

EXPLORING ACADEMIC PERSISTENCE FOR NONTRADITIONAL BUSINESS
STUDENTS AT FOR-PROFIT UNIVERSITIES

by

Leroy Purdie

Liberty University

A Dissertation Prospectus in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored academic persistence for 10 nontraditional students pursuing business degrees at for-profit universities in southern Georgia and northern Virginia. The literature review provides a theoretical framework based on Tinto's (1975) theory of persistence and Bandura's (1993) self-efficacy theory. Data was collected through a demographic survey, timeline of significant events, in-depth survey, and a letter of advice. Data analysis included identifying significant statements, utilizing participant feedback to create structural and textural descriptions and ultimately describing the participant essences of their experiences. The decision to pursue a degree themes that emerged were career progression, family security, transferability, and convenience. The academic integration themes were engagement, personal relations, and encouragement. The social integration themes were positive student experiences, confidence building, and positive team interactions. Finally, the characteristics of persistent student themes were self-efficacy and faith.

Keywords: business, for-profit, nontraditional student, persistence

Dedication Acknowledgements Page

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List of Abbreviations

American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)

American College Testing Program (ACT)

Associate of Arts (AA)

Bachelors of Arts (BA)

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

Government Accountability Office (GAO)

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Initial Public Offering (IPO)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Higher Education Amendment (HEA)

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

For several decades federal and state entities have invested in programs with the purpose of providing access to higher education (Tinto, 2012). A myriad of students have the opportunity to attend college but many of them do not persist until completion. Several of the students attending college are nontraditional students and they attend for-profit organizations to pursue their business degrees. Anstine (2013) found that approximately 44% of all college students do not persist until graduation. Tinto (1975) hypothesized students who were socially and academically integrated into college were more likely to persist and Bandura (1993) believed that students with confidence in their ability coupled with the guidance of effective faculty members were likely to be successful in school. The most recent literature reemphasizes the importance of integration and its impact on student success (Tinto, 2007). Even though studies have repeatedly indicated the positive impacts of student social and academic integration, additional research is necessary to determine programs that positively impact student persistence. This chapter provides information related to the purpose, and significance of the study as well as the research plan for data collection. This chapter also introduces the research questions that were used to guide the study.

Background

More students are entering college than ever before; however low persistence rates are common (Barnett, 2011). Anstine (2013) contended approximately 44% of students in the United States do not persist until graduation and many of the students are classified as nontraditional. Nontraditional students generally do not enter college during the same year they graduate high school, do not depend on their parents for financial support, work at least 35 hours

per week, and may be single parents (NCES, 2011). Several of the nontraditional students enroll in for-profit universities pursuing their business degrees.

At the beginning of 2013, more than 21.8 million students were expected to attend American universities or colleges (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Fast Facts, 2013). The 21.8 million students are approximately 6.5 million more than were enrolled during the 2000 school year (NCES Fast Facts, 2013). Approximately 39% of the 21.8 million enrolled students met nontraditional student status (NCES, 2014). Nontraditional students are generally identified by age and also part-time registration status. Several nontraditional students attend courses to assist them in their current occupations while some attend with intentions on finding a new occupation. Giliardi and Guglietti (2011) posited nontraditional students meet one of the following criteria: (a) delayed enrollment after high school, (b) part time college attendee, (c) works full time hours, (d) financially independent, (e) has other dependents than spouse, (f) or does not have a diploma from high school.

During the 2009-2010 school year there were more than 350,000 degrees conferred in the field of business (NCES, 2011). Business programs are extremely important today. The mission for business programs is to prepare students for employment opportunities especially when jobs are scarce. Business programs are also responsible for producing business leaders, entrepreneurs, and individuals capable of creating businesses to stimulate the economy (Cavico, Mujtaba, & Bahaudin, 2010). While many nontraditional students graduate with their degrees in business, a higher proportion of nontraditional students do not persist in college. Roberts (2010) found that the typical college student graduates from college within six years. Persistence is defined in this research as a student enrolling in college and completing a four-year degree within six years. When overwhelmed with life activities, many students make the decision to

depart from college. Bennet and Kane (2009) found disparities in the number of students persisting through their first year of business courses in 12 universities during the 2005-2006 school year. Persistence rates were 84% at the higher end of the 12 university study; however, on the lower end of the 12 university study, first year persistence rates were alarmingly low at approximately 30%. Deming, Goldin, and Katz (2013) found for-profit organizations are attuned to the marketplace and quickly open schools, train faculty, and offer programs in fast growing areas such as healthcare and information technology. For-profit organizations provide the same curriculum at several locations and a bulk of their profit is generated from federal student aid. A gap in literature exists surrounding persistence for nontraditional business degree seeking students attending for-profit organizations.

Situation to Self

As a graduate and undergraduate instructor of business and general studies courses at a for-profit university I have the opportunity to teach many courses with new students. Often, I am the first instructor many nontraditional students pursuing their business degrees have the opportunity to meet. Over the last seven years I have witnessed many students discontinue their education. Unfortunately many of the students making the decision to drop out of school do so during their first year. I have always been curious about what really makes students persist in college when they enroll. Several of the students who dropped out of my school were talented and had the potential to be successful. By the same token, there were other students who struggled during their first classes that continued with their studies and completed their degrees. This study is important to me because I was eager to understand the role I might fulfill in student persistence. I wanted to find key social and academic integration strategies that prove useful in helping students persist in their education at for-profit educational institutions. I am a firm

believer students are generally more successful and persistent when they feel as if they are a part of the organization which is supported by the literature. I was also interested in strategies my organization could use to increase student persistence. This study helped me to find beneficial social and academic interaction strategies positively impacting student success as well as persistence in college.

My ontological assumption was that participant perspectives related to persistence would be provided and as a researcher I undertook the responsibility of describing their perspectives. I understand that the participants provided information as they believed it to be true and I found consistent themes amongst the participants' descriptions. I also described the situations provided by the participants related to their reality as it related to persistence during their college experience. Stalker (2009) found that ontological narratives help us to understand our social reality and they also help us to understand events and histories of others. Ontological narratives are provided by the participants and as a researcher I provided thematic interpretation of the information. As a researcher I was able to explore the social reality of nontraditional students who persisted in a business program at a for-profit university. The paradigm that was used to guide this study was constructivism. A constructivist's view is a reflection of learning that has previously taken place (Cobern, 1993). I understood that knowledge is "fallible by virtue of lacking exactitude and comprehensiveness" (Cobern, 1993, p. 109). As a researcher I understood that knowledge is an interpretation of my experiences and for my knowledge to be worthy I had to ensure my experiences were interpreted meaningfully (Cobern, 1993). The participants had the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences while completing their degrees. Their experiences happened within the last five years and I understood the role I undertook when describing their experiences. The participants also had the opportunity to create a timeline of

significant events impacting their success while completing their degrees. When describing the information I carefully bracketed my own personal experiences to ensure I did not insert my personal opinions into the information provided by the participants. Moustakas (1994) believed our conscious world is not observed when describing the phenomenon we are researching; instead, we investigate the new information with a fresh perspective. To ensure the information I was describing was new and fresh to me, I set aside previous knowledge of similar situations, restrained myself from relying on what I believed to be true, and searched for information in its newest form. There was no presupposition on my part when describing the information as it was presented. The descriptions reflected the participant's ideas and not my own. I recorded my personal thoughts throughout the process to ensure the data I described was reflective of the participants' experiences and not my own.

Problem Statement

The problem is that a significant number of nontraditional students enroll in business programs at for-profit colleges and do not persist. More students are enrolling in college than ever before. According to Frazier (2012) 40% of the students enrolling in higher education courses are nontraditional students. Despite the large number of students enrolling in higher education courses, fewer than one third complete their degree of choice (Barnett, 2011). Nontraditional students are at a higher risk of dropping out than traditional students (Giliardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2002) reported that only 30% of a 1994 cohort of nontraditional students persisted. Student persistence has become a major issue in higher education. The students do not accomplish their goals and many of the students dropping out of for-profit colleges incur significantly higher debt amounts than students who drop out of public colleges or universities (Deming, Goldwin, & Katz, 2013). DiMaria

(2011) found for-profit universities charge from six to thirteen times more for education than public institutions. Deming, Goldwin, and Katz (2013) discovered that for-profit universities enroll a more disadvantaged population of students in comparison to other postsecondary schools. Approximately 95% of nonprofit school students have high school diplomas as compared to only 75% of for-profit students (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2013). According to Tolbert, Moore, and Wood (2010), nonprofit organizations differ from for-profit organizations in the following ways: (a) a significant amount of nonprofit organizations resources are obtained from other organizations not expecting repayment, (b) the organization is operating for purposes other than making money, and (c) there are no ownership interests in the organization that can be sold (Tolbert et al., 2010). Deming et al. (2013) found that for-profit institutions train faculty and offer programs in fast growing areas such as healthcare and information technology. For-profit organizations provide the same curriculum at several locations and a bulk of their profit is generated from federal student aid.

Several of the nontraditional students enrolled in for-profit organizations enroll in business programs. Deming, Goldin, and Katz (2012) found that approximately 50% of the programs offered in for-profit organizations were business related. Unfortunately, many of the students enrolled in business programs do not persist until completion. Bennett and Kane (2009) believed that business programs from a 12 year university study reflected first year student retention rates as low as 30%.

Researchers have dedicated significant time studying student persistence and degree completion (Hsu & Bailey, 2011). Giliardi and Guglielmetti (2011) found nontraditional students are more likely than other students to drop out of college. Although a great deal of time has been dedicated to student persistence, a gap in the research exists related to persistence for

nontraditional business degree seeking students attending for-profit organizations. There is a need for additional research to explore persistence in nontraditional students pursuing business degrees at for-profit universities.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore persistence for nontraditional students who pursued business degrees at for-profit universities. The focus of the inquiry was to research nontraditional student persistence for business students graduating from for-profit universities. Nontraditional students are generally identified by age and also part-time status. Generally, nontraditional students do not enter college during the same year they graduate high school, do not depend on their parents for financial support, work at least 35 hours per week, and may be single parents (NCES, 2011). Several nontraditional students attend courses to assist them with their current occupations while some attend with intentions on finding a new occupation. Nontraditional students find that for-profit organizations meet their needs for personal and professional advancement.

For-profit organizations are identified as organizations that are attuned to the marketplace and quickly open schools, train faculty, and offer programs in fast growing areas such as healthcare and information technology (Deming et al., 2013). For-profit organizations provide the same curriculum at several locations and a bulk of their profit is generated from federal student aid (Deming et al., 2013). According to Deming et al., (2012) for-profit organizations are not as confined as public educational institutions in relation to their physical location, tenured faculty or alumni. They have the ability to create curriculum based off the needs of the local populace and at the same time create structured programs to assist with timely program completion. They also quickly offer identical programs in different locations to increase

enrollment. During 2000-2009, enrollment in healthcare classes doubled in public institutions. During the same timeframe enrollment tripled in for-profit educational institutions (Deming et al., 2012). Although public institutions doubled their healthcare related programs during the 2000-2009 timeframe, for-profit organizations quadrupled the number of programs available to students (Deming et al., 2012).

Tinto's (1975) theory of persistence was used to guide this study. Tinto believed students who were socially and academically integrated into the institution of higher learning were more likely to persist (Tinto, 1975). After forty years of research, Tinto (2007) found that his original ideas about retention were incomplete and additional details were necessary to understand student persistence. Student demographics are significant when attempting to determine persistence. When attempting to impact student persistence leaders should have an understanding of the sociological, psychological, and economic factors related to individual students. Sociological, psychological, and economic factors are significant indicators as to what may cause a student to depart from school. Tinto (2007) hypothesized that the first year was a critical time to impact students and increase a student's chance of completing a degree. Tinto (2007) discovered connectedness to family was important for increasing student persistence and he also found that engagement is paramount to student persistence. Students who remain connected to their families, churches, and even tribes are more likely to persist (Tinto, 2007). In order to increase student persistence from an organizational standpoint, staff and faculty members have to be heavily involved with the students. Tinto's later research focused on the importance of faculty members heavily engaging students while in the classroom (Tinto, 2007). Students who do not live on campus are not likely to have any other type of engagement that would link them to the school and serve as a positive contributor to persistence.

Significance of the Study

This study may be beneficial to for-profit universities and society in general. When students persist in college they will have the potential to find employment that will assist them in repaying the loans they borrowed while completing their degrees. Their degrees will also help them to fulfill their societal roles by becoming contributing members of society. This study provides information on the impacts of social and academic integration in for-profit organizations. The information can be used to assist for-profit organizations in creating environments conducive to student persistence.

This study is significant within the field of education because it will add to the literature related to student persistence for nontraditional students. It may also prove beneficial for researchers studying nontraditional business students pursuing their degrees at for-profit universities. The information offers insights into nontraditional student characteristics as well as their individual life and school experiences that led them to persist in spite of difficulties. The information can be used to compare and contrast other demographics and at the same time analyze persistence characteristics. The research sheds light on why students in business programs remain in school until degree completion. The information gleaned from this study may be beneficial in providing researchers with similar studies a baseline as to what is relevant to student demographics as well as individual characteristics when researching persistence. It is hoped that the findings of this study will help researchers to better understand why students enroll in for-profit universities and their motivations for persistence. The study provides information on their experiences as well as the characteristics of individuals or organizational initiatives that helped them to persist. Bandura (1993) hypothesized students are more successful when they believe in their ability to be successful. Students believing they have the ability to be

successful are likely to be successful in college. In similar fashion, faculty members, and staff with feelings of self-efficacy are able to positively impact student success in college (Bandura, 1993). Tinto (1975) believed lack of integration into the college may lead to low commitment and the students may leave the organization. This study provides information on integration and efficacy as well as reasons why nontraditional students enroll in business programs at for-profit colleges. The results of the study are beneficial to the organization being studied and will provide additional information as to what helps their students to enroll and persist in their organization. Increased student persistence ultimately increases the organization's bottom line. When nontraditional students persist in business programs at for-profit universities they increase the credibility of the organization as well.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What motivated nontraditional students to enroll in a business program at a for-profit higher education institution?

This question provides information as to why the nontraditional students chose a business program as well as the for-profit organization. Bandura (1993) posited students' beliefs in their own personal efficacy are beneficial in assisting them with their motivations and aspirations. Nontraditional students believing they have the ability to complete a degree are likely to pursue business degrees to help them in their current and future occupations.

Research Question 2: What staff, faculty, and peers academic integration strategies helped nontraditional students persist in completing their degree at a for-profit higher education institution?

Severeins and Wolff (2008) hypothesized formal academic integration consists of contacts related to the university itself and informal academic integration involves student and teacher

contact outside the direct context of the learning environment. Tinto (1975) believed students with higher degrees of academic integration are more likely to persist while in college. This question was beneficial in exploring student, staff, and faculty interactions on nontraditional student persistence.

Research Question 3: What were the nontraditional student experiences involving faculty, staff and peer social integration characteristics that helped them to continue pursuing their degree at a for-profit higher education institution?

According to Tinto's (1975) retention model, students who perceive there are more benefits than costs related to school are more likely to persist while in college. Nontraditional students perceiving they have friendships, satisfaction, and academic achievement are likely to continue on and complete their degrees. This question was beneficial in exploring student motivation to persist.

Research Question 4: What personal characteristics of the nontraditional students were helpful in their continued pursuit of their business degree at a for-profit higher education institution?

Bandura (1993) hypothesized students possessing self-efficacy pursued difficult situations as challenges and treated them as tasks to be mastered and not avoided. Nontraditional students with confidence in their abilities are more likely to persist in for-profit universities while pursuing their business degrees. This question was beneficial in exploring characteristics beneficial to persistence.

Research Plan

The methodology for the study was qualitative and the design was transcendental phenomenology. Whitmore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) believed qualitative research pursues

depth of information instead of breadth and it also attempts to find the “subtle nuances” (p.524) of life experiences. This study explored the life experiences of nontraditional students enrolled in business programs at for-profit universities. Purposeful criterion sampling was used to select students who persisted in college and completed their degrees. I solicited input from 10 nontraditional students who completed their business degrees at for-profit organizations. Creswell (2013) believed criterion sampling is beneficial to a study when all participants have experienced the phenomenon. The participants were contacted via email with an invitation to participate in the study and received additional email instructions if they met the study characteristics. Participants selected for the study participated during an in-depth interview, created a timeline of significant events, and also wrote a letter of advice for future college students. Moustakas (1994) posited transcendental phenomenology seeks to disallow prejudice or presupposition. This study sought to explore persistence with an open mind and to describe the meanings of the data.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to nontraditional students who completed their degrees at two for-profit universities. The participants selected for the study were nontraditional students who graduated with a business degree from a for-profit university. Nontraditional students are defined as students who do not enter college during the same year they graduate high school, do not depend on their parents for financial support, work at least 35 hours per week, and may be single parents (NCES, 2011).

Summary

At the beginning of 2013, more than 21 million were expected to attend American universities or colleges (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Fast Facts, 2013). Of those enrolled students there has been a rising number who are considered nontraditional. In 2011 approximately 39% of the students enrolled in four-year institutions were nontraditional (NCES, 2014). The number of nontraditional students pursuing their degrees continues to grow and many of the students pursue degrees at for-profit organizations. Tinto (2007) believed when attempting to impact student persistence leaders should have an understanding of the sociological, psychological, and economic factors related to individual students. Sociological, psychological, and economic factors are significant indicators as to what may cause a student to depart from school. This study is significant to the field of education because it sheds light on the characteristics of students who persist. It also provides information related to the impact of social and academic integration as well as adding to the literature related to student persistence.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter two presents a review of the literature related to persistence and self-efficacy. The review of information provides the theoretical background of persistence in students enrolled in college. The literature also provides details on strategies to assist universities, faculty members, and staff with increasing student persistence. The review provides data on Tinto's (1975) theory of persistence, Bandura's (1993) self-efficacy theory, as well as Maslow's theory of motivation (1943). The foundation for student motivation to enroll into college is underpinned from Maslow's theory of motivation. The review also provides information relating to academic integration, social integration, nontraditional student characteristics, business schools, for-profit organizations and loan default rates.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's (1975) theory of persistence provides a framework for this study. Tinto (1975) believed students who were not academically and socially integrated into an organization were less likely to persist than students who were integrated into the organization. Consequently, students who are academically integrated and not socially integrated are also less likely to persist. Students have to be academically and socially integrated into their organizations in order to increase their chances of persistence. Terenzini and Pascarella (1977) found that individual personal attributes as well as faculty and peer interactions within the organization can impact social and academic integration. Voorhes (1987) believed that student and faculty contact outside the classroom was beneficial in increasing student persistence. The type of integration efforts reported by participants frames this study.

Self-efficacy theory also serves as the framework for this study. Bandura (1993) contended students believing in their own self-efficacy are more likely to persist. When students have confidence in their abilities, when faculty members trust in their abilities to instruct students, and when faculty members believe in the program of instruction, the students are more likely to succeed.

Persistence Theory

For many years, researchers have attempted to determine the characteristics of students who persist in college. Although the number of students pursuing college degrees has increased, over the last decade, a disproportionate number of students failed to complete their college degrees (Chen, 2012). Chen (2012) contended approximately one fifth to one quarter of students do not complete their first year of college. Only 53.4% of a 1995-1996 cohort persisted after the first year (Chen, 2012). O'Keefe (2013) found that during the 2003-2008 timeframe more than 6.8 billion dollars were issued in subsidies to students who did not complete their first year of college. During the same timeframe more than 2.9 billion dollars in grants and student aid were paid to students who did not complete their first year of college as well (O'Keefe, 2013). Hetzel and Laskey (2011) posited a very diverse group of students are entering college and many of them do not possess the necessary skills to persist in college. Approximately 29% of students entering college are underprepared in one of the basic skills such as reading, writing, or arithmetic. Roberts and McNeese (2010) believed persistence rates vary from institution to institution. The variance of persistence is dependent upon the types of students attending the institution of higher learning. Educational institutions recruit specific students and it is their responsibility to ensure they create an environment in which their recruits can be successful (Roberts & McNeese, 2010). The underprepared students are often considered at-risk. At-risk

students have difficulties other than deficits in basic skills. Several at-risk students lack the motivation to pursue their degree. Some also lack time management skills, class concentration techniques, study strategies, and personality traits conducive to classroom success (Hetzel & Laskey, 2011). Academic persistence is a major issue in higher education and several researchers have attempted to determine characteristics and traits of students who have the drive to persist in college.

Barbatis (2010) contended retention rates are often considered indicators of the organization's quality of instruction. School administrators also consider support services and the student's success as a measure of organizational success. According to Fincher (2010) many organizations assess their success by their persistence rates. In order to increase academic persistence, researchers have sought to implement strategies to increase student persistence. Early models assessing attrition provided structural arguments relating to the institution's social charter and size (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977). Kamens (1971) found that large and prestigious organizations were more likely to have higher levels of persistence due to the selection of programs they had the ability to offer students. Students had several choices of programs and they also had recruiters on campus as well as alumni to help with integrating the students (Kamens, 1971).

Seidman (2013) found that there were several factors that impact persistence. He believed that factors such as breaking away from the family, first generation student difficulties, student proximity to home as well as classes with career focus impacted student persistence. Seidman (2013) contended several students were hesitant in breaking away from family ties and this negatively impacted their success in college. He argued that students were more successful when they embraced being away from home and were integrated into college activities. Students

who were first generation college students did not have family members to ask about college leading them to struggle with various college expectations and their studies. When students attended classes with a career focus they were more successful in school. Career oriented classes helped the students to make decisions on their future and they also helped the students to understand how the classes related to their future occupations. This study sheds light on many factors related to student persistence as well as techniques that may be beneficial in increasing student persistence.

Instead of relating organizational size to persistence in an organization, Tinto pursued a broader focus into how researchers actually measured persistence. Tinto (1975) believed that although there is a great deal of information related to academic persistence, researchers must ensure they are measuring student persistence instead of student withdrawal. Research on persistence was not always provided in a manner to distinguish concrete reasons students did not persist. Some students departed from college because of academic failure while others departed due to voluntary withdrawal. By the same token students permanently dropping out of college are often combined with students taking a break from school and returning at a later date (Tinto, 1975). While in college many students found that their schedules did not provide the necessary time they needed to be successful with their studies. Because of their schedules they may have withdrawn with intentions on returning at a later date. In order to assess student persistence, data should accurately reflect the reasons students do not return to college. Once an accurate assessment is completed in regards to the type of departure from college, a more in depth perspective on student persistence can be derived from the information (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto (1975) drew from Durkheim's theory of suicide and related it to student persistence. When students are not integrated into the institution of higher learning, suicide is

more likely. Students with insufficient moral value integration and insufficient collective affiliation are more likely to commit societal suicide. In essence, students dropping out of college (social system) are very similar to others committing suicide in larger society. Though colleges are comprised of academic and social systems, a lack of integration into either of the systems decreases the chances of persistence. Tinto's more current work sheds light on the importance of cultural, economic, institutional, and social forces that impact student persistence (Tinto, 2007). Wolniak, Mayhew and Enberg (2012) found that factors such as demographics, socioeconomic status, precollege academics, college grades, financial aid, college choice, and the role of social and academic integration were paramount to student persistence. Students who were academically prepared prior to entering college persisted at higher levels as well as students with adequate financial means. Terenzini, Lorang, and Pascarella (1981) believed student's precollege characteristics determined the level of commitment to goals and the institution. Students have different levels of goal commitment and which, in turn, interacts with the academic and social environment, of the organization which leads to varying levels of integration. When students are integrated into the organization they are more likely to persist (Terenzini, Lorang, & Pascarella, 1981). Terenzini and Pascarella (1977) found personal attributes such as skills, attitudes, and the environment when interacted with faculty members, administrators and peers, will impact social and academic integration. Social and academic integration remain key factors impacting student persistence.

Although there have been many models created relating to student persistence over the last couple of decades, integration or involvement has remained as a centerpiece for student persistence (Tinto, 2007). Tinto (2012) found that successful student integration positively impacts student retention. Even though integration is important, Tinto (2012) found that there is

not a great deal of information detailing what should be done to integrate students. Many of the programs created to integrate students are disjointed and do not meet organizational intent.

While integration and involvement are important, the first year is a critical time to ensure students are engaged in their learning environments.

Cox, Schmitt, Bobroski, and Graham (2005) found that the first year is the most crucial year for determining student persistence. Even though the first year is the most formative time for the students it is often the time when students receive the least satisfactory introduction to the university in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, and concept (Cox et al., 2005). In order to engage students, universities should provide innovative learning strategies to make the college transition easier (Cox et al., 2005). The greater task surrounding persistence is to determine how to make involvement matter regardless of the educational environment. Zepke and Leach (2010) posited engagement is a construct that can be variously defined. Engagement has been defined as a student's active participation in their learning as well as a student's involvement in activities that will lead to high quality learning. In a fashion similar to Tinto (2007), Zepke and Leach (2010) found that there are four conceptual perspectives on student engagement. The perspectives are as follows: student motivations and their willingness to learn, student and teacher transactions, institutional support, and engagement through political, social and demographic factors. When the preceding areas are addressed in an academic institution, student engagement increases and students are more likely to persist.

Although there are many new students entering college, several of them leave during the first year (Barnett, 2011). Sparkman, Maulding, and Roberts and McNeese, (2012) contended there are several predictors of student persistence and academic success. Tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the American College Testing Program (ACT) and high school

grade point averages (GPAs) predict success in college. Similarly, Mangum, Baugher, Winch and Varanelli (2005) found that factors such as the first semester grade point average (GPA), first semester course evaluation as well as the students' perceptions of their financial difficulties were predictors of persistence. Tinto (1975) believed in order to predict student attrition; the entire background of the student must be evaluated. Characteristics such as individual and motivational traits play an important role in persistence. Individual characteristics include social status, high school experiences, sex, age, race, ethnicity, and ability. Motivational attributes include career and educational expectations, and motivation for academic achievement (Tinto, 1975). Similarly, Maslow (1943) discussed the importance of human needs and their impact on individual motivation. Maslow (1943) hypothesized human needs are arranged on hierarchies of prepotency. In essence humans generally fulfill lower level needs only after they complete more powerful or important needs. Maslow (1943) contended humans are "wanting" animals and all their motivations are precipitated by their desires for satisfaction (p. 12). Maslow (1943) found when physiological, safety, and love needs are satisfied, humans will attempt to fulfill their esteem needs.

When fulfilling esteem needs, individuals search for a high self-evaluation, a high self-esteem and a high level of esteem from others. Consequently, when fulfilling esteem needs, students may elect to enroll in college because of a "desire for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for confidence in the face of the world, and for independence and freedom" (Maslow, 1943, p.12). Students may also search for prestige amongst their peers as well as highly distinguished reputations.

According to Wright, Guarnieri, and Murdock (2013) full time working individuals over the age of 25 earn 35% - 43 % more than others who do not have degrees and this financial

aspect serves as enticement for students to enroll in college as well. Individuals with degrees are also more likely to be hired for jobs (Wright et al., 2013). Tinto (2012) found that individuals who start college but do not graduate earn approximately \$750,000 less over their lifetime than individuals who complete their degrees. Individuals with an associate's degree earn approximately \$354,000 more than students with high school diplomas (Tinto, 2012). The monetary outcomes serve as motivations for students to enroll in college.

Although students make the ultimate decision to enroll in college, Williams and Williams (2012) found that elements of a student's educational environment play a critical role in keeping students motivated. According to Williams and Williams (2012) motivation is the process of motivating, a need or desire to accomplish something, and the action of an individual working toward completing his or her desires. Motivated students generally pay attention while in class, work on assignments sooner, ask and answer questions, and they are constantly motivated (Williams & Williams, 2012). In order for students to remain motivated, factors such as the students, teachers, educational environment, assignment content, and instructional methods are critical elements that may impact student success. In order to keep students motivated, faculty members should be trained, able to monitor student progress, dedicated to student learning as well as inspirational (Williams & Williams, 2012).

According to Schweinle and Helming (2011) higher levels of motivation and success are associated with students feeling as if they are challenged with their studies. Activities that are challenging are beneficial to student motivation. Consequently, activities that are too challenging tend to become devalued (Schweinle & Helming, 2011). According to Vanthournout, Gijbels, Coertjens, Donche, and Peter (2012) students are impacted by autonomous and controlled motivation. Autonomously motivated students are motivated to learn

because they want to learn and they learn on their own. They have internal motivations such as personal importance, or a perceived value is placed on the learning. On the other hand, control motivated students can be motivated by internal or external pressure to learn. Internal pressures such as shame, guilt or even pride may impact their actions as well as external motivations such as rewards or punishments (Vanthournout et al., 2012). Vanthournout et al. (2012) found that some students are amotivated and have no interest at all in learning. They do not generally participate in activities and they will have difficulties in studying. Vanthournout et al. (2012) also found that autonomously motivated students persist in school longer, earn better grades, concentrate more in class and are more engaged in learning in comparison to control motivated students.

Tinto (2007) admittedly agreed that portions of his earlier works were not complete and after four decades of additional research inroads have been made to explore persistence. Tinto (2007) argued the effects of classroom practice as well as the investment in faculty and staff may serve crucial roles in increasing student persistence. Higher education institutions may consider varying curricular as well as varying grading and assessment practices. These ideas have continued to be a major focus of universities today. When institutions of higher education place a concerted emphasis on academic as well as social integration they are likely to experience higher levels of persistence within their student populations (Tinto, 2007). Tinto (2012) found that only a quarter of the students enrolled in college are traditional students. When leaders assess student characteristics they have to understand that most students do not live on campus. They attend class for the duration and they depart to tend to their other obligations (Tinto, 2012). Their college experience is only the classroom. In order to increase persistence leaders have to be creative in providing beneficial classroom experiences to ensure their students persist.

Academic Integration

Severeins and Wolff (2008) believed formal academic integration consists of contacts related to the university itself and informal academic integration involves student and teacher contact outside the direct context of the learning environment. During this contact students and teachers may consider themselves on the same level socially and they may discuss personal matters (Severeins & Wolff, 2008). Woosley and Miller (2009) determined academic integration serves as a predictor to student success and persistence. They found that academic integration during the first three weeks of the semester were crucial to student persistence and success. Pascarella and Terenzini (1977) found when students interact with faculty members they increase their institutional commitment, as well as academic integration. Frequency of contact with faculty members also increases academic achievement and intellectual gains. According to Amen (2011) students remain in school when they perceive their intellectual and social values align and they are satisfied with the quality and values of the organization. Voorhees (1987) found that the most common indicator utilized to assess academic integration is the grade point average. Students with higher GPAs generally do better in school and they also persist at more significant levels. Some students may feel as if a high grade is the reward they receive for doing well with their studies. Similarly to Severeins and Wolff (2008) Voorhes (1987) believed contact between students and faculty members and staff outside the classroom helped students to be successful with their studies and to persist at higher levels. According to O'Keefe (2013) students who feel as if they have a positive relationship with one person at the university is more likely to persist. Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2010) also discovered that a relationship with one individual increases a student's chance of persistence and an aspiration to excel in their careers. Students experiencing informal interactions with faculty members seem to

be more motivated than those with formal relationships. Informal interactions between students and faculty members serve as agents of culture and they also influence student attitudes and values (Komarraju et al., 2010). Barnett (2011) posited student integration often leads to persistence and is often experienced through participation in college courses as well as engaging in campus activities. In order to help students to feel integrated into the organization faculty and staff members may consider discussing the student's personal goals, appreciating their cultural history, and or taking extra time to assist students with their class assignments (Barnett, 2011). Komarraju et al., (2010) hypothesized there are four types of student–faculty interactions. Students and faculty members are involved in functional interaction in which they discuss academic questions outside the classroom. They are involved in personal interactions in which they discuss personal issues. They also have incidental interactions in which they may simply speak to each other and disengagement when there is little interaction inside or outside the classroom (Komarraju et al., 2010). According to Talbert (2012) academic centered integration plays a tremendous role in increasing student persistence and academic success. When peers interact with their classmates and socialize they increase their cognitive development, self-confidence, and motivation (Talbert, 2012).

An additional dynamic that should be taken into consideration when assessing academic integration is the number of first generation students attending college for the first time. First generation students are students with parents who have no college experience. Woosley and Shepler (2011) indicated that first and non-first generation students have similar experiences as they relate to student or family participation. First and non-first generation students attending college are often influenced by encouragement from their parents, relatives and their guidance counselors. Unfortunately first generation students did not receive as much support as their non-

first generation peers. Many of the first generation students did not have people in their lives who knew the difficulty in adjusting to college life (Woosley & Shepler 2011). Vuong, Welty, and Tracz (2010) indicated that first generation students are twice as likely to drop out of college as their counterparts with parents who completed college. Woosley and Shepler (2011) found that first generation students are generally fairly disinterested in their high school courses and do not feel challenged. By the same token, these same students find that their first year of college can often be overwhelming. The first generation students have lower expectations about their grades and they may not be confident in their academic skills. According to Padget, Johnson, and Pascarella (2012) first generation students are highly disadvantaged. Many first generation students came from low income environments, spent less time socializing in high school, had lower standardized test scores and were less prepared academically to enter college. Several of the students had lower level critical thinking skills as well (Padget et al., 2012). Approximately 47% of first generation students accomplish their college degrees in comparison to their peers with at least one parent who completed college (Woosley & Shepler, 2011). Woosley and Shepler (2011) believed first generation students who felt as if they had the ability to complete their assignments were more likely to be successful. Woosley and Shepler (2011) stipulated that first generation students are at a higher risk of dropping out of college. First generation students may feel as if other students are members of a group in which they do not belong. They feel as if other students have different expectations as to the ways students should, dress, speak, or act while in school.

According to Vuong et al. (2010) first generation students experience barriers in accessing higher education and they are less likely than second generation students to persist until degree completion. First generation students also experience lower first term GPAs as well

as higher dropout levels. Woosley and Shepler (2011) found when first generation students find students who are similar to them and they are able to stay true to the people they really are, they are more likely to persist in college. First generation students are also more likely to persist in college if they find faculty members in which they can form relationships (Woosley & Shepler, 2011). These thoughts align with Bandura (1993) and his thoughts on student self-efficacy. Bandura believed relationships with faculty members with perceived self-efficacy increased student chances of persistence. According to Bandura (1993) confident faculty members create beneficial “mastery experiences” (p. 140), for their students.

According to O’Keefe (2013) students who have not been integrated into the organization and do not have a sense of belonging are more likely to drop out of school. Universities dealing with financial pressures have begun increasing class sizes, increasing the ratio of student to teacher and have become dependent upon online learning materials. These interventions have made student integration efforts more difficult. These initiatives have further disconnected the students from the academic staff of the organization and have increased chances of student withdrawal (O’Keefe, 2013)

Social Integration

Severeins and Wolff (2008) believed social integration consists of student involvement with peers on school assignments. Social integration may consist of collaboration on assignments as well as participating on team assignments for a team grade. The informal level of social integration may consist of frequent social contact and participation with activities provided by the university. When students have many friends and feel as if they are at home when at school, they have a better chance of persisting (Severeins & Wolff, 2008). Severeins and Schmidt (2009) contended that social integration at the formal level is centered on peer contacts

and matters of learning. Students may be expected to collaborate and this collaboration may have an impact on attrition. The informal level differs from the formal level because the formal level is characterized with frequent social contact and also participation in other student activities. Severeins and Schmidt (2009) emphatically believed students with friends at school and a sense of belonging in school have a much larger chance of completing a degree. Similarly Tinto (1975) believed social system integration could often lead to new levels of commitment. When students feel as if they are a part of the university they are likely to do well in their classes and they are more likely to persist while in school. Thomas (2000) contends peers are a very important source of influence while in college. When students feel as if they are integrated into the university they acquire satisfaction from the organization which in turn assists with persistence. Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, and Kommers, (2012) found that students who were connected with fellow students, and participated in extracurricular activities were more likely to graduate. The same concept applies to first-year students who have the social support of family and friends. They are likely to persist and they may do better academically (Rienties et al., 2012). Rientes et al. also found that being a member of a study association, fraternity or sports club increases social integration and can also positively impact academic success.

Self-efficacy

Bandura (1993) posited perceived self-efficacy plays a significant role in cognitive development and function. Self-efficacy is realized through motivational, cognitive, affective, and selection processes. There are also three levels in which perceived self-efficacy serves as a contributor to academic development : the student's belief in his or her ability to regulate and or master their academic activities, the teacher's belief in his or her ability to motivate students and

promote learning, and the faculties' beliefs in their collective instructional efficacy (Bandura, 1993). When students believe they have the ability to accomplish their goals, they are more likely to achieve them. Along the same lines, faculty members believing they have the ability to reach the students are more successful in the classroom as well.

According to Poore, Stripling, Stephens and Estep (2014) faculty efficacy is cyclical. When faculty members have confidence in their teaching abilities they put forth more effort and continue to teach courses. When they teach more courses they become better teachers and become more confident in their abilities increasing their efficacy. Majer (2009) contended self-efficacy is a mental resource that centers on an individual's ability to engage in behaviors with the intention of accomplishing goals. Gore (2006) contended self-efficacy was an individual's belief in their ability to perform successfully at a designated level. According to Madonna and Philpot (2013) self-efficacy is the perception individuals have on their ability to be successful in different situations. Although many individuals have adequate skills and abilities Bandura (1993) believed there was a big difference in having knowledge and skills versus being able to use them during times of duress. In other words, individuals need more than skills; they need self-belief as well in order to effectively utilize their skills. Two people with the same levels of skill may not be successful at the same levels if they do not have adequate self-belief (Bandura, 1993).

Self-belief serves as a key attribute in students being motivated to learn. Although self-belief is a major factor in accomplishing tasks, students with fixed self-theories have the tendency of knowing their limitations and then giving up when they do not achieve their goals (Zepke & Leach, 2010). Similarly Hoyert (2009) found that student success levels were impacted by the "static or malleable nature of intelligence" (p. 1) and their adoption of individual

learning goals. Students believing in the flexibility of intelligence attempt to improve their competence by mastering their educational environments and increasing their knowledge, skills, and abilities. These students also know how to adapt when they encounter difficult obstacles (Hoyert, 2009). By the same token, students with static views seek favorable opinions of their knowledge and avoid negative opinions. These students seek out simpler tasks to ensure their success and will also exhibit maladaptive behaviors such as avoidance and helplessness (Hoyert, 2009). Students believing they have no limitations are more likely to succeed with their goals and to apply more effort when they experience difficult situations. Self-efficacy tends to assist students with determining what they will do and at the same time how much energy and or time they will exert when accomplishing their goals (Gore, 2006).

Bandura (1993) found goal setting is based on an individual's belief they can complete their goals. The stronger the self-efficacy of an individual the higher the goal they will set and the harder they will work to accomplish the goal. By the same token, students with malleable self-theories have the tendency to adopt learning goals and embrace challenges when placed before them (Zepke & Leach, 2010).

Snyder (2002) found that individual hope was significant in accomplishing goals and defined hope as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)" (p.250). Snyder (2002) created a trilogy of hope in the goals, agencies, and pathways individuals take to accomplish their needs. Goals tend to be targets individuals set for accomplishment at a predetermined time. Goals can be images in the mind or they can be verbal descriptions and they can be specific or general in nature. Snyder (2002) found that higher hope goals were more

likely to be achieved than vague goals. In order for goals to be accomplished they must be specific in nature and they should be deemed valuable to the individual.

Snyder (2002) initially believed goals that were perceived to be unattainable were not applicable when discussing hope. Consequently, he found that high hope individuals were able to make changes to their situations and achieve what was perceived to be impossible (Snyder, 2002). Snyder (2002) believed high hope individuals did a better job at planning (pathways) for accomplishing their goals. In essence low hope individuals are less likely to make alternative plans to accomplish their goals when they experience difficulties.

Madonna and Philpot (2013) found that students who believed they had the ability to be successful were more likely to be successful academically and they had better end of course final grades. Lorschach and Jinks (1999) contended self-efficacy involves an individual's sense of confidence in their abilities. Through the lens of a constructivist, Lorschach and Jinks (1999) contended constructions are created by the culture of the setting as well as the individuals in the setting. Events that take place over a period of time can constrain construction of what an environment is like to learn. In essence, the individuals present in the environment as well as the physical characteristics of the setting can impact an individual's learning. Schreiner, Noel, and Cantwell (2011) posited when students have positive interactions with faculty and staff they develop more confidence in the organization bolstering self-efficacy and the students persist at higher levels. When students achieve an enhanced sense of self-efficacy they will generally invest greater psychological energy and they may become more socially integrated into the organization. Individuals with high levels of self-efficacy visualize success when completing their goals while individuals with low levels of self-efficacy visualize failure and all the bad things that could happen if they attempt to accomplish a goal (Bandura, 1993). Van Dintner,

Dochy, and Segers (2010) argued when students interact with faculty or staff members affirming they can complete a task, their performance is better during times of duress. Social persuasion helps students to believe they have the ability to complete tasks they set for themselves. This type of persuasive feedback is most effective when the students trust the staff or faculty members to be reliable and knowledgeable. When faculty members reassure their students of their abilities, they are likely to be more successful in accomplishing their goals (Van Dinther et al., 2010). Wright et al. (2013) found that self-efficacy was a positive predictor of a student persisting in school during the first year of college. Thomas (2000) posited when students have several friends and ties outside of their peer group they perform better. When students have broad networks of peers as well as connections outside of their peer group they are likely to be more successful while in college. A great deal of information suggests self-efficacy is beneficial to students while attending college. Wright et al. (2013) found that self-efficacy has a positive impact on student persistence as well as academic success.

Related Literature

Nontraditional Student Characteristics

Wyatt (2011) found that nontraditional students are the fastest growing segment for college students. Nontraditional students are diverse and they make up 4 out of every 10 undergraduate students (Wyatt, 2011). This significant percentage of nontraditional to traditional students is not expected to decline. By 2017, the US Census Bureau projects 20,080,000 students will be enrolled in college and 8,198,000 of the students are projected to be nontraditional students (Wyatt, 2011). According to Frazier, Young, & Fuller, (2012) the adult learner population was expected to grow from 28% in 1970 to 40% in 2014. Twenty five year old students grew from 20.2% in 1970 to 28.7% in 2002. The female percentage of students

grew from 10.2 percent in 1970 to an expected 24% in 2010. Male students were 17.6 % of the population in 1970 and expected to decline to 14.8% in 2010 (Frazier et al., 2012).

Although the number of students has increased, this does not take place without a cost. Many of the first generation students are not prepared academically or psychologically for college life. The National Center for Education Statistics (2002) identified nontraditional students as students that /are (a) delay enrollment into college after high school, (b) attend part time for some part of the school year, (c) full time workers, (d) financially dependent, (e) have dependents other than a spouse, (f) a single parent, (g) and do not have a high school diploma. When students meet only one of the characteristics they are considered minimally nontraditional, students meeting two or more of the characteristics are considered moderately nontraditional, and students meeting three or more are considered highly traditional (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Hollenhead and Thomas (2012) found that most nontraditional students enroll in for-profit and community colleges to complete their degrees. Approximately 60% of the students are women and 10% are African American.

Johnson and Nussbaum (2012) posited nontraditional students have very busy schedules and are often overwhelmed by family responsibilities, scheduling conflicts, and intimidation of returning to school. Even though nontraditional students are responsible for competing activities many of them outperform traditional students academically. Nontraditional students utilize coping strategies as well as adaptive goal orientations to obtain higher GPAs (Johnson & Nussbaum, 2012). Forbus, Newbold, and Mehta (2011) found that stress and apprehension were very common with nontraditional students. While stress can have positive and negative outcomes, anxious students may not perform well when placed in unfamiliar environments. Nontraditional students with lower stress levels and satisfaction with their academic experiences

have the tendency to manage their time well. Nontraditional students experience stress from their families, work, and their academic life. This type of stress can be detrimental to a student's success if not managed appropriately. Santovec (2013) found that many nontraditional students lacked self-confidence because some had been out of the classroom for 30 years or more and many of their previous experiences led them to believe they could not learn. Some nontraditional students are dealing with divorce or similar life altering events while they are completing college classes (Santovec, 2013). Although some nontraditional students have to deal with major life experiences, Wyatt (2011) contended nontraditional students spend more time with their academic responsibilities, are more serious about their studies as well as more motivated than traditional students. They are also concerned about their individual achievement and are fairly independent. According to Wyatt (2011) nontraditional students (a) asked more questions in class, (b) completed more drafts of papers prior to submission, (c) and were more prepared for class in comparison to their traditional peers. According to Gordon (2011) nontraditional students are in search of active learning strategies leading to cognitive growth and transformational learning. They also search for knowledge they have the opportunity to apply immediately (Gordon, 2011).

Business Schools

According to Bohanon (2008) business schools (commerce schools) have operated in the United States for many years. The Wharton School opened in 1883 at the University of Pennsylvania. Several other business schools to include the universities of Chicago, California, and Columbia were established prior to 1900. The universities of Vermont, New York, and Michigan were established in the early 1900s. A Wharton professor spoke on behalf of the business community as to why the students in college were not able to learn about business while

in college. Several students attended college enrolling in business classes and terminated their college enrollment when they finished the business courses. Several other students completing their degrees were entering into business and did not have the necessary business background that was beneficial to them (Bohanon, 2008). In recent years, the business college has become a critical part of higher education and many students graduate to start their own businesses.

Business schools play a very important role in academia. They are responsible for providing a variety of programs at places and times that are beneficial to interested students (Cavico et al. 2010). The business programs help students to find employment and they also prepare them to be leaders in society. According to Fogle and Grossnickle (2013) business programs help students to become entrepreneurs and start their own businesses. Business programs oftentimes offer education related to real world experiences which are beneficial to students when applying for employment. Employers are interested in the practical skills college graduates have to offer. According to Muff (2012) business schools are responsible for preparing students for the complex decisions they will be responsible for making when they enter the workforce. Muff (2012) found that some business schools focused on scientific rigor instead of skills that are applicable in the workplace. Several faculty members do not have the necessary experience to facilitate classes relating to real world business transactions. While some critics believe faculty experience in business is relevant in facilitating instruction, traditional school defenders contend “superb scholarship leads to higher institutional prestige” (p.649) which in turn leads to higher salaries (Muff, 2012).

Xie and Steiner (2013) found scholars and practitioners complained that most of the information graduates learn while in school is not applicable in business. They also found that business schools produce specialists instead of the needed managers in business. Consulting

firms with an emphasis on management can simulate a two year business school experience in three weeks (Xie & Steiner, 2013). Xie and Steiner (2013) also found that employers do not hire graduates because of their abilities, they hire them because they are part of a “prescreened pool” (p. 1).

According to Cavico et al. (2010) business schools oftentimes assess their academic success by their perceived rigor or scientific research accomplished by faculty members. While research may be important in schools of dentistry, chemistry or medicine, this approach may not be appropriate in business programs. Business programs should consider using a model centered on faculty members with experience in the workplace (Cavico, et al., 2010). O'Brien, Drnevich, Crook, and Armstrong, (2010) believed that business schools focusing on theory could possibly bind business school research into a “straightjacket that limits its relevance and value to practice” (p.638).

Burke and Rau (2012) found there is a research-practice gap in management. In order to bridge the gap the integration of research into teaching is necessary. When research is integrated into teaching it helps students to understand the need for research and at the same time helps them to learn beneficial decision making techniques in professional settings (Burke & Rau, 2012). In essence if managers are not familiar with current research they will not have the capability to act upon it and they will not know their actions are necessary (Burke & Rau, 2012). According to Dostaler and Tomberlin (2013) until recently the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) required colleges to have at least 50% of their faculty members at the bachelors and masters level to be academically qualified for accreditation. Academically qualified instructors generally have a Ph D. and publish in credible journals. In

2013 the AACSB changed their requirements to 40% with the intention of encouraging additional academic practitioners (Dostaler & Tomberlin, 2013).

Although there are several positive outcomes of business schools, recent reports have alluded to business schools bearing some responsibility to the unethical leaders in recent years. Leaders in Enron and Worldcom were cited as examples of the negative impacts of business schools (Cavico et al. 2010). Business students are often stereotyped as being centered on increasing the bottom line. The new entrants (students) of business schools are supposedly transformed into self-serving seniors by the time they graduate (Lopez, Rechner, Buchanan, & Olson, 2005). Although the blame surrounding unethical actions has been to some extent placed on business schools, Neubaum, Pagell, Drexler, Ryan, and Larson (2009) found through their research that there was no evidence to support the claims of relationship between business schools and unethical actions. They found that blaming business schools was too convenient as well as a very simplistic summarization of the cause.

Noorda (2012) found that business schools are ranked and celebrated as the best and most appreciated schools of higher education. Students enroll in business programs with high expectations as well as qualifications. Starkey, Hatchuel, and Tempest (2004) found that growth in business schools was most prevalent after World War II. This was the time when the most prestigious chose to enroll in business colleges. The business education became the degree of choice for many students versus traditional degree subjects.

According to Cox et al. (2005) there has been a call for changes in business education. They found that additional skills are needed in the workplace to manage diverse organizations, globalized institutions, as well as more prevalent restructuring and downsizing activities in organizations. Students oftentimes receive instruction on how to be specialists when they may

need additional insight on generalist activities during business operations (Cox et al., 2005). To assist in remedying the lack of knowledge in business skills they found that a first year course providing business management concepts was advantageous to student integration as well as student persistence. Cox et al. (2005) found that “first year experience courses” (p. 4) were beneficial in providing (a) academic support, (b) assistance with university technology, (c) assistance with discovering college degree opportunities, and (d) the opportunity to bond with their peers and individuals in their social networks. When students participated during the first year experience courses they completed more credit hours, earned higher GPAs, and returned to school to continue their programs (Cox et al., 2005)

For-profit Organizations

According to Chung (2012) for-profit organizations began in the 18th century as private schools for business programs and trades. The schools continued to grow even more after the passage of the GI Bill after World War II. The organizations grew throughout the 1970s and the National Association for Proprietary Schools was formed. The Higher Education Act of 1972 recognized for-profit institutions as eligible institutions for federal aid. The 1970s marked a time when corporate ownership became a major share of the for-profit sector (Chung, 2012). In 1991, DeVry became the first for-profit organization to offer an initial public offering (IPO). Cellini (2012) posited there are approximately 7,550 for-profit institutions with roughly 2.5 million students enrolled in their programs.

There is a noticeable difference in the for-profit organizational structure. For-profit organizations are governed by individual owners or they may have a managerial board. They are businesses and their goal is to earn a profit from the services they provide to the students. For-profit organizations issue stock and are taxed as businesses. Chung (2012) found that in 1996

there were 589,600 students enrolled in proprietary institutions and by 2004 there were 1,188,881 students. The student enrollment at for-profit institutions percentage rose from 3.95% to 6.71% during this time period. For-profit organizations spend approximately 11% of their revenue on advertising (Deming et al., 2013). Twenty four percent of their revenue was spent on sales and marketing with the average amount of per student recruitment total of 4000 dollars during 2009.

Deming et al. (2013) determined for-profit organizations are attuned to the marketplace and quickly open schools, train faculty, and offer programs in fast growing areas such as healthcare and information technology. For-profit organizations, also known as proprietary institutions provide the same curriculum at several locations and a bulk of their profit is generated from federal student aid. Carey (2010) contended for-profit institutions fix the educational failures that traditional schools leave behind. They serve the population of students that private and not for-profit institutions ignore (Carey, 2010). For-profit student populations have increased more than three times the population of the year 2000 and many of the students enrolled in the large national chain schools (Deming et al., 2013). For-profit organizations issue 18% of all associate's degrees as well as 33% of the Associate of Arts (AA) degrees in business management or marketing. They also issue 51% of the degrees in computer science, 23% in healthcare, and 34% in security services (Deming et al., 2012). Five percent of all Bachelors of Arts (BA) degrees are issued by for-profit organizations and 52% of all BA programs in communications are granted by for-profits (Deming et al., 2012).

Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 proposed by President Johnson was the foundational act that led to student financial aid. The act is based on the assumption that all students, regardless of their financial abilities deserve an opportunity to pursue training that helps

with their careers or a degree (McGuire, 2012). During the 2009-2010 school year the federal government issued approximately 146.5 billion dollars in grants and loans through the Title IV program. Title IV funds are available for traditional, private, profit, and not for-profit institutions. Of the 146.5 billion dollars awarded during the 2009-2010 school year, for-profit organizations received approximately 32 billion dollars in Title IV funding which is approximately 20% of the total amount of the loans. Title IV funding is authorized by the Department of Education and requires all organizations receiving funding be accredited by an approved accrediting agency, must be registered by one of the states, and meet standards on a continual basis (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2012). The standards consist of program length as well as student loan repayment activity. For-profit schools must provide training for employment in a recognized occupation or should provide a program in which a student can obtain a liberal arts degree (Deming et al., 2012)

With the increased population of students from 2000-2001 and 2010-2011 Pell Grant totals increased from 10 billion to approximately 35 billion. Stafford loans increased from 37 billion to 86 billion. Conversely state loans only increased about 5% from 2000-2010 with no real growth since 2007(Deming et al., 2013). Cellini (2013) contended financial aid served as a final effort for some students to afford college. Ninety five percent of all students enrolled in for-profit organizations receive Pell grants while only 27% of eligible students in public community colleges receive the same financial aid.

Although many students utilize financial aid to complete their college degrees, many of them do not persist. Low persistence rates are problematic for educational institutions because student recruitment is very costly (Fogel & Grossnickle, 2013). Unfortunately, many of the students remain responsible for student loans even though they did not complete their degree.

Approximately 39% of students acquire student loans and the average annual loan is approximately \$5100. The cumulative loan amounts for public and for-profit organizations vary. Students in public institutions borrow approximately \$13,100 while students in for-profit organizations borrow \$19,140, and \$16,380 in private colleges (Belfield, 2012). There are many consequences for students choosing to amass high levels of debt. Stress is a major outcome of high debt amounts as well as student decisions to select occupations with high entry salaries with limited wage increases. Unfortunately, students enrolled in for-profit organizations generally have higher loan amounts and are slower in repaying their loans.

Belfield (2012) found that the average loan default student was a male from a low income family and a minority. These same characteristics also identify students with high levels of debt. Belfield (2012) discovered that the college type had only a limited role in determining student loan default. Colleges designated as church related, selective in student acceptance, or large enrollments were not indicators of student default either.

There is a great deal of information surrounding the tactics for-profit organizations utilize to attract students. Chung (2012) found that for-profit organizations attract more minority, low income, and female students than other categories. Cellini (2012) discovered that for-profit students generally have parents that did not help them with their studies, they had higher levels of absenteeism during high school, and many of the students are parents. These statistics may indicate that for-profit institutions open doors for the disadvantaged to complete their degrees. While this information sheds a positive light on for-profit organizations, additional literature describes for-profit organizations as utilizing predatory practices to recruit students. Students enrolling in for-profit organizations generally pay more for tuition and they can often earn the same degrees at public institutions (Cellini 2012).

A recent report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that 4 out of 15 for-profit institutions visited used fraud or deceptive tactics to increase student enrollment. Applicants were encouraged to provide false information on their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) (DiMaria, 2011). Students were encouraged to not report funds they had in their savings accounts and to add ineligible dependents. The tactics were used to make the students eligible for Pell Grants or other subsidized loans. DiMaria (2011) posited that all of the 15 institutions that were visited reported information that was questionable. One representative told an applicant they were accredited by the same accrediting body that accredited Harvard and the University of Florida when neither of the statements was true. Representatives at a business college told an applicant they were accredited by an institution affiliated with the government and this was not true. A representative from one institution told an applicant that barbers earned \$150,000 to \$ 250,000 per year when barbers only average about \$43,000 annually.

For-profit organizations have offered education for students since the late 1800s. The number of students attending for-profits has increased tremendously over the last few decades. For-profit organizations are oftentimes praised as vehicles for hands on and job specific training for students seeking new occupations (Chung, 2012). They are also viewed as predatory institutions that utilize deceptive tactics to increase student enrollment (DiMaria, 2011). Nonetheless, with the negative stereotypes describing the organizations, several students chose to attend the organizations.

Loan Default Rates

Policy makers contend a college education is the bridge that individuals need to become prosperous and to become middle class citizens (Hillman, 2014). In general, college students are expected to make more than those without college degrees, and also have lower unemployment

rates. State and federal governments have also implemented completion agendas in which they encourage more individuals to enroll and to complete their college degrees. According to Javine (2013) students generally utilize two forms of repayment for their college degrees. They use credit cards or secure student loans. While student loans tend to have lower interest rates, the overall amounts are determined at a later date (Javine, 2013). Approximately two thirds of the students attending college utilize loans to complete their college degrees. The average person will accumulate 26,000 dollars in student loan debt (Hillman, 2014). Between 1993 and 2004 the college wage premium increased by 27% and real tuition and fees rose at public and private four year colleges 63% and 43% respectively (Rothstein, & Rouse, 2010). Consequently the number of four year degree seeking students applying for financial aid increased from 58.7% in 1993 to 76.1% in 2004. According to Rothstein and Rouse (2010) students with the need to pay off their current debts choose career oriented programs as well as programs they feel will earn them the most income.

Many students have more debt because of the government's shift in offering more loans instead of grants which do not have to be repaid. The government's loan based system has not only helped students to accumulate loans, it has also helped students to make the decision to depart college because of the debt incurred from their loans (Hillman, 2014). According to Javine (2013) the amount of student loan debt was higher than credit card debt in the United States during 2010. According to Hillman (2014) the rising price of a college education has been higher than the rate of inflation and family income levels for a decade. The amount of outstanding student loan debt was 867 billion dollars at the end of 2011. This number is higher than auto loan lines of credit as well as credit card debt (Hillman, 2014). Ionescu (2009) posited college loans are based solely on the individual's need and are subsidized by the government.

Students are allowed to begin repaying their loans 180 days after degree completion at a fluctuating interest rate. Student loans are now considered in default status after 270 days (Hillman, 2014). Prior to 1998 loans were considered in default status after 180 days. During 1990 approximately 22% of all student loans were in default ultimately leading to the 270 day change (Hillman, 2014). Several programs have been instituted to assist students with loan repayment. The 1986 Higher Education Amendment (HEA) allowed students the opportunity to switch to plans that were income dependent and students were also given the opportunity to lock in interest rates (Ionescu, 2009). The opportunity to switch to plans with lock in rates was discontinued in 2006 (Ionescu, 2008). In 1992 requirements were relaxed so higher income families became eligible for student loans. Changes in bankruptcy rulings have made student loans nondischargable under Chapter 13 Bankruptcy Code. The Bankruptcy Code was changed from liquidation to reorganization and this change served as a deterrent for students defaulting on their student loans (Ionescu, 2009).

For-profit educational organizations are the fastest growing, have the most diverse populations, and obtain the largest amount of funds from federal student aid programs (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2012). Unfortunately the loan default rates have steadily increased since 2005. Loan default rates are measured by the two year cohort default rate. Organizations receiving Title IV funds are expected to have less than 25% default rate for three years and to also not exceed a 40% default rate in one year. In 2008 the two year cohort default rate was 11.6% in comparison to 6% in public institutions and 4% in private nonprofit institutions (Deming et al., 2012). In 2012 the U.S. Department of Education moved to a three year cohort default rate. The three year cohort default rate at for-profit schools was 24.9%, at private nonprofit schools the rate was 7.6%, and at public institutions the default rate was 10.8% (Deming et al., 2012). The

three year cohort default rate may serve as an incentive for institutions of higher learning to minimize default in comparison to the two year default rate window (Deming et al., 2012). When institutions of higher learning do not meet the three year cohort default rate requirement they are eligible for sanctions in their Title IV funding. According to Hillman (2014) one of every ten students with student loans defaulted on their loans within three years of entering the repayment period. Students defaulting on their loans can be subjected to several undesirable consequences. Students can have their wages garnished, their income tax returns can be seized, collection costs can be added to their loans, their credit scores can be impacted, and they can be restricted from receiving additional student loans or social security benefits (Hillman, 2014).

Deming et al. (2012) pointed out that students of for-profit organizations have higher unemployment rates, higher idleness rates, and earn less than students attending not for-profit schools. These statistics are related to students in school for six years. For-profit school students also are not as satisfied with their educations in relationship to the amount of money they spent on their degrees (Deming et al., 2012).

Javine (2013) contended certain demographics of students are impacted by higher amounts of student loans. Students who are in a later year in school with lower GPAs are likely to have higher student loan amounts. Students attending in state universities are likely to have lower loan amounts and African American students are likely to have higher loan amounts than other students. Hillman (2014) found that students who were successful with their studies had lower chances of defaulting in repaying their student loans in comparison to students who were not successful with their studies.

Summary

The number of nontraditional students enrolling in higher education has increased tremendously in the US over the last few decades. Nontraditional students are diverse and they make up 4 out of every 10 undergraduate students. By 2017, the U.S. Census Bureau projects 20,080,000 students will be enrolled in college and 8,198,000 of the students are projected to be nontraditional students (Wyatt, 2011). The students are generally 24 years or older, they attend school while supporting families, and they are usually from low income families. Nontraditional students attend school to increase their marketability or to learn specific skills. Although there are many students enrolling in college, only 44% of the students enrolling persist until degree completion (Anstine, 2013). Several students enroll in business programs to assist them with their business ideas or to increase their knowledge on business. Bennett and Kane (2009) found that some business programs reflect first year persistence rates of 30%. Several of the nontraditional students enrolling in business programs, choose for-profit institutions as a tool to acquire hands on skills as well as job specific knowledge (Chung, 2012). When students enroll in for-profit organizations they pay more for their education than they would have in public or private institutions (Belfield, 2012). Nontraditional students attending for-profit organizations experience higher default rates than their counterparts at private nonprofit and public schools. With the 2012 changes in Title IV funding from a two year cohort default rate to a three year cohort default rate institutions of higher learning have an added incentive to minimize loan default rates (Deming et al., 2012).

Nontraditional students enrolled in business programs at for-profit institutions will likely have increased levels of persistence when they are socially and academically integrated into the organizations (Tinto, 1975). Students feeling as if they have the ability to be successful with

their studies along with competent and confident faculty members are likely to persist as well (Bandura, 1993). When faculty members and staff understand the role they play in student persistence, levels will likely increase in the organizations.

This study addresses the gap in the literature pertaining to the persistence of nontraditional students enrolling in business programs at for-profit organizations. The research builds upon the current literature surrounding persistence and also adds to the literature by including nontraditional students pursuing their business degrees at for-profit organizations. The information extracted from this study is beneficial to faculty members, staff, and organizational leaders to assist in increasing student persistence.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The problem investigated in this study was that many nontraditional students who enroll in business programs at for-profit colleges do not persist. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore academic persistence for nontraditional students pursuing business degrees at for-profit universities. Chapter Three contains information related to the design of the study, the participants, the researcher's role, and the data collection and data analyses sections.

Design

In exploring and understanding the experiences related to persistence of nontraditional business students at for-profit universities, a transcendental phenomenological approach was selected as the appropriate method for the study (Moustakas, 1994). According to Polkinghorne (2010) phenomenology is used to describe conscious experiences. During this study I described the conscious experiences of the nontraditional student participants and documented the data. In transcendental studies an open minded approach to understand meaning is beneficial (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) further stated in order to know something there must be a previous thought about the object as well as a concept by which the object can be related. The object becomes the center of transcendental phenomenology and instead of explaining the object it must be described. The description of the object should be an "intuitive grasp of the essences embodied with an experience" (p.49). Nontraditional student experiences will be described during the study as they relate to persistence. This study explored persistence in nontraditional students seeking business degrees at for-profit universities. The inquiry explores faculty student engagement, student efficacy, and student experiences involving the university. The participants completed in-depth interview questions (Appendix A) to describe their experiences while in

school and they provided information on what motivated them to complete their degrees. The setting for the study is two for-profit universities. University One is a for-profit university located in Savannah Georgia and University Two is located in Northern Virginia. The participants were independent students at least 24 years of age, working full time, and supporting dependents. All participants received surveys via university and personal email.

Research Questions

1. What motivated nontraditional students to enroll in a business program at a for-profit higher education institution?
2. What staff, faculty, and peers academic integration methods helped nontraditional students pursuing their degree at a for-profit higher education institution to persist?
3. What were the nontraditional student experiences involving faculty, staff and peer social integration characteristics that helped them to continue pursuing their degree at a for-profit higher education institution?
4. What personal characteristics of the nontraditional students were helpful in their continued pursuit of their business degree at a for-profit higher education institution?

Setting

The setting for the research is two for-profit universities. I used a mutually agreed upon meeting place during three of the interviews. The remainders of the interviews were conducted telephonically.

University One

The student population for University One is diverse and faculty and staff members are diverse as well. The student makeup for University One is 34% Caucasian, 22% African American, 7% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 1% American Indian, and 29% unknown. Sixty- nine

percent of the students are female and 31% are male. The faculty makeup is 67% Caucasian, 19% African American, 6% Hispanic, 3% Asian Pacific Islander, and 5% unknown. Fifty-seven percent of the faculty members are female and 43% are male (Southeastern University One “Pseudonym”). The university offers a myriad of courses ranging from undergraduate business degrees to doctoral studies. The university offers courses throughout the US with varying degree programs in each region. The university does not have a spring break and only closes for two weeks during the Christmas holiday. The main campus for the university houses the senior leadership and campus presidents are responsible for local campuses. The diverse population of nontraditional students will be beneficial in gleaning additional information for student characteristics. The university is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and holds regional and programmatic or specialized accreditation and has offered business courses for more than two decades. In order to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in business a student must complete 120 credit hours. To earn a Master of Business Administration a student must complete a minimum of at least 36 hours. The university reported an enrollment of 319,700 students (Coronelli, 2014). The university also offers courses online. According to Burnsed (2010) the university has a 38% retention rate amongst first-time full time students.

University Two

University Two is comprised of mostly working adults. Approximately 64% of the students are 31 years old or older, 31% of the students are 23-30 years old and 6% of the students are reported as traditional age students. Approximately 66% of the students are female and 33% of the students are male with a majority of the students being ethnic minorities. The university operates on a quarter system and classes are offered year round. Faculty members are identified as dedicated to be a teacher, committed to educational aspirations, and they have academic as

well as work life experience (“Northern Virginia University Two” Pseudonym). The university is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and several of their individual programs have earned accreditation and endorsements. The university began as a business college in 1892 and earned university status in 1998. The university also offers courses online. During the 2014 school year the organization reported an enrollment of 21,437 students (Brown, 2014). According to Burnsed (2010) the university has a 52% retention rate amongst first-time full-time students and a 45% retention rate amongst first-time part-time students.

Participants

The participants are baccalaureate graduates from two for-profit universities. The participants were selected because of the critical information they offered to the study. Forbus et al. (2009) posited nontraditional students are at least 24 years old, work full time, and have dependents to support. The participants met these criteria during the study. The participants are at least 24 years old and are a diverse group. I utilized maximum variation to differentiate the for-profit organizations as well as the students. I solicited information from participants attending two different schools with the purpose of increasing the likelihood of different perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) hypothesized that the maximization of differences at the beginning of the study will likely yield differences as well as different perspectives. For example, they will come from different backgrounds. Participants were comprised of different socioeconomic status, different races, different occupations, different genders, and different ages. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. The nontraditional students graduated with a degree in business within the last five years regardless of their concentration from a for-profit university. I utilized a convenience sample of students graduating from 2010 to present. I also solicited information from students

who continued on to pursue their master's degree. These students were easier to contact versus past students who were no longer in school. Morrow (2005) contends researchers do not find adequate amounts of evidence by a specific number of participants, however; sufficient numbers of participants are important. Thematic patterns are usually identified with 3-5 participants to hundreds (Morrow, 2005). I took into consideration that some of the students pursuing their master's degree have the opportunity to be enrolled in a future class I will facilitate. For this reason, I chose to avoid any students who had not completed courses I had the opportunity to facilitate at a future date. In selecting the participants I utilized former students who attended University One and several of the students were my former students. I also solicited information from the participants in suggesting other individuals who were willing to participate during the study. I utilized a colleague in Virginia to assist with finding participants who completed their degrees at University Two.

Appendix: Profile of Participants

Table 1

Profile of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Nontraditional Status	University
Allen	M	Caucasian	Financially Independent	University 1
Carlos	M	Latino	Financially Independent	University 1
Carol	M	African American	Financially Independent	University 2
Eric	M	African American	Financially Independent	University 1
Kenneth	M	African American	Financially Independent	University 2
Kyler	M	African American	Financially Independent	University 2
Mona	F	African American	Financially Independent	University 1
Myra	F	African American	Financially Independent	University 1
Roslyn	F	Caucasian	Financially Independent	University 1
Sonny	M	African American	Financially Independent	University 2

Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix C) was secured from Liberty University. Several of the students I solicited to serve as participants had already graduated from the universities and I would not have to discuss the information with the universities. I intended to secure approval from the universities of interest for students who were pursuing their master's degree. My initial intent was to gain permission from the campus directors of Universities One and Two. After several attempts I was not granted the access from the Campus Directors as I initially planned. In order to find the participants I utilized snowball sampling to find the participants. I relied on LinkedIn as well as word-of-mouth to solicit assistance from the participants who attended University One. The students were contacted with an initial request email with the consent form (Appendix C) attached. They were then sent the demographic survey to ensure they met nontraditional student status. Once nontraditional student status was determined we either met in person or conducted the interview over the telephone. I relied on a colleague who had access to students from University Two to provide email addresses or phone numbers of possible participants. The students were contacted with an initial request email with the consent form attached. They were then sent the demographic survey to ensure they met nontraditional student status. Once nontraditional student status was determined I conducted the interviews over the telephone. All participants were issued pseudonyms to protect their identity and all information was stored on a password protected computer and locked in a file cabinet. I was the only person with access to the key.

The Researcher's Role

As a researcher my role was to collect, analyze, and interpret information as provided by the participants. I served as a human instrument and interpreted information as provided by the

participants. Schwartz and Schwartz (1955) posited the observer is the instrument responsible for investigating and interpreting phenomena. Human instruments filter data and ultimately transpose it into reality. I had to ensure all my personal biases were identified in advance and made sure they did not impact my judgment when describing research data. I understood that I may have an affinity to University One because I have served as a member of the organization for the last eight years. I have also established relationships with some of the students who participated during the study. I had to ensure my interview questions were not leading. To ensure interview question clarity I solicited feedback from a colleague with a terminal degree in business. I utilized his feedback to reconstruct questions that were perceived as leading or unclear. By the same token, I had to also ensure I focused on individual responses and not the responses I anticipated prior to the interview.

I serve as an Area Chair at for-profit University One. I have worked at the university for eight years and I anticipate some of the students serving as participants will be previous students. I hold a BA in Psychology from Campbell University in Buies Creek, North Carolina an MA in Human Resources Development from Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri, and an Education Specialist Degree from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. I am currently a doctoral candidate at Liberty University.

Data Collection

Four data collection methods were used in the study. Data was collected utilizing a demographic survey (Appendix D), in-depth interviews (Appendix A), timeline for participant significant events (Appendix E), and a letter of advice for future students relating to success (Appendix F). The demographic survey was emailed to the participants to determine their nontraditional student status. I also provided a consent form (Appendix C) requesting the

participants' signatures. Once the survey questions were completed and returned and I confirmed participants met the nontraditional student pursuing business degree criteria, participants signed consent forms and subsequently were scheduled for an interview. The participants were emailed 13 questions relating to a template of the timeline of significant events (Appendix E) for completion so the information could be discussed when they appeared for the interview. During the interview the participants provided feedback to twelve interview questions, discussed their timeline of significant events, and they wrote a letter of advice for future students. Students who met over the phone emailed their letters of advice after the interview was completed.

Demographic Survey

A demographic survey (Appendix D) was used to screen participants to ensure they met the nontraditional student requirements. The survey consisted of 9 questions relating to student age, independent status, prior college course completion, and the timeline of their entry into college. I contacted previous students either in person or through email at University One. I utilized a colleague in Virginia to assist with finding students who attended University Two in Virginia. I ensured the potential participants met the nontraditional requirements with a cursory screening. The participants were at least 24 years old, may have had dependents, did not depend on their parents for support, did not attend college the same year they graduated high school, and worked at least 35 hours per week. All information pertaining to participants who were not selected was safe-guarded on a password protected computer and stored in a locked file cabinet. The information was shredded when adequate data was received from selected participants.

The survey questions (Appendix D) and the consent forms (Appendix C) were emailed to the participants for completion. The electronic survey determined if the participants fit the

criteria for nontraditional students. Nontraditional students are usually 24 or more years old, they live independently, may have dependent children, and did not enter college immediately following high school (NCES, 2011).

In-depth Interviews

When potential participants were identified as meeting the study criteria I then scheduled an in-depth interview with each of the participants via email. If I did not receive an email response after two email requests, I contacted the students by telephone if I had their telephone number. The in-depth interviews addressed research questions 1-4. The interview questions were beneficial in ascertaining reasons why participants selected a business program at a for-profit university as well as the academic and social integration interactions with peers, faculty members, and staff that helped them to persist. Lastly, the in-depth interview questions provided feedback on the participants' personal characteristics that helped them to persist in college. The in-depth interview questions are as follows:

Table 2

In-depth Interview Questions

Associated Question	Corresponding Research Question
1. What led you to select business as your field of study?	RQ 1
2. What were your reasons for selecting a for-profit university?	RQ 1
3. How often did you interact with staff members and what was the nature of your interactions?	RQ 2
4. What situations, if any helped you to believe staff members were confident in you or wanted you to succeed?	RQ 2

5. What experiences with staff members helped you to feel as if you were a valued member of the university? RQ 3
 6. How often did you interact with faculty members outside of class and what was the nature of your interactions? RQ 3
 7. What situations, if any helped you to believe faculty members were confident in you or wanted you to succeed? RQ 3
 8. What peer interactions helped you to succeed when you were in college? RQ 3
 9. What techniques did you use to help you believe you could be successful during your most difficult personal and college related situations? RQ 4
 10. What challenges did you experience that made you believe you were not capable of completing your degree? How did you overcome these challenges? RQ 4
 11. What personal characteristics helped you to believe you had the ability to complete your degree? RQ 4
 12. Do you have anything else to add pertaining to the questions above? Questions 1-11
-

I conducted an in-depth semi-structured interview with the participants at a mutually agreed upon location with three of the participants. Prior to the interviews, I requested colleagues with doctoral degrees in education from accredited universities to review my questions and I sampled an outside population for clarity of the questions to be asked during the interview. I scheduled the interviews for one hour to ensure I had enough time to solicit information as well as member check the information. Interviews are comprehensive and yield a great deal of detailed information (Goodwin, 1999). During the interview the participants were provided the opportunity to discuss experiences that helped them to persist while in the for-profit

universities. Phenomenology attempts to evaluate information without being disturbed by the natural world (Moustakas, 1994). The information gleaned during the interview was written and audio recorded, and interview questions were not written or read in a fashion to solicit a specific response.

The interview questions were derived from my review of the literature. Question one establishes the reason the participant enrolled in college. Cavico et al. (2010) posited business schools are responsible for creating leaders and entrepreneurs. This question provides data on the participant's perspectives as to why they entered the business program. Question two established the reason why the participant selected a for-profit institution instead of a public university. According to Cellini (2012) nontraditional students enroll in for-profit universities as a result of labor demands. This question provided additional data as to why students select for-profit universities. Questions three, four, five, six, and seven establish the level of integration with faculty and staff members. Tinto (1975) found that perceived integration in the social and academic systems of the college may positively impact persistence. Questions eight and nine discussed social integration, and efficacy, and how they impacted persistence. Bandura (1993) stated that motivation is cognitively generated. When students believe they can complete a task, they set goals to assist them in completing their tasks. Questions 10 and 11 solicited information on the challenges the students experienced while completing their college degrees. They also discussed the strategies they used to overcome challenges while completing their degrees and how their personal characteristics helped them during the process. Bandura (1993) contended personal accomplishments are not achieved because individuals have skills. Personal accomplishments are achieved when individuals have a belief they have the ability to use their skills well. Finally, question 12 solicited additional information that may have been missed in

relation to any of the previous questions. Participants were provided the opportunity to summarize or re-visit questions or answers they felt a need to clarify.

The participants were given the opportunity to provide data on their experiences with the university staff and faculty members as well as their motivations and efficacy beliefs. In preparation for the interviews I piloted the questions with a colleague possessing a Doctoral Degree to ensure clarity. I met with participants to discuss survey data and additional information as required. During the interview, I requested the participants discuss their timeline for the decision to enroll in school as well as significant times when persistence was tested. I requested the participants write a one page letter with tips for success for future students (Appendix F). The letter discussed what they would do differently if they had to pursue their degree again.

Timeline of Significant Events

Prior to the in-depth interviews, I emailed the participants a questionnaire (Appendix D) that asked them to identify a timeline for their significant events while in college. The timeline started from the time they made the decision to join college until the date they graduated college. I requested that the participants answer and return 13 questions prior to our in-depth interview so I had the opportunity to review the information. The timeline served as a visual representation of the events shaping their decision to enroll in a higher education college or university as well as indicating those events that impacted their persistence. The timeline provided data on information that both positively and negatively impacted their college experience. According to Tinto (1982) external factors such as personal finances, institutional transfer choices, and differences in education careers surrounding diversity may impact student persistence. The timeline will provide data to discuss how they handled the situations impacting them during the

pursuit of their degree. During the interview I discussed the timeline with the purpose of glean information related to their success in persisting while in college. The timeline sheds light on when they experienced difficulties as well as their handling of their difficulties in relation to the time they had invested in completing their degrees.

Letter of Advice

The last data collection item that was obtained during the meeting was the letter of advice (Appendix F). I requested the participant write a one page letter of advice addressing other nontraditional students considering pursuit of a business degree from a for-profit university. The participant was allotted time during the interview to complete the letter. Participants who completed interviews were given time to complete the letter and email them back to me. I provided the computer and storage device for the information. It is hoped this letter will serve as a guide for future students and be beneficial to universities, faculty & staff members, and future research studies.

I collected the data for this study from a demographic survey, in depth interviews, a timeline for significant events, and a letter of advice. I remained cognizant of my personal biases and ensured I analyzed the data placed before me by the participants. In order to make sure I was describing participant interactions instead of my own, I recorded my thoughts and perceptions continually to ensure I was aware of my thoughts and did not unconsciously insert my thoughts into their feedback. I also ensured to remember that every statement provided during the study has equal value (Moustakas, 1994).

Epoche

According to Moustakas (1994) epoche (Appendix G) is a Greek word that relates to staying away from perceiving things as we do on an everyday basis. Knowledge is naturally judged and presupposition of what is perceived in nature is true and it becomes reality. During the epoche process I had to set aside my judgments and understandings and I also had to visit phenomena freshly, naively, and in a wide open sense (Moustakas, 1994). In order to avoid my presuppositions, I recorded my thoughts prior to receiving participant feedback. I reflected on my initial thoughts when describing participant feedback. I dutifully ensured the information provided by the participants was provided and at the same time avoided using my own initial thoughts. I kept in mind that what I saw in my consciousness was there and at the same time allowed whatever was there to linger (Moustakas, 1994). Prior to the study I recorded some of the following thoughts. I initially believed that a faculty member's knowledge and his or her willingness to assist a struggling student would positively impact a student's persistence. I also believed students would share several team interactions that were negative and would prove stressful at times. I anticipated the students would have contemplated discontinuing their college experience because of negative team experiences. I believed students would find that faculty experience in a business setting would be beneficial to them and finally, I anticipated students would gravitate toward faculty members who looked out for their well-being, personally, and academically.

According to Van Manen (1990) bracketing is the suspension of a researcher's belief in the "reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world" (p.175). When analyzing data I had to ensure I was not imposing my own personal beliefs. I was aware that emotional involvement with the topic, presuppositions from reading the literature, and

interactions with the participants may interfere with fair collection and interpretation of data (Morrow, 2005). In order to bracket I avoided thinking about the world as I believed it to be. I gazed upon the world as an observer and I took a fresh and naïve look at it (Moustakas, 1994). I recorded my thoughts on what I believed to be true and reflected on my initial thoughts when describing participant data to ensure my presuppositions were not inserted into the data.

I also used reflexivity during the process of data analysis. Reflexivity is self-reflection that is often carried out in journaling (Morrow, 2005). To assist with understanding my personal feelings I constantly recorded information on my experiences, reactions, assumptions and biases. I was then able to examine my thoughts and then set them aside to the best of my ability (Morrow, 2005).

Horizontalization

During the horizontalization process all statements were treated equally. When all data was reviewed, repeated statements as well as overlapping data was deleted (Moustakas, 1994). The remaining data was considered the horizons. In order to create a textural description of the phenomenon, I utilized coding to detect significant themes. I initially reviewed the data determining possible themes during my first look. I then conducted a secondary coding to ensure I found thematic inferences in the data.

Textural

In order to describe the phenomenon in a new way I was mindful of the epoche, and horizontalization. I was mindful that horizons are unlimited and that I will never be able to exhaust my experience of things no matter how long or often I look at them (Moustakas, 1994). I considered that no perception of an experience lasts forever and that conscious life contents will often appear and disappear (Moustakas, 1994). In order to compose textural descriptions I

ensured all information was transcribed as presented to me and I ensured the “meanings and essences” of the experiences were captured in the transcribed information (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

Structural

I provided a structural description of the underlying dynamics of participant experiences as well as the themes and qualities connecting “how” (p.135) their feelings were aroused during the process (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) found that structures are brought into a “researcher’s awareness thorough imaginative variation, reflection and analysis beyond the appearance and into the real meanings or essences of the experience” (p. 139). I ensured participant thoughts and feelings were transcribed carefully to include the “meanings and essences” of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994, p.121)

Composite Description

Moustakas (1994) contended the synthesis of textural and structural descriptions form the essence of the data representing the group as a whole. In order to synthesize the textural and structural descriptions I provided descriptive accounts of the participant’s experiences. I constantly recorded my thoughts and bracketed my original beliefs to ensure my thoughts were not inserted into participant descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

Reduction

According to Giorgi (2012) there are five necessary steps when analyzing data. Transcendental reduction focuses on “consciousness as such” (p.5) instead of human consciousness. The first step in the process is to “read the data entirely to get a sense of the whole” (p.5). I read all the information prior to forming opinions on what the data represented. I was sure to gain a clear understanding of the information in its entirety rather than select

individual sections at a time. I also transcribed the recorded data to ensure all information was maintained. I realized participant pauses as well as conversational fillers were important during the transcription process. All the information was treated carefully and transcribed in its original state.

Step two of the process consisted of rereading the information (Giorgi, 2012). During the second reading of the information I found transitions in meaning and marked the appropriate descriptions. I constituted parts of the information because most descriptions were too long to be retained easily (Giorgi, 2012).

During step three of the process I transformed the data, or words of the participants into expressions (Giorgi, 2012). I was able to glean information from the responses provided and related the information to its impact on academic persistence. Giorgi (2012) found that free imaginative variation was necessary during this step. Free imaginative variation is the time when the researcher clarifies the phenomenon (Bevan, 2014).

During step four I took a closer look at the more psychologically sensitive expressions utilizing free imaginative variation to clarify the phenomenon. (Giorgi, 2012). During step five of the process I utilized the entire structure to clarify the raw data (Giorgi, 2012).

Trustworthiness

To increase data trustworthiness I used multiple sources, and methods, to ascertain richness, and breadth of the data gathered (Morrow, 2005). Lincoln and Guba (1982) contended truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality are important factors to consider when distinguishing, good, bad or inadequate research. Researchers should be able to present their findings so as to demonstrate the truth of their data. Data outcomes should be applicable in similar contexts with different respondents, the outcomes should be consistent when introduced

to similar respondents, and data should be neutral of the researcher's biases and perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1982).

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1982) found that data deemed trustworthy should be credible transferable, dependable, and confirmable. In order to increase the trustworthiness of my data I utilized triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checks. When member checking my findings I spoke with the participants to ensure my data reflected their thoughts and not my own. For data triangulation I utilized multiple techniques for gathering data. I recorded the data through written transcripts as well as an audio recording to ensure I had a firm understanding of the data shared by the participants. The written transcripts and the audio recordings helped me to re-visit information shared by the participants. Prior to using the data for the study member checking took place allowing participants the opportunity to edit and approve the information for accuracy. I bracketed the information to ensure I took a fresh look at persistence. I ensured I monitored myself and provided accurately descriptive accounts of the information provided by the participants. The data was representative of the participant's thoughts to assist in persistence exploration and to increase transferability of the information. In order to ensure the data was reflective of the participant's thoughts and not mine, I utilized peer debriefing to ensure I presented honest data (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). Lincoln and Guba (1982) found peer debriefing is useful in stress decompression, research advice, and stress relief. I utilized a peer to review my data to ensure the information was reflective of participant ideas and to also gain advice on the methodological steps of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). I requested a peer to review my work for accuracy and I also member checked the information. The peer had a terminal degree in business and he has college teaching experience with nontraditional students.

Transferability

I utilized purposive sampling to ensure I procured the maximize range of information (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). The participants all pursued their business degrees from for-profit universities and they met nontraditional student requirements. I provided background information related to nontraditional student experiences and used participant feedback to provide thick description of their individual and group experiences.

Dependability

I utilized overlapping methods for data triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). I engaged the participants through an in-depth interview, a timeline of significant events, and I also had them to complete a letter of advice for future students. The participant experiences were similar in each form of data collection and the information was documented as the participants described their experiences. I allowed a peer with experience in teaching nontraditional college students to review my data to increase data dependability and the dependability audit process.

Confirmability

I practiced reflexivity in recording my personal thoughts and biases to ensure I provided participant descriptions and not my own (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). I constantly reminded myself that my experiences as a teacher in the classroom shed light on only a small portion of the life of a student. I also provided background information of other researchers reflecting similar experiences of nontraditional students. The supporting information related to persistence was beneficial in completing the confirmability audit for my research.

Ethical Considerations

In order to protect the identity of the participants, each site and participant was assigned a pseudonym. The pseudonym was used for individual identification and there are no references

to the actual name of the participant. All information related to the study is stored on a password protected computer and any hardcopy files were stored in a locked file cabinet and I maintained the key. The participants for the study earned a bachelor's degree prior to the beginning of the study and I do not have any control or influence over them. The participants pursuing their master's degree completed all courses in the master's program which I facilitated. The classes consist of leadership, human resource management, or strategic management courses. I chose to avoid any students that may be in future courses I facilitated to avoid any undue pressure to participate. I was interested in soliciting feedback from willing participants who were not under pressure and were willing to share their thoughts freely. During the screening process I asked all students if they had aspirations of pursuing a graduate degree at the university where I taught. If the students were considering a graduate degree in my area of study I did not consider them for the research study. I also recused myself from future classes in which research participants were enrolled. During the time of the study University One completed the last cohort of graduate students and no additional classes will be taught at the university. The termination of the cohort ensures I will have no conflict of interest with any of the students from University One.

Summary

A transcendental phenomenological approach was selected as the appropriate method for the study (Moustakas, 1994). According to Polkinghorne (2010) phenomenology is used to describe conscious experiences. I described the conscious experiences of the participants as they related to persistence. Textural and structural descriptions were synthesized to create the composite participant experiences (Moustakas, 1994). As a researcher I utilized bracketing and journaling to ensure the information in the study was generated from the participants and not me. I solicited participant data after IRB approval during an in-depth interview. Students from two

for-profit organizations provided a timeline of significant events as well as a letter of advice for future students. I ensured all information was member checked to ensure participant thoughts were carefully described. I ensured all data was safe-guarded during the process and pseudonyms were used to protect the organizational and individual identities.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This phenomenological study was conducted to explore academic persistence in nontraditional students pursuing business degrees at for-profit universities. The information gleaned from this study could help leaders to understand what motivates students to persist while in college. The study used a qualitative methodology to explore the impact of the staff, faculty, and peer influences on student persistence. Whitmore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) believed qualitative research pursues depth rather than breadth of information as well as the “subtle nuances” (p.524) of life experiences. A transcendental phenomenological design was used to explore the experiences of students who persisted until completion of their bachelors or masters degrees. Transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to minimize prejudice or presupposition (Moustakas, 1994). According to Polkinghorne (2010) phenomenology is used to describe conscious experiences. Through this lens, participants’ experiences related to motivation and persistence were analyzed and transcribed here.

This chapter provides the findings of the study in relation to the research questions. Moustakas (1994) states that in order to know something, there must exist a previous thought about the object as well as a concept to which the object can be related. The object becomes the center of transcendental phenomenology, and it must be described rather than explained. The description of the object should be an “intuitive grasp of the essences embodied with an experience” (p.49). This chapter describes student experiences related to motivation, persistence, and hope and their relation to persistence.

Participants

Ten students were recruited to serve as participants during the study. All students were deemed to meet the criteria of nontraditional students during the last year of their degree completion. All participants had earned their bachelors or masters degree during the time of the study. The study focused on students who completed their degrees no more than five years prior. Six of the students graduated from a for-profit university in Savannah Georgia and four students attended a for-profit university in the Northern Virginia area. The participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities during the study. They were identified as Carol, Carlos, Mona, Eric, Allen, Kyler, Myra, Roslyn, Kenneth and Sonny.

Carol is a 46-year-old African American mother of three children. She has two sons and a daughter. She has worked as a human resource specialist for several years and is very confident in her level of competence in carrying out her duties. She is convinced that the best teacher is one that has real world experience with the subject he or she is teaching. Carol graduated with her Bachelor's degree in December 2015.

Carlos is a 41-year-old Hispanic male father of two children. He has two sons and he currently works for a local oil company. Carlos served in the military and believed that his education was a necessity for him to be successful in life and he also found that success is not easily achieved and you have to be willing to work hard to obtain your goals. He graduated with his bachelor's degree in 2011.

Mona is a 49-year-old African American female and has one 24-year-old child. She works for a local government office in Georgia and is not married. Mona and her child completed most of their graduate courses in the same class. She said that her child is one of her

sources of motivations for attending college and completing her degree. Mona had completed all coursework prior to the interview and later marched in her commencement ceremony completing her master's degree.

Eric is a 54 year-old African American male, has three daughters, and is married. Eric is a military retiree and serves as a contractor on one of the local military installations. He completed his bachelor's degree in 2010 and his master's degree in 2012. Ernest asserted that his family was profoundly supportive of him while he was completing his degrees.

Allen is a 37 year-old Caucasian male, has two daughters and, is married. Allen has spent the majority of his professional career in sales. He currently serves as a salesperson for a reproduction company. Allen also worked as an academic advisor for University One. He earned his bachelor's degree in 2011.

Kyler is a 30 year-old African American male and has one son. He currently serves in the United States Navy. He described himself as a fighter and is very excited about his Navy career. Kyler completed his bachelor's degree in December, 2015.

Myra is a 54- year- old African American Female, has three children and is married. She has two daughters and a son. She currently works in early childhood education and has served as a teacher for several years. She is guided by her faith in God and relies on her faith when making decisions. Myra graduated with her bachelor's degree in December 2013.

Roslyn is a 52- year- old Caucasian Female and has three children. She has two daughters and one son. She currently works part-time for a marketing agency. Roslyn has dealt with many life changes that helped her to make the decision that college was a necessity in her life. Roslyn completed her bachelor's degree in 2012.

Kenneth is a 41-year-old African American male and has four children. He has three sons and one daughter, and he currently works as a contractor. Kenneth was in the military and found that college facilitated his progression while in the military. Kenneth completed his master's degree in 2012.

Sonny is a 59-year-old African American male and has three children. He has three sons and he currently works as a contractor for the State Department. Sonny spent more than 20 years in the US Army. He realized that a degree in business would be beneficial to him at his current organization. Sonny completed his bachelor's degree in 2012.

Results

During data analysis, 12 themes interwoven in participant responses (Figure 1) became apparent. The themes were reinforced and enriched during the coding and comparison of participant descriptions. During the analysis of the data, the themes ultimately provided form to the shapeless data provided by the participants (Van Manen, 1990). The essential themes (Van Manen, 1990) identified throughout the analysis and interwoven throughout the participant descriptions are as follows: (a) Career Progression, (b) Family Security, (c) Convenience, (d) Transferability, (e) Engagement, (f) Personal Relations, (g) Encouragement, (h) Positive Student Experiences, (i) Confidence Building, (j) Positive Team Interactions, (k) Self-Efficacy, and (l) faith.

Research Question One: The Decision

Research question one asked: What motivated nontraditional students to enroll in a business program at a for-profit higher education institution?

The participants provided informative data describing their choices to pursue a business degree. Although there are many other programs available, many students find business programs appealing. Business programs offer opportunities that other educational programs cannot. The participants offered the following insights related to their motivation to enroll in a business program.

Participants were asked what made them select business as their field of study. When queried on their decision, most of them believed they would benefit from choosing business as a career path. They also believed that having a degree would open doors for them for future positions and occupations.

Career progression. Six of the participants believed that a business degree would help them to progress in their careers. They believed a business degree would open doors to new opportunities and it would also assist them in climbing the ladders of success in their current organizations. Carlos found that having a business degree was beneficial to him because he was a manager and a business degree would provide him with expertise and resources in his current occupation. Carlos mentioned that a business degree “went along with his strengths” and that acquiring one was in line with his future aspirations. Mona found that having a business degree was beneficial to her in her occupation. She believed “you can do anything with a business degree.” She knew that she needed to have a degree to be successful in her current occupation

and a business degree was beneficial in her pursuit of a wide variety of goals, including future occupations.

Carol was a manager when she started pursuing her degree. She said she “liked working in the office environment” and this ultimately led her to the business profession. Because of her fondness of the office environment she selected a degree in marketing management to assist her with her future occupations. Sonny was “currently a manager” which “gave [him] kind of a means to look at the business aspect.” Sonny described the benefits of working as a manager and the benefits of having a degree to facilitate his upward progression. Kenneth found that a business degree would be beneficial to him in his current profession. In his job he was required to have at least 24 hours of business credits to maintain his contracting credentials. The 24 mandatory training hours constituted a step towards his business degree. Kyler found that earning a business degree would be beneficial to him because he wanted to “start [his] own business”. He believed the skills he received from completing his degree would assist him in establishing his own businesses at a later date.

Family security. Participants in the study indicated they were interested in pursuing a business degree so they could create a better lifestyle for their families. Five of the participants described the future benefits of having a degree and how degree completion could help them to provide for their families.

Eric believed that owning a business would be beneficial to his family. He had been in the military for many years and thought he “needed to have a new career” when he retired. He wanted to “own his own business.” He described the benefits of having his own business as a foundation for himself and his family as he got older. Eric believed that creating a business

when he was younger would be a financial asset to his family as he got older. Similarly Kyler always wanted to open his own business because he felt he was “business minded.” He believed that having a degree would be beneficial in his career and also later in life. Allen found that his previous jobs did not provide the stability he needed to provide for his family and believed his business degree would provide the stability he believed was necessary. Sonny described his upbringing and how difficult it was for his family to afford “education beyond public school.” Sonny was adamant he would have the means to provide for his family so his children had the opportunity to attend college. He knew earning a degree would be beneficial in providing the opportunity for his family to be successful. Kenneth believed that his family security was very important to him and knew that his education would open doors for him to be successful. He knew he was a “full time employee with children” and his degree would be beneficial to his family and his future.

Convenience. Seven participants offered convenience as a reason for selecting business as their field of study. University One and Two offered course schedules that were amenable to the participants and most of the participants lived within a reasonable proximity to the universities. The universities offered more business degree programs than other programs which influenced the participants to make the decision to select the business degree out of a range of possibilities.

Carol claimed she was initially ignorant between the differences between profit or not-for-profit universities. She said she knew she needed to go back to school and she had the option to “take one course at a time.” The convenience of University One helped her to make the decision to choose business as her field of study. The business courses were offered frequently and were well suited to her schedule, a reason cited by most of the participants. Like Carol,

Carlos found that “it was located pretty close to his place of employment and it was obviously agreeable to be able to take a class and complete the class work.” He was able to depart from his place of employment and make it to class on time. He described University One as “a convenient location and convenient hours and a workload I could handle and keep a full time job.” Similarly, Mona found that University Two was amenable to her schedule and she could not resist the opportunity to go to college and obtain her degree. Mona said, “You can’t beat going to work, getting off work and being able to go to school once a week. The homework and all, that is time consuming but I wasn’t doing anything else.” Despite the time commitment required by class assignments, she still believed the convenience of University One made it possible to actualize her education aspirations.

Eric asserted that University Two was a good fit for him and his work schedule. He said he thought a degree would be achievable “with class only one day a week.” He was able to balance his family and home life as well. He shared, “I have a lot to do after work with the church and the kids.” Although he had many responsibilities related to his other roles, the flexibility and pace of the class schedule made degree completion attainable for him. Allen had similar beliefs as other participants about the convenience of University One. He “only had to go to school once a week” and was able to meet the schedule requirements. Kenneth cited the flexibility of University Two as a key factor that allowed him to pursue the business program. He stated, “I was obviously a full-time employee with children so I wanted a university that would give me the flexibility to do both in residence and some online courses.” Sonny described the convenience of the university being in close proximity of his home and his job. He valued being able to “do [his] fatherly duties, being able to look after [his] kids it was more so

convenient [sic].” Sonny believed the convenience of the university was a huge factor that led him to select the university and the business program.

Transferability. Five participants selected business programs because of the transferability of the degree. Myra spent many years in early childhood education. She enjoyed her occupation but she felt she wanted a change. Myra believed when she completed her degree her “career started.” She felt she “wanted to pursue something better than educating preschool.” Roslyn decided to select business as her field of study because “it was a very broad area that would provide [her] the opportunity in different areas of the workforce.” She believed that a degree in business would be beneficial to her future jobs. Carol believed completing her degree would validate that “[she] knew the information” and her knowledge would help her to gain access to jobs she could not have acquired prior to completing her degree. Mona found that completing her degree would help her to pursue a position as a teacher. She believed “[she could] retire in two years” and then she could possibly become a college instructor because she completed her degree. Carlos believed completing his degree would allow him the opportunity to change his profession and he could possibly “be a faculty member.”

Research Question Two: Academic Integration Methods

Research question two asked: What staff, faculty, and peers academic integration methods helped nontraditional students pursuing their degree at a for-profit higher education institution to persist?

The participants discussed several staff, faculty, and peer integration methods that were beneficial to their persistence during the course of obtaining their degrees. Participant interviews were infused with examples of positive engagement through receiving phone calls, having

personal conversations or seeing a friendly face in the hallway, were examples that echoed throughout participant interviews. Exchanging pleasantries or directing participants to class were small gestures offered by staff members that became memorable experiences for the participants. Participants repeatedly remarked on the impact positive engagement with staff and faculty members had on them. The participants' nonverbal communications during these recollections reflected the sincere feelings they had for the staff and faculty members. They were thankful for faculty taking the time to express interest in their personal and professional well-being. Staff and faculty members were available on campus and staff members often reached out to the participants to ensure they had what they needed to be successful during their classes. The staff and faculty members served as a source of strength for the participants and the participants knew staff and faculty could be depended on when needed.

Engagement. All participants reflected on staff and faculty member engagement through telephone calls and in-person interactions, and at times participants reached out to staff members to initiate friendly contact. Carlos recounted that staff members engaged him on numerous occasions. He described interaction with staff “two to three days” during the week. He interacted with the staff members in the hallway or through telephone contact initiated by the staff. The staff members generally discussed how class was going as well as financial or academic issues that may have been impacting him. Eric shared having interactions with the staff members “at least once a month.” He also described times that he would contact the staff members just to check on them to see “what was going on.” During interactions with faculty, Eric participated in conversations related to his personal achievement. Staff members were “continually encouraging” him to be successful and to achieve his goals. Allen described relationships with his academic, enrollment, and financial counselors. He characterized the

counselors as very “interactive” and reported that they would “typically answer any questions within 24-48 hours.” Kyler described several interactions with the staff members. He was convinced that the staff members “were going to be the reason [he] completed [his] degree.” Every time Kyler and the staff members crossed paths “they reminded [him] of why [he] started [his program].” Kyler recalled times when he felt he was “lost.” The staff members reinforced his confidence and bolstered his belief in the possibility of success. Myra described interactions with the staff members “about three times a class.” She relayed her satisfaction with the faculty members knowing who she was “by name.” She frequently saw the staff members “standing in the hallways.” The constant staff member engagement helped her to feel that she “was never alone.” Kenneth totaled interactions with staff members as “probably two to three times a session”, although the frequency increased during preregistration for “next semester classes.” There were many faculty members who had previously been in the military and “would come out and do a lot of touching bases [sic] with the veterans that were attending the school.” Since Kenneth was also in the military, this basis of interaction was unique and relevant to his relationships with faculty. The staff and faculty members would also reportedly engage students who “had a grade below a B” to ensure they maintained their GPAs. Sonny relayed many communications with the staff members. He stated that the staff members “constantly communicated with you and I still receive communications to come out and to speak.” He found that faculty presence and enthusiasm was genuine and Sonny was always happy to hear from them. Sonny found the staff members to be “very supportive and they communicated with [students] all the time and [he] liked that.” Carol believed faculty members “made you feel like you were of value while you were in their class.” Similarly, Mona reflected on several instances when staff and faculty members engaged her with “greetings and stuff like that in the hallway”

and they also contacted her ‘just about every week’ to ensure her needs were met. Roslyn was impressed that faculty and or staff members “were at the door and greeted you.” She described occasions when they “asked if you had any issues” that needed attention.

Personal relations. Six participants depicted personal situations in which staff members extended themselves to make sure the participants were successful in completing their studies. Allen recalled the time when his father died. He had just finished his first class when he received the news. Allen notified the staff members about the loss of his father and found “they were very concerned about [him] and they were very thoughtful about [his] father passing away.” Allen described how the staff members knew about what he was going through “but they didn’t share it with other people.” Similarly, Mona discussed a time when her “aunt was dying” and she was very stressed during the ordeal. Although she was experiencing the loss of a very close family member she received the necessary moral support from faculty and staff members to endure and complete her class. Mona also described a faculty member as a “mentor” to her while attending the university. Eric felt the staff members were “caring and sincere.” The staff members did not simply care about his education but they cared for “myself and my family.” The staff members repeatedly told Eric that they were available when he needed them. Kyler recalled the personal interactions that he had with several staff members. He found that the personal interactions with staff members “help you.” The staff members reached out to him to make sure he was doing well personally in completing the goals he identified as important to him. Staff members took a personal interest in reminding him of his goals on a continuous basis to ensure he remain grounded and on task. Sonny recalled when he was less than six credits shy of completing his degree and he was contemplating “taking a break” from school. Sonny reflected on the staff and faculty members who reached out to him to reassure him that he could

be successful. The staff and faculty members helped him to understand that his goal was degree completion and they also provided guidance on time management techniques to help him with his studies. Kenneth described interactions with faculty and staff members asking “how you’re doing or if you need counseling” in relation to class success.

Encouragement. Six participants recalled situations when staff members offered encouragement to show empathy and at the same time let students know they had the ability to be successful when they may have felt discouraged. Mona described her advisor as very “knowledgeable and helpful.” Her advisor shared that she understood the difficulty of being a single parent and she also helped Mona to “understand the logistics of how it all really worked.” She recalled that advisors “made you feel like you were important, like you were of value.” She recalled the encouragement of the advisor as a resource to assist her during her difficult times. Carlos described staff members as having a “general interest in my education” and believed they were monumental in his continued pursuit of his degree. Carlos described the staff members as providing “a lot of encouragement for me to pursuing my degree [sic].” Myra also portrayed the staff members as motivators for her. She did not believe she was really “smart, smart” and felt she needed that “push of encouragement.” The academic counselors regularly expressed confidence in her that she could be successful regardless of the situation in which she found herself. Roslyn recounted speaking to her academic counselor on several occasions. Most of the time the staff members were encouraging her because of “crazy team stuff” that may have happened during the week. Roslyn expressed “I believe that my counselors were right behind me.” Roslyn described supportive phone conversations with her advisors and she occasionally received emails “that said you can do this.” Roslyn called her advisors “a great support team.” Sonny described the staff and faculty members as “very supportive.” He reflected on occasions

when faculty members spent time after class to ensure he understood the class information. The faculty members took time to encourage him that he could complete the assignments and they met him in the training room to ensure he was “comfortable” with the text material. Kenneth believed the faculty members were “vested in the students” and they wanted the students to be successful academically and personally.

Staff and faculty members utilized creative techniques to ensure the participants knew they were a part of the university family. Participants expressed feelings of belongingness to the university and they vividly shared the experiences that made them feel as if they were important to the staff. Staff members contacted participants routinely to make sure they had what they needed on an academic, personal, or financial level. Staff members stepped in when unusual circumstances arose that were beyond the capacity for students to address on their own. They solved difficult situations to the satisfaction of the participants and reminded them that they could be called on as necessary. The level of staff and faculty engagement was beneficial to student persistence; without the engagement students expressed doubt as to whether they would have persisted in fulfilling their educational goals.

Research Question Three: Student Experiences

Research question three asked: What were the nontraditional student experiences involving faculty, staff and peer social integration characteristics that helped them to continue pursuing their degree at a for-profit higher education institution?

Participants shared several experiences that contributed to their feelings that staff and faculty members believed in them and wanted them to succeed. Experiences with staff, faculty members, and peers helped the participants to form bonds that have continued even after

graduation. These sources of support demonstrated their confidence in the participants through their actions. For example staff members developed solutions to complex problems to ensure the participants were successful in their classes. Further, there were recalled instances where they overstepped their normal boundaries to assist the participants who were mired in difficult situations for which they did not have the resources to overcome alone.

Positive student experiences. Six of the participants shared positive experiences that helped them to feel as if they could persist while in college. Eric recalled the time when he had to have surgery on his eye. He made the decision that he would unenroll from class and take the class once he healed from his eye surgery. Eric contacted his advisor to let her know of his plan, and she encouraged him to “talk to the administration up front”. The administration informed him that he could leave class to recover from his surgery and make up the work when he returned. This was a special circumstance that was allowed in unique circumstances. Eric felt the counselor “had concern for [his] health and [his] education so [he] could continue it.”

Allen recalled the dedication of one particular faculty member who was more interested in the students’ welfare than his own. Allen needed additional assistance with his statistics class and discovered that a faculty member would be conducting a workshop on a Saturday. Allen was impressed the faculty member spent “eight hours [teaching]. Now the interesting part of that story is not the fact that he spent eight hours that’s not it, but that the interesting fact is that he was not feeling well and he ended up having a heart attack that night.” Allen was profoundly affected by the dedication of the faculty member. The faculty member’s “dedication is something that just always stuck out in my mind like going above and beyond even though he was not feeling well. He was physically sick, he stayed to help students because he loved students that much.”

Sonny relayed a time when he felt as if he was struggling with his writing assignments and sought help from his instructor. He expressed “writing and English was a challenge to me” and the university “levied” many writing assignments. His professor told him “to go back to the basics and when I'm structuring my papers to look at it not as a whole but from paragraph to paragraph and try to convey my message.” He took the advice of his instructor and his paper writing process became much easier. Like others, Mona described a positive experience while pursuing her degree. Mona found that her class schedule had changed and her academic counselor told her she “would have to finish the rest of these classes on line.” Mona was distraught because she was accustomed to her learning team and did not want to finish classes online. Mona told her counselor “no, we're not going to do that. I was in tears.” After speaking to the senior advisor and the Director of Academic Affairs “I switched over to the other management class that was going on and then they were telling me that I had to pay for this class out of pocket because it was not in the new program.” Mona was dissatisfied with the outcome and told them she would not be paying for the class because the switch was not her fault. After further discussion with the academic counselor and the Director of Academic Affairs, she shared, “they were both instrumental in getting me switched over and talking to the director to waive the fees.” Although the situation was emotionally difficult as it transpired, Mona's faith in the university was restored when the staff members came together and addressed her problem by taking her perspective and feelings seriously. Kenneth reflected on a situation when a faculty member encouraged him to participate in a trip to China so he could understand the experiences of students in his class. Kenneth was impressed the faculty member had the faith and confidence in him that he would recommend him for attending the trip to China. Kenneth would have attended but “his schedule just didn't mesh up.” Kyler relied on the staff members to hold him

accountable to accomplishing his duties while in school. Kyler found that the staff and faculty members had the “willingness to listen to [his] issues and willingness not to listen to [his] excuses.” These relations helped him to be successful while completing his degree.

Confidence building. Five participants described staff and faculty interactions that helped them to feel confident in their abilities. The participants reflected on conversations with staff members who reassured the students that they had what they needed to succeed. The staff and faculty members also conveyed the firm commitment that they would be available to and present with students along the way. Mona stated “the staff made you feel like you were important. The faculty gave you the confidence you would succeed.” Carlos was convinced the staff members “had a general interest in [his] welfare and [him] continuing and completing [his] education goals.” He shared that staff members’ “enthusiasm sort of made [him] feel that they were genuinely concerned with [him] and that they valued [him].” Carlos also reflected on his interactions with faculty members whom he believed “were confident in me and wanted me to succeed.” Carlos found that faculty members wanted him to meet assignment expectations. He described “When I was not performing up to potential, or they felt I had more to give they would go out of their way to coax that out of me or not accept the bare minimum.” The faculty members were foundational in helping him understand that he could achieve at higher levels.

Roslyn reflected on her interactions with staff and faculty members and described the staff and faculty members as “supportive.” She relayed, “They kind of were at the door and they greeted you and they asked if you had any issues.” If you were looking on the wall strangely at the little TV screen to find out where you should go they were right there to say “This is where you need to go.” Faculty members eagerly helped Roslyn to understand she could do better when she was performing below her ability. Roslyn found that “if [she] knew [she] could do

better and faculty members knew [she] could do better they would tell [her] that.” Staff and faculty members worked with the participants in class and around campus regularly reassuring them they had the necessary tools to be successful in class and to earn their degrees. Myra reflected on faculty members “acknowledging [her] grades.” She experienced a renewal in her confidence when faculty members told her “you did it. Faculty members constantly encouraged her and told her “I told you, you could do this.” Myra used the encouraging feedback to stay motivated and engaged in her studies. Sonny reflected on interactions with staff and faculty members that helped him to believe he could succeed. Faculty and staff members made time for him when he needed assistance and helped him to believe “with the support in the college also gave [him] the confidence to succeed [sic]. Sonny believed faculty and staff members would be available to him if he needed assistance and in turn he would be successful in completing his degree. Similarly, Kenneth described interactions with staff and faculty members that helped him to believe faculty and staff members “are here for you.” Kenneth reflected on staff and faculty members visiting classes to ensure students had the necessary tools to be successful in their classes. They offered additional classes and or guidance if students needed assistance.

Positive team interactions. Six participants described the influence of positive experiences with their peers when completing team assignments. The participants came together to work on team assignments in and outside of class. The participants learned from each other, benefitted from the strengths of others, and improved their weaknesses through interactions with those who were more familiar with the material. Many of the participants formed relationships that have continued after graduation. When describing his peer interactions, Carlos depicted “relationships were definitely positive and the people that I came across were definitely people to have in my life... not only did they challenge me they brought new and interesting points of

view- things that I hadn't seen." The members of his team were helpful and "they definitely had knowledge to offer." Similarly, Mona was extremely satisfied with her team experiences. She reflected, "I thank God I had good teams the entire time." Mona was often placed in the role of team leader and "it kind of helped [her] appreciate the team concept". She found the opportunity to learn about "giving the guidance and everything" to be a profoundly rewarding experience. Allen experienced his team interactions very positively and believed they were beneficial to his persistence in pursuing his education. He was on a team with two women and he described "They were like me." He and his team members worked together for two years and they evidenced "great communication." The team experience "reinforced with [him] that as far as teamwork, teams shouldn't alter the way [he] felt about working on an academic team with students." Allen claimed he "never had a problem working on a team at work" and he believed his team experience at school allowed him to learn skills also applicable to the workplace. Kyler described his experience that his team members were working towards a common goal and realizing "this common obstacle is in front of [them]." He depicted that his team found that "[They] had to do what [they] had to do to ensure [they] passed." In order for the team to pass it oftentimes meant "taking extra seconds to help out the other ones get something that the other ones may not have been clear about." The participants worked together to ensure they succeeded as a team. Roslyn also described her team interactions as beneficial. She stated [She] had "good team members and in fact we are still friends." Kenneth believed the "group projects helped [him] to succeed." He was convinced the group projects were important to his education, and they were "not necessarily long drawn out papers, business proposals, or what have you, but something as simple as getting together or have a meeting of the minds."

Overall, participants found that staff and faculty members were willing to assist them during their most difficult situations. The positive interactions between staff, faculty, and peers were essential to participant persistence. The negative impact of the students' personal issues on both emotional and academic well-being were mitigated by the support and collaborative efforts of staff and faculty members. Participants were impressed with how the staff or faculty shared innovative ideas to help them succeed when personal problems impacted their studies. Students believed the staff members were genuinely concerned for their success, and would do all that was necessary to help them to persist in school. Additionally, relationships between peers became vital to the success of the participants. Participants believed they were all members of one team that was dedicated to meeting the goal of fulfilling each students' academic achievement. Enduring relationships were formed while collaborating on team assignments and several of the participants felt as if they obtained skills related to effective teamwork because of their experiences in the classroom.

Research Question Four: Participant Characteristics

Research question four asked: What personal characteristics of the nontraditional students were helpful in their continued pursuit of their business degree at a for-profit higher education institution?

Several of the participants relied on their faith and personal confidence to assist them during their most difficult personal times while pursuing their degrees. Many of the participants believed there was no obstacle they could not overcome in order to complete their degree, and diligently completed their assignments even when they were overwhelmed by burdens in their lives. Several participants endured the combined strain of taking care of families at home,

working at difficult jobs, and completing time consuming class work. Despite these obstacles, they were convinced they would endure until they reached their goals of degree completion.

Self-efficacy. Nine participants were confident in their abilities and did not allow themselves to consider failure as an option. They were committed to the goal of completing what they had started regardless of any obstacles. Carol believed she was successful because “it was just [her]pushing [herself].” She felt if she pushed herself she could be successful. She stated, “I am confident in who I am and I knew [I had] the skill set to have the degree I just didn’t have the degree to support my skill sets.” She believed she had the ability but she thus far lacked the degree as a demarcation of her knowledge and skill. She felt the need to acquire the degree “to show everyone that [she was] not just talking out the side of [her] head. [She was] talking because [she] actually knows the information.

Carlos described his “relevant attention to detail” and he was convinced “[his] research methods are pretty much in line with what [he] expected them to be.” He felt he was “very capable of completing tasks that are set in front of [him].” Eric was similarly confident in his ability to be successful in college. He believed that his abilities for “self- thinking, looking within [him] self and knowing” facilitated his persistence. His personal and military experiences bolstered this belief: he stated, “I have always been successful with things that I accomplished in the military and at home before I joined the military.” He was convinced he had the “self- drive” to accomplish his goals. He shared, “I am not the one that wants to fail, I don’t want to fail in front of my kids, not in school. Maybe basketball or sports, that may be a different thing ...education, we don’t fail in that.”

When describing the characteristics that supported his persistence, Allen remarked that he was very confident, stating, “I knew I was going to complete the degree. I was going to complete no matter what.” Allen believed he was “consistent, committing 100% and taking an attitude of no failure. He wanted “to do the very best [he] could and eliminate as many obstacles as possible as [he] could see down the line.” Allen was also committed to persistence because he “sacrificed a lot of personal time” while completing his degree. Mona described herself as persistent, declaring, “I never put myself in a position where I don’t have the ability to give 100%.” She indicated that she “[doesn’t] join things and then [doesn’t] show up, just because.”

Kyler was exceedingly confident in his ability to complete his degree as well. Kyler maintained, “I knew I was going to complete [my degree] no matter what.” He also contended “I am a fighter; I’ve been fighting since day one.” He eagerly described his will to succeed claiming, “I work best when my back is against the wall and sad to say, life has not been easy for me.” He acknowledged that life was oftentimes difficult but he concluded, “Whatever I have to do to get it done, I will get it done.” Kyler admitted that he was not always able to solve situations easily but “[He] always got it done.” Myra was similarly adamant she had the ability to be successful in completing her degree. She declared “I was dedicated and persistent in going to school. I wouldn’t let anything stop me.” She eagerly described herself as “just persistent; [she] was determined.” In a similar vein, Roslyn stated “I’m not a good quitter and I have always been one to say Yes I can do it.” She commented, “Can’t is not really in my vocabulary.” She knew that she had the option to defer her degree during difficult times but she maintained that degree completion “is a choice and [she was] going to do this.” In agreement, Kenneth described his steadfastness while completing his degree. He “never had any challenges that

made [him] feel as if [he] wasn't going to finish, [He] was always determined to finish." He described himself as "self-confident, resiliency, and determination [sic]."

Faith. Two participants relied on their faith as a resource during the course of completing their degrees. They utilized their inner strength to guide them through the difficult times that challenged their mettle. When Myra experienced challenging times she used "prayer; faith; a lot of studying; [and] a full wholehearted desire to finish what I started." When Kenneth was asked how he overcame difficult situations, he immediately responded "That's easy; prayer." He felt that school may have been arduous at times but in comparison to the personal challenges he faced in life, the challenges he faced in school were "very very minute in comparison." Eric said he was a "finisher" and his "beliefs" would not allow him to fail in completing his degree. His personal beliefs helped him to persist when he experienced difficulties in life and or school. Mona recalled having to rely on her faith when she experienced the death of her aunt and an impending paper during the same time period. She said "Lord I hope this thing paces out." Her faith and beliefs helped her to understand that she could be successful during a very difficult time. Carol reflected on her faith in God as her assistance during difficult times. Carol believed "God never put anything more on her than [she] could bear." She used her faith to guide her through difficult times and she endured until her challenges were overcome.

The participants were very confident in their ability to complete their degrees. They relied on their own abilities (self-efficacy) and their will to complete the educational goals they started. They believed that they had the internal and external resources to overcome difficult life situations. Instead, challenging circumstances only reinforced their mettle, and they continued to endure until they completed their goals.

Summary

In this chapter experiences related to persistence of ten nontraditional students pursuing business degrees at for-profit universities were explained with rich personal descriptions. The data was collected via an in-depth interview and a letter of advice in which the participants vividly discussed the experiences that helped them to persist until graduation even through their most difficult personal or professional situations.

During analysis, twelve themes emerged from the data. The participant responses to research question one yielded the overarching theme of career progression and three subthemes. The subthemes family security, convenience and transferability emerged from participant responses. The first theme of career progression describes the reasons students select business schools including the notion that business schools are essential to progress in some careers. The participants found that business degrees would be a valuable asset in their profession, and if they were to be successful in their current or future careers, a firm business foundation was a necessity. The second theme, family security is related to the importance the participants placed on being able to support their families. The participants believed that a business degree would be beneficial to them in providing for their families. The third theme, convenience, was important to several of the participants in choosing a business program. For example, the universities were in close proximity of where the participants worked or lived, and they had programs in business that were convenient to the participants. The business degrees met the needs of the participants, a factor that influenced the decision to enroll in those particular programs. The fourth theme was transferability. The participants believed a business degree would benefit them at their current jobs and would prove to be an asset in any future occupations.

Participant responses to research question two offered an overarching theme of engagement and subthemes, personal relations, and encouragement. The fifth theme was engagement. The participants consistently remarked that they were engaged by the staff members on an ongoing basis. The staff members were present in multiple ways; in the hallways, or over the telephone or email. The staff members were committed to maximizing student success, and students counted on them for support when students had problems that may have been impeding their progress. The staff members also engaged students to ensure they were reaching their academic potential. The sixth theme was personal relations. The participants felt the staff members went out of their way to assist them when they were experiencing personal problems. They were made to feel that the staff members genuinely cared for their general welfare and their success while in class. The seventh theme was encouragement. The participants adamantly expressed the importance of the faculty and staff members' encouragement which supported the belief that they had the ability to be successful in their studies.

Participant responses to research question three yielded the overarching theme positive student experiences, and subthemes, confidence building, and positive team interactions. The eighth theme was positive student experiences. Although the participants encountered difficulties while in college, they found that staff and faculty members were essential sources of support to overcome challenging situations that at first seemed insurmountable. One participant even recalled a circumstance when a faculty member placed his own health at risk to ensure students were successful with their studies. The participants also shared situations in which staff and faculty members worked collaboratively to ensure students' schedules and classes were in line with their degree plans. The participants wholeheartedly believed the staff and faculty

members were dedicated to making their college experience positive and beneficial. The ninth theme was confidence building which was related to participants' conviction that the staff members and faculty renewed students' confidence by reinforcing that they had the ability to do well on their assignments. The faculty members were enthusiastic about participants' success and they freely expressed their confidence in the participants. The tenth theme was positive team interactions. Several of the participants described positive experiences with their learning teams. Team members were able to work together on assignments that would have been much more difficult if they had not been permitted to collaborate. Many of the participants described relationships with former team members that have continued after graduation.

Participant responses to research question four yielded the overarching theme self-efficacy, and one subtheme which was faith. Relevant to internal sources described by the participants, the eleventh theme was self-efficacy. The participants were remarkably confident in their personal abilities to be successful in college. They did not believe in failure as an option. The participants took challenging situations in perspective and stride and made every opportunity to overcome the obstacles encountered during their college experience. Finally, theme twelve was faith. The participants shared how they used their faith to help them stay focused about college. They described prayer and faith as resources they used to support their success in completing their college degrees.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

This phenomenological study was conducted to explore academic persistence in nontraditional students pursuing business degrees at for-profit universities. Chapter Five provides a summary and discussion of the results. Chapter Five also details the implications of the study, researcher discussion, implications, limitations, recommendations for future research and the final summary.

Summary of Findings

Nontraditional students pursuing their business degrees at for-profit universities experience many situations that impact their persistence. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore academic persistence for nontraditional students pursuing business degrees at for-profit universities. The collection of stories shared by the participants reflect shared experiences. The participant's stories produced 12 themes. The themes were as follows: (a) Career Progression, (b) Family Security, (c) Convenience, (d) Transferability, (e) Engagement, (f) Personal Relations, (g) Encouragement, (h) Positive Student Experiences, (i) Confidence Building, (j) Positive Team Interactions, (k) Self-Efficacy, and (l) Faith.

Career Progression, Family Security, Convenience, and Transferability

Research question one addressed the motivation of nontraditional students to enroll in a business program at a for-profit higher education institution. The themes relating to the reasons nontraditional students selected for-profit universities to complete their degrees were career progression, family security, convenience and transferability. Several of the participants

admitted that they were not aware of differences between for-profit and not for profit universities. They simply knew they wanted or needed to complete their degrees to earn promotions at their current organization or to make them potential candidates for positions in other organizations. The participants believed they had the necessary knowledge and abilities to be successful with their own businesses. When the participants discussed career progression they discussed their future goals and how their success would positively impact their families as well. Most of the participants believed a degree in business would offer opportunities that otherwise would not have been available to them.

The participants agreed that convenience was one of the most compelling factors that led them to a for-profit university seeking a business degree. Universities One and Two were centrally located and in close proximity to the students' home or work. The universities offered business degree programs with classes that took place after work hours. Many of the participants commented favorably on the class schedule that allowed them to go to class for only one night a week after work, taking the remainder of the week to complete their assignments.

The participants discussed how having a degree in business would offer their family some form of security through higher income that would provide a better lifestyle. One participant believed his degree would enable him to start a business that his children could inherit and manage after his retirement. Several of the participants were concerned with making a better life for their children, both currently and for the future.

Several participants described transferability as a reason to pursue their business degrees at for-profit universities. One participant asserted her belief that a degree in business would be a spring board to her next career. Although she had worked in childcare for many years of her life,

she knew that earning a degree in business would open doors to other careers that may be more fulfilling. Participants were also interested in using their degrees to explore different areas in the field of business.

Engagement, Encouragement, and Personal Relations

Research question two addressed the staff, faculty, and peers academic integration methods that helped nontraditional students pursuing their degree at a for-profit higher education institution to persist. The themes relating to students' academic integration in their colleges were engagement, encouragement and personal relations. Several of the participants believed the staff and faculty members excelled at engaging them while students were completing their degrees. The staff members contacted the participants via telephone, email, and chance meetings in the hallways of the universities. Some of the participants reported receiving phone calls once a week.

Several of the students described encouragement from the staff members while completing their degrees. Participants experienced the staff and faculty members as empathetic, knowledgeable and helpful. The staff members communicated their understanding to participants regarding the challenges of going to school as single parents or working adults.

Participants described personal relations with staff and faculty members that were beneficial to their success while completing their degrees. One participant reflected on a situation when his father died and the staff and faculty members were supportive and sympathetic to him during his time of need. He experienced the staff members as taking a personal interest in his loss and showing their concern while also respecting his privacy.

Positive Student Experiences, Confidence Building, and Positive Team Interactions

Research question three addressed the nontraditional student experiences involving faculty, staff and peer social integration characteristics that helped them to continue pursuing their degree at a for-profit higher education institution. The participants relayed several staff and peer social integration situations that contributed to their success while pursuing their degrees. The themes related to social integration included positive student experiences, confidence building, and positive team interactions. Several participants reflected on positive experiences that bolstered their confidence in the university. One participant described a time when staff and faculty members helped him to complete his class when he was experiencing medical issues. He believed staff members were interested in his health as well as his education.

The participants reflected on the situations in which the staff and faculty members renewed their confidence. Participants described the staff members as enthusiastic, genuinely invested in students' success, reliably present, and instilling of confidence. Several participants reflected on instances when they were told by their faculty members they were not performing to their full academic potential. The participants listened to the faculty members and they felt as if they were better students because of the advice they received.

The participants believed their experiences with teams were beneficial to their success. They described the benefits of having some members on their teams who had more work experience and others with class related skills. Several of the participants formed personal relationships with their team members. At the time of the interview several of the participants were still in contact with team members they met while completing their degrees.

Faith and Self-Efficacy

Research question four addressed the personal characteristics of the nontraditional students that were helpful in their continued pursuit of their business degree at a for-profit higher education institution. The participants described themes such as faith and personal confidence (self-efficacy) as characteristics that helped them to be successful while completing their degrees. The participants shared that they pushed themselves while they were completing their degrees committed to succeeding and not considering failure as an option. They described themselves as confident in who they were and believed a degree would serve as validation of their skills and abilities.

Some of the participants believed their faith in God would be enough for them to be successful while they were completing their degrees. They used prayer when they experienced difficult times. Their inner strength derived from faith was a key resource in coping when they encountered obstacles in college or their personal lives.

Discussion

This study is grounded in Tinto's (1975) theory of persistence, and Bandura's (1993) self-efficacy theory. Tinto's (1975) theory of persistence suggested students who were not academically and socially integrated into an organization were less likely to persist than students who were integrated into the organization. Similarly, Severiens (2009) believed that students who felt as if they were at home when they were at school had a much better chance of succeeding in college. The participants persisted through their college programs despite the challenges they faced while pursuing their degrees. Several participants described academic and social integration techniques such as encouragement, engagement, and sincere concern that were

used by faculty and staff members. Faculty members engaged students and provided support with or without explicit requests for assistance. The students frequently encountered staff members in university hallways and the staff members often sent emails to students to ensure their needs were met. Some participants reflected on times when their faculty members overextended themselves to ensure the students were successful in class. Faculty members risked their health and personal time to ensure the participants were successful during their courses. Faculty members also provided guidance to struggling students and offered advice to assist them with their difficult courses.

Tinto (1975) indicated that students who were not socially integrated into the social system of the college or those who were not academically integrated in their colleges were not likely to persist until degree completion. These students are likely to have low levels of commitment and will likely pursue other activities that are appealing to them. For students to persist they have to integrate themselves academically and socially into the college or the university. Rientes (2012) posited that having friends in school and having informal social contact with university staff members is positively related to student persistence. Several of the participants described favorable experiences with their team members as well as the university staff members. Team members became long-term friends and several students continued to maintain relationships with their past team members at the time of the interview.

Bandura (1993) believed that students with confidence in their ability to master academic tasks, when guided by effective faculty members are likely to be successful in school. Many of the participants in this study were confident in their abilities, and their self-efficacy was crucial to their success in college. Participants knew they had the drive to be successful and they believed that failure was not an option. Bandura (1993) theorized there was nothing more

powerful than an individual's belief in his or her abilities and the ability to control their abilities which in turn controlled their lives. When individuals possess high levels of self efficacy they will set more challenging goals and work harder to accomplish the goals they set for themselves (Bandura, 1993). Several participants had multiple responsibilities at home and work and still were successful in their pursuit of their degree because of their belief in their abilities. Bandura (1993) contended that individuals with strong self-efficacy visualize a successful outcome, which in turn, helps them to accomplish their goals. Even though a person may have a wealth of knowledge and the necessary skills to accomplish a goal, they may not be successful during a difficult situation. An individual must have self-efficacy to use his or her skills effectively (Bandura, 1993). The participants were able to use the confidence they had in themselves to overcome any obstacles they encountered during their college experience.

The participants' experiences related to persistence were reflective of Tinto's (1975) theory of persistence. Tinto (1975) believed students who persist are generally academically and socially integrated into the organization and they are likely to persist until completion. The participants vividly shared experiences which helped them to feel as if they were integrated into the organization and they were ultimately successful in persisting until they completed their degrees.

Several of the participants enrolled in the business programs to create better lives for their families and to increase their chances of finding employment. Other participants believed a business degree would be beneficial to them when starting their own business. According to Fogle and Grossnickle (2013) business programs help students to become entrepreneurs and start their own businesses. The participants were interested in utilizing their degrees to increase their success and to provide a better life for their families. Muff (2012) believed business schools are

responsible for preparing students for the complex decisions they will be responsible for making when they enter the workforce. Several of the participants felt their degrees increased their knowledge in the workplace and they ascertained having a degree proved their qualification as business leaders. The participants were eager to complete their degrees so they could ultimately prove they had what was necessary to be successful business owners and leaders.

Deming et al. (2013) determined for-profit organizations are attuned to the marketplace and quickly open schools, train faculty, and offer programs in fast growing areas such as healthcare and information technology. He also discovered that for-profit schools issue 51% of the degrees in computer science, 23% in healthcare, and 34% in security services (Deming et al., 2012). Several of the participants enrolled in the business courses because of the university's convenience. The participants found that the class schedules aligned with their work schedules and the universities were in close proximity to their workplace or home. Participants from both universities reflected on the "new school" that opened in their area and they felt their business programs would meet their needs. According to Deming et al., (2012) for-profit organizations, also known as proprietary institutions provide the same curriculum at several locations and a bulk of their profit is generated from federal student aid. Most of the participants were not knowledgeable on the difference in for-profit and not for-profit schools. They enrolled in the for-profit organizations because they offered the degree they desired and the universities were convenient to them. The participants also believed their education from the universities would open doors for them in the workplace.

Implications

The recommendations offered by the participants are grouped into the following categories: necessary student life changes, student personal characteristics for success, student integration into the university, and faculty and staff roles for continued degree pursuit. Several nontraditional students felt overwhelmed with their multiple roles as primary financial provider, parent, and student. To assist the students with completing their degrees, faculty and staff members have to ensure they are involved in student lives from their initial contact through graduation. The following recommendations are offered to improve the chances of success and persistence of future students.

Necessary Student Life Changes and Expectations

The participants discussed the changes students may have to make in their lives as well as reasonable expectations when pursuing a business degree. Earning a degree is not an easy task and individuals pursuing a degree must anticipate making life changes and setting realistic expectations about their individual outcomes. They have to also ensure they are aware of their individual responsibilities.

Degree benefits. Mona indicated that students have to understand that “doors open” when they earn a degree in business. They should be aware that an “associate’s degree is not enough” if they want to be successful. They also need to understand that earning a degree helps students to learn more about “culture and diversity” which is beneficial in the workplace. When students pursue degrees they should ensure they understand all degree requirements and they should also understand that degrees are beneficial when the students actively participate during their courses. Engaged students will likely reap the benefits of their degrees when they complete

them. Surely, having a degree is an accomplishment but the person who earned the degree has to be able to demonstrate their knowledge in the workplace if they want to be successful in their careers.

Discipline and commitment. Eric said that students have to be “disciplined” in order to make the decision to pursue a business degree. Students considering a business degree have to make sure they focus on having a degree and they have to make sure they are willing to create a good study routine. Sonny expressed that students need to have a “disciplined life” and they also need to make sure they do not “look for life rewards so fast or instant gratification.” Students also need to “look at what [they] look to give back to humanity and pursue it with an open mind.” Allen shared that students who are expecting to pursue a business degree should “multiply their commitment level by ten.” They should also be forward thinkers and “decide on the outcome and then go for it.” Roslyn indicated that students who are considering a degree in business should have “determination, clear goals and persistence.” They should also be willing to “ask for advice” when they are experiencing difficulties. Students who want to be successful in school have to make sure they have the ability to tell their family members and friends “no” when they have assignments that are due. They also have to be willing to sacrifice time during their work weeks to study and to prepare for the classes they have to attend online or on campus. Students should also remember that earning a degree is a structured process and instant gratification may not apply. The student who understands their perseverance is a necessity during difficult times stands a greater chance of persisting until degree completion. When students experience difficulties with their courses they should avoid hesitation and contact staff and or faculty members to assist them with their problems.

Goal setting. Carol stated that students need to assess their lives for the next “five, 10, or 15 years.” To fully consider options, they need to compare what they can accomplish without a degree in comparison with what they would be able to accomplish with a degree. While students benefit from goal setting, they must ensure their goals are well thought out and they need to be realistic. Although a degree may separate an applicant from one without a degree there is no guarantee that a degree will secure a new job. Students have to ensure they have a goal to be successful in their courses and creatively find ways to transfer what they learned in class to what they are required to do in the workplace.

University selection. Myra said students should do their homework and research potential schools. Students need to make sure “their best interest is at hand.” They should also ensure the schools they are researching are “accredited and credits are transferable.” Kenneth claimed that students should consider for-profit universities because they “offer greater flexibility to deal with life’s inevitable changes.” Students considering pursuing a degree should take the necessary time to decide which university is beneficial to their goals. For-profit and not-for-profit universities operate differently and also charge different prices for education. When contemplating going to college potential students should consider conversing with students who have earned their degrees and they may also consider conversing with a friend or family member with experience in higher education.

Personal Characteristics for Student Success

Several of the participants discussed the characteristics students need to have in order to be successful in college while pursuing their degrees. While all students are different and have

differing goals, they share very similar characteristics as to what helps them to be persistent in their studies.

Goal oriented and disciplined. Mona believed that in order for students to be successful while in college they will need to “have a goal of completion” in mind. They will also have to “make a plan” and make sure their “goal completion should be a priority.” She also said students have to “be persistent” when completing their degrees. Myra and Eric conveyed that students should have “determination” and be “self motivated.” Eric believed students would definitely need “good study habits.” He also stated in order for students to be successful during their studies, they must have a “desire to learn.” Sonny relayed that students needed “goals” and “discipline” in order to be successful while in school. He also believed students needed to be focused and they need to have the “ability to hear, read, think, and speak outside the box.” Students will also need to be “active listeners” in order to hear “what is being said and what is not.” Allen indicated “grit and tenacity” were necessary for students who wanted to be successful when completing their degrees. They also need to be persistent and “learn to say “no” [to prevent] over-committing or “no” when asserting one’s rights.” There are several characteristics that are beneficial to student success in college. Students should start their degree program with degree completion being their ultimate goal. They should find outlets to help them decompress when they become overwhelmed with their studies and they should also find mentors to assist them throughout the process. A good mentor could serve as a sounding board to help the students understand that it is not unusual for students to struggle personally and academically from time to time when completing their degree. They should also remember the ultimate responsibility is theirs to complete their degree and they can only blame success or

failure on themselves. Degree completion is not an easy task; however it can be completed when students stay the course and do their best.

Student Integration Into the University

Several of the participants' recommendations relate to integration into the university. The participants found that faculty and staff member engagement was beneficial to their continued success.

Concern and availability. Sonny and Eric both remarked that faculty and staff members should show concern for the students in order to help them feel as if they are part of the organization. They also agreed that students should show concern for each other as well. Mona relayed that staff members should be available in the hallways to welcome students when they arrive for the day. She also believes that it is important for students to see faculty members helping other students when they need help. She said it is important to see faculty members "checking on students." Faculty and staff members are critical to the success and continued degree pursuit for students. They should make sure they convey sincere concern for the students' academic and personal welfare. Students know when their best interests are being considered and they also know when they do not have the attention of staff or faculty members. Staff and faculty members should work diligently to establish relationships with their students in and out of the classroom. A simple technique such as learning each student's name is a start for gaining student trust. Faculty members who establish relationships with their students are more likely to positively influence their education. Several students reflected on their experiences upon entering their buildings for class. Most of the students described positive interactions with the staff members when they met them at the door. This interaction helped the students to feel as

if the staff members cared for their success. Several of the students used the time to ask staff members questions. Although the staff members sent emails to students, the students enjoyed personal face-to-face interaction. Although the interaction was positive for most students, some students believed the interaction appeared disingenuous. In order for the engagement to be successful, staff members need to have an understanding of their students as people with genuine concern for their success and well-being. In order to increase student persistence, it is imperative for staff and faculty members to acknowledge student presence when they arrive to campus. Students are often impressed when faculty or staff members remember them by name and can remember details of previous interactions. Staff and faculty members should make conscious efforts to, at a minimum remember current student names and show them they matter personally and academically. Staff members should make every effort to avail themselves prior to class so students have the opportunity to discuss issues they may be experiencing. The staff and faculty efforts will likely have a positive impact on student persistence.

Student activities. Kenneth asserted the university should “institute an anonymous chat room” in order to “give students the ability to offer real-time feedback and suggestions on what challenges they face.” Kenneth also believed it was important that “staff are in-tune and plugged-in to said feedback and suggestions so that they can incorporate (in practical) solutions and/or acknowledge such concerns.” Carol said that universities should have “student activities as part of the student life.” It is imperative universities create programs that help students learn about current business practices. Theory in the classroom is a necessary tool to help students understand baseline business issues. By the same token, real-world business practices are a necessity in helping students to understand what happens in business on a daily basis to include new innovative practices. Universities should consider having their faculty members with

current business experiences share information with the students. Universities with business programs should ensure faculty members with up-to-date business experience are on campus to facilitate discussions with students. These faculty members should be able to illustrate how to transfer information from the classroom into real world daily activities. Komarraju (2010) found that students who knew one faculty member closely were more satisfied with their college experience and they were more likely to go further with their careers than those who did not have such a relationship. The faculty members should also have an awareness of the business courses offered at the university and be able to establish a dialogue with those students who may be struggling with their business classes. Rientes (2012) found that perceived esteem of faculty members was positively related to social integration. Hiring faculty members who are perceived as knowledgeable and trustworthy would be beneficial to student integration. These faculty members should be available to help students conceptualize the information conveyed in class. They may also serve as sounding boards for students who may be struggling with their assignments. Significantly, Severiens (2009) posited academic integration involves contact with faculty members outside the classroom and that regular contact with faculty members leads to successful academic integration and positively impacts students. As such, faculty members participating during the discussions should be available both before and during class. This interaction with expert faculty will be beneficial to student success in their classes. Participants discussed the significance of having faculty members with up-to-date knowledge of business practices to assist them with their academic and personal pursuits. They also believed a virtual chat-room would be beneficial to them so they could have instantaneous feedback to business related questions. Seasoned faculty members would serve as a critical tool in assisting students with their business related events. This process would also likely increase student persistence.

The student interactions with seasoned business faculty members will likely have a positive impact on student persistence. This practice helps the students to understand what to expect in the workplace. The university should also provide activities on campus so students feel a connection with the university. In order to engage students, universities should create more activities involving students. Universities should consider activities such as student of the year or student of the month. They should also consider showcasing students who are active in the community in a university-wide newsletter to demonstrate their success. The newsletter could also serve as a tool to congratulate students who open businesses or develop ideas which help their current employers. The activities should take place on an ongoing basis throughout the year. Komarraju (2010) believed all humans have a need to belong. They also need frequent positive interactions and the feeling of others caring for them. Students should be able to partake in the activities during their breaks or even before class. This gives students the opportunity to meet with their team members as well as other students they would not ordinarily have contact. Rientes (2012) found that not only do students need to succeed academically, but they also need to participate in the student culture- a recommendation that universities would benefit from implementing. Faculty members and staff personnel should work together to determine what type of activities are beneficial to the students. The activities should be ongoing throughout the year and not only during specific times. In order to increase student persistence, universities should consider identifying staff members to serve as activity coordinators to increase student participation while attending the university. The activity coordinators should talk to students to determine cost effective events the students would like to participate in while on campus. The student of the month or student of the year program as well as the campus newsletters could launch the program. When faculty and staff members dedicate their time to recognize and

encourage students during their successes, their actions will positively impact student persistence.

Faculty and Staff Roles for Continued Degree Pursuit

Several of the students discussed the faculty and staff roles that were important to help students continue pursuing their degrees. Faculty and staff members have to ensure they monitor the organizational pulse so they have the ability to engage students.

Encouragement and engagement. Mona said that faculty and staff need “to encourage students.” Faculty members need to “share business experiences” and staff members need to “stay in contact with students.” She also believed staff members “should be able to break bad news without discouraging students.” Ernest shared that staff members should take the time to get to know the student and they should “encourage and guide them.” He believed the faculty and staff members should “remind them of their personal goals.” Roslyn also believed faculty and staff should encourage students and “try to explain why the student should come to class, turn in assignments on time, and finish the program.” They should also “find out the student’s goals for the future.” Similarly, Allen said faculty and staff members should “focus on outcomes and do everything with the question [in mind] “Is this what is best for the student? Putting the student’s needs above personal needs.” Carol asserted that staff and faculty members needed to have “a genuine interest in the student’s career goals.” She also believed staff and faculty members should “show enthusiasm” when dealing with students and the enthusiasm should be “interpreted as genuine.” Faculty and staff members have a shared role in encouraging students while completing their degrees. Students oftentimes experience difficulties in their personal and professional lives that may impact their success in school. While staff and faculty members are

not social workers, they should attempt to talk to students who have substandard performance in or out of the classroom. They should also be willing to refer students to appropriate counselors that are available at the school when necessary. When students sense that faculty or staff members are genuinely interested in their success, they are likely to persist in school and they will likely do better with their studies.

Continuing education for staff members. Universities should make sure their staff members understand the importance of student integration and conduct continuing education classes on how integration impacts student persistence. In order to decrease the number of students who do not feel integrated into college, staff members need to be made aware of their impact on student success. It is recommended that universities implement a program with monthly classes on how to deal with student concerns as well as mandatory one-on-one or voice contact requirement with students on a semi-weekly basis would be adequate. A staff member should call a student during the week or meet a student prior to class in order to facilitate the students' integration into college. Staff members should also make themselves available in the learning resource centers or other learning areas where students are present. This gives students the opportunity to discuss issues that may impact them. When staff members show their concern for the students, the students feel as if they belong to the university, and this will likely cause them to want to remain members of the university. Participants described the positive impact of staff members greeting them when they arrived to campus. They also discussed how important it was for staff members to show genuine concern for them during their most difficult times. The availability of the staff members will be beneficial in helping students make the decision to persist until degree completion.

Continuing education for students. Universities should consider offering introductory courses to educate students on the college experience. The introductory course should focus on the reasons why students do not complete their degrees. This course should be one of the first courses a student enrolls. The information could be integrated into the coursework of another course; however, the information should be relayed to the students in detail. The university should consider carefully screening the faculty members who facilitate the course. The faculty members should have a likeable personality and they should be able to establish a connection with the students. During the course, faculty members should share their experiences related to student attrition and consequently they should share their experiences with student persistence. The course should go into great detail about the pitfalls of not completing a degree to include the financial costs. By the same token a portion of the course should focus on how students persist as well as techniques they used to help them when they struggled. The university should consider having students who are in their senior year of college to visit a class and reflect on their difficulties to reassure the students they can be successful.

Limitations

Several limitations were noted while completing this study. The study relied upon information that was extracted from only nontraditional students, and the participants had to rely on their memories to provide responses for the study. All participant data was not completed and returned to the researcher as requested and I currently facilitate courses at University One. My affiliation with University One may have biased my opinion to the university.

The study relied on self-reported information from participants and some of the information was retrieved from students graduating within the last five years. Tinto (1975) contends personal issues should be considered when exploring persistence and the data from this

study will address this phenomenon. Students may not be able to remember all personal issues impacting their persistence. Because memories may fade with time, I chose to select individuals who graduated within the last five years. The study was limited to two for-profit universities. Students from other locations may not have the same experiences as the locations used in this study. The participants in the study are business majors and their responses may not be the same as business students from other locations. Since I have taught courses at one of the selected universities (University One) for the last seven years, the students were more willing to participate in the study because of our previous interactions.

Although the study findings may be transferable to many nontraditional students pursuing their degrees at for-profit universities, the sample used during the study is not reflective of every member of this population. The snowball sampling used during this study was indicative of nontraditional students. The transferability limitation was partially addressed by including two different for-profit universities as sources of participants increasing variability in the sample.

One of the students did not complete the letter of advice for future students and one student did not complete the timeline of significant events. Although the information may have shed light on events that may have happened during their lives, not having the information did not impact the study. The in-depth interview served as the foundation of the study while the letter of advice was to be completed after the interview. Future researchers may consider having the students to stay on the phone in order to ensure completion of the last document. They may also consider setting a subsequent 30 minute telephone appointment to discuss the document(s). I emailed the last form to the participants at the start of the interview. My intention was to use the interview to serve as a reminder of their college experiences and then have them to share their ideas about success for future students after the in-depth interview was completed.

Other potential limitations of this study included the limitations commonly affecting all self-report retrospective studies. Morrow (2005) contends that memories tend to fade over time. The participants involved in the study had received their degrees within the last five years. Although five years is arguably a short span of time, some of the participant memories may have declined in accuracy as they became reconstructed over time. Several of the students provided rich details of their interactions while in school, but, vivid memories are not necessarily accurate. Additionally, some of the students who attended University One (the university where I facilitate courses) provided overwhelmingly positive accounts about their experiences related to school. Conversely, the students from University Two had no issues discussing negative experiences as well as university shortcomings they experienced while pursuing their degrees. The students seemed potentially abler to freely share their negative experiences than participants who attended University One.

Lastly, my perspectives about University One are inevitably biased because I have facilitated courses for the university for more than seven years. I serve as an area chair for the organization and I bear some responsibility in the decisions that are made regarding curriculum and governance. I personally believe the university educates students well and also am convinced that our students are capable of being successful. Although some of the information I heard may have run counter to my beliefs, I attempted to bracket my personal biases when recording and interpreting data in order to ensure that the data was trustworthy. All steps were taken to ensure the data captured from human sources was meaningful, trackable and grounded in the life situations of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1982).

Recommendations for Future Research

This research provides a foundation for future studies relating to academic persistence of nontraditional business students pursuing their degrees at for-profit universities. It is essential to learn about the situations that positively impact nontraditional business students seeking their degrees at for-profit universities in order to find strategies to help students persist. Researchers who find the situations that impact students positively are likely to find strategies to help students to persist.

Future researchers may consider gaining internal access to for-profit universities if possible. A researcher with access to the faculty, staff, and student populations would have the opportunity to discover which activities help students to feel as if they have a sense of belonging. Future researchers with internal access would find that information obtained from students about factors related to their success coupled with knowledge of the techniques used by the university would contribute a more complex investigation of factors contributing to persistence. It is strongly recommended that future researchers begin the process early. During this study I had great difficulty gaining access to the universities. University Two relayed they did not help researchers who were completing studies involving their organization. Conversely, University One provided instructions for researchers to conduct studies pertaining to their organization but met monthly to discuss research proposals and each time they provided feedback they requested additional information making the entry very difficult.

Future researchers should attempt to discover programs that universities use to ensure faculty members are available to students. Tinto (1975) posited a model of institutional action is needed to help universities develop policies and practices that may be beneficial to student persistence. Severiens (2009) posited that knowledge of formal academic integration can only be

gained by studying the organization itself. Informal integration, in contrast, involves the students and teachers outside the classroom. During interactions outside the classroom the faculty members and students may consider themselves socially equal and even discuss subjects that are personal in nature. Given this, future researchers should endeavor to research integration techniques in which faculty and students interact outside of the classroom. For-profit universities may not offer as many extracurricular activities as compared to public institutions and thus the chance of outside classroom interactions are less likely. A future researcher would generate important contributions by exploring creative ways for universities to unite students and faculty members in a less formal environment.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore academic persistence for nontraditional students pursuing business degrees at for-profit universities. Chapter Five detailed the implications of the study, researcher discussion, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research. Several recommendations for universities and students were suggested that could prove beneficial to universities. Universities should consider conducting training with staff and faculty members to help them understand their impact on student persistence. The universities should also provide courses that help students to understand the negative outcomes of attrition as well as the positive outcomes related to persistence. Universities should ensure they encourage students, engage students, and ensure faculty and staff members are available to meet student needs. They should also provide activities to ensure students know they are valuable to the organization. In order for students to be successful they need to be goal oriented and disciplined and they should take the necessary time to research the university they will attend. Students should set goals related to their degree completion and they

should be committed to completing their goals and they must be disciplined to ensure their success. Finally, students should ensure they constantly remember the benefits of having a degree and the opportunities a degree can provide them.

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APPENDIX A

In- Depth Interview Questions

1. What led you to select business as your field of study? RQ 1
2. What were your reasons for selecting a for-profit university? RQ 1
3. How often did you interact with staff members and what was the nature of your interactions? RQ 2
4. What situations, if any helped you to believe staff members were confident in you or wanted you to succeed? RQ 2
5. What experiences with staff members helped you to feel as if you were a valued member of the university? RQ 3
6. How often did you interact with faculty members outside of class and what was the nature of your interactions? RQ 3
7. What situations, if any helped you to believe faculty members were confident in you or wanted you to succeed? RQ 3
8. What peer interactions helped you to succeed when you were in college? RQ 3
9. What techniques did you use to help you believe you could be successful during your most difficult personal and college related situations? RQ 4
10. What challenges did you experience that made you believe you were not capable of completing your degree? How did you overcome these challenges? RQ 4
11. What personal characteristics helped you to believe you had the ability to complete your degree? RQ 4
12. Do you have anything else to add? Questions 1-11

APPENDIX B*Participant Request Form*

Attn Participant:

My name is Leroy Purdie and I am a doctoral candidate with Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. I am currently conducting a study related to student persistence. The title and purpose of my dissertation is Exploring Academic Persistence for Nontraditional Business Students at For-Profit Universities.

I am writing this email to invite you to participate in a study relating to academic persistence while in college. Your feedback will be beneficial in identifying strategies that help students to persist during college. Please let me know if you are available for the study. The meeting should not take more than an hour of your time. I look forward to your response at the email address below. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Leroy Purdie

lpurdie@liberty.edu

912.856.1681

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 7/23/15 to 7/22/16 Protocol # 2196.072315

CONSENT FORM

Exploring Academic Persistence for Nontraditional Business Students at For-Profit Universities

Leroy Purdie

Liberty University

School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study related to persistence. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a nontraditional student attending a for-profit organization and you are pursuing a degree in business. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Leroy Purdie, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore academic persistence for nontraditional students pursuing business degrees at for-profit universities.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

Participants are expected to complete a demographic survey to determine their eligibility for the study. The survey should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. Participants are expected to spend no more than one hour of their time during an in-depth interview. During the in-depth

interview, participants will provide feedback on 12 questions related to persistence while in college, and provide feedback on 4 questions offering advice on persistence for future students. Prior to the in-depth interview, participants are expected to complete a 13 question timeline of significant events that impacted their persistence. The timeline of significant events form should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete. Participants will receive the blank form during first email contact with the researcher. Participants will be audio recorded during the in-depth interview.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risk is minimal, which is no more than experienced during every day activities. There are no direct benefits to participating. The information may help society in general with implementing techniques that are beneficial in increasing academic persistence.

Compensation:

Participants will not be compensated financially or academically for participating during the study.

APPENDIX D*Demographic Survey Information***Edit Options Logic Move Copy Delete****1. What is your age?**

SurveyMonkey Certified

- 17 or younger
- 18-20
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older

2. Are you White, Black or African-American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander, or some other race?

SurveyMonkey Certified

- White
- Black or African-American
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- From multiple races

Some other race (please specify) **3. How many children are you parent or guardian for and live in your household (aged 17 or younger only)?**

SurveyMonkey Audience

- None
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- More than 4

4. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

SurveyMonkey Certified

- Less than high school degree
- High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Graduate degree

5. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

SurveyMonkey Audience

- Employed, working full-time
- Employed, working part-time
- Not employed, looking for work
- Not employed, NOT looking for work
- Retired
- Disabled, not able to work

6. Which of the following best describes your current occupation?

SurveyMonkey Certified

- Management Occupations
- Business and Financial Operations Occupations
- Computer and Mathematical Occupations
- Architecture and Engineering Occupations
- Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations
- Community and Social Service Occupations
- Legal Occupations
- Education, Training, and Library Occupations
- Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations
- Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations
- Healthcare Support Occupations
- Protective Service Occupations
- Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations

- Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations
- Personal Care and Service Occupations
- Sales and Related Occupations
- Office and Administrative Support Occupations
- Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations
- Construction and Extraction Occupations
- Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations
- Production Occupations
- Transportation and Materials Moving Occupations

Other (please specify)

7. Do you have any children under 18?

SurveyMonkey Audience

- Yes
- No

8. Which of the following best describes the field in which you received your highest degree?

SurveyMonkey Certified

- Mathematics
- Science
- Healthcare
- Medicine
- Computing
- Engineering
- Technology
- Business

Other (please specify)

9. Are you currently enrolled as a student?

SurveyMonkey Audience

- Yes, full time in graduate school
- Yes, part time in graduate school
- Yes, full time at a four year undergraduate college/university

- Yes, part time at a four year undergraduate college/university
- Yes, full time at a two year undergraduate college/university
- Yes, part time at a two year undergraduate college/university
- Yes, at a high school or equivalent
- No, I am not currently enrolled as a student

APPENDIX E*Timeline of Significant Events*

1. When you were in high school did you have plans to pursue a college degree?
2. When and at what age did you decide to attend college?
3. Why did you decide to pursue a college degree?
4. Were there any personal or professional events in your life that helped you make the decision to join college?
5. If you had a child or children prior to making the decision to pursue a college degree, what impact did being a parent have on your decision?
6. Did you feel as if you had the necessary support for college prior to enrollment?
7. How much of an impact did finances have on your decision to pursue a degree? Please list your thought process pertaining to financing your college degree.
8. What steps did you take to find out how to enroll in college? Was most of your research conducted via telephone, email, or in person?
9. When you spoke to the enrollment counselors did you feel as if they were interested in your success?
10. Once enrolled in college, what was most difficult for you in relation to your class work?

11. Were there any significant events that impacted you during college that made you second guess your decision to join?

12. What steps did you take to overcome the obstacles you encountered? Were faculty or staff personnel helpful in making your decision to stay in college?

13. What was most beneficial in helping you to stay focused during your difficult times while pursuing your degree?

APPENDIX F

Letter of Advice

1. What life changes are beneficial in helping future students to make the decision to pursue degrees at for-profit universities seeking a business degree?
2. What actions can students, faculty, and staff take to ensure future students feel as if they are a part of the organizations?
3. What actions can faculty and staff members take to ensure future students feel the need to continue pursuing their degree?
4. What personal characteristics do you believe future students will need to assist them with completing their degrees?

APPENDIX G

Epoche (October 2014)

As a college instructor I have had the opportunity to serve as an adjunct faculty member as well as an Area Chair. In both roles I have had the opportunity to interact with my peers. I have learned a great deal about their instruction techniques as well as their ideas on what right looks like in the classroom. Fortunately I have had the opportunity to witness instruction at its best in my own personal opinion. Unfortunately I have had the opportunity to witness faculty members who struggle in the classroom and they are content with their performance. As a peer I was able to offer advice on what was appropriate in the classroom and I shared information from the faculty handbook to support my ideas. As a Chair I share information from the faculty handbook, coach, mentor, and provide evaluations for faculty members when they are meeting the standards and even more when they are not.

Since I have seen my fair share of lackluster performances in the classroom, I make every attempt to exceed standards. This does not mean that I believe I am perfect and I openly admit I have made my share of mistakes as well. My interactions with faculty and staff members have helped me to believe that we deeply impact our students' successes. If we are not confident with our teaching abilities or the material we are sharing with our students we are not helping them. Every student in our classroom deserves the utmost attention and our interactions with them ultimately let them know if we are concerned with their success. Faculty members who are not active in creating an atmosphere conducive to learning will ultimately negatively impact student success.

During this study I had to make sure that my feelings about what right looks like in the classroom took a back seat and I had to listen to the participants and interpret what looked right to them.

APPENDIX H

Change in Protocol

Inbox

Good Afternoon Leroy,

This email is to inform you that your request to expand your participant criteria to individuals who have completed their degrees from XXXXXXXXXXXX within the last five years regardless of their geographic location as opposed to limiting participants to graduates living in southeastern Georgia and to conduct your interviews by phone as needed has been approved.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Best,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

The Graduate School

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APPENDIX I: Themes and Significant Statements

Theme: Career Progression

Allen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had over ten years of management experience • It was something I could use in any business because my background was in management
Carol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can do anything with business with any spectrum • All I knew was to go to school
Carlos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Went along with my strengths • Hand in hand with the strengths and what I think I am efficient at • Would be a good fit for as far as my career
Eric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own my own business
Kenneth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To obtain certification in contracting
Kyler	
Mona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I could see myself either training or leading someone or teaching
Myra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wanted to pursue something better than educating preschool
Roslyn	
Sonny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hope to someday own my own business

Theme: Family Security

Allen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And provide for my family during the time going to school
-------	---

Carol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You need to take your time because your children are young • A degree can give you upward mobility that gave me the push • I look at my children, I knew I needed to get a degree • I knew that in order for me to excel in the work f force a degree w as a must
Carlos	
Eric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take care of my family • Pass it down to them when I get older
Kenneth	
Kyler	
Mona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wanted him (son) to have his foundation
Myra	
Roslyn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not want to let my children down, they were very proud
Sonny	

Theme: Convenience

Allen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I only had to go to school once a week • I felt you know it was something I could do, flexible and something I could finish up • It was one of the programs they offered at night • At the time, the for- profit and non- profit, private school didn't really make
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	<p>a lot of sense to me. I just looked at it as a way to go to college</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully accredited, being able to go to school one night a week versus having to go to school during the day and work • Those matters of convenience were big options for me as far as being able to finish school
Carol	
Carlos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly the convenience • Close to my place of employment • Had a convenient location and convenient hours
Eric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodated my needs with class only one day a week • One day a week was really beneficial
Kenneth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The flexibility that they offered at the time
Kyler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How they catered to working adults
Mona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can't beat going to work, getting off work and being able to go to school once a week • So primarily the convenience
Myra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to go to school in the evening and work during the day
Roslyn	
Sonny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was the convenience more than anything else • Right by the house • Opportunity to do things at home and still do my fatherly duties

Theme: Transferability

Allen	
Carol	
Carlos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a faculty member one day
Eric	
Kenneth	
Kyler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I always wanted to own my own business • Want to own my own work for notable or one of the top companies in the world
Mona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I found out that I could be an adjunct instructor
Myra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would provide me the opportunity in different areas of the workforce • Career started
Roslyn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very broad area that would provide me the opportunity in different areas of the workforce
Sonny	

Theme: Engagement

Allen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They were very active with the student members • She was great as far as staff she was really great
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That interaction was really positive • I had a lot of interaction with staff • Very helpful typically would answer my questions within 24 -48 hours
Carol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They made you feel like you were important • Like you were of value while you were in their class
Carlos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The interactions were all generally positive • Two to three days I would say I interacted with faculty or staff members • Social interaction or exchanging pleasantries
Eric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interacted with them at least once a month • Call them just to see how things were going • They would stop and talk to me to see how things were going • Always offered their assistance
Kenneth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probably 2 to 3 times a session they were very active • Come around and ask people to get in early • Check in with you to see if you were on track • Do a lot of touching bases with the veterans
Kyler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They stayed on me every day • They reminded me of why I started
Mona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the greetings and stuff like that in the hallway • Just a pleasant face to see at first, always greeting • Just about every week • She always called back she initiated calls

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They were on it the whole time
Myra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About three times a semester • They knew who I was they never forgot • For somebody to be concerned they were always standing there • Their presence was known
Roslyn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On a weekly basis • Were at the door and they greeted you • Asked if you had any issues
Sonny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I did interact with them constantly • They constantly communicated with you

Theme: Personal Relations

Allen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can attest to personal relationships with staff members as a student that I became professionally close • Still friends with most of them • She gave me a hug and everything was great • Seemed to care about my well being and the success of my classes
Carol	
Carlos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A general interest in my welfare and me continuing and completing my education goals

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They valued me being there
Eric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They wanted me to succeed by the way they seemed sincere and caring • For myself and my family • They were very helpful and motivated me to stay in school • Like a family atmosphere to me • I believed they showed their sincere interest in me and they wanted me to be successful
Kenneth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask you how you're doing or if you need any counseling
Kyler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They were going to be the reason I get my degree • Day to day, just the personal interactions that I had with staff members • It was the personal interaction that I had with a lot of the staff members that helps you
Mona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She was kind of mentoring me • She showed concern • Kept me feeling like they cared that I was there
Myra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I never felt like I was alone • I'm having a pretty hard time with this class and I could always talk to them • They would give me that input of understanding what I wasn't understanding
Roslyn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their readiness to help

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were very supportive everyone from that school was very supportive
Sonny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professors they offered their time if you had a problem • If class went to a certain time they would stay over to help you with your specific situation

Theme: Encouragement

Allen	
Carol	
Carlos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lot of encouragement for me to pursuing my degree
Eric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They were continually encouraging • If I had any issues or any problems, and just to encourage me • Just hang in there, just keep striving • Learn from the mistakes, buckle down and study and get a good routine
Kenneth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They were vested in the students • Doing everything they could for that matter to make sure you maintain that 4.0 GPA
Kyler	
Mona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It made me believe they cared and I was a valued member • She was also very encouraging to me too
Myra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I needed that push of encouragement and that was what my counselors did • Me being an older person I just needed that you can do it • Keep going don't let anything stop you

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That type of motivation and encouragement • Acknowledging when I did great points
Roslyn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They were right behind me • They encouraged me through phone conversations sometimes or just email that said you can do this • A great support team • And they knew I could do better they would tell me that
Sonny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They were very supportive and they communicated with you all the time

Theme: Positive Experiences

Allen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They don't talk about what your personal stuff • They didn't share it with other people • They were very concerned about me and you know they were very thoughtful • Teacher would make the exception for me to be able to continue on with the class • I could tell they really cared about you • His dedication is something that just always stuck out in my mind • He stayed to help students because he loved students that much • He genuinely cared about not just me but the students in general
Carol	
Carlos	

Eric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had surgery on my eye • You can be out and make up the work • That was showing her concern for me going to school • She enlightened me on the program that they had that could assist me • They worked with me and that was a good thing
Kenneth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of outreach for veterans that were on campus • Tried to talk me into going but my schedule just didn't mesh up (China)
Kyler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to listen to my issues and willingness not to listen to my excuses
Mona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jumped into the situation to ensure that we got instruction • Getting me switched over and talking to the director to waive the fees
Myra	
Roslyn	
Sonny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go back to the basics and when I'm structuring my papers • Getting that support from them

Theme: Confidence Building

Allen	
Carol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you were enrolled in that class, they gave you the confidence you would succeed
Carlos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They were confident in me and wanting me to succeed • Had a certain level of expectations for students

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coax that out of me
Eric	
Kenneth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are here for you
Kyler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They would help me along to get me to the finish line and I believed it
Mona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made you feel like you were important
Myra	
Roslyn	
Sonny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the support in the college also gave me the confidence to succeed

Theme: Positive Team Interactions

Allen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They were like me, they wanted to do their very best • They spent the extra time they needed • They had the same mindset that they wanted to do well
Carol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would help them with their math or certain subjects
Carlos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relationships were definitely positive • They brought new and interesting points of view • They had knowledge to offer
Eric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of us worked together • They would break it down so I could understand • The teamwork concept really worked and helped
Kenneth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not only get us to promote academic excellence but also to give us that peer

	to peer interaction
Kyler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have to do what we have to do to ensure we pass • Taking extra notes or passing notes ensuring that one of us was going over the material • Taking extra seconds to help out the other ones
Mona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I thank God I had good teams • It kind of helped me appreciate the team concept • I kind of led it but it was a joint effort
Myra	
Roslyn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Had some good teams • Did have some good team members and in fact, we still talk occasionally
Sonny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students were very supportive of me we had study groups • So the students there all they wanted to was to make sure they did well • Failure to them was not an option

Theme: Self Efficacy

Allen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I knew I was going to complete no matter what • Attitude of no failure
Carol	
Carlos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have the relevant attention to detail • As long as I keep focused, I am very capable of completing tasks
Eric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was self thinking within and looking within yourself and knowing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wanting to be successful at whatever I do • Keeping that drive to accomplish what I started
Kenneth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was always determined to finish • Self-confidence. Resiliency determination. • Certainly I could overcome challenges of finishing school
Kyler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind myself why I am here sometimes • I always knew I could get it • Buckling down and getting it done • At no point did I didn't think I couldn't complete it • Different level of motivation to ensure that I completed it • I'm a fighter. I've been fighting since day one • But I always get it done
Mona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's just my persistence that I have • I don't put myself in a position where I don't have the ability to give 100% • don't join things and then don't show up
Myra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistence, I was dedicated and persistent in going to school • I wouldn't let anything stop me • I was determined • I'm going to do this
Roslyn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wholehearted desire to finish what I had started • I'm not a good quitter • I can do it

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can't is not really in my vocabulary
Sonny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had the drive and wanted to pursue getting that degree • I knew that I could do the work

Theme: Faith

Allen	
Carol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank God I finished
Carlos	
Eric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My beliefs
Kenneth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now that's easy. Prayer
Kyler	
Mona	
Myra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer, faith
Roslyn	
Sonny	