in that area because for someone who is a business major and your advisor is an English major, or English professor, you know, it's kind of ironic that – how would they know about the classes I would need to take? That's the thing I didn't understand. [The college] really did such a – I thought they had enough advisors there... I would say it pushed me back a semester. But I think I took classes I shouldn't have taken towards my Associates degree, so it was like that area was like, "Ok, what am I doing wrong or what are they doing wrong?" So that part really discouraged me 'cause I was trying to get done.
- Yes, I used the advisors—a bit confusing at times. You must ask the right questions.
- I would say it pushed me back a semester. But I think I took classes I shouldn't have taken towards my Associates degree, so it was like that area was like, "Ok, what am I doing wrong or what are they doing wrong?" So that part really discouraged me because I was trying to get done. This was a downside for me. My area was business and my advisor was an English professor. I didn't get much help. It pushed me back a semester.

While it was not always clear whether the participant referenced a college advisor or a faculty advisor, several graduates did identify faculty advisors as the focus of their concern. Interestingly, in the literature, Ashburn, Bartlett, and Wolverston (2006), in a two-year college survey with academic advising as the focus point, found that most students preferred faculty

members as advisors. In my study, for the four who identified faculty advisors, two indicated good services and two had negative experiences.

During the time frame that these graduates were students, the college did not differentiate advising for the very-at-risk student from that of any other college student. In 2009, several of the regional campuses instituted an intensive advising program specifically for the very-at-risk student. These advisors work only with this particular population and are specially trained to address the unique needs of the very-at-risk student. By the second year, all campuses will have this specialized program in place. This action was taken to address the research that points to the need for differentiated treatment for the purpose of improving retention. The twenty graduates interviewed in this study would not have had this advantage and they strongly reflect that here.

In conclusion, I note that 95 % of this very-at-risk population did access advising services. Only one out of 20 did not. Ashburn, Barlett, and Wolverston (2006), in their study cited in the literature review, reported that 26% of the developmental population did not access academic advising. With two graduates affirming this service as a main key to their success, I find that advisement for these graduates did contribute to their degree-achievement even though graduates clearly identified advising as the weakest area of the college program.

Considering the strength of the affirmation overall, however, it speaks well for the college that this was the weakest link in the developmental program. Interestingly, the college under study addressed this concern even before voiced by this population.

Library Assistance

Historically, the role of the librarian was clerical in nature, keeping records, cataloging, with the occasional assisting of students with various inquiries. In this technological age, librarians primarily assist with research. In the literature, librarians are generally not included in research studies exploring the academic success of the very-at-risk population. While librarians are not considered “special services” offered as a component of the developmental programs in

place to serve this population, they are without doubt a very integral and important service to these students. That is why I included them in this study.

The results of this part of the study surprised me. I did not expect the strong voice of affirmation; I thought librarians were less significant to the success of this mostly part-time, reticent, more academically inexperienced population. At the college under study, a librarian is always sitting in a visible location with a sign overhead inviting student to request assistance with research. Other assistants circulate the area helping students with the computers, even to the point of showing them how to format papers. Workshops on topics such as searching the databases, writing a paper, learning MLA format for papers, etc. are offered weekly. The college library sends a welcoming, smiling, service-oriented message to all who enter.

Ten interviewees highly lauded the helpfulness of the librarians. All of these ten students drew on the librarians for help with writing papers. One said he used the librarians instead of tutors in the learning center. Another learned MLA format from a librarian. Nine said they did not access the help of the librarians. Several said they go there just to study.

One student said, “I did use the library and help from the librarians because I had a lot of papers. We did go to the library and they taught us how to use everything. There were some classes where I needed to do a paper and I asked the librarians and the next thing you know they have all of these color coded papers. One for Work’s Cited, MLA formats, where to find the books for this certain topic, and help with the online sources. The librarians were very helpful people.”

Another student named the library as the second most helpful college program for his success in degree-achievement. He raved about a particular librarian whom he named and concluded, “That was like my home.”

Some said that while they never approached a librarian for assistance, the librarian would come to their class to instruct them about how to do research. The words of one student summed it up for many, “I can’t say enough about how helpful they were.”

Graduates also affirmed the availability and conduciveness of the library for study. The student who reported the library as third most important to her success concluded, “They have the library open from early morning to late in the evening. That was a great help because of all the studying. Because sometimes it would benefit using the library way before an 8:00 class, whether it was to print out a paper, if your printer at home died or something like that; and then later in the evening and especially on Saturdays. I used the library often on Saturdays when I could.”

I included this question in the interview to explore the initiative of these successful graduates. When approaching a writing assignment, the students accessed one of four avenues to achieve a quality product: learning center (tutoring), faculty member, family member, and/or the librarians. The quality of the library services at this college under study caught the attention of a considerable number of this population who credit those services for their success. Beyond this, I offer that the academic environment of this college under study is conducive to serve well those who are very-at-risk and underprepared. This is demonstrated by the librarians who are not employed as part of the developmental program but who compassionately and effectively serve this population.

I conclude this section with my favorite student comment: “I used the library and the librarians were very helpful. Especially the elderly ladies – they are very helpful and I did use the library and I spent a lot of time in there, actually. They had all the resources I needed to succeed.” It seems as if the stereotypical librarian still holds a place in the life of a modern-day college student.

Financial Aid

“All the tutoring in the world cannot save students who run short of the money they need to pay for college” (Hoover, 2008, para. 1). The results of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (2008) show that 45% of the respondents cite lack of finances as a greater threat to persistence than academic preparedness (Hoover). Also in this survey, students strongly affirmed the need for financial advising (78%), but 33% rarely or never accessed it. For those who did pursue financial aid advisement, they often found the process frustrating.

This frustration, confirmed by the report from the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (2008), purports that while community colleges serve a large population of low-income families/students, many eligible students are not applying for financial aid. Students reported complexity of application forms as one reason they failed to follow through with the process. Developmental students find complexity of application forms daunting.

Menoza, Mendez, and Malcolm (2009), in their review of the literature, note that while no research has been done to determine the most effective financial aid package, studies do show that the availability of financial aid is the sole avenue to college for many students. Persistence, however, is the greater challenge once students have used a large part of their financial resources, especially when needing a considerable number of developmental courses which do not count toward graduation.

Vincent Tinto (1993), the leading researcher in student attrition, concurs with reports that finances are generally not the main cause for student attrition. He observes that often students cite financial difficulty as a reason for not persisting, but in actuality, it is simply a more socially acceptable explanation for dropping out than is failure or dissatisfaction.

According to the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (2008), particularly in the developmental education program, one can reasonably conclude that financial aid is the gateway to college for this population. For thirteen of the twenty participants in this study, this

was true; they couldn't have gone to college otherwise. For the seven who did not access financial aid, four expressed a value of achieving a college education while graduating debt-free. All four worked while in college; one stopped-out until he could earn enough to continue without borrowing money. One student's place of employment paid her way; the other two students came from families who could pay up front.

The students who did not receive financial aid had various reasons for not drawing on this provision by the college. One student who valued debt-free living took longer to graduate so he could work to pay his tuition. His family also helped him as much as they could. Another shared that her place of employment paid her tuition until she had to quit working to be successful in college, then, while it created hardship and a very tight budget, she and her husband and two children sacrificed to pay her tuition from his salary. Both of these students were born in other countries and were reared in cultures that valued hard work; indebtedness was not inherent in their thinking or lifestyle. Both made great personal sacrifice to attain a college education debt-free.

Another American-born traditional student was determined to achieve her degree and graduate debt free. Her father and her mother each paid a third of her education; she paid the other third herself by working while in college. She verbalized her pride in graduating debt-free while observing the heavy debt load of her friends and colleagues. This same student also exhibited other attitudes of independence and self-reliance by not accessing the learning center at any time during her college experience even though she had depended on learning support throughout her prior school experience.

Two of the students who did not accept financial aid were children of professionals and lived at home. Both went to college right from high school. The family and the student highly valued a college education and tuition money was readily available. One student used loans to finance her education, but did it through her local bank and not through the college financial aid

program. She paid them back quickly while working part-time and also graduated debt-free. The seventh student gave no explanation; he just affirmed that he did not use financial aid to acquire his college education.

For those graduates who did access financial aid, two criticized the laborious and sometimes confusing process required to access it. One commented that financial aid was a wonderful service but it could be improved by devising less formidable ways of attaining it. Their testimony corroborates the report from the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (2008) about the difficulty of applying for financial aid.

In addition to the financial aid plan offered by the college, individual students acquired aid through Social Security, Welfare, Veteran's benefits, grants, companies which they worked for, and Career Link (HEAP).

One student shared that her financial aid ended before she had completed her program and it almost caused her to drop-out. Through encouragement from a friend, she borrowed the money. In her words, "I did take out a loan that was \$2500 and I took another \$2000 and put it on credit card. There was frustration there but if you want something you are going to find a way." This comment confirms Tinto's (1993) research conclusion that finances are generally not the main cause for student attrition. This student did attain success in her course work and her strong desire for degree-completion enabled her to withstand this difficult financial challenge.

Teaching Methods

I have found no research study that pinpoints teaching methods as a factor leading to attrition. However, Vincent Tinto's (1993) model, explaining why students leave college, identifies social integration and academic integration as significant for student retention. Academic integration includes how well students do with their coursework and overall achievement. Students do drop-out because they fail courses and some students are unsuccessful or feel inadequate because of teaching methods. Graduates responding to the interview prompt

about teaching methods they encountered acknowledged the hardship created for the student when instructors used less than desirable methods. Obviously, these graduates rose to the challenge.

To analyze the impact teaching methods had on these graduates, I listed every description offered by the graduates. I did not give them a checklist about which to comment. I offered an example such as lecture or small groups. The graduates generated the additional descriptions indicated below by letter of the alphabet. I assigned a ranking according to how frequently the interviewees referred to that particular method. Letter A indicates that more students commented on clarity of instruction. Following is a table indicating the interviewee on the vertical column (numerals) and the description of the method on the horizontal column (letter corresponding to description below). The X in the table indicates the teaching method referenced by that particular interviewee. The total at the bottom indicates the number of interviewees who mentioned that particular method.

A – Clarity of instruction, step-by-step, detailed

B – Projects success to student, encourages, supports

C - Time – refers to instructor - taking time to explain or keeping to a schedule regardless of student achievement

D – Lectures – only or mostly

E – Notecards/notes

F – Writes on board – student finds it easy to take notes

G - Dumps information – content rather than student oriented

H - PowerPoint – recorded as positive or negative

I – Groups/Activities/Hands-on

J – Enthusiasm – teacher demonstrated love of the subject, enthusiasm about course

K – Class discussion

L – Use of textbook

M – Preference for visuals

N – Stays on subject, no rabbit trails

Table 2
Teaching Methods Preferred by Graduates

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
1	X	X	X				X							
2	X	X	X	Pos.										
3		X												
4	X		X	Neg.										
5						X		Neg.	X					
6	X													
7	X	X	X											X
8		X	X	Neg.				Pos.						
9	X	X	X			X						X		
10	X		X	Neg.										
11				Neg.					X		X			
12	X	X		Pos.						X			X	
13		X		Neg.	X	X	X			X			X	
14				Neg.		X		Pos.		X				
15	X	X	X		X		X				X	X		X
16	X	X			X									
17	X	X	X				X			X				
18	X			Neg.	X	X			X				X	
19	X	X	X		X							X		
20				Neg.	X			Neg.	X		X			
Total	13	12	10	10	6	5	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	2

The characteristic most referenced and clearly valued by the graduates is detailed, step-by-step, clearly understandable instruction. Interestingly, if the student understood the instruction, he or she viewed the instructor as excellent (see Appendix D for student verbal descriptions). Second, graduates valued instructors who projected success through encouragement and support. I included this with teaching methods because the faculty focus was on course success rather than personal relationship.

Next, graduates highly regarded instructors who made time for the student, either by

further explaining the content privately, or by taking additional time in class to explain obscure concepts. The graduates were quite aware of and did not value “rushing” through the material to cover a certain amount of content.

Fourth, ten participants referred to the lecture method. Participants # 2 and #13, the only two positive ones, affirmed that they could learn and take good notes from the lecture method. The other eight students who commented on the lecture method were negative –referencing boredom and lack of active learning techniques which keep one engaged and bring clarity to the content.

I draw here on Kay McClenney’s (2007) research to corroborate the interviewees’ assertions with her findings from the online 2007 Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement. The results link active and collaborative learning to “higher grades, higher course completion rates, number of terms enrolled, credit hours completed, long-term persistence, and degree completion (McClenney, 2007, Engagement Matters section). While engagement in the learning process matters for all students, it is particularly true for the at-risk student population (Green, Marti & McClenney, 2007).

Based on McClenney’s (2007) active learning research results, it is not surprising that in this study, lecture methods received strong negative ratings. However, while eight of the ten participants did comment negatively about the lecture method, half of the group of participants made no references to lecture methods. By implication, these interviewees had no strong aversion to this method. Clearly, as long as they could take good notes and understood the concepts the instructor was explaining, the graduate felt they had been well-taught.

Five graduates specifically mentioned “writing on the board,” a method they highly valued. Often alluded to by educators as an old-fashioned method no longer in vogue, these graduates found this method to contribute to their learning. Three of the five graduates placed in the 20-25 age bracket (compare Appendices C and D), indicating they were not part of the older

generation raised on that method. Only one was an international student whose elementary and high school education took place in Sudan, where education is typically relayed through the lecture method.

Graduates who named PowerPoint presentations as an instructional method were divided in their opinion. The two interviewees who viewed PowerPoint presentations in a negative way related it to the lecture method—where too much of a good thing loses its effectiveness. The two graduates who affirmed PowerPoint presentations considered them a visual aid, thereby enhancing auditory instruction.

Surprisingly, only four graduates mentioned active learning techniques. I did not suggest this when asking them to identify teaching methods that were effective for them; this may explain the absence of a highly popular technique. Frequently, when students verbally and informally evaluate teachers, they refer to the more active things taking place in that particular class. Perhaps students still do not conceptualize the typical college classroom as a hands-on learning experience.

The remaining shared insights were not so closely related to teaching methods but were important to the graduate for his/her success. These included: enthusiasm of the professor (3), stays on the subject with no rabbit trail distractions (2), use of textbook by student to enhance learning (2), taking notes to study (6), importance of instructor use of visuals (3), and the negative perception of the professor who seemed to just “dump information” on them (3). One participant commented that any method worked fine as long as the professor varied them (not included in the table above).

Twelve participants also conveyed appreciation for faculty who they seemed to feel projected success in their teaching or in their way of relating to the students. While this characteristic is typically not classified as a teaching method, it seemed to be imbedded in the graduates’ responses to the methods question. I include it here for that reason.

In conclusion, graduates had considerably more positive than negative comments about the faculty at the college under study. Developmental education researchers Roueche and Baker (1987) write that the most successful colleges are those which include a responsive and dedicated faculty. The most effective teachers are those who give time to their students outside of class time (Roueche & Roueche, 1993). However, effective teaching also includes time spent in preparation, designing learning activities that actively involve students in the learning process and that construct knowledge, building new knowledge on prior knowledge (Roueche & Roueche). Interviewees cited both of these values although the effort instructors put forth in teaching strategies were less strongly recognized as significant to the graduates' degree-achievement.

I also reference Fabrizio's (2001) study from the literature review which characterizes the best developmental educators as "patient, approachable, accessible, organized, confident, teach using a multi-modal format, personable, innovative, accepting, and computer literate" (p. viii). Fabrizio's view of this list as a viable framework for selecting faculty and for instructor-training programs concurs with the findings of this study. Participants cited all of these qualities except computer literate as important to their success.

Non-academic Factors

For this research study, I have defined non-academic factors as those support systems coming from sources other than academic programs as perceived by the participant. Interview questions #'s 1-11 (see Appendix A) addressed non-academic factors. As participants told their stories, themes emerged from the data that originated from the personal life of each graduate (non-academic); these factors were beyond the control of the college itself (see Appendix F).

I perused the transcriptions for text referencing non-academic factors and extracted those comments. Factors emerging from their personal life experience vary from student to student. Despite the very different backgrounds and perspectives of the participants, I found some

common factors in this category as well. The following categories emerged: faculty relationships; supportive persons such as family, friends, and colleagues; other sources of support including personal faith and goals; and personal qualities such as determination, perseverance, and self-efficacy. I separated faculty relationships (non-academic) from faculty teaching methods (academic) because most of the participants seemed to be much more aware and affected by how faculty treated them than by how faculty taught them.

Faculty Relationships

The college under study biyearly evaluates the faculty using the Students' Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ), a research-based faculty assessment measure. Students evaluate each of their instructors in these areas using a five-point scale from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1): learning, individual rapport, enthusiasm, examination, organization, breadth, group interaction, assignments, exams, and workload.

Overall, faculty are rated high in this research-based assessment and also during informal conversation and through internet communication such as rate your professor websites. However, most informal comments reference teacher personalities and interpersonal relationship skills with students. I mention this here as a backdrop for what I found in the study.

As mentioned above under faculty teaching methods, Vincent Tinto's (1993) model for why students leave college identifies that both social integration and academic integration are significant for retention. One of the areas included in social integration is faculty relationships. Since social integration clearly involves student relationships to faculty, Tinto recommends that colleges develop activities and processes for faculty to foster this type of integration. This was confirmed by Astin (1993) who found that relationships with faculty contribute significantly to student success.

College faculty vary in their expectations of students and in how they view and relate to their students (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates, 2005). While some expect students to

pursue them for assistance and relationships, others take the initiative to offer their services to help the student succeed. These interviewees emphatically confirmed the latter at the community college under study.

The interviewees in this study identified faculty relationships as the avenue in which they were able to form relationships which lead to a sense of integration and group membership. These very-at-risk successful graduates persisted in their efforts to find that sense of integration even when an instructor was aloof or unavailable.

When graduates found they had an instructor with whom they could not connect, they found support through another avenue—through a tutor or a different instructor or adviser. Several interviewees spoke of canvassing the students in their classes about which professors they know who were accessible in this way before enrolling in their classes for the following semester. Some interviewees also confirmed that they did not hesitate to use “rate your professor” websites to identify those teachers with whom they could develop a supportive relationship.

Overall, students spoke out strongly on behalf of faculty relationships in my study. I looked to the descriptions of the characteristics of the dominant age group in this study and how this may relate to the intensity of their affirmation of faculty relationships. Fourteen of these graduates age-qualify as millennials. Papers written about the characteristics of millennial students frequently refer to their positive relationship to older persons in their lives, particularly parents and other adults who work closely with them (Denham & Adbow, 2002; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Coates, 2007). This generation is more likely to draw from those they consider experienced and helpful. I find this characteristic relevant to the strong relationships to faculty members that these graduates reported.

I found the following three common themes repeated throughout the transcribed interviews (also see Appendix F): the importance of personal contact with the instructor, positive

feelings about the instructor evident in rapport or interpersonal relationships, and instructor helpfulness and support toward success. I recorded all the negative statements as inverse positive attributes. I will discuss the negative comments at the conclusion of this section.

The first theme I address here is personal contact with the instructor. According to faculty testimony, many students do not take advantage of office hours or talking to an instructor one-on-one. The majority of these interviewees not only made use of instructor office hours, but also talked about the importance to their success of having access to the instructor and of feeling accepted and supported when they met with the instructor. This was evident in comments such as the following:

- The main thing that was important for me was that you were able to talk to them one to one, and there were a lot of students so you got that one on one time if you wanted to. That was great.
- Every semester I had, I'd visit their office. Some weren't so nice, some of them were excellent...If you couldn't get the problem this way, then work it this way, you know, and have that one-on-one with her, that's really meaningful. She didn't make you feel like you shouldn't come to her office...
- My music professor was very good. She actually took me to her office and we kind of did some things there that helped me learn better. It was nice having that.
- I talked with [my professor]. I talked to her like she was my counselor. She was very open.
- The office hours that the instructors had were helpful. You could call them as well. I use the office hours for math.
- A lot of them emailed and offered to help after class.
- If I had a problem, I can talk to them and get understanding.

Similarly, yet worthy of distinction, I categorized “helpfulness or support regarding student success” as a second theme found within open communication. While office hours or talking to the instructor one-on-one depended upon the effort of the student, this theme found in the following interviewee comments came from instructor initiative:

- The relationship – you were more close to the professor. It was more focused on what you’re there for – focused on your career.
- I don’t see any madness, nothing bad, they laugh with me and then they just would talk and we’d become like, you know...they were ready to help me.
- I know there’s like one professor that supported me a lot, but outside the college is like one of my friends.
- All the instructors were pretty personable, very willing to help with any questions, and didn’t make you feel uncomfortable in asking a dumb question in class or they’d be available right after class.
- I felt like they cared. I felt like they wanted me to succeed. They weren’t there to fail me. They were there to teach me. They were there to see that the sanctity of the course went through. They were there to see me meet objectives and grow through my experience. I felt like if I wasn’t meeting their expectations I could go up to them and ask for help.

I entitled the third theme “rapport” or interpersonal relationship—a deeper sense of affinity with the instructor. Research recently conducted by Peter Barbatis (2010) confirmed that faculty-student interaction is a key factor in student persistence. This was evident in comments such as:

- If I needed to get something done I always stayed in communication with the instructor.

- I feel any professor if I need help, I just go and see them and they help me. Yeah. They willing to help me.
- Even though he does care a lot –he does care a lot about me and we just chat and talk – that’s why I went a different direction. I should probably stop by and see how he’s doing and see what he’s up to. He’s always like whenever I was doing some activity stuff for SWAT, he’d just like stop by to chat with me a little bit and say, “Hi, how are you doing?”
- If I had a problem, I can talk to them and get understanding.
- My one professor I had was in theater and he actually came to see me in a play. I didn’t even know it, but he did. That was amazing to me because professors don’t usually do that—they kind of just take your information and say ‘Okay, I’ll see what I can do.’
- The English professors were really good. Their relationship with me was excellent. I loved it in there.
- She was very open. I always liked her. She also came to my dad’s funeral. I was really surprised. I didn’t expect her to do that. She was the one who contacted all my teachers to let them all know what happened. She was the one that was with me the whole time through thick and thin and from beginning to end.
- He’ll even be walking and I’ll beep the horn at him. (Is he young or is he older?) He is older. (He’s been there a while?) Yeah probably, it is to the point where he has students taking him out for lunch.

These quotes spontaneously spoken confirm the strong connection to the faculty that is in reality evident at this college under study. The college’s formal faculty assessment (SEEQs)

administered to all students as well as student informal evaluation evident in conversational comments and student writings confirm these findings.

Negative indicators. In contrast, students perceived the following negative indicators as factors that created obstacles to their success. Whereas students valued time given by faculty members as key to their success, so also they viewed lack of time and effort on the part of the instructor as a detriment to their college experience. Other negative traits included inflexibility, lack of communication, lack of consideration for student needs, lack of enthusiasm for the teaching profession, disorganization, and poor teaching techniques. While these observations were made by the interviewees, all indicated that these were the exception rather than the rule and all cited only one example which did, however, remain vividly in their memory. I note with interest that these negative experiences did not deter these graduates from their goal.

Other Persons of Support

Seventeen interviewees affirmed parents as important to their success. This concurs with research cited in the prior section that millennial students experience a more open relationship to parents than have generations before them (Denham & Adbow, 2002; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Coates, 2007). In addition, Tinto (1975), in his extensive literature review of attrition studies, observes that students whose parents show interest in their teen-ager, give advice, and offer support, show greater persistence.

Interestingly, eight of the seventeen participants in this study (who had parent support) stated that they had no support of significance other than their parents. The undeniable message from these interviewees was that parents were a compelling factor to their success, whether it was moral support, praise, financial support, babysitting, or tutoring. From this, it appears that while peers are thought to have major influence on college friends, parents are the stronger force in the lives of college students when degree completion is at stake.

Only three of the twenty graduates in this study did not cite parents as a strong support factor to their success; two of those three were in the oldest age bracket (46-50). Typical of an older achiever, they drew on other sources of support. One named an uncle and the other identified a daughter as their support and inspiration. The third one had never had parental support, not even as a child. This participant had a significant other without whom success could not have been achieved.

Other support persons in the lives of these participants included in-laws, spouses, siblings, uncles and aunts, grandparents, and children who encouraged or assisted them at some point in their college career. In addition to immediate family members, support persons in the lives of these participants included fellow church members, personal friends, colleagues in the workplace, fellow students, and significant others.

Support from parents included words of encouragement and expectation, tutoring, financial support so student would not have to work while in college, and child care. Comments from interviews include:

- They helped me a lot and my brother and his wife and kids
- Dad said education is forever
- My parents are both teachers and think you should be educated
- They were happy I was doing it, but they didn't think I would succeed. Once I made the dean's list, my parents kind of realized that I can succeed and encouraged me on
- They tutored me all through school
- My parents were supportive and wanted me to graduate
- Mom and Dad are both college graduates and helped me through
- I had a lot of encouragement from my parents. Dad has a technology degree.

- My parents would help me [financially] if it got to be too much with work. They said school comes first.
- My mom encouraged me to take business and she watched my daughter a lot while I was in school.
- Mom, dad, my brother –they would quiz me on stuff.
- My parents wanted me to go because they never went.
- So I was thinking, you know, this is a lot...it became stressful on how to balance my work and stuff like that...My parents sat me down and talked with me about it.

While it is clear that students who did not achieve degree completion also may have had parental support, these successful graduates strongly credited their parents for their success. Based on the responses from these interviewees, pairing parental support with caring, personally-involved instructors apparently creates a strong support system for very-at-risk students. Following under the next category called sources of support are two other factors clearly expressed by the interviewees.

Sources of Support

Peter Barbatis (2010), in his recent study of persistent underprepared college students, found the following non-academic characteristics when looking for determinants of persistence in the 22 subjects of his study: sense of responsibility, goal orientation, resourcefulness, determination, cultural and racial self-identification, and faith (p. 17). In my study, I started with the most basic reading course in development education as the common factor among the interviewees in my study. Barbatis' study involved first-year college students who were members of a learning community. Interestingly, the participants in my study also identify goal orientation, determination, and faith as factors leading to their success. In addition to these, I

identified perseverance and self-efficacy, traits that emerged as interviewees spoke of their challenges and how they confronted them.

I organized these five factors into two categories called sources of support and personal qualities. Throughout the interview, participants spoke naturally of their journey through their college experience. At any time, when answering any question the interviewee spontaneously expressed his or her thoughts and feelings about how they approached difficulty or obstacles. Faith became apparent as a category when the first three interviewees clearly and without prompting or hesitation and not knowing how I might view the supernatural, shared the importance of faith to their persistence. Four more interviewees added similar sentiments identifying faith as the most important factor and in some cases the only factor to their success.

Interviewees both explicitly and implicitly spoke of the personal goals that kept them moving through the obstacles. Several mentioned that when up against a wall, sometimes the only thing left was to see that goal at the end. One graduate commented that without purpose, you won't succeed. Following under this heading called sources of support is a description of how interviewees referenced faith and goals.

Faith. Seven of the twenty participants identified faith as vital to their success. It was quite apparent while interviewing the first three graduates and later four more that faith was an integral part of their life experience. Personally, my parents reared me in an environment of faith-filled teaching and practice, so I understood the importance of this factor to them. I adopted a personal faith at a young age and understand the strength and power it holds in decision-making and lifestyle. A person with a profound faith in God will do whatever they perceive is the word and will of God. The thinking and practice points to this—if God leads one to go to college to get a degree, one will go to college to get a degree and nothing short of physical impossibility will stop this person.

To demonstrate the strength of this factor, I will highlight several interviewees here. One interviewee who had never had a high school education lost his job through an injury. He returned to school in his mid-40s first to get his GED and then to enroll at the college under study. He took four years to complete his program and throughout that time he practically lived in the tutoring center. Beyond that, he hired a personal tutor so that he could pass his math courses. He had no family and no support system other than his church friends. He quickly learned that the type of instructor one has made a significant difference to success, so he sought out professors that were open, supportive, and clear in their instruction. He found these through talking to other students and if a class was full, he went to the professor he wanted and asked to be signed in as an overload. Even so, he recognized that with all his efforts, the obstacles were extensive with his limited educational background. He said:

I couldn't make it through without Him because back when I was doing the bus between 94 and 2001, the Lord had me really study His Word. He said I want you to really understand me and whatever I tell you to do, don't worry about what nobody else say. Trust me. So I had to take the Bible literally, personally, and that really helped me when I got into college.

Throughout the interview, it became apparent that this man would not quit no matter how impossible it seemed to get, because he moved ahead by means of a power from within that he could trust in and depend upon.

A second interviewee came from a similar underprivileged background. She, too, was laid off from her place of employment around the age of 25 and then became pregnant as a single woman. When her child was one year old, she decided to return to college. She describes her beginning college experience by sharing:

When I started over the summer it was pretty easy with two courses so I thought I would add more and took four courses and was working and taking care of my

daughter, and I failed several of those classes and had to retake them. I did retake them.

Throughout her college experience, she had to repeat four courses in addition to taking at least two developmental courses which do not count toward a degree. Paying for and putting the time and effort into additional eighteen credits would stop many developmental students. Instead, she said, “I am a Christian and saved, and I believe God put me in college, and there was no way he would put me in a place for me where I would fail.”

I found it interesting that from this transcription, we can see that after failing four courses, she did not perceive that she had failed in this experience. She had after all achieved degree-completion. She had achieved what God had led and enabled her to do despite all the barriers along the way. She continues:

When I had to wait a semester to go due to financial aid, I got discouraged but the next time I went to financial [office] it was approved. I said this is God. I didn’t want to be a quitter. My sister went to college and she quit, so I knew I would have a hard time if I quit explaining to people why I quit. I didn’t want to tell my daughter I quit so that helped me to go through. I wanted to be able to say ‘I made it!’ I know God put me here and he didn’t set me up to fail. It was a struggle but I prayed and God went with me when I went to each class.

Some of her challenges are apparent in this comment:

If you would take one class and fail and then had to take it again, it would be discouraging. Sometimes you feel like you never got ahead. I was working three jobs and taking care of my daughter so I am wondering if having to work hindered them.

This interviewee impressed me as one of two who overcame the most difficult barriers to achieve a degree—far beyond what most students could endure. She fought on four fronts:

limited financial resources, single mom, work schedule, and limited educational background. Yet she persisted to graduation despite the severity of her challenges. A strong faith in God's purpose for her life and a resolve not to be a quitter—a combination that is possibly inter-dependent in her approach to her college experience. But by all appearances here, a force that is unstoppable.

A third participant shared similar sentiments: "I really relied on the Lord to help me every step of the way and constantly praying that He would help me be able to pick up the schooling that I was going for plus juggling the kids, getting them to school and what they had to do."

Similarly, another iterated, "We understand that our lives are led by God. So, when He leads us in something, He gives us what we need to fulfill what He called us to do... So, I just like working for God and for people."

Another said,

I am a Christian and saved and I believe God put me in college and there was no way He would put me in a place for me where I would fail... It was a struggle, but I prayed and God went with me when I went to each class.

Finally, this participant's comments clearly reveal the reason she did not give up despite the obstacles that many of these students face. She commented:

I had time because I didn't have a job. I knew I had to put a lot of effort into my classes. I knew I would need my family's support. I told them I wouldn't be able to fix dinners as much as what they were used to. I wouldn't be able to clean the house as much. My husband had fights about it sometimes. If I didn't have God in my life and pray like I did, I think I would have gone bonkers.

These interviewees identified faith as the most important factor and in some cases the only factor to their persistence. For such students, faith represents the conviction that one can't do this on their own, but with God's strength, which He gives when one follows His leading, a

person can do anything. With that as a belief system, students such as the young lady cited above persisted through the near impossible.

Goals. Interviewees both explicitly and implicitly spoke of the personal goals that kept them moving through the obstacles. Several mentioned that when up against a wall, sometimes the only thing left was to see that goal at the end. One graduate commented that without purpose, you won't succeed.

There are reasons behind why we set goals or what goals we set. A summary of the explanations of goals given by interviewees include: to disprove the naysayers in their past, to be able to say you are a college graduate, upward mobility after seeing that no other member of your family had it, to be able to better serve others, to return to "your people" and give back to the community. The remainder of the graduates cited the usual goals for achieving a college degree—to make more money, get a better job, have a good career, attain a better life, set an example for my children, to be able to help their children, for the enjoyment of learning, to be more competitive in the field, to be like their peers, and achieving a life-long dream.

Sometimes when support systems fail, when our own efforts fail, when we lost sight of why we are doing a particular thing, we need to go back to the original vision and/or goals to find the strength to continue. One graduate confirmed this when he said:

I thought as the semester progressed and I got tired and wore down and I wondered if I was going to be able to keep doing it however many more years it took to get the degree. It almost slowed me down, but I kept telling myself that I need the degree. It will be worth it.

Another interviewee stands out who faced the impossible, but only on one front—multiple learning disabilities. This student otherwise had plenty of support in professional parents, unlimited resources, and no work schedule to negotiate. However, his learning

disabilities, particularly his lack of short-term memory, would have stopped most high school graduates from continuing. He found a way to navigate the roadblocks, shared the following:

I knew what I wanted to do...I would see all of these obstacles in my way and I would see my goal at the end. I would keep my head on straight and know I wasn't going to fail. I think you need to have that purpose at the end or you won't succeed.

Not surprising, in that all of these participants were very-at-risk students, several mentioned the need to achieve a college degree to prove the naysayers in their past, wrong. One graduate said, "I wanted a college degree...to prove to the people again, the ones that turned me down, that I could do it and get a college degree and then I could succeed in whatever I wanted to do."

While another graduate's discourse is a bit lengthy, it describes well what students experience who enroll in college at a decided disadvantage:

I really wanted to go to college. That was always my thing. (Before you started college what did you think college would be like?) I knew it was probably going to be very tough. I knew it was going to be hard work, more work than high school. I thought the professors were probably going to be tougher than the high school teachers. It was just one of those things that I knew it was going to be tough, but I knew I wanted to take a chance at it. It was my goal. It was tough for me as I have learning disabilities. I had special needs classes and my teachers were saying, 'I don't know if you can make it' because it was so tough. My SAT scores were really low because of my learning disabilities. I wanted to take advantage of it. I just wanted to see how far I could make it. I really wanted to do it. I was amazed. It took me five years, but I am glad I graduated and got a degree. When I graduated it was really heart-wrenching for me because I hit the top mark.

Early Childhood was a really tough department to be in. The professors were tough...My tests were tough and I was glad I made it.

Another graduate interviewee who by academic protocol at most colleges would never have been able to matriculate as a college student or succeed in an academic program had one driving goal—to be a college graduate. Born with “an arm’s length of disabilities,” he acquired a high school diploma with much parent and school support. An engaging young man with spirit and determination, he shared his drive to be respected in a family of all college graduates:

It was my dad [encouraged him to go to college] and having the influence of a doctor [dad] and my brother who was at the time going for his bachelors, and he was very successful. This motivated me to go for that success as well. I felt like my dad and my brother connected more, and I felt maybe it was on the level of education. I felt like they talked down to me at times. I assumed that maybe if I got a college degree he would speak more like an equal, which he has.

There were other graduates who wanted a degree because it set them apart from their family and/or relatives. This young graduate understood the benefits of a college degree when observing those around him who did not acquire one:

Most people in my family didn’t have one, so I wanted it for that reason and I did job searching as I was getting out of high school and just seeing what was out there. I saw that jobs with better pay and hours required a college education. It was amazing to see with a degree what the pay difference was. I looked at that and thought it wise. It never hurts to always keep learning.

Five of the interviewees cited goals to serve others as their purpose for achieving a college degree. I found this particularly the case with international and minority graduates, although not all of them mentioned it. One traditional white interviewee mentioned it as well. An international student said:

...one of my points of view is not just to be just me, just me all the time. I'm trying to see how to help the community, also. When I'm talking about the community...because I love people and then I have a spiritual background that I'm really open to just share.

Another international student who came from a very poor country in political upheaval stated his desire to return to his country despite the fact that his standard of living is so much improved here. He gave his reasons for this decision:

I see myself that someday I have to go back to [my country] and because of legal systems and criminal justice background with a master's in criminal justice, I can be able to teach them legal systems. I see if I take my criminal justice background from this country and try to help people with it, the student that I will be teaching and tell them what are the ethical applicable beliefs of the public servant. I think it will be helpful to them.

Another international graduate had no plans to return to her country of origin since her family was well-established in this country. However, she still verbalized the desire, "I feel lucky to have people around help me, and now I want to pay back." Her concept was to give back to America because America had given so much to her.

A minority graduate confirms his desire to give back to his own people. He confirmed that indeed since he graduated, he spends much of his time doing that. In fact, he brought along a young man from his community to our interview. My interviewee was mentoring him and as a result, the young man was now enrolled in college. He shared:

So that was my real motivation, I wanted to learn and once I got my education I wanted to be able to put back into the community, and especially do what my uncle did and continue to reach out to people within the inner city and motivating my culture to even do better.

Finally, an interviewee who had not gone to college for the purpose of serving others, found purpose in doing so while he was a student. That student recounted:

I guess I would say probably halfway through my degree there was this one kid in the class that had a learning disability. He couldn't take notes. The teacher had asked me if I would take notes for him and she gave me this paper that was the white sheet and the yellow sheet underneath so the ink went right through. At first I thought this isn't fair, but then I was glad I was able to help someone while learning in college. That was a motivation for me. I thought it would slow me down, but doing something good for somebody just really seemed to encourage me and just keep going knowing that I could help them and not let them struggle. I have seen so many from the beginning just drop out and don't continue. This student had already been in another college and didn't do so well and he came to [college] and he was already in Criminal Justice classes, and I thought if I could help him continue...If I have the ability, I should go ahead and do it.

As stated above, the remainder of the graduates cited the usual goals for achieving a college degree—make more money, better job, good career, better life, set an example for my children, to be able to help my children, enjoyment of learning, to be more competitive in the field, to be like their peers, and achieving a life-long dream. One graduate's response summarized it this way:

I always wanted more for myself. It's funny to say, but I always pictured myself in this fancy school with this briefcase – this vision of myself. To make me better, you know. I think – how my parents raised me, you know, each generation should get better and what they didn't accomplish that child shall accomplish. So that was always my dedication.

Another student who also had more life experience outside the country said it similarly:

I have traveled to ten different countries through the People to People, a student ambassador program. Traveling the world it really opened up my eyes. There are so many opportunities out there for me. That's what made me want to go to college because I could see myself doing something more with my life than just working in a factory like I do now.

I note with interest that while most of the goals identified by these graduates imply personal ambition, a substantial portion also reflect others-orientation. Both can be strong motivators when facing obstacles that threaten to disrupt an individual's life goal. I included a considerable amount of text in this section to attempt to portray more thoroughly the passion and conviction with which these interviewees spoke.

Personal Character Qualities

Whenever the comments of an interviewee portrayed character qualities, I cut that response from the transcription and categorized it as a character quality. Then I read all of those at once and determined three subthemes: determination, perseverance, and self-efficacy. While similar in meaning, determination connotes the sense of firmness of purpose and resolve evident in comments such as "We are all capable of doing it; it's just you have to be determined to sit down in front of that table and open that book. Just start studying. It will come to you." Inherent in the definition is a sense of toughness, nerve, problem-solving, and immovability (Dictionary.com).

Perseverance, on the other hand, implies a strong sense of persistence in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement (Dictionary.com). Both qualities presented frequently throughout the transcriptions, whether in isolation or intertwined, and I highlight them in the following sections.

Determination. Why do some students persist while others succumb to the pressures of college requirements? Determination is evident throughout the transcriptions when interviewees

are speaking of hardships they encountered or when they experienced failure and became determined to find a way to succeed instead of becoming discouraged and giving up. Another way determination manifested was when interviewees shared the extra effort they took to “go after what they needed.” In one case it was driving to a campus nearly an hour away to get the quality of tutoring he needed.

Most interviewees talked about the amount of work, how hard it was to stay focused, the obstacles they had to overcome, the fact that they wanted to quit. Yet they stayed with their resolve; they stayed firm in their purpose—their determination outweighed the obstacles. Many students drop out for understandable reasons—lack of finances, family problems, childcare, transportation issues, personal problems, job opportunities elsewhere. I note here that the graduates in this study also faced one or more of these obstacles, but persisted.

Determination is a pre-college characteristic—most likely developed at a very young age. As interviewees discussed their college experience and the challenges they faced, it seemed that when they talked about their determination, they were tapping something deep within. Whether encountering any limiting academic factors or even nonacademic factors such as lack of family support, these interviewees spoke of finding a way to progress around or through those obstacles by sheer determination.

The following quotes show an underlying strength and determination; the quality of resolution, firmness of purpose, and resolve is quite evident:

- It is certainly hard, but life is hard and if you want something bad enough, you got to go for it. You got to sometimes put everything aside and do what is right for you and concentrate on school for a few years. I tell my friends that still to this day. A lot of them regret dropping out and here they are in their twenties and they think it is too late...

- So right away I recognized you have to work hard and you have to be responsible for your own actions and you have to do it on your own...you have to be responsible for your own actions. So then I tried, and then I knew it's on me what I do in order to succeed.
- We're all capable of doing it; it's just you have to be determined to sit down in front of that table and open that book. Just start studying. It will come to you.
- I had the determination to learn and really apply myself and just soak in every experience through school – through the people that I met, through the work, through the classes that I took. I took a lot of classes to where it would help me interact with people, as well as applying it to the education I was going for. I think people skills you can always learn.
- I would say it was better when I actually got into the focus of my major, but as far as some of Gen-Ed classes—they were a lot of work. It wasn't that it was really hard work. It was just getting the work done and getting it in on time. Some of the kids in my class didn't do any of it.
- I was one of those people who always did my homework and I studied. I always put school first. I had ADD, well I have ADD so that is how I knew ... because I had this all my life I knew where I would have to start and I knew school would be much harder for me in college, so that is why I started where I did. I forced myself to go and start at the lowest level and work my way up... I definitely got in contact with all my professors at the beginning of the semester and said, 'Look, I have ADD and I know I am going to struggle, tests for me are my worst thing ever...' Tests for me –I can study for hours and hours and still may not pass a test. I would depend upon extra credit and I would try to be up front with my professors... It was hard working and

going to school. I was living by myself and paying bills and having the stress of all that and school...I stayed full time, except for clinical I did go part time. (So how did you handle the hard work? What did you do to get through?) Long hours-I tried to take as many classes as I could. I just kept everything with me all the time so I could study when I had breaks.

- ...I thought it would have nothing to do with passion-all I had to do was work. I would need to attain goal "A", objective "B" and then I realized that all I had to do was give 110 percent and grow myself and they grade you on growth and not on the goal. I switched my pattern to showing up early and making eye contact. (Did you figure that out yourself or were people coaching you on that?) No, I figured it out and I started to tell other people. Just give eye contact, be the first one at the door, show up early.... People like to see passion...I like to see not perfection but people giving their heart and soul into this.

The following students experienced failure but turned failure into determination instead of discouragement.

- I think what it was is that I was surrounded by kids that were in the same position. They kind of helped me and I kind of helped them. It was one of those things where it just helped me push through. I was going to have to take my personal life and college and work it together. I had to study hard. I had to really study hard as soon as it started. What happened was when I first started I took an English class and I flunked it because I didn't put enough effort into it. I didn't care. My personal life was more important to me than college. I learned from there that if I wanted to stay in college and I wanted to do well I have to push forward and study harder. I have to give my all.

- When I started over the summer it was pretty easy with two courses so I thought I would add more and took four courses and was working and taking care of my daughter and I failed several of those classes and had to retake them. I did retake them. You just have to find that medium.
- Math was always my weakest. I always had to work extra hard and it always came to be a challenge for me. I knew that when I failed the first couple times ... Then there were times when I wondered if I really wanted to go back to school. What happened was the job that I was at said ‘look if you go back to school and get your degree we will allow you to be our manager.’ That was an incentive for me to go back and pursue an education.
- I realized I just gotta keep going. (Did you believe that you could pass it the second time around?) Yeah. ‘Cause, I mean, I felt like the first time I didn’t put enough effort into it as I could have...You gotta almost like want to be able like I said...want to be able to accomplish it.

A third element of determination presented as “going after what I needed.” These graduates knew what they needed and took steps to obtain it:

- I thought I might want to quit at that point because I didn’t have the money. I put it on my credit card so now I am \$4000 in debt on my credit card. I did take out a loan that was \$2500 and I took another \$2000 and put it on credit card. There was frustration there but if you want something you are going to find a way.

Two students changed majors in order to obtain a degree. Both were stymied by a required course which they could not pass; they chose to switch majors rather than drop out.

Perseverance. While perseverance can look like determination, I am including them as separate categories because of one defining difference. Metaphorically, determination draws

from deep within and taps into a reservoir of purpose and resolve. Perseverance results in continuing to do that over an extended period of time and through overwhelming obstacles. Students can start out determined, yet not persevere when challenged. The interviewees in this study spoke of challenges that stopped many of their classmates.

Three aspects of perseverance evident in interviewees' responses were attitude, action, and solution. Graduates exuded a pervading attitude of "if I can endure, I can win this battle" along with a sense of "and indeed I can." Note the attitude here:

I had to buckle down real hard. (But you weren't going to give up?) No. (Did the thought of quitting ever cross your mind?) No because I don't quit... There were times when we didn't always like the class, but we had to buck up and deal with it.

This interviewee spoke for others when she sized up the situation, assessed what was needed, and moved through the difficulty based on her attitude that it can be done – I just have to do it. Another interviewee said, "I kinda have a philosophy to get the best out of everything..." No doubt many students come to college with truisms from their past, but these interviewees made choices based on their judgments that persevering would positively affect their future. This attitude enabled them to persist through undesirable circumstances or just plain fatigue—mental and physical.

Attitude also played a significant role in perseverance as demonstrated by these graduates:

- But when I started college I saw a more modern way of college here in America, so I saw it was more effective in the ways to get the student to understand what they need to know. Then I was completely satisfied, and I said to myself, I didn't know how well I'm going to succeed, but I'm just going to try to do my best and see where that takes me.

- ...for me, the beginning is important and the end is important. Then I believe in the law of Alpha and Omega so then, usually, the alpha is good and the omega should be good. This is being positive. Knowing I start good. I should end good. I was just pushed, you know, pushed in a set time when I will not stop no more. I need to have my degree. That did not stop there, then I keep continuing then one I day I hope, not too long, then I can try to have a degree.
- There is several things. I think first you had to commit yourself. And the second with the help from your professor and the people around. They encourage me, they looked me up, they wished to go further and further. And help me to continue. (How did you push through your fear?) Oh. I just learn, study hard.

No matter how good the attitude, no matter how much one believes in a goal, action must be taken. For these interviewees, the action was sometimes as simple as going to class. Sometimes it was signing up the third time to repeat a failed course. It included daily note-taking, studying in the night, seeking help, and pursuing faculty relationships. These graduates were active in pursuing what it took to make it to the end, making the extra effort to put them over the top.

The actions of these particular graduates demonstrate perseverance as noted in these comments:

- As long as they wrote notes up on the board I was pretty good. As long as they told us what they were going to focus on that day that would be helpful to me. I figured the rest out myself. Vocabulary words—I would make flash cards. For reading I would take notes and write notes in the margins in my books. I would always have my notebook there and I would always be writing. That is how I did it.

- I took it day by day and there was sometimes where I just thought this is too much work. Doing the work paid off. I got the good grades and it just kept motivating me to keep going.
- The only time I wasn't at school was when I had to go to the hospital. Besides that I was in school all of the time.
- Oh, there's always surprises; (both laugh) especially on the homework because I never was a person who liked to procrastinate. If I needed to get something done I always stayed in communication with the instructor as well.
- I failed the class the first time and then I didn't realize that I had to take it again and she was the same teacher I had to take it with again. I needed to pass this class to graduate.

Interviewees engaged in a third aspect of perseverance—the ability to solve problems.

One interviewee with a full-time job and a family realized that if she truly wanted to be a successful student who actually learned the course content, she would have to leave her job. She took that step even though it meant financial hardship for her family. Others found ways to get transportation, baby-sitters, other work shifts, and finances needed for completion of college. Some graduates proactively faced and solved the working student problem. These students share their solution to this obstacle:

- For me it took forever because then I have to work and sometimes I would actually have to take off a semester because my goal was to not have to get financial aid— it was not to owe any money. That was my goal. And that extended my years in [college]. (So, it was 5 years, but that was because you took some time off. How much time did you take off? Just one semester, or more than one?) Probably more

than one. The thing is, if I did not have cash on me, I would not take more classes. I would only take classes that I had cash for.

- I resign my full-time job last year in August to go to school as a full-time student and recently right now you know the economic turndown, the economy slow down and sometime I wonder myself if what I can do in the future and my major support my family when I have a job with 15 years. I worked for them for 15 years. I have good benefits and I have all kind of benefits but not a stock... What I'm doing right now [being a student] I love it and then the future will be depend on what I make it so even when I start a new job I don't make much but I'm still happy what I'm doing so I go for it.

Skip Downing (2005) identifies eight choices that successful college students make. All of those characteristics are evident in the responses from these interviewees. I chose to identify non-academic character qualities from student responses, because I believe it is from these inner qualities that choices leading to success are made. The data in this study confirms Downing's research. The reader can note the eight choices throughout the responses categorized determination and perseverance above: accept personal responsibility, discover self-motivation, master self-management, employ interdependence, gain self-awareness, adopt life-long learning, develop emotional intelligence, and believe in themselves (p. 231).

Self-efficacy. While there are several definitions for self-efficacy, the definition used here is "a person's belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation." These graduates spoke of obstacles and how they addressed situations that presented; however, the discussion also reveals numerous obstacles that graduates thwarted by means of decisions they made or attitudes or beliefs that they held about their own ability or responsibility.

I chose self-efficacy as a theme because these interviewees were not only determined to succeed; they took the steps necessary to persevere and also believed in their own personal

ability to succeed as a college student. Other studies have used the term “sense of responsibility” for some of the same characteristics (Downing, 2005; Barbatis, 2010), but I chose self-efficacy because the belief in themselves is more integral to the responses given by the interviewees.

This finding corroborates two studies. One study by Wenger (2002) found that successful students characterized themselves as self-disciplined and help-seekers, whereas unsuccessful students identified themselves as lacking self-discipline, procrastinators, and resistant to seeking help. A second study by Galligan (2002) found that at-risk students show a high reliance on supportive staff and instructors as well as fail to take personal responsibility for their learning or lack of it, whereas successful students demonstrate personal coping skills and autonomy.

For instance, in the following quote, the interviewee expresses a confidence that emanates from a difficult background:

And that was my drive background too, but my main drive was where I came from I went through the war, so I knew I went through hard times and I knew what it was to be poor, and that drive still drives me today to go forward and to make something out of myself.

Note the self-efficacy in these responses:

- You have to go through school to get a degree in something; but my other drive was that one time I heard a quote. It was something about saying, I don’t know if it was Einstein or one other scientist, I read this somewhere that nobody was born smart. You weren’t born smart, so you have your mind. If you use your mind, you become smart...They didn’t think ‘Oh, ok, I wasn’t born smart’ so they didn’t do anything about it.
- I wanted to start at the very bottom anyway just so I could work my way up and know exactly what I was doing at what I was getting into.

- I know some of the students were afraid to raise their hands because they were in college. Once one of the kids started to ask then the others started to ask and realized it wasn't that big a deal. You are here and you are paying for college and education. Don't be afraid to ask if you don't understand something.
- I knew right away it would take – when I started college...I wanted to see the system, to see how the system works – like what do you have to do in order to get there? So right away I recognized you have to work hard and you have to be responsible for your own actions and you have to do it on your own. To study on your own; you have to be responsible for your own actions. So then I tried, and then I knew it's on me what I do in order to succeed.

This kind of solid belief that degree-achievement lies within oneself seemed to be inherent in all the graduates, even though not all articulated it this clearly. However, self-efficacy emerged through responses that noted an individual can and should do what it takes to graduate, including responsibility for their own learning in case of poor quality teaching,

A graduate with a family and work schedule did not have the luxury of choosing when she would come to college or choosing particular professors that were lauded as good or easy. Rather than let that affect her performance, she said:

- I have no problem. I think you have to try yourself, you have to try your best and they will see it. Whatever people said just make it and see how it works so I convince students you can do something so difficult. They are afraid to go to see him. I said 'Just go to see him and he help you.' He will, whatever the project in class so difficult and you come here you ask me and I'm going to help you. Just go see him. That's how I did it before and I got the good grades. (Do you think you got a better grade because you went to see him than if you wouldn't have

gone?) Yes. Absolutely. If you don't go see professor when you struggle, you won't get good grades. And don't listen to people, listen to student around say oh that one won't help you. Just go see if they help or not help. But I got help.

This same graduate noted that once when she found herself in a course with an instructor who made no effort to help a student learn, she decided to learn the content on her own—through studying the textbook. She valued learning the content even in a situation where she could have passed the course without learning—by being present and jumping through hoops. She understood the need for the content at a later point in her career and took responsibility for her own learning since it was not going to take place otherwise. That is self-efficacy.

A graduate, who came to this particular community college from another country where he had received his education to date, contributed:

- I had my limitation when I came here. I did not feel like I had a strong background to be very successful because this system is completely different than the system that I was prepared for...so my success was depending on accepting the limitation that I had. I took it that I'm really an intelligent person to be successful on my own. I accept the realities of my weakness.
- As far as support, in a way, I had to figure on my own because I didn't have anyone here to tell me this is the right direction, this is the wrong. And my dad necessarily didn't know that because they didn't grow up here, so on that side, they knew and told me, "Ok, go to school, go to school" but they didn't really know what school was best. So I didn't know what to expect so I didn't know how to figure it out; it took me awhile to figure out everything on my own to look at it from a different perspective.

While the above graduates demonstrated self-efficacy through drawing from inner strength and personal belief systems, these interviewees also found strength in aligning

themselves with colleagues. The following comment comes from the young traditional student who faced the challenge of overcoming multiple learning disabilities all throughout his school career. He took four years—year-round—to achieve his associate’s degree and took some courses multiple times. He shares a very astute choice leading to his success:

I could help other people and have them help me out and lean on them and they lean on me and we most likely can come together with two legs. (That’s great. Did you talk with them?) The older students were more serious. I made friends with the older students...Students in their 40s and 50s—they knew what they were doing. They knew why they were here. They had a purpose and I had a purpose so we both had a general purpose together. Yes, I liked the people with purpose.

Other graduates named steps to success that included their own hard work in addition to studying with others:

- The friends that I made we would take some things together—or I had this one I can give you my notes. So you would have the extra notes. I didn’t rely on the notes I was given and I would still check my own but they were helpful. I did meet some people that I was able to connect with. I remember Geography was one of them. It was very very hard. We always met early for our Geography test and studied. For me knowing how I learned I would make copies of the maps and then I would name them over and over again until I remembered them. You had to know the whole world so I would write everything. I would do that from the day I got the map until the day I got the test. I passed with an A.
- I think I thought it was going to be tough but once I got in and starting at the level I did, I thought it was kind of easy. Actually it was fun for me to

learn again. There was a student there and we would compare notes and learn together. In math we would take a problem and try and get it before the other one would and it would make it fun.

Research shows that students who join organizations and get involved in campus activities are more likely to complete their program (Tinto, 1975; Karp & Hughes (2008). Many community college students are commuters with jobs and/or children and do not have the luxury of giving time to organizations. Two interviewees spoke of membership in college organizations. For this graduate, membership in student government provided her with a family and close friends and an opportunity to give to others:

- It wasn't just part of me getting experience, but it was to give back to the students. I really enjoyed that. I made so many friends through there. I still talk to [the faculty advisor] all the time. I still go down there and hang out with the old crew. It was really nice to help out other students. We went to a domestic violence shelter to help out there. We threw a party and watched their kids.

Obstacles

Obstacles happen. What one does with obstacles can change the course of one's life forever. The question asking interviewees to identify any obstacles they faced while a student elicited data that confirmed or denied the character qualities inherent in their other responses. Note the perseverance, determination and self-efficacy evident in these interviewee responses.

Graduates with obstacles such as learning disabilities looked to the college program to help them to succeed. However, the college program, even when designed to increase student success can be static. One graduate who had experienced learning support all her life found that she was not eligible for the college learning support program because she proved to be too high-functioning. She considered that a great roadblock, mostly because it denied her special testing

services which allowed for the use of a calculator in math and longer test-taking time periods. Instead of giving up, she decided to take it as a challenge. When she succeeded, she was ecstatic. She recalled the following, clearly the quality of self-efficacy:

One of my elementary school teachers was not supportive of me and she would say you are not going to be anything more than a McDonald's worker. I knew at a very young age that I wanted to work with children, with Special Education or Elementary Ed. I knew I wanted to work with kids. To have that said to you is mind boggling. That was also the initiative because I wanted to prove her wrong. The day I graduated I found her and said here is my college degree and you said I would never amount to anything.

In a similar situation, a student did not find the college faculty to be accommodating within a particular academic program. Note the sole reason this student persisted to graduation:

...They did not handle my learning disabilities very well at all. They did not help me. They tried to turn me down and say I shouldn't be [in this program] just by the way my test scores were. They didn't know that I knew all of the information. If they asked me something I could tell you "like that."... You know they discouraged me and it was kind of hard to want to keep going because they kept telling me I wasn't good enough... It was tough for me because if I didn't take an [a class in that major], I didn't have that problem. I was relaxed. I was less stressed and then I would go in there and it was like, 'Why are you here, why are you doing this.' Because I love this and this is what I want to. I ignored them and worked hard and did what I needed to do to get out of there.

Many values instilled in childhood carry over into adulthood. This student demonstrates that principle when addressing this obstacle:

There was a class that had a lot of information, something about becoming a master's student or something? And I did very well on that, but some classes that had a lot of information thrown at me sometimes – Oh! It was Anatomy. At that point, it was just so hard because there was a lot of information to understand and to comprehend and to study effectively in a way where you can answer questions correctly. In a way, I had to break a whole big chapter in between, so at that time I wasn't doing very well in that class, and I felt like I was giving my best, but I wasn't getting anywhere and you get the frustration. On the other hand, like it was part of the responsibilities I had to provide for my family at that time – that made it hard so I almost came to the quitting point. But then again, I didn't quit because I knew that like I've been told this by my father, once you start something take it to the end, no matter what. Just give it your best and hang in there just when things seem to fall apart, that's when you need to hang in there for an extra step and that's when you get over – so I hung in there and I became successful.

Skip Downing (2005) writes that students who are not successful exhibit the characteristics of a victim. Victims see themselves as powerless to control what happens to them—they are controlled by luck, fate, or others more powerful than themselves. Conversely, successful students take appropriate action to overcome obstacles in order to achieve their goals. Note how that describes what the following interviewee said:

The obstacle that I had was having a family and going to school. So, a lot of people...it's not easy at all. Just doing two things...how can you combine both of them? You should know how to do that. It's like have a positive schedule...Then I just have to do my homework. So then this is an agreement between my family and I... All of us we understand...not to cut it totally but it was balance in a sense

where we can do fun but not too much. Daddy should do this. So everything was like scheduled.

A single mother who worked part-time and went to college full-time talked about the challenges of juggling all of that responsibility. She comments:

I look back and I still can't believe I did all that I did. I mean, going to school fulltime, taking four classes, plus working, being a mother – you know, I wasn't perfect in each one of those roles, but I knew it was just for a short time – it wasn't going to last forever and it was going to benefit my family in the end. (Was there ever a time you wanted to quit?) Oh, sure. (Why didn't you?) Because what kind of example would that be to my children? When times get tough or what you're handling gets rough – what's the answer, to quit? No, I couldn't show that. I didn't want them to learn that. It was just always relying on the Lord even more through those tough times. You know, to be tired and get up in the mornings about 4:00 and do some studying before the kids would get up, get ready for school and go to work, and be a lot of late nights writing papers, or whatever. But it all had to be done.

Another single mother, but one who has strong support from the children's father, has a handicapped child to consider among all her other responsibilities. Note the self-efficacy in her response to the question about obstacles:

I would say work. I had to stop at times during the recession to work. Sometimes my son's sickness was an obstacle. (How is your son now?) He is doing well. He has to be fed through a feeding tube—his medications all go through the feeding tube. He requires 24 hour care. (Do you have support for that?) Me and his dad. (No outside nurse coming in?) No I am his nurse basically. (What would you say with no outside support, no family backing you was your primary motivation for

going to college?) Proving to myself that I can be somebody, I was abused and people would tell me I would never gonna do this or make something of myself. I was going to prove them wrong and better myself. Not that I'm better than you but I can be somebody too. (Where did you get that though? Why do you have that when so many other people don't?) I took it to my heart. I believed in myself. You know how they say it's not going to come to you, you have to go get it? That is my motto. You can't think about it—you have to go get it. Anybody can!

Every student has obstacles. I observe with interest that all developmental students have access to the college's academic programs designed to enable them to succeed. When the chips were down, however, graduates demonstrated the non-academic factors of self-efficacy, perseverance, and determination often supported by personal goals and faith.

To contrast the attitudes of these graduates with their colleagues who did not succeed, I asked what they observed while in college about their colleagues who dropped out. Note that these successful very-at-risk students also faced these same obstacles. I included all responses here to highlight the similarities and differences of responses.

Table 3
Why Colleagues Don't Succeed

	Why Colleagues Don't Succeed
1	Didn't take high school seriously, no support from home, discouraged over having to take developmental courses first
3	Didn't take work seriously, didn't do homework, younger students wanted to hang out, have fun, going because their parents made them, stopped coming, must not be paying it themselves
4	Could be making money instead of spending it; need more encouragement; background; lifestyle—have to work, family
5	Economy affects them financially; bad study habits; the way some professors teach (method) – don't teach them to think/learn. Family issues
6	Painful sacrifice required
7	Having a baby or a guy (that wouldn't stop me); doing poorly in a subject such as math
8	Time, money, family situations, not dedicating themselves to their studies, don't believe they can, came to college because they felt they had to, not because they wanted to
10	Didn't come to class; didn't finish assignments on time, wondered why he didn't pass – he should know why
11	Wanted to do their own thing, didn't care about the professor, work, and stuff; thought it too hard; have a baby; personal thing. Parents force them, parents pay for the education and they figure who cares – it's my parents money
12	Don't want to waste time in developmental courses because they are not counted as a credit – they think they don't need those, but they do
13	Some of them had the grades but with family and work just had to drop it. They did the work it's just that it didn't pay off and they had to give it up; no motivation, attitude that they didn't care – couldn't turn off the cell phone, tried to multi-task; didn't seem to want to be there
14	Money/financial aid, failing a class; don't see where their classes are going to lead them
15	Negative – don't like this class, get discouraged because they are in the lowest class; too much work; aren't going to get anywhere – they have that kind of attitude they won't make it; must think positive
16	Money, no purpose
17	Always making excuses to the teacher, free tuition
18	Boyfriends, girlfriends, social lives; university wouldn't accept developmental course for credit, so she left; perhaps not challenged at a younger age and then they run from challenges
19	Maybe they don't believe in themselves; influenced by others; atmosphere they are around that really impacts them
20	Stress, it is baffling to me, family, getting pregnant, working, living on your own; it is too much for them, you have to want to

Summary and Conclusion

I addressed two research questions in this study: (1) I looked for factors that graduates identified as leading to their success and (2) I looked to identify aspects of the developmental education program at the college under study that contributed to the successful completion of each one's program. I designed the interview questions to elicit responses that ultimately led to data that addressed the research questions.

Interviews with twenty graduates produced approximately 350 pages of transcribed data. I categorized responses to interview questions pertaining to the developmental education program as academic programs. These included tutoring (learning center), developmental courses (reading, writing, math), college success courses, advising, library assistance, financial aid, and faculty teaching methods. Interviewees affirmed all programs to some degree as valuable to them in terms of their successful degree achievement.

All but one of the twenty graduates stated the importance of the development courses to their success and verbalized they could not have been successful without them. Almost as strongly, fifteen graduates affirmed the tutoring center. Not all graduates enrolled in college success courses: those who did highly affirmed its value. However, it did seem that this component of the developmental program caused them to make a greater recall effort. Some could hardly recall the experience although after some prompting about course content, they did remember and affirm that at the time, they felt it met a need.

Overall, graduates affirmed advising as important; interviewee response also identified this as the weakest area of the program, but as important. This may result from the fact that advising is not mandatory although few very-at-risk students could register without the assistance and counsel of an advisor. They also spent far less time with an advisor than with faculty or in courses or the learning center. The college under study has recently taken steps to

initiate an intensive advising program that seeks to provide a mentor/advisor who keeps closer contact with each at-risk student.

I was surprised at the strength of affirmation for the librarian assistance reported by the interviewees. Half of the interviewees called on the librarians for assistance and in one case used librarians in place of tutors. Historically, librarians have not been known for their learning assistance; in the past they assisted students with locating information. My personal perception after listening to these successful graduates is that the library personnel of the college under study understands that many community college students are at-risk students and seeks to serve them according to their individual needs, not just according to a job description.

Financial aid was highly important to thirteen of these graduates. The fact that seven graduates did not access financial aid surprised me. This fact supports Tinto's (1993) finding that finances are generally not the main reason students drop out. Two students commented about the difficulty of filling out financial aid forms and felt more assistance should be offered.

Finally, interviewees highly lauded faculty who taught in a clear, step-by-step, organized manner. For the most part, they did not mind lecture as long as content was clear, and notes were presented in a logical way and easily recordable. These interviewees were seeking a pathway to success and this was the method that enabled them to achieve it. Active learning and interesting professors, while valued by the interviewees, did not take the forefront in what the interviewees valued.

A noteworthy occurrence was the frequency with which interviewees would immediately talk about their relationship with the instructor when specifically asked about the methods of the instructor. Clearly, faculty relationship influenced their success more than methods did, at least in their minds if not in fact. When asked to revisit the subject of methods students referenced the usual methods mainly commenting that they disliked long, boring, irrelevant presentations

whether lecture, PowerPoint, or activities. When interviewees felt that they had learned, they were happy about whatever method the instructor used.

While the interview questions delineated each academic factor for interviewee response, non-academic factors were derived from the interview transcriptions. I identified themes from the interviewee responses to questions addressing generalities such as sources of support, primary motivations, and obstacles. The following themes emerged: faculty relationships; other persons of support such as parents, extended family members, and friends; goals and faith; and personal qualities including determination, perseverance, and self-efficacy.

Parents and faculty members emerged as highly significant to student success. While one could distinguish numerous personal qualities throughout the transcribed interviews, I chose the three dominate themes that were marked throughout all twenty interviews: determination, perseverance, and self-efficacy. Additionally, when interviewees responded to what they perceived as reasons their colleagues dropped out, these three qualities were absent.

In Chapter Five, I examine each participant to explore possible profiling characteristics of a successful very at-risk student.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that led to the successful completion of an associate's degree or program diploma by very-at-risk students and to understand how each factor contributed to the individual's college experience. I anticipate that the analysis of and conclusions drawn from this data will help the college under study and others to understand the internal dynamics of the developmental program and the personal resources within successful graduates, so that the college can advise students more knowledgeably and make program decisions accordingly.

To review, the two research questions driving this study are:

1. What factors do very-at-risk student graduates (i.e. students scoring less than 50 in the ACCUPLACER Test) identify as leading to success?
2. Which aspects of the developmental education program at the college under study do very-at-risk graduates identify as contributing to their academic success?

The findings from the research data represent the voice of successful students who overcome barriers and obstacles experienced by unsuccessful students. The findings are relevant to the college under study and, I believe, to other community colleges with similar demographics and programs.

To elicit the data, I read each interview transcription and noted every response to each prompt. I placed these comments in a table so student perceptions of the value of each program became readily apparent (see Appendix C). I then reread each transcription to attempt to unfold a profile of successful behaviors and/or belief systems as observed in each individual participant.

Chapter Four presents a detailed description of a difficult journey through community college from very-at-risk, but successful, graduates. It includes an analysis of two categories of data: components of the developmental program (academic program factors) and personal factors

(nonacademic factors). This chapter is an attempt to reconstruct a more integrated profile of character qualities, attitudes, and beliefs which lead to success for these graduates.

The first research question sought to elicit the participant's perception of the factors that lead to their success. In their responses, participants related their perceptions as they recalled their journey through their certificate or degree program. Using cross-referencing, I identified four themes embedded in the transcripts and seemingly inherent within the participants. These four themes include: dealing with failure, relationship with instructors, inner drives, and functionalism as seen in student active pursuit of degree. The themes are explored against a backdrop of literature and relevant theory.

Theme 1 – Dealing with Failure

The theme of failing courses, repeating courses, avoiding courses, and finding a way around courses was too pronounced to overlook in this study. The following table identifies the failure theme existing in the data.

Table 4
Failure Theme

	Situation	Solution
1	Attempted and failed at 3 different colleges	Returned to the community college to complete his degree
2	In danger of failing a course	Left a good job and embraced financial hardship to give more time to studies
3	Failed a course because a stay in the hospital precluded completing a paper by the due date. The professor would not accommodate his request for an extension.	Repeated the course and worked very hard to forgive the professor for his inflexibility and lack of compassion for his illness.
4	Failed a math course	Repeated it with teacher who broke it down and tutored her in his office.
5	Failed a course first semester	Learned he would have to study harder – achieved Dean's list second semester
6	Failed a math course	Repeated it with a different teacher; would drop a course if he saw he was failing
7	Failed a business course (major)	Repeated it
8	Failed an Early Childhood course (major)	Changed major – he felt they didn't handle his LD very well in that

		department
9	Failed at least four courses	Repeated them – she had a strong sense that God had called her to complete college and failure wasn't going to stand in the way. She seemed completely unfazed by her numerous failures.
10	Failed four math courses – had multiple learning disabilities	Repeated one twice; found a way around another; got hours of tutoring to pass one with a D.
11	Was failing a computer course	Worked many extra hours in the computer lab, sometimes with the help of the instructor. Managed to pass with a C – felt it was given to her for her diligence.
12	Failed a math course three times	Found a business math course that she could apply to her degree instead – and found she could pass that one.
13	Was failing Chemistry	Withdrew from the course
14	Failed a math course	Repeated it with a different teacher and passed it.

The personal character qualities of determination, perseverance, and self-efficacy delineated in Chapter Four present strikingly in the table above. A close examination of participant response to failure reveals internal fortitude. Responses imply that the participant relied on a variety of solutions: college programs such as advising, change of instructor, or tutoring; studied more; retook the course; or found a way to substitute the course. All responses required the participant to take action with the intent of moving ahead.

I draw on attribution theory developed in the early 1970s by Weiner as one explanation for student persistence in spite of failure. Attribution theory, an influential framework with roots in social psychology, grounded much of the research in academic success and failure over the past two decades (Bempechat, 1999). The theory explains achievement and the associated attributions.

Weiner's (1979) framework addresses four factors affecting student response to success or failure: ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. These factors operate within three continuums:

locus of causality, stability, and controllability (Weiner). The theory purports that a student who attributes his success to an internal locus of causality understands that he possesses a sense of control and ability to achieve and is more likely to pursue similar tasks. Effort is a controllable, internal attribute and while participants of this study spoke frequently of task difficulty, they also acknowledged their disciplined effort which ultimately led to achievement despite difficulty of task. External attribution can also be healthy and valid if indeed the student failed through uncontrollable circumstances such as task difficulty. According to Hunter and Baker (1987), student perception of the cause of failure, and not necessarily the reality, determines the outcome.

A table by Bernard Weiner (1979) that organizes these factors follows:

Table 5
Causes of Success and Failure, Classified According to Locus, Stability, and Controllability

	Internal		External	
Controllability	Stable	Unstable	Stable	Unstable
Uncontrollable	Ability	Mood	Task difficulty	Luck
Controllable	Typical effort	Immediate effort	Teacher bias	Unusual help from others

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Weiner's theoretical framework explains much about the persistence through failure by the participants in this study. Fourteen of the twenty participants in this study experienced failure. When addressing failure, the majority of these participants indicated a locus of internal, controllable causality (effort). To correct the failure, they responded by simply repeating the course (more effort). The assumption was that they had the ability to pass it; they just didn't on their first try. One participant voiced in the interview that he learned the necessity of increasing effort in college compared to his high school experience. Another participant said she had to quit

her job in order to become successful. These participants believed the ability lay within them; they just needed to draw on it to a greater degree.

Those who viewed their failure through the lens of external locus of causality (task difficulty, luck) proceeded by changing majors, changing instructors, or finding a substitute course. The student who failed in three other colleges, simply returned to the community college to complete his degree. He was not ashamed to talk about the failures; rather, he was grateful for the support he found within the community college. He recognized that his ability to pass courses (internal locus) was intact as long as he remained in a supportive community college setting (external locus).

Weiner's (1979) second continuum of causality, stability, defines causes of success or failure as stable (such as native ability or task difficulty) or unstable (such as effort or luck). In a study grounded in Weiner's attribution framework, Dweck & Reppucci (1973) found the students who persisted in the face of failure viewed effort rather than ability as the most important contributor to success or failure. In a later study, Dweck (1975) confirms that students who view failure as resulting from lack of ability are less likely to persist than those who believe failure stems from a lack of motivation. The latter group is more likely to increase efforts to succeed.

Without any embarrassment or sense of failure, one graduate spoke of failing at least four courses. She was not daunted by her failures at any time, commenting tellingly that she is not a quitter and that God did not lead her to college for her to fail or drop-out. Failure to her simply meant "repeat the course; you will get it the next round." While she viewed the failure in terms of task difficulty, she perceived that by drawing on God's ability within her, she could succeed over time. She had the time, so she moved ahead to success—no matter how much time it was going to take. A number of researchers confirm this interpretation, noting that students will

dogmatically persist through difficult tasks and repeated failures when they view ability as unstable or changeable (Bempechat, 1999; Dweck, 1975; Dweck & Reppucci, 1973).

The graduates in this study referenced more frequently what they did about failures than why they failed. For example, even the student who had multiple learning disabilities and failed the same math course four times spoke only of his approach to finding a way to pass the course. Hunter & Barker (1987), in applying attribution theory in the classroom, write that students must believe that they have the ability to achieve success and that they can take action to alter outcomes. This young man exemplified this belief when he repeated the course, knowing that each time through he gained additional skill. He also found a tutor compatible for his learning needs and drove a considerable distance to gain his tutelage.

The graduates' reflections of how they dealt with failure is useful for guidance counselors, students, and faculty at the community college under study. Further, grounded in Weiner's theory of attribution, these findings are applicable to students in general. I now proceed to another finding that applies to many college students—the importance of having a relationship with instructors.

Theme 2 – Relationship with Faculty

Sandra Allen (2008) combines experience and research to offer that three characteristics for an effective learning climate are the instructor's approval, enthusiasm and use of students' ideas, and teacher-student interaction. Allen also notes that 70% of the 100 students surveyed valued instructor input over any other feedback they received. Two of these three were evident in the comments interviewees made concerning the faculty at the college under study. These interviewees talked about the instructors' approval in the context of time given to them by the instructor to help them succeed, whether through feedback or through tutoring.

Interviewees in this study repeatedly affirmed faculty who were available to them when they needed support as seen in the quotes included in Chapter Four (also see Appendix F). In the

comments listed under column three, one can see the support these participants felt from their instructors, not only in understanding the course content, but in going the extra mile for these individual students. Interviewees also embedded in their comments a sense that it seemed very important to the instructor that the individual student succeed.

Roueche and Roueche (1999) purport that faculty are essential to the success of a developmental program; therefore, a professor should exemplify the ability to use a unique set of skills and expertise in order to be assigned to developmental courses. Developmental instructors should exhibit a thorough understanding of the at-risk population, the college's goals, the most effective teaching techniques, a desire and ability to collaborate with others, and a belief that at-risk students can succeed (Roueche & Roueche).

Though the interviewees did not quite state it this way, it is a powerful thing in terms of Durkheim's theory of social integration and inclusion to experience the kind of care and concern coming from an authority figure (a millennial's personal value) as seen in Appendix F. Therefore, I draw on Emile Durkheim's theory of suicide to explain the importance of faculty relationships seen in the transcribed interviews of these twenty successful graduates. Tinto (1993) writes about the relationship of Durkheim's theory of suicide, in particular, egotistical suicide, to student attrition. Egotistical suicide occurs when individuals are unable to form relationships within a group or society which lead to a sense of integration and group membership. This generally occurs when the individual holds differing values from the community, leading to their perceived social isolation.

Tinto (1993) sees the relationship between the suicide model and student attrition because dropping out "highlights the ways in which the social and intellectual communities that make up a college come to influence the willingness of students to stay at that college (104)." However, he does not purport that college structure equates societal structure; rather, he uses it as descriptive model for explaining numbers of departures from college, not individual departures.

To address these departures, Tinto discusses the academic system which speaks to the formal education of the student as well as the social system which pertains to the social and personal needs of the student. When either of these systems is less than adequate for the needs of a particular student, that student's ability to persist may be greatly impaired.

With attrition as his research concern, Tinto (1993) stresses the importance of studying how academic and social systems within a college affect student attrition while understanding that the experiences of individual students with each of the two systems may vary greatly. The interviewees in my study confirmed the importance of both academic assistance and personal relationship with faculty, although they did not seem to differentiate between the two. However, most interviewees clearly expressed that without relationship, they lost a sense of security. Several shared how they dropped the course and picked it up again with a different instructor. These students quickly learned to find instructors who would engage in relationship—either by questioning other students, asking advisors, or using the web source “rate my professor.”

Returning to Weiner's attribution theory delineated in Theme 1 above, I note with interest that “unusual help from others” is external and unstable in the context of locus of causality. However, interviewees viewed faculty relationship as a controllable factor. As students, they simply manipulated their environment until they found instructors that could and would meet their needs. Hunter & Barker (1987) note that “controllability of causality creates the feeling of being commander of one's fate... (p. 52).” Students who view their own actions as controlling their fate will change their actions when needed to achieve the outcomes they desire (Hunter & Barker). This view of cause and effect provides confidence and a sense of empowerment needed to navigate their way through the college experience as a very at-risk student. This phenomenon confirms the self-efficacy factor identified in chapter 4.

Heroes. Significant to me as a researcher and even more as a professor is the emergence of “heroes” throughout this study. To highlight the critical place interviewees gave faculty

relationships, I include this subsection called “heroes” identified as faculty and staff at the community college under study who went above and beyond the call of duty and showed personal interest in the student. I place this discussion under faculty relationships because all of the heroes mentioned were faculty at the college. Students and graduates have historically lauded teachers as influential in their lives. This study confirms that truism.

In this study, I define the term “heroes” as a particular person in the lives of these graduates whom they considered a key to their success. Heroes are persons who leave an indelible mark on our lives, as was the case here. Interviewees mentioned a particular college faculty member more than once and sometimes multiple times throughout the interview to emphasize the important part the person played in the life of the student. Here, I summarize the kind of heroes identified by sixteen interviewees:

- A professor and department head who continued assistance long after the student graduated and even into the student’s masters program
- Twenty-one specific faculty members who went way beyond the call of duty
- A librarian
- Three advisors

Twenty-six heroes in a community college named by sixteen graduates unsolicited in the interview, certainly underscores the power of the faculty-student relationship.

One graduate of the college under study continued his education at a local university to earn a bachelor’s degree. While there, he returned to the community college under study for help when he needed it. A particular professor he had known there would read his papers and make suggestions for improvement. Now that he is in a master’s program at yet another university, he continues to return to the community college under study for assistance. He said, “So I think much of my credit can go to her. Sometimes when I ask – if I have a question that I need

explanation or if I have an issue of what I want to do, I ask her to make an opinion before I make a decision.” Apparently, he continues to find his source of strength and success in the intimate, caring, atmosphere of the community college under study.

Other heroes provided other components for success. One participant changed her major after her experience in a particular professor’s course. I include the exact conversation from this participant rather than a summary because it more adequately captures the significance of the professor to her career decision.

So I just put down ok the major will be the Business Administration but I do love computer. So I learn a lot of computer. Took a lot of computer classes. But I didn’t do good. So I said, Ok. Let me go back my major in Business Administration. So then I entered accounting class. So he just made me fall in love with Accounting major.

(Now, did you say you did like computers or you didn’t like them?)

I do like it.

(You do like computers? But you didn’t do well?)

I do like it but it’s kinda hard.

(It was hard in the classes?)

Yeah.

(But when you took accounting you found you loved it?)

I found I loved it and I can do it and he convinced me. It’s just my feeling when I enter the class and the way he teach and he looked at the students. He just like ok you can do it and you can go for it.

This same student, with the agreement and support of her husband and children, quit her job so she could give full attention to her college courses. A different professor had challenged her work schedule which, along with family responsibilities, took too much of her time away

from studies. According to her, he told her she cannot succeed in his class if she doesn't give more time to studying. The decision to quit work based on his statement made the difference for her successful completion of college.

Another participant spoke of a professor throughout the interview. Obviously, this professor impacted her life to the point where she still maintains contact. She spoke of the professor's availability, encouragement, and clarity in teaching. She says, "She was the one that was with me the whole time through thick and thin and from beginning to end. "

I found a number of participants who also gave credit to the first professor they encountered. The first day of college is daunting for many students; for very-at-risk students who come with the stigma of having placed in the lowest reading class offered by the college, the anxiety magnifies. Several students mentioned that first professor who set the stage for their success both by the way they taught and by their words of encouragement. For this participant, the first professor forever endeared her to college through the extension of emotional and relational support. I share her first words of the interview here, but she referred back to this professor and the class several times throughout the interview. In the participant's words:

I was shy and I wondered if I was going to be able to go up and talk to someone.

My 001 English teacher was a real sweetheart. She was like a grandma and she made me feel comfortable. It was a small class, there were only 10 of us and she would let us sit around and talk some days and that was helpful. She brought us candy and cookies for the holidays. She made us feel welcome in her class. She was my grandpa's age. I could easily relate to her.

Similarly, another student said, "I can't really remember that much from it [my first course]. I remember that she [professor] was pretty supportive. After I got that course done it helped me to realize that hey, I got this course out of the way and I can continue on to the next

one. I think if I would have failed that first course it would have made me shy away from college... I would have dropped, definitely.”

This same interviewee found a math professor to be so supportive and helpful, that later when he attended a different campus, he would make a 60 mile round trip to the original campus and back just to get help from this professor. His words include:

I would drive down here and I would spend a few hours with him and drive back up to the other campus. He said to me if you work hard and your heads into the game I will eventually get you to pass. That was Math 103. I basically leaned on him to pass. (Was he like a one-on-one tutor at that time?) Sort of at that time-I had him for the [first] math [course]. It was [Math] 020. I passed it with him. I came back to him. He said if you give it 110 percent we will get you through.

That whole teacher to student experience when you are feeling down and loved – he was like a father to me. He told me when he was teaching and I should be in that class and I was. That got me through. (He would give you everything if you would give him everything.) I ended up with a D but I earned that D. Opposed to all those classes where I walked around where I said I got an A-they would ask me what I would get in Math. I said I got a D. They were asking me why I was happy about it-because I earned it.

For this graduate, a “D” signified success and the success came through a professor who believed in him, demonstrated by time, tutoring, and support, like a father. This interviewee spoke with passion and referred to this professor more than once.

Another professor was a hero for being tough. The participant had significant learning disability obstacles and knew his limitations. He maintained an open posture towards his professors, tutors, and parents, all who invested heavily in him. He shares:

I was failing Math 103 for the second time and I went to [my professor] and I was really upset. I said this is tough. I won't pass. I was expecting a tap on the back and a response like aw... I'll help you out. He said, "Are you going to cry about it or are you going to step up?" I was so surprised. He said, "Don't you think it was hard for me or your father? I have a Master's degree. Do you think it was ever difficult for me? You got to stand up." He did not pat me on the back. (He didn't pity you?) He basically kicked me in the ass and said keep your head up and move forward. (You needed that.) I went to the learning center and put my head down and got the books out and I kept my head straight. (Wow) Yeah, that was the most significant experience. I came out of there angry at him because he didn't connect with me emotionally. He didn't give me the support that I am used to-but he still gave me support. That was very different. Do you want me to give you a tissue or do you want me to give you a pen and a paper and you go at it? (That is good insight that you had there.)

For another participant, her first advisor was her hero possibly because this was the first college employee she met. She shares the lasting impact of this advisor:

I think going back I thought if anything I wasn't going to be good enough. It just felt like I was so far out of touch. I had been out of school for so long. I took that test and I must say the lady at the [advising] office, she didn't look at me like I was stupid. She just took me and said these are the courses that you will need to take. You will start out with these courses. I also went to another regional campus because of the courses I was in. I had to go up there and there are some down sides to all of that too, but to make the story short I followed her guidelines until the last subject that I had.

One participant referred to celebrities such as Maya Angelou and Tina Turner as heroes who were her inspiration. Otherwise, the heroes were faculty who inspired, supported, and ultimately were credited with participant success. The data leave no doubt that faculty are major influences in the successful degree achievement experienced by these participants.

I note with interest that while the above examples were positive forces in the lives of these graduates, any negative encounter with a professor or advisor was also vividly imprinted on the mind of the interviewee. While other negative examples, such as poor teaching methods, disorganization, and lack of interest on the part of the professor, are presented under the title “Negative indicators” in the section prior to this one, here I refer to those that emotionally affected the interviewee. All the vivid negative experiences shared by the participants related to embarrassment, belittlement, or some other form of devaluing the student.

One interviewee shared that a director of a major program indicated that attending graduation was not necessary. In the words of the interviewee, “He said we could if we wanted to, but it wasn’t necessary because we were just [graduates of this particular program]. He said you didn’t have to go to walk... He really upset us. He upset a lot of [us] and a lot of them changed their majors.”

Interestingly, all but one participant recalled only one negative experience in their college career, while one participant recalled two experiences. While that one negative experience was vivid in the memory and often referred to more than once throughout the interview, I note that these graduates were not thwarted in their degree-achievement goal. While the interview questions were open-ended and allowed for opportunity to relay negative experiences, the positive examples of experiences and faculty relationships out-weighed the negative ones both in numbers and intensity. Perhaps this highlights one factor leading to success—the ability to see the good in life experiences rather than living in or dwelling on the negative.

In conclusion, faculty relationships were strong for these interviewees. All related heartfelt positive experiences indicating the importance of personal contact with the instructor. All exhibited positive feelings about most instructors evident in rapport or interpersonal relationships, and most of all, instructor helpfulness and support toward success was described at length. The research supports the importance of this relationship for degree-achievement persistence. While we do not know the experience of those who did not achieve degree-completion, we do know that these successful graduates experienced and highly valued faculty relationships.

Theme 3 – Inner Drives

Nearly every student had a strong inner sense or “voice” that they identified as a reason for persisting in the face of great obstacles. Several interviewees described it as a personal relationship with God who clearly led them into and through the program. Others described it as an inner sense of purpose such as wanting to give back to their people or family. Still others wanted to achieve degree-completion to prove to themselves or some outside doubter that they had what it takes to do it. Something within would not allow them to give up; it was almost as if they could not live with themselves if they did. Note the comments below:

Table 6
Evidence of Inner Drives

1	The Lord said, Well, I want you to go to school now; I want you go and give what you’ve been given when as a child and as a teen-ager...
2	I see myself that someday I have to go back to Sudan ... I can be able to teach them legal systems. I see if I take my criminal justice background from this country and try to help people with it, the student that I will be teaching and tell them what are the ethical applicable beliefs of the public servant. I think it will be helpful to them.
3	My goal was – the whole way through school – was to think of the example I’m setting for my children. I knew that if they attended college right after they’re finishing high school, they should have an easier time of it than I did going back to school. I wanted to be able to provide that example for them...and to be able to provide for them.
4	My main drive was where I came from I went through the war, so I knew I went through hard times and I knew what it was to be poor, and that drive still drives me today to go

	forward and to make something out of myself.
5	...help my children, that's my goal.
6	One of my point of view is not just to be just me, just me all the time. I'm trying to see how to help the community also.
7	I guess it's kinda to say I accomplished it...I guess it's just...it's hard to explain....I kinda wanted like to succeed kinda, you know...
8	It was tough for me as I have learning disabilities. I had special need classes and my teachers were saying, "I don't know if you can make it" because it was so tough. My SAT scores were really low because of my learning disabilities. I want to take advantage of it. I just want to see how far I could make it. I really wanted to do it. I was amazed. It took me five years, but I am glad I graduated and got a degree... I wanted a college degree, number one to prove to the people again, the ones that turned me down, that I could do it and get a college degree and then I could succeed in whatever I wanted to do. Another reason was-I really wanted a teaching degree. I wanted to be a teacher. I love children and that's what I wanted to do.
9	I am a Christian and saved and I believe God put me in college and there was no way he would put me in a place for me where I would fail.... I didn't want to tell my daughter I quit so that helped me to go through. I wanted to be able to say "I made it!" I know God put me here and he didn't set me up to fail. It was a struggle but I prayed and God went with me when I went to each class.
10	...part of the reason why I was wavering going to college because I am a learning disabled person and I felt that I could never learn how to learn. It was my dad and having the influence of a doctor (dad) and my brother who was at the time going for his bachelors and he was very successful. This motivated me to go for that success as well. I felt like my dad and my brother connected more and I felt maybe it was on the level of education. I felt like they talked down to me at times. I assumed that maybe if I got a college degree he would speak more like an equal, which he has.
11	Proving to myself that I can be somebody, I was abused and people would tell me I would never gonna do this or make something of myself. I was going to prove them wrong and better myself. Not that I'm better than you but I can be somebody too.
12	One of my elementary school teachers was not supportive of me and she would say you are not going to be anything more than a McDonald's worker. I knew at a very young age that I wanted to work with children, with Special Education or Elementary Ed. I knew I wanted to work with kids. To have that said to you is mind boggling. That was also the initiative because I wanted to prove her wrong. The day I graduated I found her and said here is my college degree and you said I would never amount to anything.

Just as is evident in Theme 2, interviewees demonstrate self-efficacy throughout Theme 3 in their comments about the personal importance of degree-completion. Albert Bandura (1982) writes that people respond to challenging situations according to their self-perception of efficacy; how long they persist and how hard they work to achieve is the result of a high or low level of self-efficacy, not willpower. People who are not sure of their ability to control certain

challenging situations typically lighten their efforts or do not persist to achievement at all (Bandura).

I am convinced through hearing the stories of these interviewees that willpower alone would not have carried many of them through the adverse circumstances they faced. Hunter and Barker (1987) note that students who place themselves in control of their successful achievement of goals possess confidence and a sense of empowerment. Therefore the student believes in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation and acts accordingly. Weiner's (1979) Attribution Model locates this factor as internal. Only the individual can identify whether inner drive is controllable or uncontrollable, stable or unstable. I conclude that for these interviewees, their high level of self-efficacy (internal) combined with inner drive propelled them to degree-achievement.

Theme 4 – Structural Functionalism as seen in Student Active Pursuit of Degree

Interviewees qualified for this research study because they persisted in goal achievement and did not allow any frustration with the system to hinder them. Instead, all found a way to get the help they needed whether by accessing assistance from the college program components, seeking support from sources outside the college, or in one case, by determining she could succeed through her own efforts.

The interviewee comments recorded under Themes 1 and 3 and in Appendices C, D, and F, do not reflect the thoughts of a subjugated or oppressed person—at least not in attitude. While a number of these graduates emerged from backgrounds including refugee status, poverty, families of great dysfunction, and poor economic and academic backgrounds, they did not seem to approach their college experience through the mindset of a victim. At this point, I began to look for additional theoretical explanations for what happened throughout their experience.

Throughout the study, I found that this population of successful degree-achievers did not respond as an oppressed people who needed emancipation. This specific research population

responded well to the social and academic structure at the community college designed as an integrated program. Therefore, I add the structural functionalist theory to explain the findings that differ noticeably from attrition studies. I briefly explain the nature of structural functionalism here to better understand how it relates to this study.

Structural functionalism is based on the assumption that social structures are the source for undermining or maintaining social stability (Brym & Lie, 2007). A consensus theory, structural functionalism contrasts with critical theory which is a type of conflict theory (Ritzer, 1992). Consensus theories are rooted in the shared values and norms of a people group whereas conflict theories are based on dominance, competitiveness, manipulation, and control. Whereas functionalists see unity and order as the result of the elements of a society working together, proponents of conflict theory see change and disorder emanating from those same elements in society (1992).

Talcott Parsons is the American theorist credited with developing the structural functionalist theory based on the earlier works of Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Émile Durkheim (Farganis, 2004). Parsons (1966) viewed society as a living unit comprised of inter-related parts that flow well together in unity. Each part has its own unique purpose which if not functioning well creates the imbalance or unrest observed at critical periods in social history. Functionalism includes both *structure* of the parts, i.e., how they fit together, and their *function* or contribution to society; from this the name structural functionalism is derived. Parsons argued that structural functionalism is a macro-level theory and is evident in a society that depicts unity in social functions such as families rearing children, community education, religion, and civil protection (Brym & Lie, 2007; 1996).

Foundational to Parsonian theory is the individual whom he calls an “actor” (Wallace & Wolf, 1999). In addition, norms and the cultural systems are also central to his theory of action (1999). The theory is illustrated by depicting an individual who is motivated to achieve a

particular goal, one that is desirable according to cultural standards. Achieving a college degree is a good example of this. The individual, or actor, then assesses the conditions and means needed to achieve that goal, i.e., money, time, and then plans accordingly. Finally, normative standards must be met such as passing all the courses to meet the number of required credits hours.

To further explain the above action system, Parsons delineated four functional imperatives for all systems called the AGIL scheme (Farganis, 2004; Ritzer, 1992; Wallace & Wolf, 1999). The acronym represents the four systems essential to the survival of any system: adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency. Adaptation refers to the need for a system to adapt to external systems and in turn, change the environment to meet its needs (Ritzer, 1992). Goal attainment speaks to the need for a system to identify goals and then organize its resources to achieve those goals. Integration is the central function coordinating and regulating the inter-relationships of its components and manages the relationships of the other three functions (Ritzer, 1992). Latency, sometimes referred to as pattern maintenance, pertains to the individual actors who maintain social order through habits and moral conscience. The organizations and roles that perform latent functions can be regarded as those that “furnish, maintain, and renew both the motivation of individuals and the cultural patterns that create and sustain this motivation” (Ritzer, 1992, p. 242).

Wallace and Wolf (1999) identify the educational, religious, and family institutions as those who serve the social system by setting the moral standards and by comforting, encouraging, and providing relief to those in stressful situations. Latency, so named because it is not as apparent as the other functions, serves to keep the cultural values intact by motivating the members of the society to conform to the social norms (Wallace and Wolf, 1999; Farganis, 1993).

In addition to Parsons' four functional imperatives, AGIL, he further matched these functions to a fourfold action system by means of a matrix (Farganis, 2004; Parsons, 1966; Ritzer, 1992). The action systems, cultural, social, behavioral organism, and personality systems are each connected to a functional imperative (Farganis, 2004). For example, the *goal attainment* imperative of the system is achieved by means of the personality system, while the social system is responsible for *integrating* the system and keeping peace. Behavioral organism relates to *adaptation* and finally, *latency* which includes values and norms of the society is tied to the cultural system.

Structural functionalism as a consensus theory explains the experience of the research study population more closely than critical theory. The theory explains the structural components of a "society" which is reflected in a developmental program that could feasibly be viewed as a mini-society or microcosm of a broader society and meets Parson's requirements as a social system. The following parallel reflects this.

First, the department does operate smoothly as a component of the college program as a whole. Second, the department receives support from the larger organization – both vertically and horizontally. Third, the department makes every effort to meet the needs of its "societal" members; hence, the necessity of this study—to see how well we are accomplishing that purpose. Fourth, the department continually seeks to solicit participation from students, faculty, and administration to maintain its equilibrium, values, and goals. Finally, standards of behavior are kept in the forefront with efforts to encourage compliance and unity within the classroom and within faculty collaborations and systems to engage in the event of noncompliance. Communication is central and highly valued with emphasis on positive interaction.

The imagery of structural functionalism is of a well-oiled machine (structure) that works (functions) well. This structure adapts to its environment and the environment shapes it. The nature of the system is to define and achieve goals. As a consensus theory, structural

functionalists see order, balance, cooperation, and smooth-working characteristics as an inherent part of a system. They view systems as maintaining themselves by controlling the internal environment and guiding change in a harmonious way.

Similarly, interviewees in this study described their experience at the community college in the same way. Rather than view the college as a system of oppression laden with obstacles (critical theory), they viewed the system as supportive and working well on their behalf. As students shared their experiences, I saw a program that students drew upon to assist them in their goal of degree-achievement. I observed people working together, supporting one another, encouraging, sacrificing, and giving to each other. When the system was less than helpful, I heard how interviewees found a way to make it work for them, or a way to circumvent the system and move to another level in society to find the way to success.

Witness the interviewee who was born with a congenital heart anomaly that required immediate emergency open heart surgery. He survived but with “an arm’s length list of” learning disabilities. These disabilities included: fine and gross motor dis-coordination, eye hand dis-coordination, a rare kind of dyslexia (which not only reverses the letters but inverts the letters), and no short term memory. He learned it took much repetition to store things into long term memory where he remembers them forever.

Math was especially problematic for this interviewee. Because math requires short term memory, he had to repeat each course at least one time. He would take it and then he would withdrawal before the final exam because he knew he wouldn’t make a passing grade. He knew that by taking it again with the same teacher he would know what to expect. That is how he was able to pass math.

Health care insurance agencies created a significant drawback for this student because they require a student to take twenty-four (24) credits a year during two semesters in order to be eligible for health care. A student with disabilities this severe cannot succeed with this type of

work load. He discovered that when he got to the exams near the end of the semester, if he wasn't passing or didn't have at least a C, he would drop the course to avoid adversely affecting his GPA.

Fortunately for this interviewee, this community college allows you to drop anytime up until the last day; universities generally require dropping within the first half of the course. For this interviewee, maintaining the 12-credit load to near the end of the semester gave him full-time status to maintain health insurance and then dropping a course or two on the last day enabled him to keep his GPA out of the range of probationary status. When I commented that he had found a way to beat the system, he responded that if he hadn't beat the system, he had worked within the system that was already in place.

This interviewee, for all intents and purposes, should never have made it through college. In my ten years experience with the community college, I have never heard of anyone using this system to become a college graduate, a feat otherwise unattainable for him. I cite this story as an example of structural functionalism: the community college developmental program as a living unit comprised of inter-related parts that flow well together. This interviewee experience reflects Parsons' (1966) description that each part of society has its own unique purpose which if not functioning well creates the imbalance or unrest observed at critical periods in social history.

Structural functionalism is illustrated by depicting an individual who is motivated to achieve a particular goal, one that is desirable according to cultural standards. This student assessed the conditions and means needed for degree-achievement and then worked his plan accordingly.

As stated earlier in the dissertation, Parsons delineated four functional imperatives for all systems called the AGIL scheme (Farganis, 2004; Ritzer, 1992; Wallace & Wolf, 1999). The four systems essential to the survival of any system—adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency—are evident in the data. Interviewees shared their adaptations to the program, to

faculty, to their lifestyle and strive to change the environment to meet their needs. They identified their goals and then organized the resources at their disposal to achieve those goals. The graduates demonstrated great integration, coordinating and regulating the inter-relationships of developmental education components. The college programs, faculty, and other support persons worked together to “furnish, maintain, and renew both the motivation of individuals and the cultural patterns that create and sustain this motivation” (Ritzer, 1992, p. 242).

The imagery of structural functionalism is indeed that of a well-oiled machine (structure) that works (functions) well—and interviewees in this study depicted the developmental program at the community college under study as a structure that worked well for them. As a consensus theory, structural functionalists view systems as maintaining themselves by controlling the internal environment and guiding change in a harmonious way. This describes the mission of the community college developmental program designed to assist the very at-risk student to achieve their goals and confirmed by the interviewees in this study.

Chapter Six summarizes and concludes the study with recommendations for the community college under study, then identifies areas where more research is needed.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the study and presents the findings which address the two research questions. Next, I address implications where I offer recommendations for the administrators, faculty, and staff of the college under study. Finally, I recommend areas for future research and conclude with a general summary of Chapter Six.

Summary of the Study

The growing population of underprepared students desiring a college education calls for an increase of quality developmental education programs in colleges with open-enrollment policies. Despite the best efforts of the colleges, these students, considered at-risk for a variety of reasons, show a high attrition rate. However, a small percentage of these very-at-risk students do succeed. The purpose of this study was to examine characteristic factors leading to degree or certificate achievement by twenty very-at-risk community college students using qualitative research methods.

This study defines the very-at-risk student as one who scores on the lowest end of the scale in the reading assessment required by the college under study. Consequently, college procedure requires the student to take three reading courses and often one writing course prior to enrolling in college-credit courses. This requirement discourages students as they spend semesters of time and much of their financial aid attempting to close the gap. This phenomenon along with personal reasons beyond the college's control often leads to a high attrition rate.

Researchers in this field typically explore why students drop out. This study seeks to examine students' perceptions of factors leading to degree completion. Interview questions guided the participants to examine academic and non-academic factors. Academic factors included the various programs for developmental students offered by the college under study while non-academic factors included support systems from outside the college. Through general

interview questions about their college experience, interviewees recalled ways they approached obstacles, handled discouragements, and received support from parents and friends. They spoke of faith, goals, and heroes in their college experience and ultimately revealed their own qualities of determination, perseverance, and self-efficacy.

The participants, all from the community college under study included twenty out of the sixty-one very-at-risk students who graduated between the years of 2000-2010. I conducted face-to-face interviews with all but one in another state who was interviewed by telephone. The transcriptions of the twenty interviews provided the data for this study. I then analyzed the data for themes and factors perceived by the interviewees as significant to their success.

To bring a more in-depth understanding to the research questions exploring the factors that led to the successful completion of a degree by very-at-risk students, I chose qualitative research methods. I designed this qualitative research study so that those who achieved success could add much useful insight to the field. Interview questions elicited valuable, personal insight from the participant's point of view about program components that worked or were deficient in some way. Questions also elicited personal qualities that contributed to student success.

The literature review focuses on three main areas for the purpose of providing a backdrop to understand the nature of the research problem. First, it identifies the research population from which this sample is drawn. Next, it provides a background of the history of development education and delineates the controversy surrounding developmental education. Finally, this section concludes with a review of the research surrounding high-risk developmental students, related retention statistics, and consequent findings and recommendations pertinent to this population. I also included a review of research studies throughout the additional chapters of this paper when pertinent to specific findings of this study.

Critical social theory partially informs this study; however, I draw on the specific work of critical theorist Paulo Freire (1999) who purported in his theory of emancipatory education, that

emancipation is achieved by the students themselves. Freire sought to awaken critical consciousness through dialectic discussions and thus lead the individual to emancipate themselves. Community colleges offer developmental education programs to empower students to emancipate themselves from their limited educational backgrounds and accordingly, their restricted social status. Interviewees in this study testified to their success in achieving a college education despite the adverse circumstances in their lives.

Further, the study is located in structural functionalism which is based on the assumption that social structures are the source for undermining or maintaining social stability (Brym & Lie, 2007). Whereas many developmental students in community colleges may experience challenges based on dominance, competitiveness, manipulation, and control issues (critical theory), these interviewees did not reflect those factors in the data. Rather, interviewees reflected experiences more compatible with consensus theory, unity and order as the result of the elements of a society working together. They described the community college developmental program as a source of support that assisted them in degree-achievement and a resource that worked well for them.

I used qualitative research methods for this study to give voice to this population of seldom-heard, very-at-risk students. The two research questions addressed by this study include:

What factors do very-at-risk student graduates (i.e. students scoring less than 50 in the ACCUPLACER Test) identify as leading to success?

Which aspects of the developmental education program at the college under study do very-at-risk graduates identify as contributing to their academic success?

I interviewed twenty participants with questions (see Appendix A) derived from a literature review as a beginning and then proceeded with open-ended questions to explore the interviewee's college experience. These twenty interviewees enrolled at the community college under study as very-at-risk students determined by a test score below 50 on the Accuplacer reading assessment test. These interviewees were volunteers from the group of 61 very-at-risk

students who graduated from the college between the years 2000 and 2010 inclusively. All sixty-one graduates were invited to participate. The participant demographics included eleven (11) Caucasians; four (4) black Americans; two (2) black Africans (Sudan and Toga); one (1) each from Albania, Vietnam, and India. Interestingly, there were no volunteers from the Hispanic population of graduates. Twelve of these interviewees were already in a program or were planning to enroll in a program to further their education.

The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed and coded for themes. The questions elicited responses that addressed both academic and non-academic factors. Academic factors in this study are defined as programs put into place and offered by the college to enable students to achieve degree-completion. All students had the same access to these programs. These programs include: a learning center where free tutoring is available whenever the college is open, developmental courses including reading, writing, and math, college success courses, advising, library assistance, and financial aid. I also included faculty teaching methods as academic factors.

Non-academic factors included such things as motivations, goals, personal qualities, family support, faculty relationships—those things that vary for each student. I examined and coded interviewee responses that did not directly relate to academic programs and found the following categories: faculty-student relationships; supportive persons such as family, friends, and colleagues; other sources of support including personal faith and goals; and personal qualities such as determination, perseverance, and self-efficacy.

The following section summarizes the findings from the analysis of these data.

Summary of the Findings

While numerous at-risk students credit instructors, librarians, certain teaching methods, tutors, developmental courses, college success courses, as well as outside sources such as parents and significant others, for their success, the purpose of this study was to identify and understand

how each has contributed to the individual's college experience, to locate the areas of the college program that also contributed to their success, and to uncover underlying, hidden factors that are not readily apparent. The transcribed, coded, and analyzed data show the following findings.

Academic Factors

Developmental courses. The review of the literature may indicate contradictory findings, but interviewees in this study recognized the importance of these courses to their success.

1. Nearly all interviewees stated that the courses were helpful and several stated that they could not have achieved degree completion without them.
2. Six of the graduates named developmental courses as the most important academic factor leading to their success; one reported it as the second most important program.
3. Only one student, located in the 35-40 age range and who had received an associate's degree nearly 20 years earlier, stated that she could have achieved her degree without the developmental courses. She did, however, find them excellent and did not resent having to take them.

In summary, these interviewees strongly supported the practice of mandating developmental courses. I conclude from both this study and from experience teaching developmental courses that they do prepare students for college-level courses. Students indirectly learn effective practices for a successful college experience such as the ability to follow directions, meet assignment deadlines, follow proper formatting of documents, stay in touch with the professor, make class attendance a priority, and similar successful student behaviors in addition to learning the skills taught in the course. While no specific interview question directly addressed this conclusion, interviewee comments corroborated this finding in relating positive experiences with their first course and first instructor. They spoke of the small classes and supportive faculty that made these courses worth the time and money even if they felt they already knew the skills. I conclude that for these interviewees, developmental courses played a

significant role in their successful degree-completion. It is important to student success that classes be kept small and that faculty are nurturing and supportive.

Learning center - tutoring. Interviewees ranked the learning center as the second most valuable to their success. Graduates' comments showed that:

1. The learning center is an important concept even if tutoring is not accessed by the student. It provides a quiet, comfortable place to study; graduates reported being able to focus in that environment.
2. This service was critical to the success of a number of students who have no one in their lives from whom to assess assistance. Several spoke of spending quite a few hours there, sometimes daily, even to the point of using the word "family" to describe their relationship with the tutors and others who frequented the center.
3. Some interviewees reported better grades when they made the effort to access the tutoring services.
4. The math tutoring service showed weaknesses in two areas. Several interviewees complained of too few tutors to adequately serve the number of students needing assistance. Also, student tutors demonstrated math ability, but did not necessarily demonstrate the ability to teach. Some students found that going to their instructors during office hours benefitted them to a greater degree.

College success courses. While college success courses are not required for degree-attainment, advisors assign or strongly recommend the courses believing the student needs it for success or the student requires a certain number of credits in order to attain financial aid and has no other options since developmental courses are prerequisite courses. Otherwise, most students do not choose these courses on their own, often alluding to them as a waste of money and time. Five students did not take a college success course, one could not remember if he had, fourteen students did take them.

This study found:

1. Fourteen interviewees strongly affirmed that at least one of the two college success courses made a difference in their college experience and could potentially have led to their success.
2. Despite their initial aversion to these courses, students are often surprised to find that the skills acquired in these courses may have ultimately made the difference in their college experience between dropping out or completing their program.
3. Students benefited from taking these courses, not so much by what they learned in the course itself, but more because their feelings changed about college and about learning; consequently, they attained something beyond their own abilities and skills through these courses offered by the institution.
4. Interviewees also affirmed their instructors who at this college under study were also their advisors; several named their college success instructor as their “hero.”
5. Both of the 100-level college success courses earn three credits toward degree completion as an elective, but do not transfer. For these students, college credit, time, or money were not the concern—what happened to them there was the important issue. It is understandable why all who enrolled in these courses spoke not only positively but with strong affirmation for the benefits they received from these courses.

The strength of the affirmation spoken by the interviewees in this study lead me to conclude that continuing to offer these courses as an option is very important for the success of very-at-risk students. Not only did interviewees recognize the value of the course content, their feelings about college in general and their own abilities in particular were positively affected.

Advising. The subject of the advising services evoked both positive and negative responses in a way not seen in the other components of the academic program. It is important to note here that the advisors may be counselors in the counseling office or may be faculty advisors assigned to them by the college. Faculty advisors have minimal training and have access to college counselor assistance when advising students. The following findings reflect this variance:

1. Positively, one student commented that the advisor is extremely vital and is the first person with whom you communicate; if you don't get the positive reinforcement you need, it can be devastating.
2. Fourteen students affirmed that advisors were very helpful and important to their college success.
3. There were varying degrees of importance referenced—some sought guidance every semester, some only once when they enrolled. Several mentioned that once the advisor showed them how to use the website to select courses from a program advising checklist and how to register online, they no longer sought the assistance of an advisor.
4. In the advising component, negative, even angry feelings flared. I did not experience this coming from the interviewees during discussion of any other category or college experience. I believe in nearly every case if not all cases, the negative comments were in reference to faculty advisors, not college counselors. The negative comments identified the following weaknesses in the program:
 - a. advisors not being in sync with each other, not communicating
 - b. advisors giving wrong advice about courses needed for graduation
 - c. feeling rushed to make quick decisions about courses
 - d. not supportive or helpful; had own agenda; did not listen to me
 - e. having a faculty advisor who was not in your major area of study

f. advisors were a bit confusing at times

g. having to graduate a semester later because of wrong advice

Graduates clearly identified advising as the weakest area of the college program.

Considering the strength of the affirmation overall, however, it speaks well for the college that this was the weakest link in the developmental program.

During the time frame that these graduates were students, the college did not differentiate advising for the very-at-risk student from that of any other college student. As a faculty member of the college under study, I am aware that the college under study is now addressing these weaker areas. In 2009, several of the regional campuses instituted an intensive advising program specifically for the very-at-risk student. These advisors work only with this particular population and are specially trained to address the unique needs of the very-at-risk student. By 2012, all campuses will have this specialized program in place. This action was taken to address the research that points to the need for differentiated treatment for the purpose of improving retention. The twenty graduates interviewed in this study would not have had this advantage, and that is strongly reflected here.

Library assistance. I included librarians in this study because they are without doubt a very integral and important service to these students even though they are not considered “special services” designed to serve this population. The results of this part of the study surprised me. I did not expect the strong voice of affirmation; I thought librarians were less significant to the success of this mostly part-time, reticent, more academically inexperienced population. I found the following:

1. Ten interviewees highly lauded the helpfulness of the librarians. One student even cited a librarian as his “hero.”
2. All of these ten students drew on the librarians for help with writing papers.
3. One learned MLA format from a librarian (MLA is taught in their English classes).

4. Nine very-at-risk interviewees said they did not access the help of the librarians.
5. Several find the library a useful place to study
6. Librarians have given invaluable assistance – almost to the point of tutoring.
7. Some said that while they never approached a librarian for assistance, the librarian would come to their class to instruct them about how to do research.
8. The words of one student summed it up for many, “I can’t say enough about how helpful they were.”
9. Librarians provided color-coded papers: Works Cited instruction, MLA formats, where to find the books for this certain topic, and help with the online sources.
10. One student named the library as the second most helpful college program for his success in degree-achievement. He raved about a particular librarian whom he named and concluded, “That was like my home.”
11. Library hours were very helpful: early morning to late in the evening including Saturdays and Sundays as well as the ability to use the library before an 8:00 class.

I concluded the student comment section in Chapter Four with my favorite quote, and I repeat it here. “I used the library and the librarians were very helpful. Especially the elderly ladies – they are very helpful and I did use the library and I spent a lot of time in there, actually. They had all the resources I needed to succeed.” I found it refreshing that the stereotypical librarian still holds a place in the life of a modern-day college student.

The quality of the library services at this college under study caught the attention of a considerable number of this population who credit those services for their success. Beyond this, I offer that the academic environment of this college under study is conducive to serve well those who are very-at-risk and underprepared. This is demonstrated by the librarians who are not employed as part of the developmental program but who compassionately and effectively serve this population.

Financial aid. The financial aid plan offered by the college was highly valued by those who accessed it. Individual students also acquired aid through Social Security, Welfare, Veteran's benefits, grants, companies which they worked for, and Career Link (HEAP).

Findings include:

1. The seven students who did not receive financial aid had various reasons for not drawing on this provision by the college: valuing debt-free status; employee benefits included college tuition; worked their way through; parents paid tuition; used loans from local bank
2. The thirteen who did access it verbalized that they couldn't have gone to college otherwise.
3. Two students who did receive financial aid criticized the laborious and sometimes confusing process required to access it. One commented that financial aid was a wonderful service but it could be improved by devising less formidable ways of attaining it. The literature review corroborated this finding (Hoover, 2008).
4. Graduates who had not accessed financial aid found ways to persist even when finances became a challenge.

The majority of the interviewees confirmed the importance of financial aid to their success but also shared some difficulty in accessing it. The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (2008) reported that many eligible students are not applying for financial aid; the complexity of application forms are one reason they failed to follow through with the process. The majority of these interviewees did persist through the challenging process, but one interviewee in particular cited the complexity of financial aid application as an area in which the college could improve.

In reflection, I compare Hoover's (2008) report of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement results which show that 45% of the respondents cite lack of finances as a

greater threat to persistence than academic preparedness with Tinto's (1993) conclusion that finances are generally not the main cause for student attrition. Instead, Tinto purports that persistence reflects the social and intellectual experience of the college student. He also notes that students with gratifying college experiences who attain success in their course work can much more readily withstand financial challenges.

I heard both of these sentiments expressed by the interviewees in this study. Several of the thirteen students who accessed financial aid expressed that they could not have entered college without it. For the seven who did not receive financial aid, it seems that once they enrolled and began the process, they found ways to persist. One stopped-out and worked until he could return to college. Another student accessed money from her local bank. A third student appealed to parents who agreed to assist with finances since he was demonstrating success and desired to persist. I conclude that students with personal qualities such as determination and self-efficacy can overcome financial barriers.

Teaching methods. Interviewees noticeably hesitated when responding to the interview question addressing teaching methods. Most responded with relationship observations rather than addressing teaching methods; however, when prompted with teaching methods such as lecture, PowerPoint, small group discussions, etc., they identified the area of learning which they felt most influenced their success. Even then, interviewees did not speak with the same conviction or passion as when addressing other areas of the program. They may be unfamiliar with teaching methods and how they relate to learning and/or they may believe that teaching methods relate very little to their success even though they have their preferences.

However, I found the following clear themes from interviewee responses:

1. Graduates strongly affirm any teaching method that conveys a clear understanding of the content and leads to their successful completion of the course.
2. If students understand the concepts, they view the teacher as excellent.

3. Graduates valued faculty who spent time and effort ensuring mastery much more than faculty who were concerned about covering the course content.
4. According to these interviewees, the community college under study for the most part has excellent teachers who care about their students and do much to contribute to their success.

Other categories considered important to their success and mentioned by at least two but fewer than six of the interviewees included: enthusiasm of the professor, stays on the subject with no off-topic diversions, use of textbook by student to enhance learning, ease of taking notes to study, importance of instructor use of visuals, and the negative perception of the professor who seemed to just “dump information” on them. One participant commented that any method worked fine as long as the professor varied them. I observe that while helpful, these categories reflect preferences and values of the participants and did not directly influence persistence. Rather, graduates placed substantially more value on relationships with faculty and use of support programs.

Non-academic Factors

Interview questions to elicit factors leading to degree or diploma completion included factors other than the programs put in place by the college under study. Questions elicited pre-college attitudes, high school experience with education, expectations upon entering college, obstacles confronted, primary motivations in pursuing a degree, support systems from outside the college arena, and perceptions about why their colleagues did not achieve degree or diploma completion. The following categories emerged from this data: faculty relationships; supportive persons such as family, friends, and colleagues; other sources of support including personal faith and goals; and personal qualities such as determination, perseverance, and self-efficacy.

Faculty relationships. I found the following three common themes repeated throughout the transcribed interviews: the importance of personal contact with the instructor, positive feelings about the instructor evident in rapport or interpersonal relationships, and instructor helpfulness and support toward success. Specifically, I found:

1. This study confirmed the findings of Barbatis (2010) that faculty-student interaction is a key factor in student persistence.
2. The majority of these interviewees not only made use of instructor office hours, but also talked about the importance to their success of having access to the instructor and of feeling accepted and supported when they met with the instructor.
3. What distinguished these very-at-risk successful graduates from their counterparts was the persistent effort they made to find a sense of integration and support from college personnel. When an instructor was aloof or unavailable to them, these graduates found it another way—through a tutor or a different instructor or adviser.
4. Graduates described instructor approval and support in the context of time given to them to help them succeed, whether through feedback or through tutoring or counsel.
5. Interviewee responses support the research study by Lundquist, Spalding, and Landrum (2002-2003) which identifies three areas of faculty relationships that significantly impact student thoughts about dropping-out: faculty support for student needs, timely response to students through e-mail and phone calls, and being approachable.
6. “Heroes” played a significant role in the lives of these graduates. Actions of “heroes” included assisting a student years after graduation in subsequent education programs. Another “hero” encouraged a student to change her major to a more appropriate field for her talents, a critical decision for her success. Others helped the student acclimate to college on their first day and throughout the semester. One challenged a student to

stop the self-pity and get to work—a much needed and appreciated “kick in the pants.”

7. While “heroes” represented positive forces in the lives of these graduates, any negative encounter with a professor or advisor was also vividly imprinted on the mind of the interviewee. Vivid negative experiences shared by the participants included embarrassment, belittlement, or some other form of devaluing the student. No interviewee recalled more than one such experience; however, that one experience elicited vivid description.

Other persons of support. Parents were overwhelmingly identified as the major persons of support outside of the college environment. Important but less frequent, extended family members credited included in-laws, spouses, siblings, uncles and aunts, grandparents, and children who encouraged or assisted them at some point in their college career. Fellow church members, personal friends, colleagues in the workplace, fellow students, and significant others also contributed to interviewee success. Eight of the seventeen participants who cited parent support also stated that they had no support of significance other than their parents.

1. Parents were a compelling factor to the success of these graduates, whether it was moral support, praise, financial support, babysitting, or tutoring.
2. The three interviewees without parent support each had an intense inner drive to achieve degree or diploma completion.
3. Pairing parental support with caring, personally-involved instructors apparently creates a strong support system for very-at-risk students.

Sources of support. Two strong sources of support emerged from the data as interviewees reflected on their college experience: faith and goals. Findings pertaining to these characteristics include:

1. Students who experienced an intimate relationship with God, desiring to honor His purposes for their lives, knew that God was there to also enable them to overcome any challenges or barriers to their success.
2. For those who spoke of their faith, quitting was not even an option to consider.
3. Biblical truth such as “without Me you can do nothing” and “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” enabled at least two graduates to achieve the near impossible.
4. When up against a wall, the end goal of being a college graduate sustained some interviewees through the obstacles. This was particularly true for those who had been told they could not make it or for those whose past educational experience had indicated they should not even try. They held the words “college graduate” ever before them.
5. The majority of the interviewees voiced their awareness that a college degree resulted in a better life. They were not content with the lifestyle they had experienced within their family or when observing the plight of friends who had not pursued a college degree. These interviewees knew that degree or diploma achievement could bring the desired results for their own lives.
6. Four graduates spoke of persistence with the altruistic goal of ultimately being able to better serve others, whether it was their family, their community, or society at large.

Personal character qualities. Determination, perseverance, and self-efficacy emerged as strong character qualities of these graduates. Determination, including a sense of toughness, nerve, problem-solving, and immovability, presented in nearly all interview transcriptions. Perseverance as steady persistence in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement also emerged. This is a repetitive behavior. Self-efficacy showed in interviewee responses as an

attitude of belief in themselves to achieve their goal or fulfill a perceived responsibility. The following findings gleaned from student interview transcriptions include:

1. Interviewees voiced their belief that the goal is achievable, but achievement is up to individual choice through action.
2. For these graduates, failure of courses invoked determination to find another way rather than discouragement.
3. Graduates showed an intrinsic understanding that there is a price to pay for goal achievement and the willingness to pay the price. Interviewees observed many students who had a goal but when there was a price to pay, the goal was abandoned.
4. A belief within that for every problem there is a solution by means of some other way than the one already tried.
5. Graduates exuded a pervading attitude of “if I can endure, I can win this battle” along with a sense of “and indeed I can.”
6. These interviewees made choices based on their judgments that persevering would positively affect their future. This attitude enabled them to persist through undesirable circumstances or just plain fatigue—mental and physical.
7. While setting a goal and having the right attitude are important for success, it is action that brings the result: going to class, signing up the third time to repeat a failed course, daily note-taking, studying in the night, seeking help, pursuing faculty relationships, and similar efforts.
8. Interviewees demonstrated the ability to problem-solve when confronted with an obstacle.
9. Interviewee responses showed a belief in themselves and their ability to ultimately achieve the goal no matter what kind of challenge surfaced.

10. Graduate reflections revealed a drawing upon inner strength and personal belief systems when obstacles occurred.

11. All obstacles named by interviewees that stopped their classmates who dropped-out were faced and overcome by one or more of the interviewees.

These findings indicate that the academic programs and support services offered by the community college under study extensively contributed to the success of these graduates.

Participants identified aspects of the college program that are valuable to the success of the students and provided details that can inform initiatives for improvement. Based on these findings, I make the following recommendations.

Recommendations for College Personnel and Administrators

1. Highly value the learning center. Engage in program evaluation, calling for responses from both tutors and tutees to identify the problem with math tutoring at one campus location as identified by these interviewees. Hire professional math tutors who can clearly explain math concepts and who relate well to students. Make sure there are enough tutors for the student population. The literature review supports this practice on a regular basis (Sutherland, 2009; Colvin, 2007).
2. Developmental courses are valuable if the classes are kept small and are staffed with nurturing and supportive faculty.
3. Continue to offer college success courses taught by instructors who relate well to students, who actively involve students during class time, and who teach practical skills for college success. Inform students enrolled in these classes of the long-term value of the course. While students highly affirmed such classes later, they did not see the full value while enrolled in the class.

4. Continue the intensive advising efforts put in place for the very-at-risk students. Train advisors to not only help students with course choice and registration, but also to relay factors for college success to students as they work with them one-on-one.
5. The library program and librarians are vital to this very-at-risk population. Continue to take seriously the hiring and training of these faculty members and assistants to serve this grateful group of students. Encourage the librarians with positive feedback.
6. Financial aid is crucial for the majority of this population. Because of the limitations of this very-at-risk population, seek ways to assist these students with financial aid applications, assisting with the reading and completion of the extensive forms required to access it.
7. When hiring instructors for developmental programs, adjunct or full-time, make every effort to hire those who come with references affirming their student-orientation and their clarity of instruction for the underprepared. Interview to determine their philosophy of service to developmental students.
8. Provide in-service opportunities or other college-wide opportunities to inform all faculty members, not just developmental faculty, of their importance to very-at-risk students. More non-developmental faculty than developmental faculty were cited as “heroes” who made all the difference in their successful completion of their program.
9. Recognize and encourage very-at-risk students to draw on sources of support such as parents, faith, and personal goals. These factors present as strong forces for those who have successfully completed programs.

Recommendations for Future Research

While a focus on developmental education is not just a recent trend, research studies exploring the effectiveness of developmental programs and the success of at-risk students is quite recent. In the past, personal monographs, articles, and dissertations by those more deeply

involved in developmental education have provided the information available throughout the last century (Arendale, 2002a). Quantitative research characterizes the majority of the research in this field of study. The literature lacks the specific voice of the at-risk and very-at-risk population served by our developmental programs.

Colleges and educators seek ways to improve retention rates and advance all the aspects of developmental programs. More research by means of case studies, interviews, and focus groups can provide much needed information about areas easily overlooked by those designing and administering these programs.

Studies directed toward program components and toward student populations including minorities, internationals, lower socio-economic groups, male students, etc., could reveal hidden biases, profiling, and other inequities experienced by oppressed or under-appreciated people groups.

Studies related to how the very-at-risk population relate to tutoring or learning communities could explore the accessibility of these programs to students who may not be able to access them because of personal responsibilities outside the college or circumstances such as dependency on public transportation or rides with others which preclude opportunity to stay for such meetings. Studies in these areas tend to report statistical data about involvement; the voices explaining lack of involvement need to be heard.

Conclusion

As I stated earlier in the paper, proponents of developmental education articulate a positive philosophy of confidence, support, and belief in the underprepared student, fully understanding the formidable task of combining instructional techniques, program components, and financial means to reach this deserving population. The graduates interviewed in this study have demonstrated why this is so.

While the non-academic findings confirmed my prior assumptions that students draw on something within when facing formidable challenges, I was pleasantly surprised about the strong sentiments of affirmation toward the faculty and the college in general. In an era of time when many students blame teachers and schools for their lack of success, these very-at-risk students who had experienced failure in their educational experience focused, not on who to blame, but on ways to circumvent the obstacles. In the process, they praised and valued those who had helped them—college program employees and instructors.

The findings in this study support Vincent Tinto's (1993) integration theory that student motivation and academic ability aligned with institutional academic and social characteristics lead to degree achievement. The study also concurs with Bean's (1990) attrition model in identifying the contributing role of external factors to student retention and, ultimately, degree achievement.

My experience with this population and with this study keeps pointing to those who do not view themselves as very-at-risk, oppressed persons, or victims. Instead, they see themselves as problem-solvers capable of achieving success if they decide to do so. If one support system failed they would seek and find another. They saw the decision as theirs; they are creators; they are determined; they demonstrate personal and spiritual strength. Perhaps therein lies the key.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Did you plan to go to college when you were in high school?
2. How did you do in high school?
3. Before you enrolled at this college, what did you think college would be like?
4. What did you think it would take to succeed?
5. How was your experience different from what you expected?
6. Think back to when you were a student at this college. Starting from the very first course (Eng 001), talk about your experience as a developmental student. To what do you attribute your success as a college graduate?
7. What were the obstacles you had to overcome and how did you overcome them?
8. What were the primary motivations for you to persist in completing your degree?
9. Please name any factors other than support from the community college that enabled you to achieve success.
10. Of the following components of the developmental program at the college under study, which stand out to you as most instrumental in enabling you to succeed (you may name as many as apply)?

developmental courses, human development courses, advisors, teaching methods of instructors, relationships with instructors, tutors, financial aid officers, registration officers, librarians.
11. To what extent did you receive support from each of the components of the developmental program that you mentioned?
12. To what extent, if any, did you receive support from each of the components of the developmental program that you did not mention?

13. Give an example of a time when you received help that really made a difference in your college experience.
14. What changes in the program at CPASS do you perceive would help other students be more successful?
15. What parts of the developmental program do you recommend no change since they are effective as they stand?
16. Why do you think the others didn't make it?
17. Are you interested in any further education?

Appendix B

Profile of Participants

	Gen-der	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Marita l Parent	Tui- tion	Years in colleg e	Grad. year	Site	Major - AA	Further Education Goal
1	M	46-50 (48)	Black- American	N/N	Y	4	2002-2006	H	Bus. Admin.	B. S. Business
2	M	26-30 (24)	Black- Sudanese	N/N	Y	2	2002-2004	H	AA & Bachelor's Criminal Justice	Working on Master's – Shippensburg – Criminal Justice - PhD? possibly
3	F	36-40	White	N/Y	Y	2	2006-2008	L, H	Paralegal Studies	No, Had AA Paralegal Sec'y.
4	M	26-30	Albanian	N/N	N – 1 grant	5	2004-2008	L	Surgical Tech.	BS – Alvernia College - Anesthesiologist
5	F	30-35	Vietnames e	Y/Y	Y	5	2004-2009	L	Accounting	BS-Accounting (MU)
6	M	30-35	African- Toga	Y/Y	Y	2	2005-2008	L, Y	Bus. Studies	BA-Christian Studies and MA - Counseling
7	F	20-25	Black- American	N/Y	Y	3	2004-2007	H	Humanities, Language, and Arts	BA -Business Entrepreneurship
8	M	20-25	White	N/N	Y	3	2006-2009	Leb .	General Studies	Would like -maybe
9	M	20-25	White	N/N	N	4	2004-2008	H	Business Studies	possibly
10	F	20-25	Asian - Indian	N/N	Y	3	2006-2009	H	Business Admin.	BA International Business
11	M	26-30	White	N/Y	Y	5	2000-2005	L	General Studies	Not really
12	F	20-25	White	N/N	Y	3	2006-2009	L,Y ,H	Paralegal Studies	BA – Criminal Justice (Central Penn)
13	M	20-25	White	N/Y	N	3	2006-2009	H	Criminal Justice	No

14	F	30-35	Black-American	N/Y	Y	6	2002-2008	L	Business Studies	
15	F	20-25	White	N/Y	Y	2	2009	Y	Phlebotomy - Diploma	Working on associates
16	M	20-25	White	N/N	N	4	2005-2009	H,Y	Fire Science	
17	F	46-50	White		Y	3	2006-2009	H,Y	Medical Assistant	LPN
18	F	20-25 (26)	White	N/N	N	4	2002-2006	H	Elementary Ed.	Don't need it or want to change levels of responsibility
19	F	20-25 (31)	Black-American	N/Y	Y	9	2000-2009	H	CNA & Phlebotomy Certification	Working on associates in Rad. Tech.
20	F	20-25	White	N/N	N	5	2005-2010	H	Surgical Tech.	RN
20	9-M 11-F	11 – (20-25) 3 – (26-30) 3 – (30-35) 1 – (36-40) 2- (46-50)	11- White 4 – Black American 2 – Black African 1 – Albania 1 – Vietnamese 1 – Asian Indian	2 – Married 9 - Parent	14 - Tuition	2- 9 years Median – 3.5 Mode – 3 Mean – 3.85		9 – H 4 – L 1-Y 1-Leb 1- 1-LH 1-LY 1-LY H 2-HY	2-Bus. Admin. 3-Bus. Studies 2-Crim. Justice 2-Paralegal Studies 2-Surg. Tech 1-Accounting 1-Humanities, Lang. & Arts 2-General Studies 1-Fire Science 1-Medical Assistant 1-Elem. Education 2-Certificates: CNA & Phlebotomy	12 – will continue most likely

Appendix C

Factors Leading to Degree Completion

	Teachers	Courses	Tutoring	HD	Library	Advising	Financial Aid
1	Gave specifics Showed every point Takes time with students Don't want anyone to fail	All were necessary	Lived there – especially math (3-4 hours a day) – did all homework there – didn't leave until completed (math); writing – checked grammar	Y – all should take this	Used library, but tutor met me there and helped me	Yes, helpful	Yes, in addition to Soc. Sec. & Welfare – (disability)
2	Encouraged me through tough course (5) One teacher still checks my papers years after I'm out of HACC (11) One bad experience – ended up dropping her course (21)	Dev. Ed - Could have done without them (18) Excellent courses: Science classes; English dept.; CJ (22)	Yes, for English – ESL made writing difficult so needed help with the sentences (9, 20) Good that you can walk in – no appointment (22)	N	Never used them (21)	Yes, helpful especially when transferring to Penn State (19)	Yes (20, 21)
3	Willing to help you succeed and keep you going through school, pretty personal be, very willing to help with questions, didn't make you feel	Refreshers for me – weren't hard (4) Reading – learned how to get insight (7) Writing (7) Helped me with my grades (8)	No – My brother with a master's degree checked my papers (6, 10)	Y - new outlook on college work (8)	Yes, with research (11) Third most important (14) Hours are great for working	At first (8) but once I got going – didn't need them Most important – help you know from the start –	Yes, received lots , also grants, and also Veteran's office Second most

	uncomfortable asking questions, always willing to meet with you office hours (9, 10)				mothers, early morning, Saturdays	the things you need to take (14)	important (14)
4	You could talk to them one on one (6)	Eng 001, 002, 003 – very valuable for learning the lang and understanding how to read for comp./ vocab. (1) Top most important to my success (8)	30-40% of the time – at least once a week Second most important to my success (8)	Yes, very helpful – top notch for me (6)	librarians were very helpful. Especially the elderly ladies –I did use the library and I spent a lot of time in there (8)	Yes – a bit confusing at times (5) Must ask right questions	Received a \$700 grant but never took out loans – worked to pay off – took longer to graduate but no loans . My family helped (8)
5	If I need help, any professor will help if I just go and see them (11) Top most important to my success (12)	Reading very helpful – build my English (8) English 051 also (9)	Yes, they showed me step by step (3) Once or twice a week (8) Second top important (12)	Don't remember (9)	Yes, they help e with projects (12)	Used them a little bit (9, 10)	No (12) my company paid – until I quit work – now I pay
6	Available, answer my questions after class, took time, explained things (6); also had a bad one – wouldn't accept late paper when in hospital (6)Open in	Eng 001 and 051 – very helpful – after not going to school for years – it helped me get back (8)	Yes – one of the greatest things HACC has (7, 11)	No, didn't have	Second most important – it was like my home. I like Anna (7, 11)	Yes, my first one helped a lot (8)	Yes (9)

	relating (9)						
7	One math teacher – teaches you from the beginning and breaks that down; excellent helping me to understand; excellent personality (6, 7)	Eng 001 – helpful – any English course will be helpful. I wasn't the best writer; those tools help(2) Math took it twice (3)	Excellent – there is no tutoring where I go now – I miss that (5) They are willing and able to help you. (9)	Yes, but took it last – so it was a good course but wasn't as helpful to me (6)	Yes, with research papers, data bases, computer usage (9) Library is your friend (10)	Downside for me – my area was business and advisor is English professor (6). Didn't get much help. It pushed me back a semester – wrong courses (6)	Yes (4)
8	You get to know them in a smaller college (12) I didn't go to office hours (12) talked to them before class started about football or even astronomy (12) Had more good than bad teachers (13) 80/20 – a lot of good teachers I had at HACC (13) Will give up time to help you (16)	I needed them to handle the tougher classes – might have given up otherwise (8, 16) Filled in gap – was in votech senior year in HS (8) Reading – read text to pick out important information.	Should have used it more. Maybe used it once a week (9,10)	Yes – very helpful (8) College and Career (8) HD – Master Student (9)	Yes, they helped me with MLA	Yes (9) Ann Burns -	Yes (13)
9	Very supportive professors – one	Very good experience – good	My dad (doctor) and mom (nurse) or one of	Becomin g a	Used it but didn't ask for	Yes, one helped me very much –	No (12)

	became my friend, I went to the office and help helped me to know what my mistakes are (10) One would stop by to chat with me when he saw me, but I was failing his course so I dropped it. (11)	computer/business courses (2)	the teachers helped me out with miscorrections and everything (3) I went to the math lab a couple of times to the center – waited close to 10 minutes and then left – decided to get friends to help me (4) The English lab did help me out a couple of times (9) Went once a day for one course (9)	Master Student – that’s a good course (8)	help from the librarians (11)	Marty Wise (Harrisburg) (7, 8)	
10	If I had a problem, I could talk to them and get understanding (7) Didn’t use office hours but would ask after class (8)	Important for my success (4)	They helped me a lot (4) – went once a week -top most important (5) when I didn’t go for help, I got a C on a paper instead of A or B (5)	Didn’t take (4)	Did not go to the library that much (5)	Yes, to know what to take so I don’t take the wrong things (5)	Yes (5) They give counsel and help. Second most important (5)
11	Certain professors – particularly one in science understood my disability – helped me push through the class – really helped me get through and do it. (5) A theater professor – he came	Needed Reading and Writing drastically because you need to be a good reader for Early childhood. (7) Top most important (13)	Very little – only for one short period. It was difficult to have a tutor. Doing it on my own was better for me or having a professor help me (8) The testing center definitely also tops	No (7)	Didn’t use that much – used my own computer and worked at home mostly (11)	Used one the first and second year; after that, I knew what to take – very helpful (11)	Yes (11)

	to see me in a play (10) My music Prof. took me to her office and helped me learn better. (10) Eng. Profs were very good – great relationship – helped me (10)		(123)				
12	Lisa Wolf, my paralegal teacher talk like she was my counselor –open – she came to my dad’s funeral. I was really surprised; I didn’t expect her to do that – she contacted all my teachers to let them all know (6) When I would ask for help they would help me (9) Went to office hours even for math help (9)	Eng 001 really helped me (3, 7) Top most important (13)	Yes, for Math – Statistics (8) Second most important (13)	No (8)	No - used the law library to study – used my laptop (10) What bugged me was when the library was too loud – quiet rooms were often booked (13) (need more)	Yes, Lisa was my advisor – e-mailed a lot	Yes (10)
13	Marie Ulmen – good teacher –a lot of work but it was	Thought at first they were not that helpful. Later I	No (7) Teachers made themselves available. Would study there	Yes (7) Taught note-	I did use the library and librarians for	Had several different advisors –	No (8)

	worth it (4) Teachers made themselves available – could call or e-mail anytime (8) Those who were called “Staff” just filled in and weren’t enthusiastic (10) Top most important (11)	could see it paid off when I got to college-level courses (7) Second most important (11)	though – it was comfortable, silent (10)	taking , skimmin g, time management; pertains to life	my papers – they were very helpful people (9)	wanted a transferable option – made sure I could go on for my Bachelors at Ship. (5) Helped me chose courses for my major (8)	
14	I felt like I could go to any of the other teachers and asked them questions, except for one who I feel didn’t like me (7)	They were good – helped me trainsition into college; vocab. Writing papers (5) Top most important (8)	Daily, I would go early and stay late (5) Second most important (8)	Yes – enjoyed it (5)	A lot – asked questions (6)	Yes, all the time, Didn’t take a course without asking them (5)	Yes (6)
15	Mrs. Murphy – always willing to talk to you and explain things. (1)You could talk to them. He encouraged me (7)	Really helpful - 001, 002 – could have skipped 003 (5, 6) Top most important; small, intimate – I’m never going to forget my first 001 class (10)	Yes – to use the computer, not the tutoring. My brother does – really helped him (6)		No. My mom helped me with research stuff (8)	Yes – I didn’t know what classes to take – I had 2 different ones (6)	Yes. My mom helped me fill it out because she had just gone through that with my bro.(8) Should be less confusing – more systematic (10)

16	<p>Helpful – would write on board, raise voice when something was important; varied methods; encouraged use of flash cards encouraged students to find their way of best learning (13) Could ask for help; they wanted me to succeed (14)</p>	<p>A good program with varying levels of competencies – prepared you for next level (11)</p>	<p>Yes, lots of tutoring – used it hourly (13) Eng was phenomenal; math at Hburg is not good - not enough help and only student help who are too advanced and don't care.(12) I used to raise my hand and shout "Medic"(16) York was great with Mr. Geron (12)</p>	<p>Yes, very helpful – I still use the book (5, 12) I would have been lost without it (16)</p>	<p>Yes, helped me find books and write a bibliography (14)</p>		<p>No – I was able to do it on my own (14)</p>
17	<p>Gave guidelines; told us what to expect – essential (6); one was rather insulting and always late - I did learn a lot from her though(7) A math teacher worked with three of us on week-ends (8) Each professor wants what they want (12) English teachers all seem to be on different pages –</p>		<p>Yes, all the time – Eng., Math, CIS, computer lab (13)</p>	<p>Yes, Professor extremely good in in teaching how to take tests (14) Second most important</p>	<p>Yes - In Harrisburg – I can't say enough about how helpful they were – (13)</p>	<p>Heather Burns helped me with guidelines which I followed (3) Faculty advisors were less satisfactory – not always aware of changes, felt rushed when with them (10) Top most important.</p>	<p>HEAP through Career Link (3)</p>

	they change the rules (12)						
18	Got in contact with all my professors – told them ADD – be up front (4) More good than bad but one bad math teacher – a jerk – strictly there for pay, not for us (12) All pretty accommodating of my ADD (12)	Wanted to start at the bottom –had ADD (1, 2) Loved 001 with Geri Gutwein – she was my all-time favorite – I would have tke it over and over again if I could (10) If I wouldn't have had these course I probably would have dropped out (11) Recommend to everyone (15) Top most important	Didn't go – I was determined to d it on my own after I couldn't get into Learning Support (11)	Yes – extremely helpful; couldn't wait to go to it (12) they taught a lot about me and what I needed to do to get through school (3) Second	I was there a lot but didn't really use the librarians (11)	My advisor was terrible; after my first semester I didn't go back (9) I taught myself how to pick courses (10, 16)	No (14)
19	Office hours helpful; calling them; got help with math from my instructor – always there and	They were fun and kind of easy (2)	NO, I did well up until Chemistry and when I would go for help there was no one there to tutor in chem.. (7)	Yes – very good (10)		Yes, she helped to choose classes; before this, I did it on my own from	Yes, the first time I went I found out what forms to fill out and then

	explains clearly – all of the instructors were pretty good (8); chemistry teacher poor –didn't really teach; acted like we should have already known (8, 9); Bio teacher – easy to learn; funny examples to help us remember; teaches the info. And how to learn – still friends (11) Top most important(11)					HACC's website (8)	after that I did it on my own. (9) Second most important (11)
20	A lot of them e-mailed and offered to help after class (11) Only my humanities teacher wasn't and the math teacher I dropped – I felt like I was a nuisance because I asked so many questions (12); I had great professors (12)	The math was helpful – not my strong point; didn't think I was bad at reading but I enjoyed it (7)	I used the math lab two times (9) maybe once a week	Yes, very helpful (4); taught study strategies and how to deal with school and how not to give up	The library workshop was helpful for my classes , but they came to our class, I didn't go to them.(14)	I used the catalog and logged on to my program; The director was my advisor (14)	No – I loaned money from the bank – came out debt-free (9)

Appendix D

Teaching Methods

	Teaching Methods
1	<p>Because I had a real good instructor in college algebra and I got a B in college algebra. She really – she made sure she showed every point even though some students may need to see several steps like myself and she said okay, now I showed you that step, now I'll show the people that only need just a few steps so she showed these two different methods for when you leave her class then you can go practicing the homework assignments. She takes her time with students that come to her office and makes sure because I guess she doesn't like to see any students fail and I like professors like that and that's one thing that helped me through college, too. I would always communicate with other students. I'd say what did you think about this professor? Do you think would this professor be okay for me take? Oh, not really, but I think you should take this one (Are you talking about the advisors?) No, these will be students. Sometimes you can learn from students because some students will tell you don't take that class. (That is important, I think) Cause sometimes we can pick a class and then oh man that teacher don't really explain things thoroughly like they should and they just want you to take the information and you to do the best you can. They don't break things down. (5)</p>
2	<p>Yes, I think if you have a good teacher, the chances are better that you will achieve what you want to achieve. Somebody teaches that lesson to you, when you need somebody to pay attention to you. I know that some of the challenges that the students have there are some hard courses that you need help from the professors to explain it plainly what they need - that there are some of the professors that sometimes they just come to the classroom and when you ask them, they will not be telling you what they actually need. They might be having no time, or they might be helping the other students. (So you need time and good information or helpfulness when you need it – that's good. That's what could be better. (Which of our programs in terms of our courses, our teaching methods, our teachers, our advisors do you think – would you recommend that we keep them just like we are because they're good just the way they are?)</p> <p>Lecture with good notes. (20)</p> <p>More good than bad here but one teacher got off subject; not teaching in a way that helped to learn. (20)</p>
3	<p>(Think back to the different instructors you had all through school and their teaching methods. What did you find helpful to make you successful? Did you find any that were helpful, weren't helpful – did work well for you, or did work well?)</p> <p>I don't think so, because like I said before, it just seemed each teacher was there at the right time in my life to be able to help me. A lot were very willing to help you succeed and keep you going through school.</p> <p>(So you didn't run into any bad situations – some students can. With courses that you felt were absolutely worthless, or anything like that. In that you were blessed. Did you ask other students "Who should I take for such-and-such a class?")</p> <p>No.</p> <p>(You just took what worked for your schedule?)</p>

	Right. And I just figured it was part of the learning of people skills and how to deal with people that you may not like. (9)
4	Well, every teacher had their own way that was a little different from the other teachers, and like to me, it worked well when they explained it, when they would take time to explain things in more detail. To me, details are very important. Explain in detail – most were great. (6) Lectures were more confusing. (6)
5	I love when they write on the board. They can use the powerpoint just a half so it helps the student with English as a second language they can read for first before they come to the class but if they just use the powerpoint, I was bored. Completely powerpoint - only it's so boring. (10) (That's boring to you, ok. So, it works better if they write on the board and you take notes and then you learn your notes?) (10) Uh, to pass the test I think you learn from the class. Sometime the way I pass a class is with a group. I learned from the learning center with the previous students. They knew exactly what the professor expects for the test and they can help me with the area you need to focus and you need to learn to prepare for the test. And you pay attention. Usually my professor give you ok here are the things and sometimes you know maybe not appear on the test so I notice. I find helpful when the teacher you know puts things on the board and gets the students to work together with professor and lately I found some course I feel boring if the professor just use the powerpoint only. (You don't like if they just use the powerpoint?) I don't like if they use the powerpoint only. (10)
6	When I don't understand what the professor is teaching, I ask until I understand. Some people they don't understand but they don't ask. (8)
7	I remember one professor, she was a math professor, excellent. Her methods – I'm different when it comes to math, you know, I like to approach in a way – I don't what to format or how to do that problem, but she teaches you from the beginning and breaks that down. To me that was the best because you know, a lot of professors, they, well you have this course and they want you to branch off what you learned in that previous course. Me – it was like ok, when I see that its like a foreign language and I don't understand....but she was really excellent in that area of helping me understand what the problem was. (6) As far as her personality goes, it was excellent, too. I think that's also good. If she comes to her classroom, you know with her ready to teach, it makes you want to learn. She was different – if you couldn't get the problem this way, then work it that way you know, and have that one-on-one with her, that's really meaningful. She didn't make you feel like you shouldn't come to her office. (7)
8	PowerPoint presentations worked for me (10) What didn't work – lecture on and on (11) There's a lot of good teachers I had at HACC. (13) Yeah. They were pretty good about time. Teachers, that's one good thing about teachers, you know, here is 'cause they live around the area, they...yeah...give up some of their time to come and help you if you're struggling. (16)
9	Some don't explain a lot cause they just want to go ahead and keep on schedule and they rush. (9) The methods for this instructor that some of the other students – one of my friends or other college students tell me about, that she is

	<p>a good professor, that she explains a lot, did she help other students know why we made mistakes or why this letter format is supposed to be indented or whatever; and some of the students told me she is very good professor and she helps us learn and she tells us about what we make mistakes for and I choose that professor. I feel confident that I can trust this professor to know what her methods are and free to fill this pretty basic simple to do some other type-in and do everything and do some documentation stuff. It's really helpful for me because sometimes some professors don't describe or explain a lot; like one of my math professors one of them doesn't explain a lot like how you figure out that problem to like figure out all the problems here and answer – it's like write on the other side. I don't remember that number before and I was like, "Oh wait – that is the right number" and like he doesn't explain a lot cause sometimes he just wants to plan ahead and keep on their timing and they're in a little rush and that's why I don't like other college students explaining to me about so how's your first day and how's your professors reacts or how they explain about? Like one student tells me about how this teacher doesn't explain a lot how to figure out problems or how this other documentation or how this law thing and never really explains about the case-study that we never studied for a test coming up and that's why some of them have some problems and issues with that part. (9, 10)</p> <p>Same for other business professor, a senior professor who was a good lawyer. ..He didn't write notes on the board, he told us to write down our notes and I just like read the textbook so it makes sense because you never know what's going to be on the test, and then some of them were on it – that's why I just wrote down notes on the textbook or just use a tape recorder to listen to whatever he was saying. There was one woman who did use a big – not this size like this one – a big videocassette player and recorded it. I think she did well.but I didn't do so well.</p>
10	One professor was very scheduled and organized. I like that (7). One spoke very fast and mostly lectured. I didn't understand a word – he wasn't very good (7). Otherwise they were all fine. (7)
11	Videos and verbal connections between group work. Variety (9) Early childhood had more activities which was good because lecture doesn't work as well for me. (9)
12	Very helpful, especially with my one professor. We had a special connection. She didn't mind us calling her by her first name. That made us feel comfortable. I would ask her: "I don't understand this could you please help me?" She was like, "Yeah, sure." It wasn't just before class, after class... It wasn't just her, another professor, I met with him a couple of times. But there were a lot of classes that I liked their teaching methods. Like I said I am a visual learner-if I see, I'll know it. That's about it with the teaching. I never really had a problem. (You never had a bad experience in terms of how somebody taught?) Maybe one -his teaching methods were a little hard to understand because you are so used to all your other classes. He gave us handouts. The lectures were a little boring. A lot of us students weren't really into it. I have to be into the class. I'm all about learning and I'm all about learning anything new or different, but if the teacher is not enthusiastic about it, it is hard for us students to be. (What teaching methods did you find most helpful?) Hands on. Hands on all the way, pictures-very visual, small groups. We did small groups in English a lot... Small groups were pretty interesting to get everyone else's opinion and their vibe on the concepts of our learning.(9)
13	Well I guess for the English classes you would use note cards to study. They were small and you could carry around. I found myself taking them with me to work on a Friday evening going with my parents shopping. I could just look at them real quick in the car and

	<p>it helped me to remember. It takes a lot of time preparing the note cards but it is worth it. Lecture was not a problem for me. Those that were there to learn were there to learn and those who were not there to learn you could tell. In the lower level classes the professors wouldn't put up with it. As you got up to your college level classes-what I am getting to is the cell phones. You are sitting behind a student who is not even paying attention, but you hear the phone vibrate and go off and they're sitting there texting and you are trying to listen to the professor and you just have distractions like that. That becomes hard. Lecture wasn't really a problem for me it was just the students around that you see just sleeping. They come to class and they are not even with it. Why do they waste their time coming if they are not going to learn? I usually don't let that bother me that much. If there is something you can go afterwards to the professor. Some of the professors didn't put up notes. I would get part of it and the distraction would catch me off and I would go up after class and say "I wrote down this part and missed the rest." They would go back in their notes and read it right back to me. They understand the distractions. A lot of them did but there were a few that didn't. If you needed them to repeat they would. (9)</p> <p>Some of the professors-One of the things that I learned in my effective speaking class is when you present something you have to bring forth the information in a way that the students aren't going to sit there and just fall asleep. Be excited about what you are there teaching. All the things that they offered you were great, they are very knowledgeable, but some of the professors and the way that they presented it almost acted like they didn't care. It wasn't the ones that I signed up for-it was those that you signed up for that just said "staff". You didn't know who you were getting for a professor. Some of those you could pick. Some came in to fill the class basically. You knew who they were because they presented the information and they were gone after class. There was no enthusiasm. That didn't make those classes very exciting or worthwhile going to. (10)</p>
14	<p>I think it was more about their attitude. If they were excited about what they were teaching this was really helpful. It may have been 9:00 at night but they were just as excited as if it was their first class at 7:00 in the morning. That helped a lot. It wasn't like I'm here because it's my job and I gotta be here. I also liked seeing stuff on a board or something. That helped me. (6) But if they just talked and talked, that didn't work well for me. (6) Use powerpoint or visual – make it relevant. (7)</p>
15	<p>I had my days where it was hard. I had teachers that didn't explain things at time and I thought they were scatter-brained at times. I had one teacher that came up to me and said "What can I do to help you?" I didn't pass a test. I said, "if you are going to teach about a topic, stay on that topic so we can take notes on that topic and then transition into something else." (He was all over the place?) Yes, I had a biology teacher like that and I barely passed that class with a C, she was a doozy. (Biology is a strong point for you I would guess....) Well it depends on the teacher. (1, 2) My Biology Class I was worried that I wasn't going to pass. I had to work really hard to get the grade that I did. I did fine, but the tests were very hard. She would talk so fast that you would have to write notes so fast and by the time you were done they were hard to read. (3) (You talked about a class that you almost didn't pass and that would have been because the teacher was not systematic and organized</p>

	<p>so that didn't work.)</p> <p>It was good for the labs but how she had us take notes and the way she talked so fast. That made that course difficult. You would have to reread chapters and go over your notes and you have to highlight things. You were basically re-teaching yourself. You were better off sleeping through the class and doing the work on my own. When the teacher stays on topic and explains things thoroughly is really helpful. If they are really scatter-brained than normally I don't do as well. (7)</p> <p>They always told us what the office hours were. If you showed up to class late you could go and talk to the teacher. My health teacher was also a Registered Nurse and when I saw him [working at the hospital] I already knew him so it was already someone that I knew before I even started. He really encouraged me. He was a really nice guy. He was just a little scatter- brained. He would talk about patients that he dealt with and then he would go and talk about something completely different. Then near the end he started taking what I said and actually staying on topic and then transitioning into maybe he had a patient that was something like we were just talking about and saying something about it. (7)</p> <p>In 001 when we would be reading and we have discussions that would really help. When someone didn't understand a part and the teacher would try to explain so we all would understand. The classmates sometimes were able to help explain things as well. (7)</p> <p>My Medical Terminology Biology teacher would help me. We would have the little cards with medical terms on it and she would quiz us before she gave us the test. She would run through all of the cards with us to refresh our memory. It would really help on the test. (9)</p> <p>15. (There was something that didn't work so well?) I definitely feel that Biology 121, the teacher was a nice lady, but she needed to slow down and explain things better. She just sped through the whole class and didn't really care. She didn't act like she cared whether we got the notes or not. She just seemed like she was going to teach to get the material done and go home. That was the kind of attitude she had. She didn't want to put forth the effort to be a good teacher. (9, 10)</p>
16	<p>When the professors would write stuff on the board would raise their voice when something was important – that was very helpful to me. Teachers that used different methods and not just the stick to one method because I didn't understand “this” method, but I know that... They encouraged you to write things down on flash cards. They encouraged the other students to find their own way of learning that worked for them. That was important. I don't know how to read and comprehend it but I can read it and write it several times till I do get it. (What methods didn't work-Something that didn't change-like lecture?) Yes</p> <p>(Do you recall any time when you didn't get anything?)</p> <p>To tell you the truth, no- I did have a horrible instructor in Math.(13)</p>
17	<p>I would say when you go into a class to be able to have a professor that lays everything out. They can't be vague. The need to lay all their cards on the table, you need positive reinforcement like the math teacher. It is hard for adults to go back to school and sit in a classroom with all of the young students can be intimidating for a little bit. (I can understand that.) The positive feedback was good. (14)</p> <p>I think that you can tell when a teacher is motivated and teaching and loving what she does because it shows in her work. It showed when she was describing things. Not all teachers are going to be that way and that is ok too. I think what was most difficult was my</p>

	<p>English 102 teacher. He was extremely smart and good and that was confusing and that was confusing and you didn't get the real picture until the end of the course. You learned a lot in his class but that was confusing. I think my biology class. The one biology teacher was not flexible and that was hard. I worked 20 hours plus full time school. I was trying to fit in my work hours and go to Harrisburg to fit my classes. For the lab I asked if it was ok to take your lab and not the other professors because there is a time frame. She totally refused. It worked out to my advantage anyway. (11)</p> <p>My professor was wonderful. She gave us guidelines. She told us what to expect. This is for you and not for me. I am here to teach you. I am here if you need me. She just laid all the cards on the table. That is essential for professors to do that right away. (6)</p>
18	<p>The first two times it was the same teacher. I found her very hard to follow. I am a visual learner. You can't just read to me out of the book. My first teacher I had just read out of the book. She was not visual. I need to be visual and I need to actually do it before I can understand it. They did try to help me but I just couldn't get it. It was clicking and I didn't feel like it was for me. (5)</p> <p>Most of my math classes were willing to accommodate me. They all had a copy of my IEP and my doctor wrote a letter and they had a copy of that as well. They were all pretty accommodating. I got the extension of time on my own. I got the chance to use the calculator too so that was ok.</p> <p>(So that the professors did from what you gave them-it didn't come from the top down?) Right (12)</p> <p>As long as they wrote notes up on the board I was pretty good. As long as they told us what they were going to focus on that day that would be helpful to me. I figured the rest out myself. Vocabulary words I would make flash cards. For reading I would take notes and write notes in the margins in my books. I would always have my notebook there and I would always be writing. That is how I did it.(14)</p> <p>(So really when it came to methods as long as they were organized and clear you could pretty much do any course?) Yes. (You would have your way figured out.)</p> <p>If they would just stand up there and lecture to you than you might as well forget it. I am going to just sit there and day dream. (Did you have many of those?) No. If I did I would transfer out of them. I don't remember doing that too much-there might have been one class. (14)</p>
19	<p>Yes, I enjoyed taking notes and learning. (3)</p> <p>I like my math instructor-mainly all of their instructors were pretty good. (Did you find more that were good than weren't?) The only one I had problems with was my chemistry teacher but other than that everyone else was fine. (What was it with the chemistry teacher that wasn't helpful?) He didn't really teach. He didn't really take the time to explain the material we had read. He seemed to confuse everything. He didn't go along with the book and taught differently from the book. I was actually angry one day at class because he was just sitting there and not really teaching. I felt like he didn't teach like he should have. (You knew there was a better way to teach that what he had been doing.)</p> <p>I even went to him a lot of times and I told him I was an A/B student and my GPA is such and such and this is the worse class I have ever been in. (8)</p> <p>(The teaching methods that the teachers used (other than the chemistry) did they teach in such a way that you could learn?) Yeah</p>

	<p>they would actually teach for us to learn. He taught us like we already should have known it. (9) My Biology instructor is excellent. He makes it so easy for us to learn. He uses examples in a funny way for us to remember. I can still hear them in the back of my head. I can't remember the course number. This was to the point where we had to learn the charts for the muscles and everything-piece of cake!</p> <p>(If you looked at the list that we just talked about all the developmental courses, the tutoring program, the advising program, the instructors and their methods and the financial aid which of those would you say are at the top of your list that you would say are absolutely necessary or they absolutely made a difference?)</p> <p>I would say the teachers. Their methods were excellent.(11)</p>
20	<p>I was more of an on hands person. I do things on task and not so much listen to PowerPoints or a lecture. I like interaction with the teacher in class. (Interaction, discussion...) Right (When you look back on your years here-did you have a fair amount of those compared to lecture?) I didn't actually (You had more lecture?) Yes (It could be because of your field.)</p> <p>Probably.</p> <p>(So despite that, you must have learned well with lectures because you were one of the twelve chosen.) That's true. It's harder to pay attention. Especially if you are tired or depends what time the class is. (But then when you go home you must be studying those notes.) Yeah I did try to review every day. (Yes, that is a good study technique) I never used to do that but when I started to get into my major I realized I needed to study every day. Sometimes it was just 15 or 20 minutes a day.</p> <p>(If everybody would do that it would make a world of difference.) I know, definitely. (Did you work at memorizing? Did you have memorizing tools?) Flash cards. Definitely flash cards.(10, 11)</p>

Appendix E

Teaching Methods Summary

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
1	X	X	X				X							
2	X	X	X	Pos.										
3		X												
4	X		X	Neg.										
5						X		Neg.	X					
6	X													
7	X	X	X											X
8		X	X	Neg.				Pos.						
9	X	X	X			X						X		
10	X		X	Neg.										
11				Neg.					X		X			
12	X	X		Pos.						X			X	
13		X		Neg.	X	X	X			X			X	
14				Neg.		X		Pos.		X				
15	X	X	X		X		X				X	X		X
16	X	X			X									
17	X	X	X				X			X				
18	X			Neg.	X	X			X				X	
19	X	X	X		X							X		
20				Neg.	X			Neg.	X		X			
Total	13	12	10	10	6	5	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	2

A – Clarity of instruction, step-by-step, detailed

B – Projects success to student, encourages, supports

C – Time – refers to instructor - taking time to explain or keeping to a schedule regardless of student achievement

D - Lectures – only or mostly

E - Notecards/notes

F - Writes on board – student finds it easy to take notes

G - Dumps information – content rather than student oriented

H – PowerPoint – recorded as positive or negative

I – Groups/Activities/Hands-on

J – Enthusiasm – teacher demonstrated love of the subject, enthusiasm about course

K – Class discussion

L – Use of textbook

M – Preference for Visuals

N – Stays on subject, no rabbit trails

This graph shows the number of participants who referred to each of the teaching methods listed.

Appendix F

	Personal Contact with Instructor	Rapport/Interpersonal Relationships	Instructor helpfulness – support toward success
1		If I needed to get something done I always stayed in communication with the instructor. (4)	They made sure I was accommodated for the things I needed to get down or to help me along my process and stuff. (3) I had a real good instructor ... I got a B in college algebra. She really – she made sure she showed every point even though some students may need to see several step like myself and she said okay, now I showed you that step, now I'll show the people that only need just a few steps so she showed these two different methods for when you leave her class then you can go practicing the homework assignments. She takes her time with students that come to her office and make sure because I guess she don't like to see any students fail and I like professors like that and that's one thing that helped me through [college], too. (10, 11)
2		Yes, I think if you have a good teacher, the chances are better that you will achieve what you want to achieve.	I remember that there was a time that I was taking [a course] and it was kind of a little bit challenging and the professor that I had for that class she was really very helpful. She encouraged me to go through with and then I become compatible with it so there was help that I was getting from her compared to when I went to [the university]. There was not anymore help like what I was getting here. (You got much more help

			<p>here.) The good things that was aware of when I started here and I knew it was a good idea coming from another country to go here rather than going straight to a four-year college. So my foundation at [the college] here was very relevant, very helpful. (5)</p> <p>Yes, I think if you have a good teacher, the chances are better that you will achieve what you want to achieve. Somebody teaches that lesson to you, when you need somebody to pay attention to you. I know that some of the challenges that the students have there are some hard courses that you need help from the professors to explain it plainly what they need - that there are some of the professors that sometimes they just come to the classroom and when you ask them they will not be telling you what they actually need. They might be having no time, or they might be helping the other students. (21)</p>
3		All the instructors were pretty personable. (9)	<p>(What kind of relationships did you have with your instructors? Were All the instructors were pretty personable, very willing to help with any questions, and didn't make you feel uncomfortable in asking a dumb question in class or they'd be available right after class. They wouldn't hurry up and pack up and leave right away but would give an opportunity for any other questions. (And did you take advantage of that?) Oh yes. (Did you use office hours of teachers?) Yes, I did. Especially the English writing teachers, they were always willing and offered for me to come during their office hours and I'll look over your papers, give you extra pointers, or let you know if you're on the right track. (9)</p>
4	The main thing that was important for me was that you were able to talk to them one to one, and there were a lot of students so you got that one on one time if you wanted to. That was great.	...most of the professors I had were great, they had great style that I liked. (6)	<p>The relationship – you were more close to the professor. It was more focused on what you're there for – focused on your career. (Good, I would expect that once you get to your major. (7)</p>
5		I feel any professor if I need help, I just go	<p>So when I started with the help from the professor. They encourage me so I just finish one class for the semester and I feel steady, feel like very</p>

		<p>and see them and they help me. (11)</p>	<p>strong and then I continue to speed up my study and take two courses for a semester. (2) They will tell you ok how you look like or how you will be in the future and believe it and go for it. (And you believed them? Yes. Was that your GED instructor?) The GED instructor and one of the professor from here.(Here?)Yeah. (4) So I said, “Ok. Let me go back my major in Business Administration”. So when I entered accounting class. So he [professor] just made me fall in love with accounting major. (But when you took accounting you found you loved it?) I found I loved it and I can do it and he convinced me. (And he inspired you?) Uh-huh. ...It’s just my feeling when I enter the class and the way he teach and he looked at the students. He just like ok you can do it and you can go for it. Yeah. Changed my major and make me feel confident, comfortable to continue to go.</p> <p>Whatever people said just make it and see how it works so I convince students you can do something so difficult. They are afraid to go to see him. I said “just go to see him and he help you.” He will, whatever the project in class so difficult and you come here you ask me and I’m going to help you. Just go see him. That’s how I did it before and I got the good grades. (Yes) Believe it.</p> <p>(Do you think you got a better grade because you went to see him than if you wouldn’t have gone?)</p> <p>Yes. Absolutely. If you don’t go see professor when you struggle, you won’t get good grades. And don’t listen to people, listen to student around say oh that one won’t help you. Just go see if they help or not help. But I got help. (So did he sit there with you and show you how to do?) Yes.</p> <p>(Ok. Almost like a tutor?) No. Not like tutor but he can point out ok here, how you do it. Or even like [the English professor] she just sit down and read my paper and here you can see all the way a little more professor. (Well that’s almost tutoring in the sense that it’s helping you to see how to do it better and to get a good grade. My impression of the [instructors] is that they will help so you’re confirming that, that the teachers will help you if you ask.)</p>
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			They really help you. Absolutely. (11, 12) Top most important to my success (12)
6		I said “Oh wow. That’s a good school.” (9) professors they are not...I don’t see any madness, nothing bad, they laugh with me and then they just would talk and we’d become like, you know... So, then it was so good, so good. So good to have that. (9)	They [professors] were ready to help me. I just remember that after the class then I have some questions and [the professor] took time to explain different things. That’s just great. It was just a good thing. The fact that [she was] open; I said “Oh wow. That’s a good school.” (9) They were ready to help me. So, then it was so good, so good. So good to have that. (9)
7	Every semester I had, I’d visit their office. Some weren’t so nice, some of them were excellent. – if you couldn’t get the problem this way, then work it this way you know, and have that one-on-one with her, that’s really meaningful. She didn’t make you feel like you shouldn’t come to her office...(7)	Some weren’t so nice, some of them were excellent. (7) As far as her personality goes, it was excellent, too. I think that’s also good. If she came to her classroom, you know with her ready to teach, it makes you want to learn. (13)	She was different – if you couldn’t get the problem this way, then work it this way you know, and have that one-on-one with her, that’s really meaningful. She didn’t make you feel like you shouldn’t come to her office... (So you did this in her office? You would go) The flexibility. What I mean by flexibility is the professors working with the students. You have a mixture of younger, older students so that flexibility – they understood that, you know, there are lots of students that are working fulltime and going to school part-time or full time as well. (13)
8		There’s a lot of good teachers I had at this college. (13)	They were pretty good about time. Teachers, that’s one good thing about teachers, you know, because they live around the area, they give up some of their time to come and help you if you’re struggling. (16)
9		Even though he does care a lot –he does	I know there’s like one professor that supported me a lot, but outside the college is like one of my friends – more than like five friends in stages,

		<p>care a lot about me and we just chat and talk – that’s why I went a different direction. I should probably stop by and see how he’s doing and see what he’s up to.</p> <p>and he’s always like whenever I was doing some activity stuff for SWAT, he’d just like stop by to chat with me a little bit and say, “Hi, how are you doing?”</p>	<p>going different phases, like going up and down and trying to like cheer them up because they don’t have enough money to pay for their next semester for their courses, though. (7) Same for other business professor, a senior professor who was a good lawyer. That’s why he does support for me a little and then tell me about what my future goals are going to be and ask why I had to drop his class, because I didn’t do so well for all the tests and stuff because I did write notes for myself. I went to him in the office to help me out on knowing what my mistakes are – the same for the homework assignment they give for extra credit points to help your grades up and that’s why I did pass that course very easily and I feel very confident about this teacher. (10)</p>
10		If I had a problem, I can talk to them and get understanding. (7)	
11	My music professor was very good she actually took me to her office and we kind of did some things there that helped me learn better. It was nice having that.	<p>My one professor I had was in theater and he actually came to see me in a play. I didn’t even know it, but he did. That was amazing to me because professors don’t usually do that they kind of just take your information and say OK I’ll see what I can do. She took us</p>	<p>I think the one that probably persuaded me to keep going was my last professor in science. He was the kind of guy that really gave me smiles. He really realized my disability. He helped me push through the class and make it through to the end. He was one of those people that really helped me get through and do it.(5)</p>

		<p>on a field trip and that was really nice. And the English professors were really good. Their relationship with me was excellent. I loved it in there. That was amazing, reading the plays and writing. It was just outstanding. Definitely, it was great here. I love it. (10)</p>	
12	<p>I talked with [my professor]. I talked to her like she was my counselor. She was very open. (6). (Did you ever go to office hours?) Oh yeah. (You would go to teacher's offices and ask questions?) Oh all the time. I mean even with my math teacher. I would say, "I don't understand this, can you please help me?" I met her before class, any time. Yeah I met with my teachers a good amount of time. I mean only because I wanted to make sure I understood something. I didn't want to just squeak by and not</p>	<p>I always liked her. She also came to my dad's funeral. I was really surprised. I didn't expect her to do that. She was the one who contacted all my teachers to let them all know what happened. (6) Oh yeah. I really enjoyed [this college]. (10) I really enjoyed [my professor]. To this day I still really talk to her. (11) Very helpful,</p>	<p>I would ask her: "I don't understand this could you please help me?" She was like, "Yeah, sure." It wasn't just before class, after class... It wasn't just her, I met with [another professor] a couple of times. I mean even with my math teacher. I would say, "I don't understand this, can you please help me?" I met her before class, any time. Yeah I met with my teachers a good amount of time. I mean only because I wanted to make sure I understood something. I didn't want to just squeak by and not understand something. (Did you find teachers were always open to that?) Oh yeah. (You never had trouble with a teacher who didn't want to meet you.) No. I enjoyed going to my math teacher personally first before the learning center, because she obviously was the teacher and she knows what we need to understand. Yeah she was very helpful. I mean she would help like five of us students at the same time. (9)</p>

	<p>understand something. (Did you find teachers were always open to that?) Oh yeah. (You never had trouble with a teacher who didn't want to meet you.) No.</p>	<p>especially [one professor]. We had a special connection. She didn't mind us calling her by her first name. That made us feel comfortable. I went back to the college a couple of times. We have that friendship. Not every teacher was like that. She was the only one I talked to. (Can you give an example of a time when received help that really made a difference?) I would have to go back to [my professor]. She was the one that was with me the whole time through thick and thin and from beginning to end.</p>	
13	<p>A lot of time, the teachers made themselves available. In high school teachers would stay after hours, but a lot of them were on the time schedule and they were done</p>		<p>If there is something [you didn't get] you can go afterwards to the professor. Some of the professors didn't put up notes. I would get part of it and the distraction would catch me off and I would go up after class and say "I wrote down this part and missed the rest." They would go back in their notes and read it right back to me. They understand the distractions. A lot of them did but there were a few that didn't. If you</p>

	once class was over they left. In college they were available. They gave you an office or home phone number. They would give you their email. There were plenty of ways that you could reach them and keep in contact with them. It just made it to the point that there is no way that you shouldn't be able to do the work because you had all of the help that you would need. You could reach them. (8)		needed them to repeat they would. (9) My computer teacher-it didn't matter to her if- she was up sometimes to 3:00 in the morning. She did not care when you called her. She was there to help. I felt like I didn't need the learning center because I had professors that were helpful. (8)
14	I felt like I could go to any of the other teachers and asked them questions. (6)		I think it was more about their attitude. If they were excited about what they were teaching this was really helpful. It may have been 9:00 at night but they were just as excited as if it was their first class at 7:00 in the morning. That helped a lot. It wasn't like I'm here because it's my job and I gotta be here. (6)
15		He was a really nice guy. (7)	They always told us what the office hours were. If you showed up to class late you could go and talk to the teacher. My Allied Health teacher was also a Registered Nurse and when I saw him at [the hospital] I already knew him so it was already someone that I knew before I even started. He really encouraged me. (7)
16		Instructor that was very hard on us, but I loved her. (13)	I remember an instructor that was very hard on us but I loved her. This lady was hard on us but she expected us to know things. She would say if you follow these rules and if you learn those Ds will turn into a C. It wasn't easy to make that D into a C but you did. (13) I felt like they cared. I felt like they wanted me to succeed. They weren't there to fail me. They were there to teach me. They were there to see that the sanctity of the course went through. They were there to see me meet objectives and grow through my experience. I felt like if I wasn't

			meeting their expectations I could go up to them and ask for help. (14) I came out of there angry at him because he didn't connect with me emotionally. He didn't give me the support that I am used to-but he still gave me support. That was very different. Do you want me to give you a tissue or do you want me to give you a pen and a paper and you go at it? (14, 15)
17		My professor was wonderful. (6)	I was scared. I really was. I felt like I wasn't going to be able to retain the information and know how to do it. A math professor that I had said in the middle of the class the hardest thing to him was to encourage the elderly students and make them feel like they can do this. He was the first one to give me that boost. There were times I cried too because emotionally I thought I couldn't do it. I actually wanted to quit the CIS course because those guys came from this corporate operation. I thought this class was going to be so hard. I think he gave all of us a break only because it was a new program. You would go to the computer lab and the guy at the computer lab he would be encouraging. He would say "don't worry about it, you are doing fine." A lot of these professors comforted me. I was ready to cry at times it was so frustrating. The CIS teacher did help out. He said if you need help I am here. (4, 5) My professor was wonderful. She gave us guidelines. She told us what to expect. This is for you and not for me. I am here to teach you. I am here if you need me. She just laid all the cards on the table. That is essential for professors to do that right away. (6)
18			Overall they were helpful. I could go to them. (Would you say you had more good ones than bad ones?) Absolutely! (12)
19	The office hours that the instructors had were helpful. You could call them as well. I use the office hours for math. (9)	He'll even be walking and I'll beep the horn at him. (Is he young or is he older?) He is older. (He's been there a while?) Yeah probably, it is to the point where he	She is always there and she explains everything very clearly. I like my math instructor—mainly all of their instructors were pretty good. (The teaching methods that the teachers used (other than the chemistry) did they teach in such a way that you could learn?) Yeah they would actually teach for us to learn. He taught us like we already should have known it. (9) My Biology instructor is excellent. He makes it so easy for us to learn. He uses examples in a funny way for us to remember. I can still hear them in the back of my head. I can't remember the course

		<p>has students taking him out for lunch. (11) I like my math instructor-mainly all of their instructors were pretty good. (9) My Biology instructor is excellent. I love that professor. (11) Teachers (top of the list. (11)</p>	<p>number. (That's good. He taught in such a way that you remembered?) Yes. This was to the point where we had to learn the charts for the muscles and everything-piece of cake! (He not only teaches the information but he teaches you how to learn the information.) Exactly. (If you looked at the list that we just talked about all the developmental courses, the tutoring program, the advising program, the instructors and their methods and the financial aid which of those would you say are at the top of your list that you would say are absolutely necessary or they absolutely made a difference?) I would say the teachers. Their methods were excellent. (The first number one thing that helped you and supported you...) Were definitely the teachers. (11)</p>
20	O yeah a lot of them emailed and offered to help after class. (11)		