RESIDENTIAL ADJUNCT FACULTY MEMBERS' EXPERIENCES FORMING AND

MAINTAINING CARING INSTRUCTOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS:  A

TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY


by

Kristine J. Murray

Liberty University



A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy


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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experience of fostering caring instructor-student relationships for residential adjunct faculty members at accredited degree-granting institutions in the South. The theories guiding this study were Noddings' (1984) ethic of care, which provided a framework for the formation and maintenance of relationships, and Astin's (1999b) student involvement theory, which placed an emphasis on both quantity and quality of interactions. The central research question guiding this study was: How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their experiences forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships in an effort to increase student engagement? There were three sub-questions that were investigated in this study: (a) How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their ability to develop caring relationships through positive interactions with students inside and outside the classroom? (b) How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their ability to cultivate an ethic of care with their students? and (c) What contextual factors affect residential adjunct faculty members' experiences forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships? The methods of data collection used in this study were a questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and a letter to a new adjunct faculty member. The data was analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) procedures for transcendental phenomenology, which incorporates epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. From the analysis of the data, four themes emerged: learning about the student, engaging the student, showing care for the student, and limitations in building and maintaining relationships.

*Keywords*: instructor-student relationships, higher education, ethic of care, student engagement, residential adjunct faculty members

**Copyright Page**

**Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this to my daughters. Thank you for your patience and understanding during this journey. We may have sacrificed some time together, but I hope that you see the value in what was gained. May you always be confident, know your worth, and follow your dreams.

## Acknowledgments

There have been many who have been instrumental in helping me to complete this dissertation. Without their support, I would not have accomplished this monumental achievement.

First, I would like to thank my family. There have been many late nights and missed family time. However, your support has been unwavering. To my husband, thank you for helping me sort out my thoughts even when you did not want to. Thank you for picking up the slack when I was studying. To my children, thank you for understanding when I was not able to do things with you because of my schoolwork. Thank you for motivating me to do my best and be my best. I hope that I have set a good example for you.

I would like to thank my professors. They asked thought-provoking questions and provided feedback, which helped me to grow in my thinking process and my writing. I would like to also thank my good friend and classmate Erica Badru. Erica, you have been a constant support from the beginning. You encouraged me and prayed for me through some of the most difficult times. I feel so blessed that God put you in my life to walk this journey with me. I am so thankful that I have made a friend for life.

Finally, I would like to thank my dissertation committee. Dr. Spaulding, thank you for stepping in when I lost my original committee chair. Your understanding of my circumstances and allowing me to go at my own pace allowed me the opportunity to enjoy this process. Dr. Swezey, you were one of my favorite professors. I felt like I grew the most as a scholar in your class. Dr. Spaulding and Dr. Swezey, I cannot thank you enough for your invaluable feedback and for pushing me to be the best that I could be. I could not have asked for a better committee.

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National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

**Overview**

Student retention has been a major concern in higher education since the 1960s, which in turn led to the development of multiple student retention theories in the 1970s (Aljohani, 2016; Burke, 2019). Researchers have used these theories as a framework to study student retention in recent years, and have found that various forms of student engagement including instructor-student relationships can have a positive effect on retention (Dwyer, 2017; Glass et al., 2017; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Hoffman, 2014; Owolabi, 2018; Quin, 2017). The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe residential adjunct faculty members' experiences fostering caring instructor-student relationships in an effort to improve student engagement. This chapter provides a brief discussion of the background of this topic. In addition, the situation to self, the problem statement, the purpose statement, and the significance of the study is described. Finally, the research questions guiding this study and key definitions are introduced.

**Background**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2018), there were consistently between 58% and 60% of individuals who graduated with a bachelor's degree within six years of starting from the year 2000 until the year 2010. Because institutions strive to increase that number, researchers are seeking to discover which factors increase retention. It is important to note the difference between persistence and retention. While both terms are related to students remaining at the institution until graduation, persistence focuses on the student's role, whereas retention focuses on the institution's role. Because this study focused on adjunct faculty members' experiences fostering caring instructor-student relationships, the focus was on

retention. One important factor related to retention is student engagement (Bonet & Walters, 2016; Hall & O'Neal, 2016; Turner, 2016; Yamauchi et al., 2016). While research indicates that student engagement increases student retention, there is not a clear definition of what student engagement is (Groccia, 2018; Vuori, 2014; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). However, for the sake of this study, the definition provided by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) will be used. Student engagement consists of two features:

> The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities that decades of research studies show are linked to student learning. (Indiana University Bloomington, n.d., What is Student Engagement section)

> Tinto (1975) described two spheres of engagement: academic and social, both of which play an instrumental role in student retention. Recent literature supports this claim (Groves et al., 2015; Jorgenson et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2017; Xu, 2017). Furthermore, multiple studies have found the instructor-student relationship, which includes both the academic and social spheres, has one of the most important impacts on enhancing student engagement (Groves et al., 2015; Zhou & Cole, 2017).

This study sought to explore the formation and maintenance of caring instructor-student relationships as a means of increasing student engagement and retention. Historically, the engagement and retention of students has been a concern for institutions for decades (Burke, 2019; Groccia, 2018; Tight, 2020). Socially, the formation of instructor-student relationships has a multitude of benefits for both instructors and students (Arghode et al., 2017, Dwyer, 2017; Martini et al., 2019; Quin, 2017). Theoretically, the study of the formation and maintenance of

caring instructor-student relationships furthers the theories of student involvement and the ethic of care (Astin, 1999b; Noddings, 1984). The following sections provide an overview of these historical, social, and theoretical contexts.

**Historical Context**

In the period following World War II, there was a massive expansion in higher education (Altbach, 2016; Geiger, 2016). The number of students attending college tripled from 1940 to 1970, which was met with an increase in the number of institutions (Geiger, 2016). While the creation of new institutions has leveled off, student enrollment has not. Since the 1980s, student enrollment has continued to increase leading to an increase in the professoriate (Altbach, 2016). A majority of the increase in professoriate has been part-time faculty. The NCES (2019b) stated, from the fall of 1999 to the fall of 2018 full-time faculty increased by 40%, whereas part-time faculty increased by 72%. With this rapid increase in the student population, came the issue of how to retain the students.

One of the main solutions for retention has been student engagement. However, the construct of student engagement has also been evolving since the 1930s. These constructs have included time on task by Ralph Tyler in the 1930s, quality of effort by C. Robert Pace in the 1960s and 1970s, student involvement by Alexander Astin in the 1980s, social and academic integration by Vincent Tinto in the 1980s and 1990s, good practices in undergraduate education by Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson in the 1980s, outcomes by Ernest Pascarella in the 1980s, and student engagement by George Kuh in the 1990s and 2000s (Groccia, 2018; Kuh, 2009). In 1998, the NSSE was conceived as a means of establishing a way to assure quality in higher education through the surveying of undergraduate students about their educational experiences (NSSE, 2001). One factor assessed by the NSSE is student engagement. With the

launch of the NSSE in 2000 along with its widespread use since then, the definition of *student engagement*, which includes the amount of time and effort of students as well as the opportunities linked to learning provided by the institution (Indiana University Bloomington, n.d.), has become popularized. Even though the term *student engagement* has become standard in the lexicon of higher education, the successful implementation of the concept leading to retention has not, perhaps due to its complexity. In fact, according to the NCES (1989, 2019c), 54.3% of students who started in the fall of 1980 persisted to graduation within four years, while 62% students who started in the fall of 2012 persisted to graduation within six years. While the percentage has increased slightly, there is still a significant number of students who do not persist to graduation even though institutions have placed a high priority on student engagement, which shows that attrition has been a problem for decades.

**Social Context**

Students who are able to form positive relationships with their instructors can benefit greatly in terms of their academic performance and retention (Dwyer, 2017; Hoffman, 2014; Owolabi, 2018; Quin, 2017). If instructors know their students' backgrounds, they can use that information to adapt their in-class instruction to make it more relevant to their students (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Marx et al., 2016). When students feel that the lesson is relevant to them, they are more apt to be engaged, which can lead to improved academic performance. Additionally, because adjunct faculty may be practicing in their field of expertise, they may be able to provide current professional knowledge, experience, and connections that full-time faculty are not able to provide (Stenerson et al., 2010; Stivison, 2019). Moreover, student engagement increases when students feel their instructor cares about them (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Jorgenson et al., 2018). However, students are not the only ones

affected by these relationships. The instructors are also affected, particularly in regard to their wellbeing and work engagement (Martini et al., 2019; Spilt et al., 2011). Fostering relationships takes time and effort, which can be problematic for the adjunct faculty member who is teaching at multiple institutions or has a professional job outside of teaching, and students appear to understand and accept this problem (Cho et al., 2014; Landrum, 2009). Furthermore, adjunct faculty are less likely to have office hours or even have an office in which to meet students (American Association of University Professors, n.d.; Cho et al., 2014; Landrum, 2009; Liftig, 2014). The results of the current study can benefit both students and adjunct faculty as the challenges that the adjunct faculty faced were voiced, which may lead to changes in policies that impede the fostering of instructor-student relationships.

**Theoretical Context**

In this study, the focus was on the formation and maintenance of a positive relationship between the instructor and the student. Both the quantity and quality of interactions directly relates to the fostering of instructor-student relationships. There are two influential theoretical frameworks for student engagement: Tinto's (1975) theory of student integration and Astin's (1999b) student involvement theory. Both theories indicate a connection between student engagement and retention. Tinto (1975) explained a student's decision to drop out of college as a longitudinal process made up of interactions between the student and the academic and social systems of the institution. He claimed that the more integrated a student becomes into those two systems, the more likely retention becomes. In his more recent work, Tinto (2007, 2009, 2017) explained that expectations, feedback, support, and involvement are essential to student success and retention, and it is the institution's responsibility to provide these to the student.

While Astin's (1999b) theory is similar to Tinto's (1975) theory, there are a couple of

differences, which made it a better fit for this study. Astin (1999b) does not separate integration into academic and social spheres; rather, he views the experience as a whole. Instructor-student relationships can fall into both an academic and social system. Holmes (2018) argued that academic and social integration were conjoined, supporting Astin's (1999b) view of not separating the two spheres. Holmes (2018) further argued that integration was conjoined by whom the interaction was with and not the type of interaction. Astin (1999b) emphasized not only the quantity of interactions, but also the quality of those interactions. Instructors and students can interact frequently in the classroom, but this does not necessitate a successful relationship. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, Astin's (1999b) student involvement theory was a better fit.

The second theory serving as a framework for this study was Noddings' (1984) ethic of care theory. According to this theory, an encounter or series of encounters is called caring, with one person being the one caring and the other the cared-for (Noddings, 2012a). In some relationships, such as that of an instructor and student, the relations are not equal; however, both individuals must contribute in order to establish and maintain the caring (Noddings, 1984, 2012a). The one caring must be attentive and receptive to what the cared-for is expressing, whether directly or indirectly expressed, and respond positively to the need; but, this does not mean that the one caring can always give the cared-for what is needed (Noddings, 1984, 2012a). In this case, the one caring must respond in a way, which would still maintain a caring relation (Noddings, 1984, 2012a). In turn, the cared-for responds in a way showing that the caring has been received (Noddings, 1984, 2012a). This theory guided the understanding of the formation of the relationship between the instructor and student in this study.

**Situation to Self**

My motivation for conducting this study came from over a decade of teaching English as a second language as an adjunct faculty member at both a community college and a public university. In my experience, I found that the students who are more engaged in the classroom and in various activities outside of the classroom tend to be more successful academically. On the other hand, those students who are not engaged inside or outside of the classroom experience greater difficulty and tend to leave the institution before completing their programs. As an educator, I want the best for my students. While I believe this is true for most educators, students do not always perceive this to be the case. Therefore, I think it is important for educators to foster positive relationships with their students. This may be easier said than done, especially for adjunct faculty members, who often do not have the necessary support from the institution. I realized that this is my perception, and I was curious to understand what other adjunct faculty members' perceptions were on the topic of fostering positive relationships with their students.

I acknowledge that I brought philosophical assumptions to this study. First, I brought an ontological assumption, which Creswell and Poth (2018) explained as the idea that individuals hold their own realities. My intent was to report the "different perspectives as themes develop in the findings" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20). Hence, because this is a qualitative study, I brought the rhetorical assumption that the findings reported the reality as seen through the eyes of the participants using their own words and stories of their personal experiences. Furthermore, researchers bring their own set of values to a study, which is known as an axiological assumption. I acknowledge the value-laden nature of this study and have made clear any biases that may occur due to my values. For example, I believe that teaching is more than just providing content matter to students. It is the instructor's job to help students succeed. In order to do this,

instructors must know their students on a more personal level, and students must sense that their instructors genuinely care about them. Finally, I brought a methodological assumption to this study. The methodological assumption recognizes that qualitative researchers use inductive logic; as a result, research questions and data collection strategies were modified to better reflect the understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I approached this study from a social constructivism paradigm. This paradigm posits that individuals develop subjective meanings based on their experiences, which can lead to many different views (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, in this paradigm the researcher's goal is to rely on the participants' views to inductively develop a pattern of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In other words, "the researcher's understanding is co-constructed with that of the participants through their mutual interaction within the research setting and dialogic interaction" (Costantino, 2008, p. 120). Because the researcher's understanding is co-constructed with the participants, participants are often referred to as co-researchers. With this concept in mind, the questions posed to the participants in the interviews were open-ended and broad in nature. Using this method of questioning allowed me to better understand the participants' various perceptions of the phenomenon based on their individual experiences.

## Problem Statement

According the NCES (2019c), of first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduates, only 81% enrolled in a four-year institution were retained after their freshman year, and only 62% enrolled in a two-year institution were retained after their freshman year. Even more alarming is the fact that only 60% graduated with a bachelor's degree within six years and only 32% graduated with a certificate or associates degree within 3 years (NCES, 2019c). For institutions looking to increase their retention and graduation rates, an increase in student

engagement may be the answer. Improving student engagement can take on many forms, including instructional practices (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Marx et al., 2016), academic quality (Groves et al., 2015; Xu, 2017), class size (Marx et al., 2016; Harfitt & Tsui, 2015), instructor-student relationships (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Groves et al., 2015; Jorgenson et al., 2018; Turner, 2016; Zhou & Cole, 2017), peer relationships (Hall & O'Neal, 2016; Jorgenson et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2016), sense of belonging or community (Hall & O'Neal, 2016; Sriram et al., 2020; Turner, 2016), and learning communities (Bonet & Walters, 2016; Hall & O'Neal, 2016; Martin et al., 2017). Of particular interest is the instructor-student relationship, as multiple studies indicated that this is one of the factors that has the most significant impact on student engagement (Groves et al., 2015; Zhou & Cole, 2017). Sneyers and De Witte (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of 25 quasi-experimental studies on interventions in higher education and the effect on student success. Faculty-student mentoring was one of the interventions tested. The results showed that the mentoring had a positive significant effect on retention ($d = 0.15$) (Sneyers & De Witte, 2018). In another meta-analysis, which was conducted by Roorda et al. (2017), on affective instructor-student relationships and students' engagement and achievement, 189 studies were reviewed. The results indicated, "positive relationships had a positive, medium to large effect on engagement ($\beta = .29$)" (Roorda et al., 2017, p. 245).

While there have been many studies examining the importance of instructor-student relationships on student engagement, the focus has been mainly on the students' perspective of the importance of these relationships for student engagement (Groves et al., 2015; Zhou & Cole, 2017) and the ways in which instructors can build positive relationships with students (Arghode et al., 2017; Groves et al., 2016; Marx et al., 2016; Turner, 2016). Be that as it may, building a relationship takes effort from two parties. The limited literature that explores the instructors'

experience of building relationships with students focuses on full-time faculty and ignores the experience of adjunct faculty. As the number of student enrollment increases, higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasing the number of adjunct faculty members to teach courses. In the 1960s and 1970s, the professoriate was comprised of between 22% and 30% adjunct faculty (Monks, 2009; Wallis, 2018). This number has increased substantially. The NCES (2019b) showed that from 1999 to 2017, the percentage of adjunct faculty in degree-granting institutions increased from 43% to 47%. The problem is research is needed to understand how residential adjunct faculty members describe their experiences forming caring relationships with their students.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experience of fostering caring instructor-student relationships for residential adjunct faculty members at accredited degree-granting institutions in the Southern United States. Caring instructor-student relationships are generally defined as a relationship in which the instructor is attentive and receptive to the expressed needs of the student, the instructor responds in such a way to satisfy the need or provides an alternative goal, and the student recognizes, or receives, in some way the efforts of the instructor to show caring (Noddings, 1984, 2010, 2012b). There were two main theories guiding this study: Astin's (1999b) student involvement theory, as it stresses both the quantity and quality of student interactions, and Noddings' (1984) ethic of care theory, as it provides an interpretive lens for understanding caring relationships.

## Significance of the Study

The participants in this study described their experience of fostering caring instructor-student relationships. The findings were significant because they can inform the administrators

of the challenges that residential adjunct faculty face when trying to build relationships with students. With this knowledge, there is the ability to make policy decisions, which could make it easier for the formation of these relationships, thereby having the potential to increase both student engagement and retention. Moreover, the findings increase the body of knowledge on fostering instructor-student relationships and expand upon the ethic of care theory (Noddings, 1984) and the student involvement theory (Astin, 1999b).

**Practical Significance**

This study has practical significance for HEIs looking for ways to increase retention. According to NCES (2019c), of the "first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students who enrolled in 4-year degree-granting institutions in the fall of 2016," only 81% were retained after their freshman year, while only 62% were retained at two-year institutions. A significant finding by Landrum (2009) was that 82.7% of the courses taught by adjunct faculty members were lower-level courses. Because several studies establish the importance of instructor-student relationships on student engagement and retention (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Sneyers & De Witte, 2018; Yamauchi et al., 2016), adjunct faculty have the potential to have a significant impact on the retention rates of these students. Thus, it is in the interest of HEIs to understand the experience of adjunct faculty in the formation of these relationships so that policies can be implemented to support them.

**Empirical Significance**

There is an abundance of literature on the importance of instructor-student relationships in higher education (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Jorgenson et al., 2018; Zhou & Cole, 2017) and the ways in which instructors can build relationships with students (Groves et al., 2015; Marx et al., 2016; Turner, 2016). As the success of these relationships is dependent on

both instructors and students, it is important to hear from both sides. A majority of studies have looked at the phenomenon from the student's perspective and a limited number have looked at the phenomenon from the full-time instructor's perspective. There is a lack of studies about instructor-student relationships from the adjunct faculty member's perspective. Therefore, this study gives a voice to those who have not been heard.

**Theoretical Significance**

While the ethic of care theory described by Noddings (1984) is often associated with K-12 education, it is equally relevant in higher education. One complication that can arise in higher education is the limited time that instructors have with the students. In elementary schools, teachers see their students several hours every weekday, and in middle school and high school, teachers generally see their students at least one hour every weekday for the duration of the school year. On the other hand, in higher education, instructors only see their students for a couple of hours a week for a semester. Hence, teachers in K-12 have an advantage of being able to get to know their students better. This does not mean that instructors in higher education cannot provide an ethic of care for their students. The findings in this study expand upon the ethic of care in relation to higher education and adjunct faculty's ability to show caring in spite of their unique challenges and the perceived effects it has on their students.

In addition to expanding upon the ethic of care theory, this study builds upon Astin's (1999b) student involvement theory. Astin (1999b) stressed the importance of both quantity and quality of a student's interactions to increase engagement. While the focus is on what the student does, when speaking of relationships, there must be two parties participating. From students' perspectives, instructors can build relationships with their students by being approachable (Groves et al., 2015), being accessible (Turner, 2016), having one-on-one meetings (Groves et

al., 2015; Turner, 2016), being familiar with and interested in students (Arghode et al., 2017; Groves et al., 2015; Turner, 2016), and being willing to engage with students in the classroom (Groves et al., 2015; Marx et al., 2016). It is important to also look at the issue from the other participant in this relationship. This study provided a look into the quantity and quality of students' interactions with instructors from the perspective of the adjunct instructor.

## Research Questions

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended that qualitative researchers reduce the entire study into a single central question and several sub-questions with the sub-questions breaking down the central question into its constituent parts. Furthermore, in a phenomenological research study "the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13), culminating in a description of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon. The aim of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of residential adjunct faculty in fostering caring instructor-student relationships in accredited HEIs. As adjunct faculty may work at both two-year and four-year institutions, this researcher chose not to delimit this study to either two-year or four-year institutions; rather, both options were kept available.

### Central Question

How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their experiences forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships in an effort to increase student engagement? As Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained, the purpose of the central question is to ask the broadest question possible about the phenomenon in order to not limit the participants' views. The literature emphasizes the importance of instructor-student relationships to enhance student engagement (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Groves et al., 2015; Zhou & Cole,

2017). While there are many studies looking at the experiences of students in this relationship

formation (Groves et al., 2015; Marx et al., 2016; Turner, 2016; Zhou & Cole, 2017), there is

little, if any, evidence of the experience of residential adjunct faculty members in forming these

relationships. Therefore, the intention of this question was to provide data that would lead to a

textural description of the phenomenon from the experience of the adjunct faculty members.

**Sub-Question One**

How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their ability to develop caring

relationships through positive interactions with students inside and outside the classroom? Astin

(1999b) claimed, "frequent interaction with faculty is more strongly related to satisfaction with

college than any other type of involvement" (p. 525). However, as Astin (1999b) also pointed

out, it is not only the frequency that matters; quality is also important. Positive interactions

between instructors and students may lead to the instructor being more empathetic and more

committed to and effective in building relationships with students (Claessens et al., 2017; Davis

& Coryell, 2016; Estepp & Roberts, 2013). Moreover, negative interactions could negatively

impact the student's engagement, or involvement, and achievement (Jorgenson et al., 2018;

Roorda et al., 2017). These negative interactions do not only affect students; they may also affect

the instructors. Spilt et al. (2011) found that repeated or prolonged negative interactions with

students could have a negative effect on the instructor's well being. Furthermore, bad

experiences have a longer lasting effect on well-being than good experiences (Spilt et al., 2011).

Repeated negative interactions could impact the effort an instructor puts forth toward building

relationships with students. Hence, it is important to consider not only the quantity of

interactions with students but also the quality of those interactions.

**Sub-Question Two**

How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their ability to cultivate an ethic of care with their students? Noddings (1984, 2012a) explained that in order for caring to occur, the instructor must be attentive and receptive to the expressed needs of the student, prioritize the needs of the student, and respond to the needs of the student in some way. The literature provides evidence that students expect their instructors to be approachable (Dean, 2019; Groves et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014), be accessible (Turner, 2016), be helpful (Groves et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014; Marx et al., 2016; Turner, 2016), and show that they care about their students (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Glass et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014; Jorgenson et al., 2018). To gain a better understanding of the formation and maintenance of instructor-student relationships, it is imperative to know how instructors view the expressed needs of students, if the expectations of the students align with what the instructors perceive as the needs of the students, and how the instructors are able to cultivate an ethic of care by providing for those needs.

**Sub-Question Three**

What contextual factors affect residential adjunct faculty members' experiences forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships? This question aims to provide a deeper structural description of the participants' experiences with forming relationships with their students. A structural description explains how the participants experienced the phenomenon in terms of the context, situation, or conditions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is important to understand those conditions or situations that can either support or hinder an instructor's ability to form relationships with students. The literature listed such hindrances as not having an office where instructors can meet with students (American Association of University Professors, n.d.; Landrum, 2009; Liftig, 2014) or lacking time because the instructor has to teach a class at

another college or has to go work at their professional job (Cho et al., 2014; Landrum, 2009).

Therefore, in order to understand the participants' experiences, it is important to know the

context in which it is taking place.

## Definitions

The following terms and definitions are provided to assist the reader in understanding the

pertinent terminology related to this study. These definitions are grounded in the related

literature, theoretical framework, or the research design of the study.

1. *Academic system* –related to the factors of grade performance and intellectual

   development (Tinto, 1975).

2. *Adjunct faculty* – also known as part-time faculty. There is not a commonly agreed upon

   definition for *adjunct faculty*. While some institutions only allow an adjunct faculty

   member to teach a limited number of classes per academic year, other institutions may

   classify adjunct faculty members as part-time, whether they teach one class per semester

   or five classes per semester ("Contingent appointments", 2003). However, the term

   *adjunct faculty* may generally be characterized by one who is "compensated on a per-

   course or hourly basis" with little to no long-term commitment from the institution

   ("Contingent appointments", 2003, p. 59).

3. *Attrition* – "the unit of measurement used to determine the rate of dropout of students

   who do not return for or during their first and second-year of college" (Stein, 2018).

4. *Caring* – an encounter or sequence of encounters where one person acts as the one caring

   and one person acts as the cared-for (Noddings, 2012a).

5. *Caring instructor-student relationship* – a relationship in which the instructor is attentive

   and receptive to the expressed needs of the student, the instructor responds in such a way

to satisfy the need or provides an alternative goal, and the student recognizes, or receives, in some way the efforts of the instructor to show caring (Noddings, 2010, 2012b).

6. *Co-researcher* –participants may be referred to as co-researchers, especially in studies conducted with a constructivist paradigm (Costantino, 2008).

7. *Degree-granting institutions* – a two-year postsecondary institution offering associate's degrees or other certificates or a four-year postsecondary institution offering programs at the bachelor's level or higher (NCES, 2019a).

8. *Immediacy* – "the degree of perceived physical and/or psychological closeness between people" (Christophel, 1990, p. 325). Immediacy behaviors can be verbal, such as calling students by name, providing feedback, making small talk, tone of voice, and word choice or nonverbal such as eye contact gestures, facial expressions, and body posture (Gardner et al., 2017; Marx et al., 2016).

9. *National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)* – a data collection initiative, which launched in 2000, designed to question undergraduates about their educational experience in order to assure quality in higher education (NSSE, 2001).

10. *Persistence* – used to describe students who enroll in college and remain until degree completion (Hagedorn, 2012).

11. *Retention* – students who return to the same institution the following fall. This is not to be confused with graduation, which refers to students who complete their program (NCES, 2019c).

12. *Social system* –related to such factors as interactions with others and the participation in extracurricular activities (Tinto, 1975).

13. *Structural description* –describes how participants experienced a phenomenon in terms of

the situation, context, or condition (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

14. *Student engagement* –student engagement consists of two features: "amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities" and "how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities that decades of research studies show are linked to student learning" (Indiana University Bloomington, n.d., What is Student Engagement section).

15. *Textural description* –consists of what participants experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

16. *Quality* – refers to the extent of involvement; how much effort is put into it (Astin, 1999b).

17. *Quantity* – refers to the frequency of involvement (Astin, 1999b).

**Summary**

Chapter One provided an introduction to this transcendental phenomenological research study. As stated, HEIs are looking for ways to increase retention, and the literature has shown that student engagement may be the answer. More specifically, the fostering of instructor-student relationships can make a significant impact. While many studies have looked at these relationships from a student's perspective and minimal literature from the full-time faculty's perspective, there is a lack of studies looking at the phenomenon from the adjunct faculty member's perspective. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe the experience of residential adjunct faculty members in fostering caring instructor-student relationships with the use of Astin's (1999b) student involvement theory and Noddings' (1984) ethic of theory as the framework. The central question and sub-questions were provided as well as definitions for pertinent terms. This study is significant, as it will help to fill the gap in the literature while

expanding upon the student involvement theory (Astin, 1999b) and the ethic of care theory

(Noddings, 1984).

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Overview

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework guiding this study as well as the related literature. Since the purpose of this study was to describe the formation and maintenance of caring instructor-student relationships, two relevant theories were used. The first is Astin's (1999) student involvement theory, which provides a basis for the importance of both quantity and quality of interactions between instructors and students. The second theory is Noddings' (1984) ethic of care theory. This theory provides a basis for understanding how these relationships are formed and maintained through caring relations. The second part of this chapter provides an overview of the related literature on the topic of instructor-student relationships, including an explanation of pertinent terminology, the importance of instructor-student relationships, the effects of these relationships on both student and instructors, students' expectations, faculty hesitancy to form relationships, institutional factors that hinder these relationships, and the building of these relationships both inside and outside of the classroom. The review of the literature provides a better understanding of the topic of instructor-student relationships and brings attention to the gap that was studied in this research examining how residential adjunct faculty members describe their experiences in forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships.

## Theoretical Framework

Having a theoretical framework serves multiple purposes: it identifies commonalities, enables researchers to make predictions and control phenomenon, and provides a lens through which the study is viewed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gall et al., 2007). This study, which aims to describe residential adjunct faculty members' experiences of forming and maintaining caring

instructor-student relationships in an effort to increase student engagement, is guided by two theories: Astin's (1999b) student involvement theory and Noddings' (1984) ethic of care theory.

**Student Involvement Theory**

The student involvement theory is rooted in research done in the 1970s, when researchers were trying to discover which college environmental factors affected students' college persistence (Astin, 1985). During this time period, several theories were developed to explain college dropout, including Astin's (1999b) student involvement theory. Astin (1999b) explained that the creation of his student involvement theory came from 20 years of doing student development research. He claimed that his theory had four major benefits over other student development theories: its simplicity, its ability to explain a majority of the empirical knowledge about environmental influences, its ability to embrace the principles from a variety of sources, and its ability to be used by researchers and college personnel (Astin, 1999b).

The following are five basic principles in the student involvement theory:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. The objects may be highly generalized (the student experience) or highly specific (preparing for a chemistry examination).

2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.

3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in academic work, for instance, can be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (whether the student

reviews and comprehends reading assignments or simply stares at the textbook and daydreams).

4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.

5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. (Astin, 1999b, p. 519)

To test out his theory, Astin, along with the National Institute of Education study group, conducted a longitudinal study examining over 200,000 students on over 80 different student outcome measures (Astin, 1985). The focus of the study was the effects of different types of involvement, and the results indicated that all forms of student involvement were related to changes in the students' characteristics (Astin, 1985). Based on the findings, the group suggested that institutions focus on using active modes of instruction, providing more individualized instruction, creating learning communities, and increasing the amount of direct student-faculty interactions during the first two years of undergraduate education when problems of student involvement are at their greatest (Astin, 1985; Newell, 1984).

Astin's (1999b) student involvement theory directly relates to the current study focusing on instructor-student relationships. Astin (1993) claimed, "The Student Orientation of the Faculty produces more substantial direct effects on student outcomes than almost any other environmental variable" (p. 243). Hence, instructor-student interactions should be a high priority for institutions. While this theory focuses on what the student does, relationships involve two parties. Thus, it is important to understand not only the student's side of the relationship, but also

the instructor's side of the relationship. The instructor plays a vital role in both the quantity and quality of the interactions.

**Ethic of Care Theory**

Noddings' (1984) ethic of care theory originated as a challenge to the traditional male centric views of moral decision-making. The traditional models made use of an unemotional, rational, and logical way of making decisions, which had universal and objective rules (D'Olimpio, 2019). Noddings' theory (1984) sought to provide an alternative explanation of moral decision-making, which is influenced by the relationships an individual has with others. Gilligan (2011) and Noddings (1984, 2010, 2012a, 2012b) argued that humans are born into relation; therefore, from the beginning, individuals are concerned with caring relationships. Caring relationships are based on need and dependent upon face-to-face encounters (Noddings, 1984, 2005, 2010). In such relationships there are two required agents, the one caring and the one being cared for, each of which has an important part to play in the relation (Noddings, 1984, 2005, 2010, 2012b). In equal relations, these roles are exchanged regularly; on the other hand, in unequal relations such as that of a parent and child or teacher and student, mutuality is not expected (Noddings, 1984, 2012a).

An important distinction to make when discussing an ethic of care is the difference between caring *for* and caring *about* people. Caring for someone requires a face-to-face interaction (Noddings, 2010), which involves a concrete action "intended for the developmental well-being of the relationship and the parties to the relationship" (Hawk, 2017, p. 672). On the other hand, caring about someone does not necessitate a relationship; rather, it refers to care that is extended to a group (Rabin & Smith, 2013). For example, one may care about children who have cancer and may even go as far as making a donation to child cancer research, but this is

merely a form of caring *about* because there is no relationship between the person and individual children with cancer. As Noddings (1984) explained, "'Caring about' always involves a certain benign neglect" (p. 112). It is not possible, or even preferable, to have a relationship with all people. This does not mean that one cannot be concerned about the wellbeing of others with whom there is no relationship. An ethic of care, as described in the literature, is concerned with caring *for* people.

There are three basic steps in an act of caring for: engrossment, motivational displacement, and receptivity. In the first step, the one doing the caring is attentive and receptive to the expressed needs of the cared for (Noddings, 1984, 2012a). It is important to make the distinction between expressed needs and inferred needs. Expressed needs come from the one expressing it (the cared for), which may be communicated either verbally or behaviorally (Noddings, 2005). Inferred needs, on the other hand, come from someone other than the one expressing it, such as the one caring (Noddings, 2005). During the engrossment stage, the one caring is attentive to and focused on understanding the expressed needs of the cared for while putting aside all personal values and objectives (Noddings, 1984, 2010, 2012a). In the next step, motivational displacement, the one caring prioritizes the needs and objectives of the one being cared for over his or her own. During this stage, problems may arise if the need of the cared for conflicts with the values of the one caring or if the one caring cannot provide what the cared for needs (Noddings, 1984, 2012a). If this happens, the goal of the one caring is to maintain a caring relation (Noddings, 1984, 2012a, 2012b). Either way, the one caring must act, or respond to the need, in some way; otherwise, it is not considered a caring relation (Noddings, 1984). The final step in the caring relation is a response by the cared for (Noddings, 1984, 2012b). The purpose of the response is simply to recognize the act of caring. If the cared for does not recognize the act of

caring, there is no caring relation (Noddings, 1984, 2012b).

The ethic of care theory has been influential in the field of education as a way to explain and understand the relationships between teachers and students. Noddings (1984) argued, "The primary aim of every educational institution and of every educational effort must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring" (p. 172). McLeod (2017) agreed, saying that the caring relation is "embedded in the purposes and work of education" (p. 51). It is important to note though that the idea of an ethic of care in education has generally focused on K-12 education. While the ethic of care theory has been traditionally associated with K-12 education, it can also be applied in higher education (Barrow, 2015). Furthermore, Barrow (2015) claimed that not only is an ethic of care applicable in higher education, but it is also essential. Cooke et al. (2006) found evidence that there was a greater strain on students' psychological well being, particularly levels of anxiety, once students began studying at the university, especially at the beginning of the first year. Furthermore, there has been a trend of increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and distress on college campuses across the nation (Duffy et al., 2019; Xiao et al., 2017). As instructors may be the only constant contact that students have on campus, it is even more important that the instructors show an ethic of care.

Warin and Gannerud (2014) explained that often the idea of care is undervalued in teaching practices, especially for older students because for these students, the emotional aspects of teaching are separated out from the act of teaching and learning. Contrary to this belief, instructors' demonstration of an ethic of care provides a foundation for the formation of strong interpersonal relationships with students, which in turn can play a role in how instructors communicate with their students and how they go about developing a positive rapport in the classroom (Strachan, 2020). Caring in the university classroom might be described as providing

students with respect, recognition, and reciprocity (Samuel, 2017). In other words, students are seen and accepted as they are, are valued and given the opportunity to be heard and have their opinions valued, and know that everyone has something to learn and something to teach.

In the current study, the ethic of care theory provided a framework to understand the formation and maintenance of instructor-student relationships in higher education. Noddings (1984) explained that the one caring may withdraw from the caring relation when there is not a recognition of caring. However, she does not discuss what contextual factors may influence the one caring's decision for either not pursuing or withdrawing from a caring relationship, particularly in instructor-student relationships in higher education where both parties involved are adults. The current study investigated this issue.

## Related Literature

Researchers and theorists have been studying the importance of instructor-student relationships on student involvement, persistence, and academic outcomes for decades (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1979, 1980; Tinto, 1993; Wilson et al., 1974), and they continue to do so (Dwyer, 2017; Estepp & Roberts, 2013; Groves et al., 2015; Musser et al., 2017; Shepherd & Tsong, 2014). In fact, the Higher Education Research Institute has studied college students during their undergraduate programs for over 20 years (Astin, 1999a). The institute found that student involvement enhances almost all aspects of students' affective and cognitive development (Astin, 1999a). Furthermore, the three strongest forms of involvement are academic involvement, involvement with faculty, and involvement with peers (Astin, 1999a). Additionally, several researchers have found instructor-student relationships to have one of the biggest impacts on increasing student engagement (Glass et al., 2015; Groves et al., 2015; Zhou & Cole, 2017). Hence, the focus of this literature review is on the fostering of instructor-student relationships in

an effort to increase student engagement. This review begins with an explanation of the terminology used, followed by the effects of instructor-student relationships on students and instructors. Next, a discussion of the expectations that students have for instructors, the hesitancy of faculty to engage in these relationships, and institutional factors that hinder instructor-student relationships is provided. Finally, a description is offered on how instructor-student relationships can be fostered both inside and outside of the classroom.

**Engagement, Integration, or Involvement**

Perhaps one of the biggest obstacles in the literature is the confusion caused by the terminology used. Student engagement has become a buzzword in higher education (Gibbs, 2014; Vuori, 2014). The earliest researchers of student engagement described the term through the use of observable behaviors, and later, researchers incorporated more dimensions, including emotional aspects and cognitive aspects (Hao et al., 2018). Appleton et al. (2008) pointed out that there is an inconsistency in the conceptualization and definition of engagement. In fact, they listed 19 different construct definitions (Appleton et al., 2008), and Groccia (2018) listed an additional six definitions. This confusion can be seen in the way that individual instructors define engagement. In recent studies, some instructors defined engagement on merely a behavioral dimension, while others defined engagement on cognitive, academic, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions (Barkaoui et al., 2015; Vuori, 2014). Another way in which individual instructors defined engagement was through complete involvement or as a seamless transition from one concept to another (Arghode et al., 2017). One may argue that the differing definitions by individual instructors may be due to a lack of administration's efforts in the promotion of engagement, yet even when there is a top-down approach to promoting engagement, the way in which engagement is defined can differ among individuals (Vuori, 2014). For that reason, it is

crucial to have an understanding of what engagement means.

Compounding the difficulty is that oftentimes the terms *engagement*, *integration*, and *involvement* are used interchangeably. While there is some overlap between the terms, there are some subtle differences. Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009) sought to provide an explanation of how these terms overlap and how they are unique by interviewing the individuals who were associated with the origin of the concepts (George Kuh, Vincent Tinto, and Alexander Astin) and by interviewing some scholars who have used the constructs in their research. Kuh, Tinto, and Astin all agreed that there was little difference in meaning between *engagement* and *involvement* (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). However, *involvement* is usually viewed as the responsibility of the student though the environment, whereas *engagement* puts a little more emphasis on the responsibility of the institution (Astin, 1999b; Kuh, 2009; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). On the other hand, Kuh, Tinto, and Astin agreed that the term *integration* is clearly different (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). *Integration* requires that students come to share in the beliefs of the campus community and adhere to the structural rules and requirements of the institution (Tinto, 1987; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). In other words, *engagement* and *involvement* can be seen as the means to the end, with the end being *integration*.

The focus of this study was how instructor-student relationships are related to student involvement and engagement. The instructors, who were representatives of the institution, were providing opportunities for students to become involved, or engaged, socially and academically through the fostering of instructor-student relationships.

**Importance of Instructor-Student Relationships**

The importance of instructor-student relationships as a means of increasing student engagement cannot be overstated, which is especially true for populations that might be at a

higher risk of attrition. In reality, the "quality of the relationships developed during their academic program may be as important, if not more important, to their eventual academic success" (Gallop & Bastien, 2016, p. 218). The formation of relationships is linked to an increase in student motivation and engagement (Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016; Groves et al., 2015; Parnes et al., 2020; Turner, 2016), sense of belonging or community (Barrow, 2015; Glass et al., 2015; Turner, 2016), academic success (Barrow, 2015; Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016; Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Hao et al., 2018; Musser et al., 2017; Owolabi, 2018; Parnes et al., 2020; Tinto, 1993), persistence (Dwyer, 2017; Owolabi, 2018; Quin, 2017; Robinson et al., 2019; Shepherd & Tsong, 2014; Tinto, 1993; Xu, 2017), and the cultivation of social capital (Schwartz et al., 2016; Schwartz et al., 2018), to name a few. In addition, there are a multitude of benefits for the instructor, including increasing instructor wellbeing and work engagement (Martini et al., 2019; Spilt et al., 2011), and providing a buffer against negative emotions caused by student misbehavior (Claessens et al., 2017).

### *Populations at Higher Risk for Attrition*

As Astin (1999b) and Tinto (1975) explained, student engagement is a crucial factor to student retention. There are certain populations that may be more hesitant to engage, leaving them at a higher risk of attrition. This higher risk of attrition makes fostering instructor-student relationships even more important for these populations. One population at a higher risk for attrition is first-generation college students, and another is minority students. Checkoway (2018) explained that first-generation college students usually come from a lower socioeconomic class and are often minorities. When these students enter HEIs and are surrounded by white middle-class faculty and peers, they may have difficulty integrating into the campus community. Tinto (1993) explained that when students first come to college, they enter a separation stage in which

they must separate from their former communities in order to integrate into their new community. Integrating into the new campus community may be more difficult for first-generation college students because they do not have family members who can share their experiences and give them advice. Because of the difficulty of separating from their former community and integrating into the new one, these students may experience a lower sense of belonging. Duran et al. (2020) found this to be the case for first-generation and minority students. A lower sense of belonging can, in turn, negatively impact a student's academic engagement and retention (Green & Wright, 2017; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). One way to combat this is for instructors to get to know their students. By gaining a better understanding of their students, instructors may be able to find common ground or a source of similarity, which can aid in fostering relationships, student engagement, and a sense of belonging (Gehlbach et al, 2016; Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016; Quin, 2017; Robinson et al., 2019).

### *Effects of Instructor-Student Relationships on Students*

There is an abundance of positive effects that students experience when they have a good relationship with their instructors. One positive effect of instructor-student relationships on students is the impact it has on academic achievement, or academic performance (Dwyer, 2017; Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Groccia, 2018; Hao et al., 2018; Hoffman, 2014; Musser et al., 2017; Turner, 2016; Williamson et al., 2014). Fostering instructor-student relationships provides instructors with an opportunity to get to know their students better. The formation of a relationship may result in the student being given extra or special privileges (Gregory & Korth, 2016). For example, an instructor may be more understanding of late assignments or allow the student to redo an assignment, both of which may increase student performance. Moreover, when instructors are friendly and understanding towards students' needs, the students' level of

motivation, engagement, and academic performance increase (Martin & Collie, 2016; Tsai, 2017). Furthermore, through continual formal and informal interactions with students, instructors are able to glean information about the students' backgrounds, which can be used to adjust the curriculum to be more relevant to the students (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Yamauchi et al., 2016). When instructors are able to contextualize the information for students, students become more engaged in their learning, as they are required to relate the new information with old information (Yamauchi et al., 2016). Additionally, students are being asked to take an active part in their learning, which also increases their engagement. Student engagement has been linked with an increase in academic performance, intellectual growth, and higher grade point average (GPA) (Bae & Han, 2019; Delfino, 2019; Lei et al., 2018; Williamson et al., 2014).

Another benefit of knowing and understanding their students is that instructors are able to provide a more supportive learning environment, especially for those students who may be at risk of failing (Harfitt & Tsui, 2015; Xu, 2017). By knowing what their students' strengths and weaknesses are, instructors know when extra support is needed and what type of support may be needed. This effort on the part of instructors helps to build a positive rapport with their students. When students perceive a positive rapport with their instructors, their expectancy for success increases (Estepp & Roberts, 2013) as well as their overall satisfaction (Astin, 1999b; Groccia, 2018; Groves et al., 2015; Zhou & Cole, 2017). This in turn can lead to an increase in educational commitment and persistence (Dwyer, 2017; Groccia, 2018; Hoffman, 2014; Quin, 2017; Shepherd & Tsong, 2014; Tinto, 1975), which is especially true when the interactions between instructors and students go beyond academics (Tinto, 1993). When students perceive their instructor as caring about them as individuals and wanting them to succeed, students tend to

feel a sense of belonging or connectedness (Glass et al., 2015; Jorgenson et al., 2018). This sense of belonging, in turn, positively influences students' persistence (Hall & O'Neal, 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Tinto, 1975). Furthermore, an instructor-student relationship can be a source of emotional support, which may help to buffer against stress, especially for students who may be at high risk of dropping out (Martin & Collie, 2016). This support from instructors can promote student confidence, which may lead to an increase in the effort put forth by the student (Martin & Collie, 2016).

Instructor-student relationships can also be a means for students to cultivate social capital. Social capital may be especially important for new students as they navigate the transition from high school to college. Social capital, much like student engagement, has many different definitions. Even so, as Addis and Joxhe (2017) explained, there are two main elements that appear in most definitions: "a) The existence of *networks* of relationships other than market exchange (that is, structural social capital); and b) The existence of *norms* shared by people in the network, which create the conditions for reciprocal trust (that is, cultural social capital)" (p. 147). Fundamentally, social capital is important because it provides a network, which has value for the individuals involved in the network (Đorić, 2019). For college students, developing new forms of social capital in college can lead to relationships or networks that may provide academic and professional support and success (Schwartz et al., 2016; Schwartz et al., 2018).

Making connections with instructors in particular may be especially helpful, as instructors are able to provide students with the support needed for both academic and professional success. In addition, instructors can act as a mentor to the students. In this role, the instructor can introduce the student to the cultural norms of academia as well as the professional field the student is pursuing, therefore, setting up the student for success during and after his

college experience. As many instructors are professionals in the field in which they are teaching or have a network in the professional field, these connections can be especially significant as they may provide enhanced opportunities for students after the completion of their degree (Schwartz et al., 2016).

***Effects of Instructor-Student Relationships on Instructors***

A relationship by definition is between two people. Accordingly, both parties involved will be affected by the relationship. While the focus of instructor-student relationships tends to be on the effects on students, instructors also experience some effects. Most notably, instructor-student relationships have an effect on instructors' wellbeing (Martini et al., 2019; Spilt et al., 2011). Relationships are made up of repeated interactions, which can be perceived as either positive or negative. Positive interactions elicit positive emotions, which over a prolonged period can promote wellbeing (Spilt et al., 2011). While interactions between instructors and students generally consist of the student making a demand, the instructors do not perceive it to be burdensome because of the natural impulse to provide for their students (Noddings, 1984). Moreover, once the instructor provides care for the student, the student responds. This response completes the action of caring (Noddings, 1984, 2012b). By completing the action of caring, the student is providing the necessary requirements for the relationship to be maintained (Noddings, 1984; 2012b). Furthermore, by recognizing and showing gratitude for the instructor's effort, the student is providing a form of emotional support, which can increase the instructor's wellbeing and work engagement (Martini et al., 2019). Another side effect of continual positive interactions with an individual student is that the instructor may feel a sense of obligation to the student (Frisby, 2016), which may lead to a tendency to be more understanding or lenient when that student misbehaves because the instructor views the student in an overall positive way

(Claessens et al., 2017).

Conversely, negative interactions elicit negative emotions, which if repeated daily, can have a negative effect on instructors' wellbeing (Spilt et al., 2011). For example, if a student makes excessive demands, this can create a negative emotion such as frustration or resentment, which in turn increases the emotional exhaustion of the instructor (Martini et al., 2019). Nodding's (1984) ethic of care theory further explained that when demands become too great, the one caring may become resentful and withdraw the caring, thereby, hindering the maintenance of the relationship.

**Students' Expectations of Instructors in Relationships**

Noddings (1984, 2005) explained that in a caring relationship, the one caring must meet the expressed needs of the one being cared for. In this case, teachers must meet the expressed needs of their students. As a consequence, it is critical to the formation and maintenance of a caring relationship for instructors to know what students expect from them. There are several expectations that students have of their instructors, including being approachable (Dean, 2019; Gallop & Bastien, 2016; Groves et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014), accessible (Turner, 2016), helpful (Groves et al. 2015; Hoffman, 2014; Marx et al., 2016; Turner, 2016), and caring (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Glass et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014; Jorgenson et al., 2018).

Students may have their own personal or professional motivation for reaching out to connect with instructors (Dean, 2019). However, for this to happen, the student must view the instructor as being approachable. What makes an instructor approachable may depend upon an individual student's personality, but in general, instructors are seen as approachable if they appear friendly, smile, have a sense of humor, are not too serious, make themselves available for conversations outside of academic content, and are seen in a variety of contexts outside of the

classroom (Dean, 2019; Hoffman, 2014).

In addition, students expect their instructors to be accessible not only in the classroom, but also outside the classroom. When students need extra help or want to clarify information from class, they expect to be able to reach out to their instructors and get a response. This could happen in a face-to-face format, such as meeting with the student before or after class or during office hours (Turner, 2016). While students recognize the challenges associated with providing individual attention for each student, they still expect to have access to their instructors (Cho et al., 2014; Turner, 2016). Perhaps for this reason, students are also accepting of electronic communications such as email or messages through a learning management system (Shepherd & Tsong, 2014; Turner, 2016).

In addition to being approachable and accessible, students expect instructors to be helpful. Constant parental presence and attention in a student's life may lead a student to expect the same of their instructors (Frey & Tatum, 2016), which may be especially important during a student's first year. Tinto (1993) explained that students go through rites of passage, which include the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation. In the first stage, students separate from their past communities in order to establish membership into the college community. Pichon (2019) explained that students with secure parental attachment might have difficulty separating and becoming incorporated into their new college environment. The students may struggle to become independent, preferring rather to remain somewhat dependent on others, especially their instructors. It is not enough for instructors to provide a variety of instructional methods to meet students' preferred learning styles. Students expect instructors to go beyond lecturing or showing videos in class. Rather, helpfulness can be seen in terms of being willing to answer questions and engage with students in the classroom (Groves et al., 2015; Marx et al.,

2016). It can also be seen as giving reminders about homework assignments, providing additional tutoring, supplying information about campus resources, and rendering academic and professional advice (Groccia, 2018; Hall & O'Neal, 2016; Thomas & Hanson, 2014; Turner, 2016; Williamson et al., 2014).

Finally, students expect instructors to show that they care about the students both academically and personally (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Glass et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014; Jorgenson et al., 2018). One way that students perceive caring is when the instructor adopts a classroom culture of acceptance and inclusion (Glass et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014; Sybing, 2019). In other words, the instructor accepts, respects, and values a multitude of ways of learning and points of view, which shows respect for all students (Estepp & Roberts, 2015; Glass et al., 2015; Jorgenson et al., 2018). Furthermore, instructors who make an effort to call students by name and show a genuine concern for students and their needs exhibit a form of caring (Estepp & Roberts, 2015; Gallop & Bastien, 2016). Showing genuine concern may be as simple as asking a student how his day was or what his plans are for the weekend. In essence, students just want to be seen by their instructors.

**Faculty Hesitancy to Form Instructor-Student Relationships**

With the abundance of literature indicating the benefits of instructor-student relationships, it would seem that building and maintaining these relationships would be a high priority for faculty. Nevertheless, some faculty may be hesitant to foster these relationships. One of the most significant factors in this hesitancy is a lack of time. Instructors often have multiple roles, and an attempt to fulfill all these roles may lead to fatigue or burnout (Martini et al., 2019; Strachan, 2020). Faculty often feel a tension between their scholarly activity and their teaching responsibilities (Chory & Offstein, 2017b; Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016; Hoffman, 2014). While

the "publish or perish" mentality may be stronger in full-time faculty, for those adjunct faculty members who are looking to secure a full-time teaching position, this may also be a concern. The pressure from the institution for faculty to engage in scholarly activity combined with the few rewards for building or supporting relationships with students does little to motivate instructors to put any effort toward fostering relationships (Hoffman, 2014; Samuel, 2017). Rather, instructors focus on those activities, which will benefit their careers, such as conducting research, being a peer reviewer, undertaking a leadership role, or collaborating within the industry (Chory & Offstein, 2017b).

Another factor in faculty members' hesitancy to form instructor-student relationships is differing beliefs about their roles (Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016; Hoffman, 2014). For example, if faculty view their teaching role as merely being a subject matter specialist, they may have little motivation or sense of duty to focus on the whole student, including the need to form social bonds as a way to engage the student (Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016). Butler (2017) argued that it is not the responsibility of the instructor to form a personal relationship with each student; rather, it is the instructor's responsibility to create a relationship between the student and the course material they are to learn. Furthermore, if faculty members view their role as a teacher only as a part of their duties, they will likely not invest a lot of extra time in interacting with students; instead, they will divide their time among all of their duties. In addition, instructors may view a dual role as an educator and friend to be incompatible or conflicting (Chory & Offstein, 2017b). For instance, an instructor might feel that it is better for students' improvement to have an instructor that is harder on them than one who is friendly and accommodating. Furthermore, instructors may feel that forming personal relationships with students may threaten their status or the prestige of their role (Chory & Offstein, 2017b). The loss of prestige may lead to a decrease

in the attractiveness of an academic career, driving away some of the most talented individuals in the field (Chory & Offstein, 2017b).

Another matter compounding the hesitation to form relationships with students is the sheer number of students that faculty members are in contact with. It is hard to imagine building relationships with all students, especially when teaching a large lecture class where there may be over 100 students (Robinson et al., 2019). This is especially relevant for adjunct faculty members who are likely to teach lower-level courses that are required by large numbers of students (Landrum, 2009; Marklein, 2017). Additionally, the more students that an instructor has, the more potential there is for an increase in student demands. This increase in student demands would require the instructor to spend more time meeting the needs of the student, which would either take away time from other responsibilities or require them to put in additional time. This pressure to meet the students' needs while trying to accomplish other tasks increases the likelihood of burnout (Padilla & Thompson, 2015) and of emotional exhaustion for the instructor (Martini et al., 2019), which can also occur if students are not responsive to the instructor's efforts to show caring (Noddings, 1984, 2010).

Additionally, instructors are rarely trained to teach, let alone to provide any kind of emotional or personal development support; instead, they are trained in research universities focusing on research, scholarship, and expertise in their field (Chory & Offstein, 2017b). As a result, faculty members may feel incompetent in building relationships with students (Hoffman, 2014). This is especially relevant when trying to navigate the boundaries of instructor-student relationships in higher education. Normally, there is an unequal relationship between instructors and students, but because their students are adults, some instructors may choose to approach students as equals. When instructors approach students as equals, the possibility of forming a

friendship exists (Noddings, 1984; 2008). In such cases, an instructor must be careful to act professionally and not show any favoritism (Barrow, 2015; Stark, 2017). Even appropriate friendly instructor-student relationships can negatively affect the classroom environment if particular students are perceived to be given preferential treatment (Chory & Offstein, 2017b).

In addition to having to navigate the boundaries of these relationships, adjunct faculty members often have to contend with logistical issues, which hinder their ability to foster these relationships. For instance, some adjunct faculty do not have an office where they can meet with their students (American Association of University Professors, n.d.; Landrum, 2009; Liftig, 2014) or do not have the time to meet with students after class because they have to leave to go to another job (Cho et al., 2014; Landrum, 2009).

Finally, instructors may be hesitant to form relationships with students in order to protect themselves and the institution from potential litigation. The potential legal issues range from sexual misconduct to advising students on personal issues such as drug or alcohol abuse, domestic violence, or depression. Perhaps the most prevalent legal issues are those related to sexual misconduct. The Geocognition Research Laboratory (2019) listed 530 documented cases of an individual faculty member, researcher, or instructor involved in sexual misconduct dating back to as early as 1978; however, most of these cases have occurred within the last 10 years. Harvard President Drew Gilpin Faust explained that instructors are having to rethink the way they interact with students since the recent #MeToo movement, and attorney Andrew Miltenberg agreed with the sentiment stating that the damage done to the careers of instructors falsely accused of sexual misconduct is immediate (Anderson, 2018).

Another major potential litigation is involving students' mental health. There have been several legal suits recently against such institutions as Princeton, Western Michigan University,

and George Washington University regarding mental health leave policies (Hartocollis, 2018) and several legal suits against such institutions as Gallaudet University, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Iowa, and University of Massachusetts regarding student suicides (Krohn, 2019; McKim, 2019). While a majority of these lawsuits were against the institution, there are some instances where professors were singled out in the lawsuit, such as the case of Dzung Duy Nguyen v. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2018). The fear of such litigation may deter instructors from forming relationships with their students.

**Institutional Factors Hindering Relationships**

There are several institutional factors that may also hinder the formation and maintenance of instructor-student relationships, particularly for adjunct faculty members. Something as simple as the label and design of a space can send a message (Samuel, 2017). Take the typical college lecture hall for an introductory history class as an example. The name alone, lecture hall, conjures the image of a large auditorium-like room where there may be hundreds of seats for students and a podium at the front of the room. The physical space creates a literal distance between the instructor and students. Furthermore, the number of students in the classroom acts as a hindrance to the formation of individual relationships between instructor and student (Fox & Powers, 2017; Lynch & Pappas, 2017; Marx et al., 2016). Adjunct faculty are more likely to teach these lower-level introductory courses that have large numbers of students enrolled (Fox & Powers, 2017; Kimmel & Fairchild, 2017; Landrum, 2009). Another space issue that hinders instructor-student relationships is the lack of a private office space for adjunct faculty members (Kimmel & Fairchild, 2017; Landrum, 2009). Without an office to meet students, adjunct instructors are likely to hold fewer office hours and meet less with students outside the classroom (Kimmel & Fairchild, 2017). In addition to being less likely to have office hours, adjunct faculty

are less likely to use technology as a form of communication with their students. This may in part be due to the fact that they may not have access to an official school email address and do not want to provide students with their personal email address (Flaherty, 2015; Landrum, 2009).

Another institutional factor that can hinder the formation of instructor-student relationships is a lack of training or professional development (Chory & Offstein, 2017; Fox & Powers, 2017; Kimmel & Fairchild, 2017; Parnes et al., 2020; Yakoboski, 2016). College instructors often lack any formal pedagogical training, let alone training for all the other types of support they must provide to students such as emotional support, personal development, and professional advice to name a few (Chory & Offstein, 2017b). Even if training is provided, it is often only for full-time faculty. Moreover, full-time faculty may be provided with a stipend for external professional development opportunities. The offering of such a stipend is often not provided to adjunct faculty (Flaherty, 2015).

Finally, there is little or no incentive to form relationships with students. This can be seen in the way the institutions now describe the students as consumers or customers (Chory & Offstein, 2017b). Instead, providing an education is seen as merely transactional. The student pays, and the college offers the service. With this kind of mindset, there are few rewards for putting in the effort to build relationships with students. Instead, institutions tend to place a higher emphasis on research and publishing, which can help to increase the institution's prestige, which can attract potential students (Hoffman, 2014; Samuel, 2017). Those instructors who do put forth the effort to build relationships with students can become overwhelmed due to their other obligations, which can then lead to fatigue or even burnout (Strachan, 2020). An abundance of faculty burnout could further complicate the formation of instructor-student relationships. If students are aware that there is a high rate of faculty attrition, they may be less

likely to engage with instructors on a more personal level, fearing that the instructor will not remain at the institution. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the institution to put policies into place that encourage and reward faculty for modeling an ethic of care (Hawk, 2017). After all, as Dan Chambliss explained, a successful college education is "all about people, not programs" (Pandolfo, 2012, para. 4).

**Building Relationships**

While some instructors may see building relationships with students as impractical, there are a variety of simple ways in which it can be done. One aspect that instructors should keep in mind is that there does not have to be a grand gesture in order to form a relationship with a student. Rather, "moment-to-moment experiences result in the more generalized view of the relationship" (Claessens et al., 2017, p. 478). Hence, through frequent positive classroom interactions, the instructor can build a rapport with his or her students (Estepp & Roberts, 2013), which can lay the groundwork for the formation of a relationship. It is important to note the difference between building rapport and building a relationship. Bernieri (1988) explained rapport as being "strongly associated with positive emotional affect or attitude" (p. 121). Good rapport may be associated with descriptions of harmony or being in sync with another person (Bernieri, 1988; Gregory & Korth, 2016). Rapport is, therefore, just one aspect of a relationship (Lasater, 2016). Nevertheless, rapport is an important aspect of a relationship and may even be considered to be the foundation of a relationship. Through the building of rapport, an instructor can start to build a relationship with students. As these relationships are formed and grow, there is an increase in the level of comfort, safety, and trust (Davis & Coryell, 2016). Furthermore, through these relationships, instructors are able to gain a better understanding of student needs and motivation, as well as cultivate an increase in empathy toward the student, which has a

positive impact on students (Meyers et al., 2019; Rabin & Smith, 2013; Wubbels et al., 2016).

Empathy plays a critical role in building relationships between the instructor and student. Empathy can be defined as "the degree to which instructors work to deeply understand students' personal and social situations, feel caring and concern in response to students' positive and negative emotions, and communicate their understanding and caring to students through their behavior" (Meyers et al., 2019, p. 161). This can be problematic, particularly if instructors assume that their experiences are the same as their students' experiences (McAlinden, 2018). This is especially relevant when instructors are of different racial or cultural backgrounds from their students. Tettegah (2016) explained that some people find it to be difficult to show empathy to those whom they perceived to be a member of a different racial group. This may be because they have starkly different experiences. Hence, instructors must make a concerted effort to get to know their students on a personal level.

It is important to keep in mind that building a relationship requires both the instructor and student to participate (Gehlbach et al., 2016; Noddings, 1984). When interactions consist solely of the instructor speaking, students may not feel as though there is an opportunity to build a relationship with their instructor (Robinson et al., 2019). While these interactions may be frequent, the quality of interaction between instructor and student may be lacking, which may be more important than the quantity in order to create a sense of caring (Astin, 1999; Noddings, 1984). Hence, instructors should make an effort to involve the students in the classroom. One way to do this is through the incorporation of high impact practices (HIPs) such as using common intellectual experiences, learning communities, collaborative assignments, diversity learning, and feedback (Kuh, 2008; Snow, 2018). Kuh (2008) explained that one benefit of using HIPs is the close relationship that is cultivated between students and instructors.

Moreover, what happens inside the classroom has a great impact not only on students' academic performance, but also on further involvement outside the classroom (Tinto, 1993). Interactions outside the classroom also provide an opportunity for the fostering of instructor-student relationships. Chickering and Gamson (1987) created a list of good practices in undergraduate education, one of which was to encourage contact between the instructor and students. Oftentimes, instructor-student interactions inside the classroom focus on the academic content matter, leaving little time for the more social aspects of the relationship formation. Interactions outside the classroom provide an opportunity for the instructor to learn more about the students both academically and personally. This knowledge can help instructors to develop a deeper understanding of the students' needs and motivation, making it easier to adapt instruction to be more relevant to the students (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaroui et al., 2015; Yamauchi et al., 2016). While these interactions may provide an opportunity for instructors and students to build the more social aspect of the relationship, caution must be used. The behavior of instructors outside of the classroom affects how students view their instructor (Chory & Offstein, 2017a). Consequently, inappropriate out-of-class behavior such as gossiping or talking about personal problems with students may lead to problems inside the classroom (Chory & Offstein, 2017a). Hence, interactions outside of the classroom should be focused and professional.

### Inside Classroom

As previously mentioned, building relationships with students in the classroom may be especially difficult for instructors who have a large class where interactions may become merely transactional; in other words, instructors are just providing the course material to the students (Butler, 2017). This type of interaction does not allow for an opportunity for instructors and students to get to know each other or form a relationship. Furthermore, studies have shown that

in addition to a lack of opportunities to build relationships, student engagement, academic performance, and persistence also suffer in large classrooms (Harfitt & Tsui, 2015; Lynch & Pappas, 2017; Marx et al., 2016; Scott et al., 2017; Xu, 2016). There are many ways in which instructors can meet students' expectations and build rapport inside the classroom, whether it is a large or small class. One way which has the potential to make a substantial impact, is to create a classroom culture that promotes an active and social environment (Basko & McCabe, 2018). The crucial element to creating an active and social environment is to encourage more participation from the students and put them on a more equal power dynamic with the instructor (Sybing, 2019). Instructors can do this in either a formalized, structured way or more organically. The key is to facilitate and encourage discussion and emphasize the importance of contributions from the students (Arghode et al., 2017; Glass et al., 2015; Samuel, 2017). Students may be hesitant to contribute in this way. However, teachers who listen to the students, actively support students, give appropriate feedback, provide low stakes opportunities to participate, and connect students' experiences with what they are learning, provide a classroom atmosphere in which students are more likely to feel safe and take risks, explore new ideas, and contribute to discussions (Gardner et al., 2017; Gregory & Korth, 2016; Samuel, 2017; Snow, 2018; Walker & Gleaves, 2016). Additionally, the instructor can purposefully design activities that provide students with the opportunity to engage in conversations with each other and the instructor even in a large classroom (Yamauchi et al., 2016; Xu, 2017). There are several activities that can provide this opportunity. For example, students may be asked to participate in small group discussions about the topic the instructor just lectured on, to do a group presentation about a topic related to the course material, or to participate in a panel discussion where other students are able to ask them questions. By allowing students to actively participate, the instructor is demonstrating respect for

the students, which can make the students feel that they are not only included but are also an important part of the classroom community (Glass et al., 2015; Masika & Jones, 2016).

Another equally impactful way to build rapport with students, which is directly related to promoting an active and social environment, is creating a sense of community within the classroom. In order to build a sense of community in the classroom, the instructor must be inclusive, promote a culture of acceptance, and value the cultural variation of the students (Glass et al., 2017; Glass et al., 2015; Sybing, 2019). Perhaps one of the simplest ways to promote a sense of community in the classroom is by learning and using students' names (Estepp & Roberts, 2015; Gardner et al., 2017; Hawk, 2017; Samuel, 2017). In order to do this, the instructor may give the students a questionnaire on the first day of class (Hawk, 2017). This questionnaire may be used to gather personal, academic, and professional information about the student, which can be used by the instructor to help build rapport and foster a relationship with the students. The instructor can also use this information during class discussions. For example, if a student has specific experience with a topic that is being discussed, the instructor can ask that student to contribute to the discussion (Hawk, 2017). Doing this helps to connect students' experiences to the lessons that they learn in class, thereby increasing student engagement (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Samuel, 2017; Yamauchi et al., 2016). Moreover, this may be particularly useful as a means to encourage students who do not normally join in class discussions to be an active participant or to encourage those with differing cultural backgrounds to add a different perspective to the discussion. Another way to help build a sense of community in the classroom from the first day of class is for the instructor to pair students up at the beginning of the class period and ask them to get to know their partner. After a few minutes, the instructor can ask the students to introduce their partner to the rest of the class. In

this way, students are able to form a bond with someone in the class from the beginning. Engaging in community building activities throughout the semester is also important in providing a sense of community in the classroom. Some examples of such activities are small group discussions or forming learning communities. It has been found that small groups, or learning communities, increase student engagement with instructors and provides opportunities for instructors to get to know the students better (Bonet & Walters, 2016; Hall & O'Neal, 2016; Wirt & Jaeger, 2014; Yamauchi et al., 2016). When students work in small groups in the classroom, instructors have the opportunity to walk around to the different groups and engage in more personalized discussions with the students allowing them to glean information about individual students.

If instructors employ the use of small groups as a means of getting to know their students better, they can use the knowledge they gain to build rapport with the students. One way to do this is to adapt the curriculum to be more relevant to the students (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Yamauchi et al., 2016). Some examples of this would be to include different cultural perspectives of the topic being discussed or having assignments that explore things that affect students on a daily basis. By adapting the curriculum, instructors show the students they genuinely care about them and their individual circumstances or experiences. Instructors are acknowledging that each student comes with his or her own experiences and those experiences have value, which can enhance a student's sense of belonging (Como, 2007; Masika & Jones, 2016; Owolabi, 2018; Samuel, 2017). Another way to build rapport with students would be for instructors to include personal examples in teaching, which may show how they are similar to their students (Estepp & Roberts, 2015). When people perceive themselves as similar, they may have a more positive perception of a shared relationship (Estepp & Roberts, 2015; Gehlbach &

Robinson; 2016; Robinson et al., 2019). Moreover, by including personal examples, instructors are lessening the power gap, which can be an obstacle to establishing rapport (Sybing, 2019). Perhaps most importantly, taking the time to get to know their students and using that knowledge to build a bridge to that student shows an ethic of care.

Another way to build rapport with students is through the use of humor in the classroom (Anderson, 2020; Gardner et al., 2017; Smith & Wortley, 2017). Humor has been shown not only to increase student engagement and to help with information recall, but also to help to forge instructor-student relationships (Smith & Wortley, 2017). Instructors may balk at the suggestion to use humor as a way of connecting with students because often humor is associated with comedic performance. This is not necessarily the case. Effective use of humor in the classroom requires the instructor to be authentic and play to that individual instructor's strengths and talents (Smith & Wortley, 2017). Additionally, the use of humor must be used cautiously, as it has the potential to offend others or to be inappropriate (Anderson, 2020; Smith & Wortley, 2017). For that reason, it is important for instructors to know their students and use humor purposely. There are several ways in which humor can be incorporated in the classroom. The instructor may make jokes about a common source of frustration or about his or her own mistakes through the use of videos or cartoons, or as a way to lessen the impact of criticism (Gardner et al., 2017; Smith & Wortley, 2017). While the use of humor in the classroom can make the instructor appear more human and accessible to the students, overuse of humor can undermine the instructor's credibility (Smith & Wortley, 2017). Hence, care must be taken when using humor in the classroom.

Finally, students whose instructors engage in verbal and non-verbal immediacy behaviors are more engaged, have higher expectations of success, and report having a good rapport with

their instructors (Estepp & Roberts, 2015; Marx et al., 2016). Oftentimes, the perception of instructor verbal and non-verbal immediacy behaviors alone can positively affect students' engagement, motivation, and learning (Christophel, 1990; Estepp & Roberts, 2015). Non-verbal immediacy behaviors include such actions as eye contact, facial expressions, posture, and gestures, whereas verbal immediacy behaviors include such things as tone of voice, word choice, calling students by name, using humor, making small talk, and providing feedback (Gardner et al., 2017; Marx et al., 2016). For example, an instructor who smiles and uses humor in the classroom is perceived as a friendlier instructor than one who does not smile and is serious all of the time. Additionally, instructors who do not make eye contact with students or have their back turned to the students may be perceived as not wanting to engage with students, which may hinder a student from seeking help from them. Moreover, giving frequent and context-specific feedback, as recommended to improve engagement and rapport (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Gardner et al., 2017; Sybing, 2019), can indicate to students that the instructor cares about the students' success. These immediacy behaviors provide a means for instructors to interact with students in an organic way, as it often comes naturally within a classroom setting.

### *Outside Classroom*

Interactions outside of the classroom can be just as important as interactions inside the classroom when building and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships. Some of the more common forms of contact between instructors and students outside the classroom are meeting before or after class, meeting during office hours, or communicating through emails (Estepp & Roberts, 2015; Glass et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014). These are all great ways to interact with individual students, get to know their situations better, and provide them with academic support. When instructors take the time to interact one-on-one with students outside of the

classroom, they are showing the students that they care about them and are interested in them.

There are other ways for instructors to interact with students outside the classroom, which may not be one-on-one interactions. One example is through co-curricular or extracurricular activities (Glass et al., 2017; Groccia, 2018). For example, a journalism instructor may be the advisor for the school newspaper. Students may choose to work at the school newspaper, which provides them an opportunity to work alongside their instructor and peers. By working together, the instructor and students get to know each other better and are more likely to form a relationship. Other ways that instructors may build a relationship with students is by offering them an opportunity to participate in a research project, inviting them to attend professional activities such as conferences, or participating in an academic or social organization or club (Groccia, 2018). Again, the instructor is providing an opportunity to interact with students and get to know them better. Furthermore, if the instructor personally invites students to participate in these activities, the students may perceive that the instructor genuinely cares about them academically and personally.

As previously mentioned, instructors must use caution when interacting with students outside of the classroom, especially in social situations. If an instructor forms a special relationship with a student outside of the classroom, that student may be given special attention in the classroom. While this may benefit that particular student, the other students will most likely witness this special treatment and feel a sense of unfairness or feel ignored (Gregory & Korth, 2016; Martin & Collie, 2016). Furthermore, an instructor's behavior outside of the classroom can affect how a student views that instructor, which in turn can affect how the student behaves. For example, inappropriate behavior outside the classroom from an instructor may lead to student incivility issues inside the classroom (Chory & Offstein, 2017a).

**Summary**

It is evident from the literature that instructor-student relationships have a substantial

impact on student outcomes, including an increase in engagement (Groves et al., 2015; Turner,

2016), sense of community (Barrow, 2015; Glass et al., 2015; Turner, 2016), academic success

(Barrow, 2015; Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016; Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Musser et al., 2017;

Owolabi, 2018), and persistence (Dwyer, 2017; Quin, 2017; Robinson et al., 2019; Shepherd &

Tsong, 2014; Xu, 2017). Additionally, these relationships can affect instructors' wellbeing

(Martini et al., 2019; Spilt et al., 2011). It is also well documented what expectations students

have from their instructors. Students expect instructors to be approachable (Dean, 2019; Groves

et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014), accessible (Turner, 2016), helpful (Groves et al., 2015; Hoffman,

2014; Marx et al., 2016), and caring (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Glass et al.,

2015; Jorgenson et al., 2018). There are a variety of ways in which instructors can exhibit these

characteristics both inside and outside the classroom. However, some instructors are still hesitant

to form relationships with their students, whether it is because of a lack of time (Gehlbach &

Robinson, 2016; Hoffman, 2014), differing views of their responsibilities (Gehlbach &

Robinson, 2016; Hoffman, 2014), or logistical issues (Cho et al., 2014; Landrum, 2009;

Marklein, 2017; Robinson et al., 2019).

While the literature provides a considerable amount of data on instructor-student

relationships, there is a gap that needs to be addressed. A majority of the literature focuses on the

students' perceptions of instructor-student relationships and overlooks the instructors'

perceptions. The few studies that do look at the instructor view of these relationships are either

from those who teach in the K-12 environment or full-time faculty in higher education. This

study aimed to provide a voice to adjunct faculty members, which comprises nearly half of the

teaching population in higher education (NCES, 2019b). Hence, the purpose of this

transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experience of fostering caring

instructor-student relationships for residential adjunct faculty members at accredited degree-

granting institutions in the Southern United States.

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

**Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe residential adjunct faculty members' experiences fostering caring instructor-student relationships at degree-granting institutions in the Southern United States. In this chapter, an explanation of the chosen research design is provided along with the research questions, a description of the setting, and participant selection. Furthermore, the procedures, researcher's role, data collection, and data analysis are presented. Finally, the trustworthiness and ethical considerations for this study are described.

**Design**

There are two general research methods: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research "is grounded in the assumption that features of the social environment constitute an objective reality that is constant across time and settings" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 650), whereas qualitative research "is grounded in the assumption that individuals construct social reality in the form of meanings and interpretations, and that these constructions tend to be transitory and situational" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 650). The purpose of this study was to describe residential adjunct faculty members' experiences in fostering caring instructor-student relationships, which is subjective in nature, lending itself to qualitative research. There are other qualities to this study that also led to a qualitative study being conducted, including the need to understand a complex issue in its natural setting and to empower individuals by giving them a voice to share their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Within qualitative research, there are a variety of designs: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The specific design

selected for this study was phenomenology. Phenomenology has its origins in philosophy and psychology and relies heavily on the writings of Edmund Husserl (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The primary aim of a phenomenological study is to describe a common meaning of the lived experiences of several individuals, all of whom have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

There are two main phenomenological approaches: hermeneutical and transcendental. In hermeneutical phenomenology, the researcher not only provides a description of the phenomenon, but also interprets the meaning. Conversely, in transcendental phenomenology, the researcher presents an accurate and vivid description, but not an interpretation of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). In order to do this, the researcher must engage in epoche, which is the bracketing out of any presuppositions in order to see things in a new way as if for the first time (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). In other words, the researcher must become aware of any personal biases or judgments that might exist and eliminate those preconceived notions, allowing the researcher to focus on the experiences of the participants without interference from personal ideas or judgments. Next, the researcher engages in transcendental-phenomenological reduction in which each experience is reflected upon with the aim of providing a textural description (Moustakas, 1994). Through repeated inspection of the experience, new perspectives unfold with each having equal value (Moustakas, 1994). These are then clustered into meaningful themes to provide a textural description of *what* participants experience (Moustakas, 1994). Next the researcher uses imaginative variation to provide a structural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The structural description explains the *how* of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002). In other words, the researcher uncovers what conditions must exist in order for the experience to occur. Finally, the researcher combines the textural and structural

descriptions to provide an overall essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

The aim of this study was to describe residential adjunct faculty members' experiences in fostering caring instructor-student relationships and not to interpret the meaning of those experiences; therefore, a transcendental phenomenological approach was an appropriate design. The implementation of this design consisted of bracketing out the researcher's experiences with the phenomenon; collecting data from several individuals who had experienced the phenomenon; analyzing the data; and providing a textural description, structural description, and overall essence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## Research Questions

There was one central question and three sub-questions that guided this transcendental phenomenological study.

### Central Question

How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their experiences forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships in an effort to increase student engagement?

### Sub-Questions

1. How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their ability to develop caring relationships through positive interactions with students inside and outside the classroom?

2. How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their ability to cultivate an ethic of care with their students?

3. What contextual factors affect residential adjunct faculty members' experiences forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships?

**Setting**

The setting for this study was a metropolitan area in the Southern United States. This region was chosen primarily because of its low higher education persistence and graduation rates. In this region, about 25% of individuals over the age of 25 years old had at least a bachelor's degree, which was considerably lower than the national average of 31.5% (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Moreover, persistence rates for first-time, full-time degree seeking freshman at four-year institutions in this region for the fall of 2016 was 65.8% compared to the national average of 81%, and at two-year institutions in this region the persistence rate was 60% compared to the national average of 62% (NCES, 2019c; Oklahoma State Regents, 2019). Because instructor-student relationships can make a substantial impact on student persistence, this region had the potential to benefit greatly from understanding this phenomenon.

Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that one of the challenges of conducting phenomenological research is finding individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. Because of this challenge, choosing an area with a large number of degree-granting institutions increased the potential pool of participants for this study. For that reason, this area was purposefully chosen, as the metropolitan area had more than 20 degree-granting institutions. The institutions in this area included both four-year and two-year institutions as well as public and private institutions.

**Participants**

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), criterion sampling works well in a phenomenological study because it is essential that participants have experienced the phenomenon being studied. In criterion sampling, the selection of participants is based on the satisfaction of important criteria (Gall et al., 2007). For this study, there were four important

participant criteria that had to be met. The first criterion was that the adjunct faculty member had taught a minimum of one year in a traditional face-to-face setting within the last five years. Because online courses have a different dynamic than the traditional classroom, which adds to the complexity of forming instructor-student relationships, the study was delimited to traditional face-to-face classrooms. As the goal of many institutions is to increase student retention, looking at the relationships between instructors and students could have a substantial impact. This may be especially important during the first year when students are trying to adapt to their new environment. With this in mind, the second criterion that had to be met was that the participant had taught lower-level courses, which are those courses generally taken in the student's first and second year. It is common for adjunct faculty to teach lower-level courses. In fact, Landrum (2009) found 82.7% of the courses taught by adjunct faculty were lower-level courses. The third criterion was that the participant had experience in fostering instructor-student relationships; this is critical as this was the phenomenon being studied. Finally, the participant had to have a moderate to high level of care as assessed by the Nyberg Caring Assessment (Nyberg, 1990, 2019). In order to gather demographic information and verify that participants met the four criteria set forth for participation in the study, a questionnaire was used (see Appendix A). In addition to criterion sampling, snowball sampling was also used to obtain a sufficient number of participants for the study. Snowball sampling involves asking people to recommend participants who would be well-suited for the study (Gall et al., 2007).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated that while there is not a prescribed number of participants for a qualitative study, based on a review of many studies, between three and 10 participants for a phenomenological study is recommended. An alternative recommendation is collecting data until saturation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Saturation is reached when "new

incoming data produces little or no new information to address the research question" (Guest et al., 2020, p. 2). Saturation was acquired after data was collected from 11 participants.

In an effort to gain a wide range of perspectives among adjunct faculty, participants included those who varied in age, gender, race, number of years of teaching experience, and the department in which they taught (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographic Information*

| Participant | Age | Gender | Race | Number of years teaching | Level of Care based on Nyberg Caring Assessment | Department |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ann | 43 | Female | Caucasian | 13 | Moderate | Mass Communications |
| Mike | 58 | Male | Caucasian | 12 | High | Engineering |
| Lynn | 66 | Female | Native American and Caucasian | 30 | Moderate | Economics |
| Paul | 58 | Male | Caucasian | 27 | High | Mass Communications |
| Jose | 50 | Male | Hispanic | 16 | High | Safety Studies and Modern Languages |
| Kathy | 57 | Female | Caucasian | 9 | High | Science |
| Tony | 53 | Male | Caucasian | 16 | High | Social Science - History |
| John | 61 | Male | Black | 14 | High | Mass Communications Business/Marketing |
| Mason | 32 | Male | Caucasian | 4 | Moderate | English |
| Lisa | 42 | Female | Caucasian | 18 | High | Art, English, and Humanities |
| Chad | 32 | Male | Caucasian | 1 | Moderate | Social Science - Political Science |

*Note.* Participant names listed are pseudonyms

**Procedures**

The first step was to secure Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study. After obtaining approval, recruitment letters were sent to potential participants via email. Potential participant emails were obtained through multiple methods. Adjunct faculty members known through personal and professional acquaintances were contacted to ask if they were willing to participate in the study, adjunct faculty members listed on the institution's websites were contacted, and those contacted were asked if they knew of anyone else who met the criteria that might be willing to participate in the study. In addition, social media was used to recruit potential participants. Those who indicated an interest in participating in the study on a social media site were sent the recruitment letter by email. Thus, both criterion and snowball sampling were used during the recruitment process. The recruitment letters contained a concise description of the study, the criteria required of the participants, the procedures to be used during the data collection, the procedures that would be used to protect confidentiality of participants, and a link to the questionnaire (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The questionnaire included questions to gather demographic information and the Nyberg Caring Assessment (Nyberg, 1990, 2019), both of which were used to verify participants met the criteria for participation. Nyberg's Caring Assessment Scale was originally used to assess caring of nurses (Nyberg, 1990, 2019); however, the questions were general enough to be used in this study. In fact, Nyberg's Caring Assessment Scale has been used in educational studies evaluating students' perceptions of themselves and peers as caring (Nadelson et al., 2010) and evaluating middle school teachers who built relationships with at-risk students (Brown, 2019). If participants agreed to participate in the study and met the participant criteria based on the questionnaire, they were asked to sign a letter of informed consent (see Appendix B).

After receiving the letters of informed consent, one individual was chosen to participate in a pilot study of the interview questions. This participant only participated in the pilot and not the study itself. The purpose of the pilot study was to identify any potential problems with the questions and to revise them before the study took place (Gall et al., 2007).

After completion of the pilot study of the interview questions, those participants who were identified as having a moderate to high level of care were contacted to schedule a mutually agreed upon time for a 45-60 minute one-on-one interview via the videoconferencing tool Microsoft Teams, which was video recorded using the platform. The interview was transcribed verbatim by the transcription service provided within Microsoft teams. The transcript was checked for accuracy, and then a copy of the transcription was sent to the participant for member checking. Varpio et al. (2017) explained that member checking may be conducted at two different stages of the study. Researchers may ask participants to review transcripts from interviews to verify that their words matched the intended meaning or to review data analysis to validate the interpretations of the researcher (Varpio et al., 2017). After the member checking of the one-on-one interviews, participants were sent a link to a Google form, which asked them to write a letter to a new adjunct faculty member describing their experiences and providing advice for fostering instructor-student relationships. The participants were encouraged to write freely and honestly.

Data was triangulated through the analysis of the multiple forms of data that were collected from the participants. From the raw data, any significant statements and developed themes were noted from these statements. After developing themes from all significant statements, textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon as well as an overall essence of the phenomenon were developed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

**The Researcher's Role**

In qualitative research, the researcher is a human instrument in the data analysis process. As Patton (2015) explained, the researcher must make judgments about what is meaningful in the data to create patterns, themes, and categories. Therefore, it is critical that the researcher bracket out any personal experiences that may affect these judgments. Moustakas (1994) explained in the epoche that researchers set aside any "prejudgments, biases, or preconceived ideas about things" (p. 85) in order to gain a fresh perspective of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and provide an accurate description of the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants.

As the researcher in this transcendental phenomenological study, I acknowledge that I brought preconceived ideas and biases to this study. I was motivated to embark on this study because of my personal experiences as an adjunct faculty member for more than a decade and my ability to foster instructor-student relationships. I had certain ideas about what characteristics attributed to successful relationships and what affected my ability to form these relationships with my students, so I was mindful to bracket out these ideas and focus solely on the participants' experiences when analyzing the data. Moreover, I had no prior relationship with the participants or the setting in which this study took place. I taught at institutions in the Midwest, and the participants in this study were adjunct faculty members in a metropolitan area in the South. Furthermore, I taught English as a second language, so my students were international students. On the other hand, the participants in this study taught lower-level courses with a majority of their students being domestic students.

**Data Collection**

Qualitative researchers seek to provide a thick, rich description of findings through analysis of a variety of data collection techniques. The use of multiple sources of data helps to

establish both credibility and accuracy through the testing of one source against another (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2007). The data collection for this study included a questionnaire, interviews, and letters to a new adjunct faculty member. The questionnaire was conducted first in order to gather demographic data and to verify that the participants had a moderate to high level of care, which was one of the participant criteria. In addition, the responses in the questionnaire were used to modify questions asked in the interviews. Next, interviews were conducted to help build trust and rapport between the participants and this researcher. After conducting the interviews, the transcription of the raw data was verified and sent to the participants for member checking. Once this had been done, the data was analyzed to see if there were any emergent themes that needed to be explored more or if further questions needed to be asked to gather a thicker description of any particular aspect or theme. The final form of data collection was the letter to a new adjunct faculty member in which participants were asked to write a letter of advice about forming instructor-student relationships. This was chosen as the final form of data collection as the participants had ample time to reflect on the discussions they had about fostering caring instructor-student relationships, which may have made describing their experiences easier and more accurate. Furthermore, they could include information that they would not have otherwise felt comfortable saying in person.

**Questionnaire**

The first method of data collection for this study was the questionnaire. A link of the Google form of the questionnaire was sent to the participants, who then filled it out. The questionnaire was composed of two sections (see Appendix A). The first section was created in order to gather demographic information about the participants. The second section of the questionnaire was Nyberg's Caring Assessment Scale (Nyberg, 1990, 2019). Permission was

obtained through the Copyright Clearance Center from Springer Publishing Company to use the instrument (see Appendix C). This instrument was used to determine the level of care of the participants. The questionnaire included 20 items in which participants were to indicate the degree of agreement with each statement based on a five-point Likert scale (Nyberg, 1990, 2019). The reliability of the scale was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which ranged from 0.85 to 0.97 indicating a high level of reliability (Nyberg, 1990, 2019). While Nyberg (1990, 2019) did not interpret the composite scores in terms of participants' perception of caring, for the purpose of this study a score of 1.0 to 2.4 indicated a low level of care, a score 2.5 – 3.9 indicated a moderate level of care, and a score of 4.0 – 5.0 indicated a high level of care.

**Interviews**

The second method of data collection for this study was one-on-one interviews. For phenomenological studies, the primary means of collecting data is through in-depth interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There are three main types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. In a structured interview, the interviewer asks the same questions with the exact same wording and in the exact same order for all participants. In the semi-structured interview, the interviewer has a guide with open-ended questions that can be modified during the interview. In an unstructured interview, the interviewer only has a general idea of the topics to discuss and comes up with questions as the interview is taking place. For this study, a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was used as this provides the researcher some flexibility during the interview to ask for clarification or elicit a richer, thicker description of the phenomenon being explored.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the interviewees were interviewed using the videoconference platform Microsoft Teams. The interview took place at an agreed upon time by

both the participant and this researcher. The interviews were video recorded for the purpose of

transcription. A copy of the transcription was provided to the participants for member checking

to assure the accuracy of the participants' description of the phenomenon as is recommended by

Creswell and Poth (2018). This data collection method helped to answer the central research

question as well as all three sub-questions (see Appendix D). The questions were subject to

expert review prior to the piloting of the questions.

The original open-ended interview questions to be used in this study were as follows:

1.  Please tell me about yourself.

    Prompt:  where you grew up, your family, your educational background

2.  Please tell me about where you work and what you do/teach.

3.  When did you first know that you wanted to teach?

4.  Why did you decide to become a teacher?

5.  Describe the interactions you have with your students inside the classroom.

6.  What types of interactions, if any, do you have with students in the classroom that are not
    directly related to course material?

7.  Describe the frequency and quality of these interactions.

8.  Describe the interactions you have with students outside the classroom.

9.  Describe the frequency and quality of these interactions.

10. What types of interactions inside and outside the classroom help you to better understand
    your students and their individual situations?

11. How do these interactions help you to better understand your students?

12. Describe your relationship with your students.

13. What do you do to form relationships with your students? Please give specific examples.

14. How do you show your students that you care about them? Please give specific examples.

15. How are you able to communicate a helping attitude toward your students?

16. How are you able to build trust with your students?

17. In what ways do you show sensitivity to the needs of your students?

18. Please give me an example of a relationship you had with a student that you thought was especially caring. What made it caring?

19. What characteristics would you attribute to a caring instructor-student relationship?

20. What contextual or situational factors have positively affected your ability to form relationships with your students?

21. What contextual or situational factors have negatively affected your ability to form relationships with your students?

22. What limitations do you as an adjunct faculty member have that hinder your ability to foster caring instructor-student relationships?

23. What specific institutional factors have hindered your ability to form relationships with your students?

24. What other thoughts would you like to share about your experiences of fostering instructor-student relationships?

Moustakas (1994) suggested that a phenomenological interview start with a social conversation in order to create an atmosphere in which the participants feel relaxed and trusting. Accordingly, questions one through four were designed in such a way to allow the participants and interviewer to build a rapport, which allowed the participants to be more comfortable in opening up and sharing their experiences.

Questions five through seven focused on the interactions the participants had with

students in the classroom. Several studies have found that being willing to engage with the students in the classroom (Groves et al., 2015; Marx et al., 2016) and being familiar with and showing interest in the students (Arghode et al., 2017; Groves et al., 2015) are ways in which instructors can build relationships with their students. To do this, instructors cannot focus only on the course material; they must also have interactions, which would allow them to get better acquainted with the students. By knowing their students, instructors can better adapt their instruction to make it more relevant to their students (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Marx et al., 2016), which shows an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984). However, as Astin (1999b) pointed out, it is not only the quantity of interactions, but also the quality of those interactions, which are important in engaging students.

Questions eight and nine focused on the interactions the participants had with their students outside the classroom. Students have stated that having instructors who were approachable (Groves et al., 2015), accessible (Turner, 2016), and willing to meet one-on-one with students (Groves et al., 2015; Turner, 2016) were important factors in building relationships. Moreover, interactions outside the classroom provide an opportunity for instructors to get to know their students on a more personal level. Additionally, when students have a positive relationship with their instructors, they are more willing to participate and seek help when needed. Therefore, as previously stated, both the quantity and quality of these interactions are important to consider (Astin, 1999b).

Questions 10 and 11 focused specifically on the types of interactions instructors had that helped them gain a better understanding of their students, which could be used to build rapport. Instructors can use this knowledge to make curriculum more relevant to their students (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Yamauchi et al., 2016), which shows students that they

genuinely care. Furthermore, by understanding students' past experiences and situations, instructors are able to be more empathic towards their students, further showing an ethic of care (Meyers et al., 2019; Noddings, 1984).

Questions 12 and 13 focused on gaining a broad textural description of the participants' relationships with their students and how they formed these relationships. In a phenomenological study, the researcher must provide a textural description of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). These two questions asked the participant to focus on the complexity of the issue.

Questions 14 through 19 asked participants to consider how they showed their students that they cared about them, which is important in the formation of relationships (Noddings, 1984; Nyberg, 1990, 2019), and what their definition of a caring relationship was. The literature on instructor-student relationships has an abundance of characteristics that students consider to be important in forming relationships, including being helpful (Groves et al. 2015; Hoffman, 2014; Marx et al., 2016; Turner, 2016) and being caring (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Glass et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014; Jorgenson et al., 2018). There is also evidence that trust (Davis & Coryell, 2016; Strachan, 2020; Walker & Gleaves, 2016) and sensitivity to student needs (Gallop & Bastien, 2016; Wubbels et al., 2016) are important in building a caring relationship. Thus, these questions aimed to examine how the participants were able to demonstrate these characteristics as well as provide an opportunity for them to explain which characteristics they felt were most important to building caring relationships.

Questions 20 through 23 sought to provide a structural description (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994) of the phenomenon. The structural description looks specifically at how the context or the setting influences how the participants view the phenomenon (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). There are several factors the literature listed as having an impact on an instructor's ability to form relationships with students, such as not having an office where the instructor can meet with students (American Association of University Professors, n.d.; Landrum, 2009; Liftig, 2014) and lacking time due to other job obligations (Cho et al., 2014; Landrum, 2009). Knowing what contextual or situational factors affect the participants' ability to form relationships including factors specific to individual institutions is important in understanding the phenomenon.

Question 24 provided the participants with an opportunity to add any additional information that would help to provide a rich, thick description of their experiences of fostering instructor-student relationships.

After piloting these questions, a few changes were made based on the feedback received. Several questions were taken out. Question five was deleted, which asked the participants to describe the interactions they had with their students inside the classroom because question six asked about interactions with students in the classroom that were not related to course material. The participant thought there was not much to be gained by asking both questions, and there was the potential for a lot of redundancy. Question 10 was also deleted due to redundancy because the data would be gathered in questions six through nine. Question 12 was taken out because the participant thought it was too difficult to answer without more specifics. Instead, he thought that question 18 asking for an example of a specific relationship that was caring was easier to understand and answer. Finally, question 15 was removed. The participant felt that communicating a helping attitude was synonymous with caring about a student and would, therefore, be redundant. In addition to deleting several questions, the pilot participant recommended adding a few questions that might help to answer the research questions.

Therefore, the following two questions were added:

1. How, if at all, has COVID affected your ability to form relationships with students?

2. What's an ideal environment for you to interact with students?

The purpose of question one was to explore how the pandemic, a major situational factor that all instructors were dealing with, had affected the fostering of relationships. The participant suggested question two as a way for participants to identify what the classroom or overall school atmosphere should be when developing caring relationships with students.

In addition to these changes in the questions, questions were also added based on results of the Nyberg Caring Assessment (Nyberg, 1990, 2019) for each individual participant. For example, Kathy indicated on the Nyberg Caring Assessment (Nyberg, 1990, 2019) that it was extremely important to understand that spiritual forces contributed to human care. Therefore, she was asked to explain why she thought this was important and what role did spiritual forces play in human care.

**Letter to New Adjunct Faculty Member**

The final method of data collection for this study was writing a letter to a new adjunct faculty member, which was sent via a Google form. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested collecting data beyond traditional observations and interviews as a way to capture information that may be missed in these types of data collection methods. In writing a letter to a new adjunct faculty member, participants were able to reflect on and document their experiences in forming caring instructor-student relationships, and based on their own experiences, provide advice for new adjunct faculty members. This data collection method aimed to answer the central question of how adjunct faculty members describe their experiences of forming instructor-student relationships.

Participants were asked to write a letter addressed to a new adjunct faculty member. They were provided with the following prompt:

Write a letter of advice to a new residential adjunct faculty member about fostering caring instructor-student relationships. What advice would you give to the new residential adjunct faculty member about forming and maintaining caring relationships with their students based on your own experiences? Include specific examples from your experience. You may consider addressing the following:

- Strategies that you have found to be particularly helpful in fostering caring relationships with students

- Strategies that have not been successful

- Obstacles or challenges that hindered your ability to foster caring instructor-student relationships and how you overcame those obstacles

The instructions for this letter asked participants to reflect on and include their own experiences as residential adjunct faculty members forming and maintaining caring relationships with their students, including any challenges they had faced. They were encouraged to write freely and honestly. They were asked to leave out any identifying information such as names of students or institutions.  here was no limitation on the maximum length of the letter; however, the participants were asked to write at least a couple of paragraphs. Furthermore, the participants were asked complete this letter within two weeks of receiving the Google form.

## Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and letter to a new adjunct instructor was analyzed to form a "composite description of the meanings and essences of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121) of residential adjunct faculty members' formation

and maintenance of caring instructor-student relationships. While the questionnaire may give quantitative data, it can also be used to provide a means of triangulating qualitative data. In this study, the analysis of the questionnaire, which included Nyberg's Caring Assessment (Nyberg, 1990, 2019), was two-fold. First, it helped to inform participant selection. Only those who met participation criteria and showed a moderate to high level of caring were eligible to participate in the study. While Nyberg (1990, 2019) did not interpret the perception of caring based on the composite scores, Nadelson et al. (2010) used the composite score of 1.0 to mean a very low perception of self as carer, about 3.0 as the average perception of self as carer, and around 5.0 as a very high perception of self as carer. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, a composite score of 1.0 – 2.4 was considered a low level of caring, 2.5 – 3.9 as a moderate level of caring, and 4.0 – 5.0 as a high level of caring. The survey was also used to triangulate data from the interviews and letters to a new adjunct instructor. Because Nyberg's (1990, 2019) Caring Assessment covers topics that the literature has found to be important in forming caring relationships, it was expected that if participants scored individual statements as important, those topics would be mentioned in the other forms of data collection. For example, in Nyberg's (1990, 2019) Caring Assessment, statements 10 and 11 asked participants to relate how important it was to go beyond knowing their students superficially and thoroughly understanding what situations meant to the students. These two statements were reinforced in questions six and 11 in the one-on-one interviews which asked participants to discuss the types of interactions in the classroom that were not directly related to course materials and how these interactions helped them to understand their students better. Hence, it was expected that those participants who scored a moderate to high level of caring on these statements would have more interactions with students, which would enhance their ability to know their students on a deeper level.

The data analysis procedures that were used for this transcendental phenomenological study followed the method recommended by Moustakas (1994), which includes epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. The first step, epoche, consists of putting aside any preconceived ideas, judgments, or biases that may affect the researcher's ability to look at the data in a fresh new perspective (Moustakas, 1994). In a transcendental phenomenological study, the researcher is seeking to understand a phenomenon as described by the participants; hence, it is imperative that the researcher bracket out personal experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) recommended finding a quiet place where the researcher can review personal thoughts and feelings and put aside any biases or prejudgments. This is a step that was taken before conducting and analyzing the questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and letters to a new adjunct faculty member.

The next step is phenomenological reduction, or horizonalization. In this step, the researcher goes through the raw data to find significant statements that provide a textural description of the participants' experiences. Every relevant expression is listed. In order to determine if an expression is relevant, the expression must be tested for two requirements:

a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?

b. Is it possible to abstract and label it?  If so, it is a horizon of the experience. Expressions not meeting the above requirements are eliminated. Overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions are also eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive terms (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

This step requires the researcher to continually look at and describe the data giving each description equal weight as each perspective provides a deeper understanding of the experiences

(Moustakas, 1994). From the continual analysis of the data, the researcher is able to reduce the data to significant statements. Those significant statements can then be clustered into themes.  A theme is "an *extended phrase* or *sentence* that identifies what a unit of data is *about* and/or what it *means*" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 199). Moreover, any insignificant statements not pertinent to the phenomenon can be disregarded. After clustering the relevant statements into themes, they must be validated by comparing them to the complete record of the participant. Moustakas (1994) suggested answering the following questions for validation: "(1) Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcript? (2) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed? (3) If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the co-researcher's experience and should be deleted" (p. 121). Finally, after validating the themes, an individual textural description of the experience can be provided with verbatim examples from the participant data.

The third step is imaginative variation, which aims to provide a structural description of the experience. The structural description explains how the experience of the phenomenon came to be (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell and Poth (2018) described the structural description of the experience as how the context or setting influenced the participant's experience of the phenomenon. There are a variety of structures that can affect the textural understanding of a phenomenon including "time, space, materiality, causality, and relationship to self and to others" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99), all of which make up the structural description. In this step, the analysis of the data is focused on finding those themes, which can explain how the participants are experiencing the phenomenon. The analysis of the data for imaginative variation follows the same procedure as phenomenological reduction. The data is analyzed for significant statements that provide a structural description of the participant's experiences. The statements are checked for relevance and then clustered into themes, which are then validated through comparison to the

participant's complete record. After these steps, a structural description can be provided for each participant.

The final step of Moustakas' (1994) method is synthesis. In this stage, the researcher intuitively integrates the textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon to create a description of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), which focuses on the experiences common to all of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) further noted that the essence of the experience being described cannot be totally exhausted; rather, the synthesis provides an essence of the experience bound to a particular time and place.

In a qualitative study, the researcher is the instrument used to analyze the data. Because the process of coding data by hand can be quite time consuming and labor intensive, the Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) program NVivo 12 Mac was utilized in the phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis stages. While the researcher still needs to go through the data line by line and assign codes, the use of a QDAS program makes the process more efficient. The main benefit of using such programs is the ability to store and organize the data and the capacity to locate text associated with specific codes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This transcendental phenomenological study looked to describe residential adjunct faculty members' experience of fostering caring instructor-student relationships. The data was collected through a questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and letters to a new adjunct faculty member in order to achieve triangulation. Accordingly, the data from each method of data collection needed to go through the analysis process described above.

**Trustworthiness**

As with any research, the validation of the study is dependent on the trustworthiness. The trustworthiness of this study was addressed in terms of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability through the use of multiple qualitative approaches including triangulation, member checking, acknowledgement of the researcher's bias, memoing, and providing a rich, thick description (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Credibility**

The credibility of a study refers to whether the findings are an accurate description of the participants' meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to provide credibility to this study, the use of triangulation and member checking were employed. Triangulation is the use of multiple data collection methods to corroborate evidence (Gall et al., 2007). The data collection methods used in this study included a questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and a letter to a new adjunct faculty member. Furthermore, after the one-on-one interviews, a transcription was provided to each participant to check for the accuracy of their statements and meanings, which is known as member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Any inaccuracies were corrected before the analysis occurred.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

The dependability and confirmability of a qualitative study refers to the reliability of the findings. In other words, if a study was dependable and confirmable, one would expect that another researcher conducting the same study would have similar results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Dependability and confirmability were addressed in this study through the acknowledgment of researcher bias, triangulation of data for corroboration of the evidence, and peer review. The researcher bias was acknowledged in the "Situation to Self" and "Researcher's

Role" sections in Chapter One and Chapter Three. The use of triangulation further supports the dependability and confirmability of the findings. Similar questions were used in the different data collection methods, which helped to corroborate the findings. Finally, a peer reviewed the data and research process of the study. The purpose of having a peer review the data and research process is to ask questions about the methods and interpretations and to keep the researcher honest (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Transferability**

The transferability of a study refers to the ability of readers to determine whether the findings can be transferred to other settings because of shared characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to determine transferability in a qualitative study, the researcher must provide a rich, thick description (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For that reason, a detailed description of the setting and the participants was provided. Furthermore, with multiple methods of data collection, detailed textural and structural descriptions of the participants' experience of the phenomenon was provided.

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**Ethical Considerations**

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Ethical issues can arise during multiple phases of a qualitative study. Therefore, it is critical that a researcher address any potential ethical issues before conducting the research. For this study, ethical standards established by Liberty University's IRB were maintained. Before conducting any research, approval from Liberty University's IRB was obtained. After IRB approval, participants were asked to sign a letter of informed consent. In the letter, a concise description of the nature and purpose of the study, an explanation that participation is voluntary and the participant can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and the description of any potential risks or benefits of the study were all provided. Participants, as well as the

institutions mentioned in this study, were given pseudonyms to provide confidentiality. Any additional identifying information was changed. Moreover, all hard copies of data and consent forms were kept in a locked file cabinet, and all digital data were kept on a USB flash drive, which was also kept in a locked file cabinet. This researcher was the only individual with access. Five years after the completion of the study all data will be destroyed; the hard copies will be shredded, and digital copies will be deleted.

**Summary**

This chapter provided a description of the methodology that was utilized in this transcendental phenomenological study investigating the experience of fostering caring instructor-student relationships for residential adjunct faculty members at accredited degree-granting institutions in the Southern United States. A rationale was given for the use of transcendental phenomenology along with the research questions that guided the study. In addition, the setting, participants, and researcher's role in the study were described. The procedures, data collection, and data analysis techniques were addressed in detail. This chapter concluded with a discussion on the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experience of fostering caring instructor-student relationships for residential adjunct faculty members at accredited degree-granting institutions in the Southern United States. This chapter begins with a description of each of the participants followed by the findings from the analysis and triangulation of data from the questionnaire, interviews, and letter of advice to a new adjunct faculty member. The results are presented first by the themes that emerged, which were learning about the student, engaging the student, showing care for the student, and limitations in building and maintaining caring relationships and then as direct responses to the central research question and sub-questions.

### Participants

There were 11 individuals who participated in this study. All participants met the four required criteria, which included having taught a minimum of one year in a traditional face-to-face setting, having taught lower-level courses, having experience fostering instructor-student relationships, and having a moderate to high level of care as assessed by the Nyberg Caring Assessment (Nyberg, 1990, 2019).  In addition, participants varied in gender, age, race, number of years of teaching experience, and subject matter. A description of the participants is provided below. It is important to note that all names below are pseudonyms that were given to the participants to protect their identity.

### Ann

Ann was a 43-year-old Caucasian woman with 13 years of teaching experience and a moderate level of care. She had a bachelor's degree in musical theater with a minor in business

administration, a master's degree in business administration with an emphasis in marketing, and a doctorate in human resource development. Ann had held many different positions throughout her career. She was a graduate assistant in a marketing department; was an adjunct in a marketing department; taught acting, voice, and dance; was a substitute teacher; worked in group sales in the travel industry; worked in human resources and marketing for a mortgage company; was the director of career services at an HEI; was the director for a fine arts organization; and was the chair of a mass communications department. Ann had experience working in higher education as both a full-time professor and as an adjunct. Ann indicated that in every job she had, she was doing some type of training and development, which she loved because she was always learning from people in the classroom as much as they were learning from her. Ann stated throughout her changes in jobs, she continued with an adjunct position everywhere she possibly could because "higher ed is still a side hustle kind of a job."

**Mike**

Mike was a 58-year-old Caucasian man with 12 years of teaching experience and a high level of care. He had a bachelor's degree in human physiology and a bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degree in electrical engineering. After getting his master's degree, Mike did some biomedical research and then went out and worked in the industry. After working in the industry for a while, he went back to get his doctorate. After getting his doctorate, he was a research professor. Last year, he semi-retired. At the time of the interview, he was currently working for a small company in the oil and gas industry developing equipment and training people how to use it, and he taught on the side as an adjunct instructor. Mike had taught a variety of engineering classes at a variety of levels and had also taught physics. While Mike was working in the industry, he was in a role where he did a lot of training, which was when he said he developed an

interest in the craft of teaching.

**Lynn**

Lynn was a 66-year-old Native American and Caucasian woman with 30 years of teaching experience and a moderate level of care. She had a bachelor's degree in journalism, a master's degree in home economics, and a doctorate in economics. Lynn's plan was to be a news reporter. However, after graduating with a journalism degree in the 1970s, she realized the job market was awful. She decided that she wanted to teach because she came from a family of teachers. She wanted to teach something that was not going to just be a lecture style environment, so she chose home economics. While getting her master's degree, she learned more about consumer education, and with encouragement from a professor, she continued on to get her doctorate. Lynn held a job in the banking industry, and early in her teaching career, Lynn adjuncted. Then she decided to teach full-time. During full-time teaching, she also held an administrative role. After retiring from full-time teaching, Lynn went back to adjuncting. She taught for the economics department and the finance department. Lynn stated that after coming out of college, her mindset was to gain experience in the field and then come back to academia and relay her experience to the next generations.

**Paul**

Paul was a 58-year-old Caucasian man with 27 years of teaching experience and a high level of care. He explained that he grew up in a family that valued education and was encouraged to do well in school. He decided to pursue a degree in music history, but always made a living in media. He eventually got his doctorate in mass communications. Paul had taught at a number of institutions, mainly in music history and mass communications, as both a full-time instructor and as an adjunct. In addition, he had been the advisor to the student newspaper. As an undergraduate

student, Paul enjoyed presenting research to the class, and he was good at it. He explained that he was eternally interested in all kinds of stuff.  he first thing he thought was how cool that stuff is, and the second thing he thought was that he wanted to show somebody all of the cool stuff he learned.

**Jose**

Jose was a 50-year-old Hispanic man with 16 years of teaching experience and a high level of care. He had a bachelor's degree in history, Spanish, and emergency management and a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies with a focus in higher education administration and Spanish. He was also currently finishing up a master's degree in public administration. Jose worked in university housing for about 10 years and was currently the director of emergency management at his institution. In addition, he has adjuncted. He had taught four levels of Spanish and an introductory course to emergency management. When he was taking a calculus class, he had a professor who was, according to him, the most uninteresting teacher. Jose thought that he could do a lot better, and that was when he knew that he wanted to be a teacher. He stated that his dad was a teacher in Puerto Rico and all of the women on his mom's side were teachers, so it was in his background.

**Kathy**

Kathy was a 57-year-old Caucasian woman with nine years of teaching experience and a high level of care. She had a bachelor's degree in science and a master's degree in secondary counseling. After Kathy finished her master's degree, she started applying for teaching jobs. She started off teaching science in a high school. Eventually, she started adjuncting for a local community college, where she taught general chemistry in addition to teaching at the high school. Kathy said that she felt that teaching was a calling in her life, which she felt from a

young age. Her mom was a teacher as well as two of her uncles. She remembered as a young girl teaching her stuffed animals.

**Tony**

Tony was a 53-year-old Caucasian man with 16 years of teaching experience and a high level of care. Right out of high school, Tony went into the Marines where he went through a lot of schooling. He spent over a year in language school at the Defense Language Institute and then about eight months in crypto language and crypto codebreaking schools. When he got out of the Marines, he went to a community college and got an associate's degree in arts, then transferred and got his bachelor's degree in history. After working for a few years in the plumbing, heating, and cooling industry, Tony went back to school and got his master's degree in history. While he was getting his master's degree, he was working at a local community college teaching a history class. In addition to teaching history, Tony had also worked as a university archivist and a coordinator of disability services. Tony stated that he first knew he wanted to be a teacher when he was in the Marines. He was the sergeant in charge and had to do training. He got good at the training and got accolades for being good at it.

**John**

John was a 61-year-old Black man with 14 years of teaching experience and a high level of care. He had a bachelor's degree in mass communications and advertising, a master's degree in business administration, and a doctorate degree in educational leadership. John had held a variety of roles in his career including a marketing consultant; enrollment counselor; student support specialist; director of advertising for a journal publication; project manager; director of marketing, professional, and graduate studies; program mentor; and adjunct faculty member. He had taught multiple classes in the marketing and business fields. He knew he wanted to be a

teacher during his sophomore or junior year in high school. John explained that he had been involved in industrial arts classes, which were classes like wood shop, metal shop, and drafting. He fell in love with the program and decided that he wanted to get a degree in industrial arts and teach it at the high school level. However, his plan went in a different direction, but he still became a teacher.

**Mason**

Mason was a 32-year-old Caucasian man with four years of teaching experience and a moderate level of care. He had a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in creative writing with a focus on poetry. After finishing his bachelor's degree, Mason got a job teaching sixth grade math. While he was teaching math, he realized that he really liked teaching, but wanted to teach at a collegiate level in a subject for which he was better suited. Therefore, he went back and earned his master's degree and started teaching English composition classes and creative writing at a couple of community colleges.

**Lisa**

Lisa was a 42-year-old Caucasian woman with 18 years of teaching experience and a high level of care. She had a bachelor's degree in secondary education and a master's degree in English. After Lisa got her bachelor's degree, she took a job teaching seventh grade, which she quickly realized was not for her, so she applied for her master's degree so that she could teach at the collegiate level. When she graduated, she started adjuncting at two schools and working at a department store. After a few years, she decided to take a job as a continuing education specialist, where she was responsible for overseeing the community education programs. Then she decided that she wanted to get back into teaching and had several jobs at different high schools. Throughout the various jobs, she continued to work as an adjunct instructor teaching

English composition classes. Lisa said she had wanted to be a teacher since she was in elementary school. She would make up tests for her friends, and then in junior high she had an English teacher that she had a connection with, who had pushed her towards teaching English.

**Chad**

Chad was a 32-year-old Caucasian man with one year of teaching experience and a moderate level of care. Chad had a bachelor's degree in political science and a juris doctor degree. At the time of the interview, Chad worked as a practicing attorney focusing on estate planning and probate work and was an adjunct at a community college, where he taught introductory political science. He stated that when he was in college, he thought that he would like to teach part time in addition to being a lawyer for a change of pace. He was presented with an opportunity to start adjuncting at a local community college a year ago.

**Results**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe adjunct faculty members' experiences of forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships in an effort to increase student engagement through the use of a questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and a letter of advice to new adjunct faculty members. The analysis process followed the method recommended by Moustakas (1994), which includes epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. The first step, epoche, requires the researcher to put aside any preconceived ideas, judgements, or biases that may affect the ability to look at the data from a new perspective (Moustakas, 1994). In order to do this, before conducting the one-on-one interviews, at least 10 minutes were set aside to review the questions and bracket out personal experiences and ideas about the phenomenon (see Appendix E). Time was taken before analyzing the data to do the same. The second step, phenomenological reduction, requires the

researcher to comb through the raw data to find significant statements that provide a textural description. The questionnaires, transcriptions of the interviews and the letters of advice were uploaded into NVivo 12 Mac. This software program allowed analyzation of the data and reduction of all significant statements into themes and disregarded any statements that were not relevant. Those themes were used to create a textural description of the participants' experiences forming and maintaining instructor-student relationships. In the third step, imaginative variation, the data was analyzed in order to find significant statements, which would describe how the participants experienced the phenomenon and were then clustered into themes. Using the themes, a structural description was constructed of how participants experienced the phenomenon. In the final step, synthesis, the textural and structural descriptions were integrated from steps two and three into an overall essence of the phenomenon.

**Theme Development**

Through the continual analysis of the data from the questionnaire, interviews, and letter of advice to a new adjunct faculty member, four main themes were identified (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Theme Development*

| Theme | Sub-themes | Significant Statements |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Learning about the student | Interactions inside classroom | • Asking about them and their extracurricular activities<br>• Student survey<br>• Get to class early and just try to visit |
| | Interactions outside classroom | • Meet me at Starbucks and we'll get a cup of coffee and we'll talk<br>• Come to me just during my office hours<br>• I give my students my cell phone number.  They text, and I tell them to text me |
| Engaging the student | Make material applicable | • Try to have an applicable example for things I teach |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • Tailor examples to the personal experience of some students<br>• Applying our own personal lives into the discussion |
| | Collaboration | • Student's participating in a classroom activity<br>• A successful educator understands the importance of scholarship, collaboration and achievement<br>• A lot of activities that we do with the kids and team building |
| | Share about yourself | • I share about myself<br>• Like my students to know me<br>• I share things about my personal life with them |
| | Humor | • I try to make jokes<br>• I would make fun of myself. You know, we would laugh<br>• I used to tease him |
| Showing care for the student | Being accommodating and flexible | • Try to be fairly accommodating<br>• Be a little bit more lenient<br>• I'm constantly adjusting the schedule |
| | Showing compassion and empathy | • If I'm asking for this for grace, then I I need to give them and extend the same to them<br>• You need to understand that sometimes life can get in the way<br>• It goes back to showing a little bit of compassion and kindness towards them |
| | Being fair | • Make sure that I'm not treating one more favorably over the other<br>• Offering accommodations if it's feasible and it's equitable<br>• You treat them fairly |
| | Showing up and following up | • Check in on them as humans<br>• Ask questions to students and follow up<br>• I try to catch them before they leave…Looks like you were struggling with this.  Did you get it or not? |
| Limitations in building and maintaining caring | Time | • I have to squeeze it in among other things |

| relationships | | • There's just really not a lot of time<br>• Classes are limited in time and scope |
|---|---|---|
| | Campus presence | • Not invited to be a part of the other components<br>• Telling the adjunct show up here at this time, deliver this information, and then leave<br>• You're not on campus most of the time |
| | Lack of resources | • I wish I had more resources<br>• Adjuncts at times they've not been able to get the technology they needed<br>• Limited access to support staff |
| | Class size and space | • Relationships can be forged much more easily when the class is small in number<br>• The rigors of oversized classes<br>• In terms of size and how the the desks and stuff are situated makes a little bit of a difference |
| | COVID | • It's cut back on the interactions<br>• It has been detrimental because you know, usually, you see the kids every day.  You get to, you see their face, and I haven't seen their full face since school started<br>• Having to wear masks, it it I feel like it makes it a little bit harder to connect |

The following sections will provide a description of each of the themes and subthemes through the words of the participants. When quoting participants, any potentially identifying information was changed and placed in brackets to ensure confidentiality.

*Theme One: Learning about the Student*

One of the first themes to emerge was learning about the student. Participants repeatedly stressed the importance of getting to know the students. In fact, in the Nyberg Caring

Assessment (Nyberg, 1990, 2019) eight of the participants said that it was either very important or extremely important to go beyond the superficial to know people well while the other three participants said that it was somewhat important. Learning about the student is helpful for forming relationships with students.

**Interactions Inside the Classroom.** Many of the participants indicated that they used some kind of an icebreaker within the first couple of class sessions to get to know their students. Paul indicated that he used a survey at the beginning of the semester, which he had been doing since the fall of 1994. While he used some of the same questions, he also had updated it over the years. "I ask what their nickname is, where they're from, what kind of music they listen to. If they're stuck on a desert island for the rest of their life, which CD would they take with them?" Similarly, Jose used an icebreaker at the beginning of the semester to help him get to know his students and to make a connection with them. He put it this way,

> I do the typical stuff, you know. Give me your name, where you're from. What I've
> tried to do is I try to gauge, you know, I'm trying to make a connection with them when
> they tell me where they're from, you know, because I've traveled around the state a lot
> for different things in my job, and you know, they'll say I'm from Canton. You know,
> you guys are the Bulldogs. You guys have a dam in your, in your town. I can try and
> relate to them that way. So, I try to use the icebreakers to gauge how I'm going to, how
> I'm going to conduct the rest of the semester.

Moreover, Tony offered some advice to new adjunct faculty members. He advised instructors to provide opportunities for the students to share about themselves. He said that the instructor needs to not only listen to the students, but absorb what they say as this might help instructors in the future especially in the instances where the students share some obstacles they face. Ann echoed

the advice to new adjunct faculty members to give students an opportunity to share about themselves early on in the semester. She wrote, "Many times, they are used to other professors not really wanting to get to know them. Therefore, you should break that wall early on, so they are willing to share and communicate their successes and challenges." Ann did this by asking them about their extracurricular activities, work, and family. She stressed the importance of praising them for all of their commitments, not just their academic achievements.

Getting to know the students is not limited to just using an icebreaker at the beginning of the semester. Many of the participants indicated that they arrived early to class in order to converse with their students before class started. For example, Lynn shared that she "always gets to class early and just try to visit and get to know my students and if they had questions about anything, you know, we try to deal with those questions." Chad also said that he would "just kind of check in on each class and see how everybody's doing and that sort of thing. So, hear a little about what's going on in their lives." Those conversations are sometimes used to help build rapport with students in order to start building a relationship. Kathy explained how learning about her students helped her to form relationships with them,

> I knew enough about the campus that, and kept up with enough, that I could ask them questions about things they did, and they were more than happy to talk to you. They were just amazed that anybody would be interested in what they were doing on a day-to-day basis. So that's, um, you know, talking to the specifics of students that were nurses asking them about what's required of their jobs, what's changing in their jobs. Students that were athletes, you know, trying to show an interest as how, how are your baseball games going? Did you guys win the other night? The judging team, you know, how did your competition go? And so just trying to stay on top of what they're doing with their

outside of academics and asking them questions to show an interest, and that's how you make the connection with the kids, with the students.

In addition to helping to make a connection with her students, Kathy said, "If you take an interest in their life or job, it can make an impact on them in the class. You will get more out of them." Jose reiterated Kathy's sentiments. He explained that students responded better when instructors took the time to get to know what is going on in the students' lives. Jose said, "Ask about their clubs and activities. You'd be surprised how much you have in common with them and how many of your experiences echo theirs."

Those things that the instructor and student share in common can help to further cement a relationship. As Lisa pointed out, "I think in life we just tend to gravitate toward people who have had shared or similar experiences." Furthermore, students may be more willing to open up and share with their instructors if there is a shared interest. Mason shared a situation where he was talking with a student about video games. When the student realized that Mason knew about the video games he played, his "lights went on like, oh, what, this, someone older knows about video games? Maybe I'll open up a little to him."

**Interactions Outside the Classroom.** Another way that instructors are able to learn about their students is through interactions outside of the classroom. These interactions can include meeting with students during office hours, meeting with students on campus or in the community, or participating in extracurricular activities or clubs. Mike described a situation with a student that had been struggling, and during a meeting with him during office hours, he was able to learn a little more about the student, which Mike was then able to use to help the student. "I discovered that he was very interested in music. I tried to create new examples for some of the theory that related to music and began to draw his interest. He finished the course with a

respectable 'B.'"

Mike further mentioned running into students on campus. If he had the time, he liked to sit down with them and talk. By doing this, he was able to learn more about the student and their situation. "If I'm in the line at the coffee shop with them, then we sit down and have a few sips of coffee together and just talk about how they're doing and so forth before going our separate ways." Jose, who had a full-time position on campus in addition to adjuncting, also liked to meet students on campus in an informal atmosphere such as the student center where students may feel a little more comfortable.

> I'll say meet me at Starbucks and we'll get a cup of coffee, and we'll talk about life, you know. I'll ask them, so what's going on in your life? And then after, you know, 15 or so minutes of. Okay now what? What questions do you have? How, how can I help you succeed in my class?

Another way instructors can learn about their students is by getting involved in student organizations. Paul liked to get involved with student organizations and used his job as the advisor of the student newspaper to get to know his students better by working with the students every week. He stated these interactions "puts me in a real kind of coaching relationship with that group of students all the time. And that, I think, helps break some barriers down."

### Theme Two: Engaging the Student

The second theme identified was engaging the student. Engaging students in the classroom can take on many forms as was found in the data provided by the participants. Not only is it important for instructors to learn about their students in order to foster relationships with them, but it is also important in order to help engage the students in the classroom. Several subthemes emerged when discussing how to engage students in the classroom, including making

material applicable to the student, making use of collaboration, sharing about themselves, and using humor.

**Make Material Applicable.** One way to engage students is by using the information learned about the student, whether it is about their background, their interests, or their preferred method of learning, in order to make the material more applicable to them and their situations. John explained that the key was "what do we know about the student and about and how they interact with the material and and based on that, how should I ensure that the student's getting everything they need to get from this course." Lynn expanded on that idea explaining that taking a personal interest in her students helped her to teach to her students' needs. She stated, "If I'm not addressing issues and especially on the person, in the personal finance class, if I'm not addressing issues that are of great concern to you, then I'm wasting my time and theirs." Mike went into a little more detail and explained that it is important to learn about the students because they are all different. Once instructors get to know their students, they are able to use that knowledge to make the material more applicable to the students that are in their classroom. He stated,

>Students are as varied as any other group in the population, and what drives each one may be different. Some are quiet. Some are outspoken. Some ask penetrating questions in class. Some ask superficial questions, and some never talk. Some struggle with homework and timeliness. Some are front-seat-go-getters. Get to class a few minutes early and talk to students. Ask questions. Learn about what their interests are both academically and personally. This kind of interaction provides insights that allow you to tailor examples to the personal experience of some students and potentially of those students who tend not to be drawn into conversation.

While it is important to make the material more applicable to students and show them how it applies to their career aspirations or goals, it may also be important to merely be something that is of interest to them or something that they have experience with. A student is more apt to remember a concept if they have some kind of interest or experience with it. However, this is only possible if an instructor is aware of what students' interests are and if the instructor responds to students' interests. Tony explained that this might be easier in social sciences because when topics arose that were of interest to students, they tended to perk up. They started asking and answering questions. He said, "If I'm talking about someone who may have a connection to sports or connection to something that's, you know, interesting to them, music, film, you know, that sort of thing. You can see those, those heads perk up." Paul also gave the following example from a recent media class where he had a couple of basketball players from Houston: "I keep bringing them stuff about this rapper from Houston, and they said I can't believe we're talking about this in class, and I go, why not? It's a mediated product."

**Collaboration.** Another source of engaging students is through the use of collaboration. John wrote, "I have found that a successful educator understands the importance of scholarship, collaboration and achievement." However, this collaboration must be inclusive. Many of the participants mentioned either asking questions of the class or having small group discussions, especially in larger classes to allow all students the opportunity to contribute. Ann preferred to use the Socratic method. She would ask a question and wait for someone to answer. She explained that many times students would not respond, thinking that if they waited long enough, she would give them the answer. However, she fought the urge to do that; rather, she waited until someone offered an answer. Even if their answer was not correct, she used it to engage the students in discussion by asking the student to explain his or her thought process.

Lynn preferred to use a lot of discussion in her classroom to engage students. "If I taught twice a week, which most all of my classes forever were twice a week, I'd lecture one time, one class period and the other class period was discussion based on what we had already done." Lisa said the nature of her English class provided for a lot of discussions because they discussed what was read in class. A lot of her material dealt with controversial issues, so "students have the ability to participate in class discussions. Um, they write about those things too, and then that helps start new discussion over other things." Chad added that having students participate in discussions helped keep students engaged, especially when covering a topic that might have been considered boring. He explained, "The best way that I've found is to involve them in the discussion from the get-go, and then just keep periodically doing that, and I think that keeps their attention in it a little better."

However, as Paul pointed out, it is important to be inclusive and avoid falling into the trap of having only a handful of students answer questions. He said, "there's one thing I try my best not to do is to fall into the teacher pet syndrome. You know, to always be dealing with the best students and asking them questions cause I always get good answers." One way to avoid this is to have students participate in small groups, which is the method that some participants preferred to use to engage the students. When students are working in these smaller groups, the instructor has the ability to walk around and speak with individual students. Tony explained how he used discussions in his history classes, which were lecture-based classes where he did most of the speaking, to engage students.

I drive it off of these discussions where they're allowed to talk to each other in smaller

groups, so everybody gets a chance to talk and about every topic. And then a few of them

talk, share with the larger group each time. But it'll be like four or five slides. Then one

of those discussions. I'm mingling with those groups. I'm hearing a lot of different students talk, not just the ones that are teach speaking the whole class. So, a lot of times, I'm prepared to talk about these next five slides in such a way, but if I picked up something that this student was sharing that clearly was interesting to them, I'll bring these things up, but I might be able to jump in and say, you know, it's interesting that you brought that up in conversation. So, I can build off of what I'm hearing them talk about in those conversations. Sometimes to add to the content again so that they'll remember this content now because it was driven by the fact that that was something they brought up.

**Share about Yourself.** There are a couple of reasons why an instructor might want to share information about themselves with their students. It helps the students to see their instructor as a human being, and it helps the student to find commonalities. Both of these increase the likelihood of the student seeing their instructor as someone they can relate to. Jose put it well when he wrote,

> Put yourself out there! Let them see the human side of you. Students tend to learn more if they feel a personal connection to you. It's been my experience that if I show/tell them about some of my failures, they relate better with you as they see that a person that "made it" struggled to get to where they are today.

Ann said that she tried to "share bits of myself with them so they know me a little bit more." This helped her engage with a couple of students in particular in her teaching career. She described a situation where she connected with a student who was close in age and was working in industry. She explained that the student would come to class early and stay late talking with Ann.  hey built a relationship based on a mutual understanding of their motivations. Ann also described a connection she had recently with a student because they both have children around

the same age. They would spend time talking about their children. When describing how sharing about herself with students helped to engage them, she said, "You know, it's that, it's sharing shared experiences."

Lisa also felt that it was important to share things about herself, especially when discussing something that she might have a personal connection to. She felt that this helped students to become more comfortable and willing to share as well. For example, she said,

My dad died last year, and I've talked about that a lot with them because I know some of them have had to deal with that stuff. Um, I'm a recovered alcoholic, so there's a lot of things that we talk about based on that cause the topic that a lot of students write about is, um, treating addiction as a form of mental illness rather than like a crime, and so we've gotten into some good discussions about that. It all kind of stems around the course content, and then everybody has the opportunity to contribute if they want.

Tony took the time at the beginning of the semester to not only learn about his students but to also share about himself. He did not just tell him general information like where he was from. He wanted his students to know him on a deeper level, beyond just that he was teaching them history because he liked it and had a history degree. "They'll know, you know, that not only was I a Marine, but I lived in Korea. I did these things, and you know, that's why I do that. And I like this, and I like that."

Again, the idea is that sharing information about themselves helps students to want to engage because they see their instructor as more than just a means for getting the course material. They are a human being much like themselves.

**Humor.** A fun atmosphere is more engaging than a boring one, which is why using humor is an easy way to get students engaged in the classroom. The use of humor, whether it's

telling funny stories, making fun of yourself, or teasing others, is a great way, as Paul said, "to draw them out." Lynn explained that it helped for students to see their instructor as a person, and she used humor to do that. She said, "I would make fun of myself. You know, we would laugh about stuff. I would tell funny stories about things that I had done or that my family did." Lynn stated that she would often have students come up to her after class expressing how much they appreciated her doing that because it made them realize that she was not just their instructor. She was a person, too.

Both Jose and Tony spoke of instances where they would engage in a joking manner with a student a little to engage with him. Not only does this help build a bond with the student, but they often found that the student was more willing to engage in the classroom. However, it is important to know who you can and cannot joke around with. Jose stated that he liked to find one student in the class who he felt comfortable with and make fun of him a little bit. For instance, he had a student who came in wearing a t-shirt with an opposing university on it and decided to tease him. "I said, hey, you know that's $19.99 more that you could have paid for your tuition here. And then I'll just, I'll keep on him all semester. It kind of helps me build a bond with that person." ony spoke of a former student who was a senior citizen who used a motorized scooter. At the time, Tony's office was in an area that was difficult to navigate on a scooter. When the student would come to his office, Tony would have to take over the controls on the scooter to help the student back out. The student used to tease that Tony lived for getting to drive the scooter.

### Theme Three: Showing Care for the Student

Another major theme that developed from the data was showing care for the student. It is nearly impossible for an instructor to form a relationship with a student without showing him

that he cares about him both personally and academically. This theme overlapped with the two previous themes: learning about the student and engaging the student. In order for an instructor to show a student that he cares, the instructor must learn about the student. Furthermore, a student is more likely to be engaged if he knows that the instructor cares about him. Mike pointed out this connection when he said, "Once they get to know that you're a person who's interested in them and and their long-term success, not just their success in your class, but their long-term success, I think that's the key to continuing those interactions." Mike explained that when students know their instructor cares, they are more likely to come and talk to the instructor not just about class material, but also about future plans. The students feel comfortable doing this because they have established a relationship with the instructor and know that their instructor wants what is best for them and is willing to help them.

This theme encompassed a multitude of ways to show caring. The most prevalent ways mentioned in the data were being accommodating and flexible, showing compassion and empathy, being fair, and showing up and following up.

**Being Accommodating and Flexible.** All 11 participants agreed that being accommodating and flexible was a key element to showing that they cared about their students. Being accommodating and flexible shows students that the instructor respects them as individuals, wants them to be successful, and is willing to help them achieve that success. The most mentioned way of being accommodating was being flexible with due dates. Jose said, "You gotta be flexible. Flexibility, I think, will show them that you care about their success." Chad added, "I try to be pretty, try to be reasonably understanding about if you missed the deadline by just a few hours or whatever. That's different than if it's two weeks." Mason stated that he did not mind offering extensions "cause it's it doesn't matter to me if students are going to get it

assignments in now or later because like I put in my syllabus, all life is chaos, and we can't account for all the events." Mason gave the following example to support his point,

> I had a student who emailed me on the way to the hospital to give birth, and she was worried about assignments, and I'm like please, please you have greater things to focus on right now, and it was in the middle of that freak October ice storm, and so it was like, there are multiple layers of fire right now. You should bump the essay down to like the back burner, please.

In addition to being flexible with due dates, being lenient and giving second chances to improve their work was mentioned as a way to show care for students. Mike and Paul both allowed students to redo or make up points from the first exam of the semester for those students who did not do as well as they would have liked. Mike allowed his class to redo the first exam but not any subsequent exams, because after the first exam, the students should know what to expect. He stated, "I try to let them know that my goal was not to separate them into a bell curve specifically. My goal was to make sure that they mastered the material that this course was about." Similarly, Paul allowed students to gain all the points back from their first exam, because as he explained, "The nature of the tests that I give them are such that straight 'A' students get a 30 or 50 because they got the concept, but they didn't put the right peg in the right hole."

Another way that instructors need to be flexible is in the way that they teach. Because each student is unique in the way they learn or grasp ideas, instructors must be able to be flexible in the way that they present the material. Lynn wrote, "Your goal should be to help them learn whatever the subject-matter is. Sometimes, that means you have to meet them where they are and gradually lift them to where you want them to be." Tony further explained,

> Usually, it's a visual connection. You're telling really quickly who's the ones that are,

you know, they're locked on and the ones who are just like, you know, this is clearly not connecting with them. So, a lot of it is just picking up on those visual cues and not forcing them to say you clearly aren't getting it, but just maybe reiterating it in a different way or let me relate this somehow differently so that maybe they get it. Then if I had seen that that day, I try to catch them before they leave. And so did, you know, look like you were struggling with this. Did you get it or not?

Kathy suggested that it was not just being flexible in the way you taught, you must also have patience with students who did not understand the material. She said that there are many times where an instructor will have to explain the same material in a variety of ways for those students who just cannot seem to get the material. The instructors cannot move on to the next thing just because they are tired of answering the same question in different ways.

Being flexible with the schedule is another way that the participants indicated they showed care for their students. Mike mentioned instances where he had accommodated his students based on the work they were given by other instructors. He indicated that if students came to him asking to delay a test because another instructor gave them a lot of work, he would usually put off the test for a class period because he did not "want to make the students pay for that." He realized that students were often carrying a heavy course load along with other responsibilities. Paul also adjusted the schedule on a regular basis, especially when he saw that they were backing up. He did not want to just rush through the material. He also tried to "cut them some slack" by cutting out homework or skipping material that was not important.

Lisa and Mike also mentioned making accommodations for those students who may have special learning needs or disabilities. Lisa said that there would be a "flag on the roster if we, if there's some sort of like learning or physical disability that we need to accommodate in the

classroom." When Mike became aware of such accommodations that were needed, such as needing to take an exam in a separate environment, he stated he would "always make sure that I have an exam set with those people ready to go for them to administer" to the student.

**Showing Compassion and Empathy.** Showing compassion and empathy was another element that all 11 participants agreed upon. There are three statements in the Nyberg Caring Assessment (Nyberg, 1990, 2019) that closely relate to the subtheme of showing compassion and empathy. Those statements are having a deep respect for the needs of others, remaining sensitive to the needs of others, and giving full consideration to situational factors. Ten of the 11 participants rated these three statements as either very important or extremely important. The other participant rated it as somewhat important.

John put it simply, "You need to understand that sometimes life can get in the way and impact what your student's doing and they expect you to have some sense of compassion and empathy." For some people, showing compassion and empathy comes naturally, while for others it takes some effort. Kathy explained that as a Christian, this came as second nature to her. "I think that gives you, that gives you a heart of compassion and caring for people to begin with, that you want to have that servant attitude and boldness at the same time." On the other hand, Ann stated that this was something that she had spent time working on. She explained that she was not always understanding. However, because she spent time working in corporate America, she realized that things come up that need to be dealt with such as issues with children, health issues, or issues related to caring for aged parents. Therefore, she stated she was "able to grow a little bit in those areas so that I can bring that to the classroom and treat my students similarly."

Ann, Lynn, Paul, Tony, Mason, and Lisa all provided specific examples of situations that their students had experienced, such as a friend or relative dying, issues related to being a single

parent, having a serious disease or illness, domestic violence, or issues related to pregnancy in which they needed to exhibit compassion or empathy. While the participants all indicated that they were willing to show compassion and empathy towards their students, Lisa pointed out that the students must also play a role.

> We don't always know, um, what's going on with them unless they reach out and tell us, so just letting them know that I want to help them, but I kind of have to know what's going on, and they have to take the initiative.

While it is important for the student to reach out and let the instructor know of the situation, some students do not feel comfortable sharing about their situation. Lisa acknowledged this and told her students that they did not need to tell her every detail of what was going on, but they needed to make her aware that something was happening." Kathy reiterated that point by saying instructors just need to "listen to them when they come to you and say I have a crisis at home, um, you know, and I don't need to know the details and just listening to them and giving them a break."

Showing compassion and empathy can take on different forms, such as simply listening to the student, checking in on them, providing them with resources, or giving them extra time to do assignments. Paul described how he handled a situation that had just occurred with one of his students,

> I had a worst case scenario last week. One of my students lost his father suddenly, so it was very important to me to send him an email and say, look, don't worry about class. You can get back to me when you feel like it. If you want to talk to somebody, I'm here, but you know you need to take care of yourself, and and I'm, you know, I have your back. I care. I'm thinking about you.

Tony stressed the importance of not judging the situation, having genuine care for the student, and providing him with the resources needed. "It's gotta be genuine. If I ask you how your day is and you tell me something not so great, I need to respond to the fact that it was not so great and with some compassion." Tony gave the example of a student telling the instructor that a family member died. The instructor cannot just say "I am sorry, but your assignment is still due tomorrow." Rather, the instructor should express condolences, but also ask what kind of support the student may need. It may be offering an extension on a deadline or providing the student with the notes from class if the student will miss class. Ann summarized it by saying, "It comes down to treating them like they're humans. If I'm asking for this grace, then I need to give them and extend the same to them."

**Being Fair.** While it is important to be accommodating and flexible and show compassion and empathy, it is also crucial that instructors are treating students fairly. Every student should have an equal opportunity to be successful in the class. As Ann stated, she would provide accommodations for students "if it's feasible and it's equitable." She provided a recent example where there were a couple of students who had dance competitions and requested an extension on a deadline. Instead of only giving those two students an extension, she gave an extension to the whole class so as to not treat one more favorably than the others.

However, not only is it important to not show favoritism, but it is also important that students perceive that there is no favoritism involved. Kathy stated, "You treat them fairly. I think that's important. They need to be able to see that we're all equal, and she doesn't play favorites." Along those lines, Lisa cautioned against getting too friendly with students in the chance that it might appear to be having favorites. "I don't want to get too chummy in the sense that it could look like favoritism." She was also cautious when inviting students to events

because she worried that not everyone would be able to do the event, and then those who could not attend the event may wonder if those who participated would be shown favor. To follow up on Lisa's comment, Paul brought up the point that it was not just about giving them a higher grade. There are other ways that an instructor can favor students. "Obviously, you would not give better grades to your favorite students. But do you award attention, time, respect along those same lines?"

John looked at being fair from a different perspective. He discussed instances of having to deal with disruptive students who were taking away the opportunity for other students to be successful. This is especially true in instances where group work was required, and there was a member of the team that was not participating or was being destructive to the team. John explained, "If the team couldn't resolve it on their own, I would have to step in and and apply whatever type of necessary corrective action that needs to be exercised."

**Showing Up and Following Up.** Another way that the participants indicated importance in showing care for students was by showing up and following up. In other words, being available, present, and engaged with the student both inside and outside the classroom. The Nyberg Caring Assessment (Nyberg, 1990, 2019) has a statement that relates to this idea, which is to "allow time for caring opportunities." Nine of the participants indicated that this statement was either very important or extremely important; the other two participants indicated this was somewhat important.

*Showing Up.* This can be as simple as being engaged in the classroom, as Chad stated, "Show up every day, and be engaged, and um like I said, show them that I'm, I wanna be there. I'm not just there because I have to be." If an instructor shows his students that he wants to be there, that it is more than just a job to him, the students may sense a feeling of care. Showing up

can also mean being available to the student when he needs something and letting him know that you are available. Many of the participants indicated their willingness to be available to their students. Lisa incorporated this into her weekly messaging. She said, "You know, just kind of trying to always remind them that if they need help, you know, I am able and ready and willing to help them." Likewise, Mike made it a point to be available as much as possible to his students by "just spending the time, letting them know, making well, not letting them know directly, but making it obvious to them that you are spending as much time and effort on them as they are for that class." He did this by staying after class to answer questions and answering emails within an hour unless he was sleeping. Jose also made sure his students knew he was available for them. "I always tell them officially my office hours are 30 minutes before class, but if you need to see me, just shoot me an email. Give me a call." Jose explained that he had regular office hours, but because he was on campus, it is easy for him to meet students at other times as well. Ann even went as far as giving her students her cell phone number.

> I say text me and we'll figure out if it warrants, you know, a meeting or a phone call. And I tell them they're free to text me anytime they have a thought because I will manage my own phone. So just know that if you text me at midnight, you're probably not getting an answer, you know, until I wake up the next morning and have time to respond.

Showing up for students can also go beyond coursework. Some of the participants spoke of trying to go to sporting events, concerts, or other activities that the students were involved in. Paul said he tried to "go to shows, go to sporting events, be visible on campus, be involved on campus" so that he was visible to his students. This way his students saw that he showed an interest in them and the things that they were doing. Similarly, Ann did her best to attend her students' activities when she was available. However, recently this has become more difficult

due to COVID. She said that she was unable to attend events in person. However, she had been watching live links of her students' events, and then she tried to mention it to her students. She gave an example of one of her senior students who had a recital the previous night. "I watched it as long as I possibly could. I messaged her because it was Facebook Live so I could actually comment, but then I brought it up to her this morning." Ann explained that she tried to do this because she realized that her students were bringing their "whole selves into the classroom" and she wanted them to know that she recognized that there was more to them than what they did for her class.

Tony said that he would do whatever he could to be there for his students as long as it did not cross the line. He spoke of one specific instance with a former student, who had an emergency situation and was not able to go to class because he was in an aftercare facility. He contacted the student's instructors to get the student's books and assignments and took them to him on his way home from work one night. Tony explained that as long as he was not crossing the line of doing work for a student or passing a student without the student doing any work, he would try to do what he could to make sure that the student had what was needed.

***Following Up.*** In addition to showing up, following up is another important aspect of showing students care, especially in cases where the student confided in the instructor about a particular situation. Tony wrote, "You need to be genuine, actually show you are by remembering what their situation is and continue to ask them how they are doing (both with the course material and in general)." Ann said when students informed her of situations they were dealing with, she would ask them their permission to follow up with them. She gave the following example of such a situation. One of her students had a situation where his sister had run away, and the family was very concerned because they thought she was on drugs and with an

abusive boyfriend. It was the end of a semester and Ann was worried because she was not going to see the student again, so she asked his permission to check up on him. The student agreed, so Ann set up a reminder on her calendar to contact the student and see how he was doing.

However, following up with a student was not limited to just those students who had special circumstances outside of the classroom. It was also important to follow up with students who may have been struggling with the coursework or who felt uncomfortable with the discussion in class. John commented,

> Let's say maybe their assessments are not keeping track with how they perform in a classroom discussion or how they interact with their fellow students, and so in those types of environments, I mean in those types of situations, I might reach out to the student and ask what's going on. Challenge them to to explain why they're not performing up to what I know their ability is up to. To try and see if there's, if we can discern what's going on and why their, why their performance is off.

Jose and Paul both mentioned that they taught courses where they were discussing things in the media, which had the potential of being offensive to some people. Therefore, they warned students ahead of time and tried to follow up with students after class who they thought might have been uncomfortable with the discussion. Jose stated, "If I see any of them feeling uncomfortable, I will try to end the lecture as quickly as I can, and then follow up with them after class."

***Theme Four: Limitations in Building and Maintaining Relationships***

The final theme identified from the data was limitations that adjunct faculty members faced when building and maintaining relationships with their students. The most prevalent topics discussed were a lack of time, lack of campus presence, lack of resources, class size and space,

and COVID.

      **Time.** Most of the participants indicated that their biggest constraint in forming

relationships with their students was a lack of time. This lack of time comes in two forms. First,

there is a lack of time within the classroom setting. In a K-12 atmosphere, teachers are usually

with their students five days a week for an entire academic school year, whereas instructors in

higher education are usually limited to being with their students a couple of hours a week for one

semester. As Mike wrote, forming relationships with students is "more difficult in the university

setting because classes are limited in time and scope, as compared to the K-12 setting." Tony

worked at an institution that had recently changed their classes from 16 weeks to eight weeks, so

he had even less time with students. He stated that the eight week format was challenging

because there was half the time to teach the same material. Therefore, the time that he would

have normally spent at the beginning of class talking with students had been eliminated because

he just did not have the extra time. "You just don't have time to get to know people and and do

things cause you just you gotta get through the material cause there's too much and not enough

time to do it."

      The other limitation on time is in regard to how much time the instructor may have

outside of the class time to devote to forming relationships with their students. This may be due

to having a full-time job outside of adjuncting, adjuncting at several different institutions, or

having other personal and professional commitments. Chad explained, "I would say just the

aspect of it's a part time job for me, so I have to squeeze it in among other things, and sometimes

I don't give it all the attention that I that I need to." Lisa mirrored Chad's sentiments, explaining

that she did not have a lot of time outside of the time she spent in the classroom because she had

a full-time job, was married, had a child, and did pageants. She said, "It's not that I don't want

to. It's just I think that's something adjunct professors a lot of them run up against." Mason, who was an adjunct at multiple institutions wrote, "The issues that have been the most difficult for me when it comes to building relationships with students has been time/energy constraints." Kathy also touched on both of these kinds of time constraints hindering her ability to form caring relationships with her students.

> I wasn't on their campus full-time and so, you know, I could see where [Rita] who was there full-time cause she was over the whole science department and so she saw these, and so she would just talk to them like she had known them for years because she saw them a lot, and and that was a little bit of a hindrance. I had to really work hard to try to get to know these kids, and but between that and the shortness of the semester, that can be, you know, that can be a hindrance on fostering that care for them.

> **Campus Presence.** Another factor that limited the participants' ability to foster relationships with their students was the lack of presence on the campus. The participants interpreted campus presence in a multitude of ways, including being physically on campus; participating in organizations, committees, or events; being invited to faculty meetings by department; being listed on the institution's website; and having a place on campus such as an office to meet with students. Mike thought the "main disadvantage in in being an adjunct is you typically don't have an office. You know, you're not on campus most of the time now, so so I don't have those interactions outside of the classroom like I used to." Tony expanded on Mike's sentiments,

> Number one is that we don't have a campus presence. Let's see, there might be an adjunct office somewhere. I've been adjuncting since 2005, so what is it at 16 years now. I've never really set foot in an adjunct office cause I'm usually coming from my car right

to my classroom, doing what I need in the classroom, and then going out. So, we don't

get, you know, I'm walking out to, you know, go grab a bite to eat at the cafeteria or go

to the vending machine or go to the library, wherever. I'm seeing usually three or four

students that I know that are, you know, saying hello. Those little two minute

interactions where I recognize them and said their name has a positive interaction, but if

I'm the adjunct that's just coming in right before class starts in the dark of night and then

leaving after class is over, I'm not I don't typically get that too much.

To Ann, it was more than just not having an office to interact with students; rather, it was not

being included as a part of the team. She explained that adjuncts often do not know what is

happening on campus because the administration does not include them in newsletters or

announcements. Therefore, they may not know about things like sporting events, club events, or

award ceremonies. Furthermore, adjunct faculty may not be invited to participate in things that

the full-time faculty participate in, such as faculty or departmental meetings or graduation

ceremonies.

The overall consensus was that adjunct faculty were not really included in the campus

community; rather, they appeared to just be an afterthought. If the administration does not put

much value on including adjunct faculty on campus, then there is little motivation for the adjunct

faculty members to put in the extra effort to establish their presence on campus. This lack of

presence on campus translates into less time interacting with students, which makes it harder to

foster relationships with the students. Chad explained how it was easier for full-time faculty to

foster relationships with students because they were on campus in a variety of rolls. Therefore,

"they're probably going to have a lot of different interactions with the student body rather than

just in the classroom teaching to them."

Jose, who had experience in advising student organizations, was extremely disappointed when he was told that he could not be the advisor to the Spanish club because he was an adjunct and not full-time. This limited his ability to spend more time with students, where he could have built relationships with them. He explained,

So, the Spanish club was looking for an advisor for the club. Now, being an old housing person, I have a ton of experience advising student organizations, so I told the students at the club, and I said, hey, I've been an advisor before. If you all need an advisor, I'm here. I'm on campus, I teach here, and my full-time faculty told me I couldn't do it because I wasn't a full-time professor. Here I am volunteering to step up to help a group of students, and I'm being told no because you're not a professor. So, I think that put a sour taste in my mouth. I feel sometimes, um, some of the higher faculty members look down upon us as adjuncts and I think it hinders us a little bit.

**Lack of Resources.** Another limitation that the participants stated affected their ability to show care for students was a lack of resources, including access to technology, support staff, and training. Lynn explained how a lack of technology can affect an adjunct's ability to foster relationships with students.

If you don't have all of the tools that you need, you're focused more on trying to get through that class than you are building a relationship with a student, so you know, I think the institutional support comes from giving you the tools that you need so that you can go in there and not worry about am I or are my passwords going to work. Do I have email where I can connect to to the students because at [Central State University] you can't even download your, um, class roster if they haven't set you up for an email. Well, how do you go in and start trying to develop a relationship if you can even access your

class records?

Paul's biggest issue with a lack of resources centered around his connection with the student newspaper that he oversaw. He often found himself waiting on the information technology department to fix things, which he found frustrates both his students and him. In addition, he also stated that because he was an adjunct, he did not have access to the budget, which he needed because he had to pay for entry fees for contests for his students. He said, "There are things like that, you know that they have been problematic and then that creates a barrier again with with relationships."

Another resource issue that was brought up was a lack of training or lack of support from colleagues or supervisors. Ann described her experience as a new adjunct. When she was hired as an adjunct at [Midtown University] she got very little support. The onboarding process was a day, so if an adjunct faculty member did not have experience with the learning management system the institution used, they were out of luck. She never even got an email from the chairperson. She said, "It takes a long time just to get your footing if you haven't been an adjunct before. New adjuncts, oh bless their hearts. They need a mentor." Without a mentor, new adjunct faculty members are at a major disadvantage. As, Lynn stated, when adjuncts were focused on just trying to make it through the class and did not have the support they needed, they did not have the time or energy to put towards building relationships with students.

On the other hand, not all of the participants felt that there was a lack of resources available to them. Jose, who held a full-time position at the university in which he was an adjunct had the following to say,

> Our university is for the most part as as a whole, they're very receptive of of adjunct
> faculty. You know, they provide us a training at the beginning of every semester. They

provide us with the resources that we need, and if I need anything, I just go to to my chair and I'm like, hey can I can I get this for my class? And three days later there it is in my box. Um, and institutional, we have the same access to the same resources that all full-time faculty have. You know as far as email and you know teaching resources and and online training and all of that.

**Class Size and Space.** The size of the class and the physical classroom space are also factors in an instructor's ability to form caring relationships with students. Many adjunct faculty are used to teaching lower-level courses, which tend to have larger class sizes. When classes are larger in size, it is more difficult for instructors to interact with students on a more personal level where they can start to form relationships. Ann said, "Relationships can be forged much more easily when the class is small in number, so a manageable number is important to me just because it's easier. It's not impossible, it's just easier." Ann was not the only one to express this sentiment. Jose stated, "In a smaller class, I'm able to provide more one-on-one time with the students." Additionally, Mike said, "It becomes very difficult when you've got to get a lecture to 120 students out of the way and to really, you know, form any any relationship." The participants who mentioned class size as a hindrance had different ideal class size numbers, but they were all under 35 students. Mike mentioned 30 to 35 students, Ann said 20 students, Mason prefers 15 to 20 students, and Kathy said her ideal number of students would be 12.

The physical space or layout of the room was also brought up as a potential limitation in forming relationships with students. Participants who mentioned the space of the room preferred a smaller, more intimate classroom to an auditorium or lecture style classroom. These participants also taught in such a way that encouraged a lot of student participation. Therefore, it was easier for students to interact when they were in a smaller classroom. Chad argued that it

was much more difficult for students to participate when they were in a classroom with auditorium style seating and students were spaced out over a large area.

Kathy and Jose both mentioned liking to move around and interact with students. Jose explained that he did not like being confined; rather, he preferred a free-flowing classroom where he could move around and talk with the students. Similarly, Kathy stated that she would prefer a classroom where the desks were set up in a half circle and everyone could see one another. She compared this type of classroom to a laboratory because it was more intimate. The instructor had the opportunity to move around and ask students questions, which showed the students that the instructor was interested in what they were doing.  She explained that for her "that's also where you build those relationships."

**COVID.**  The restrictions placed upon instructors and students due to COVID protocols was another major limitation in forming caring instructor-student relationships. When COVID first hit, many institutions went from in-person classes to a completely online format. Many of the participants found this aspect to be very difficult when trying to foster relationships with students. Lisa claimed, "We've been doing it all online since COVID.  It's a lot harder to build relationships with students that way." One reason why this was difficult was because the instructors could not pick up on things that they would normally pick up on if the student was sitting in front of them. Mike stated, "When it's so distant and you can't interact as well and even when you see their face, you can't you can't see their body language." Without being able to see a student's body language, it is more difficult to determine if a student understands the material, is bored, or is frustrated. Mason agreed with Mike saying, "If I were able to see someone day-to-day physically, you would be able to pick up a lot more on things and not just like verbally, but like body."

Even when students were allowed back on campus in the classrooms, the restrictions put in place made it difficult to connect with students. The major restrictions that were discussed were having to wear masks, having to socially distance, and not allowing in-person extracurricular activities. Several participants explained the difficulties they encountered when everyone wore masks. Chad stated, "I feel like it makes it a little bit harder to connect and to, um, and to tell who's paying attention and who's not." Kathy also commented, "It has been detrimental because, you know, usually you see the kids every day. You get to, you see their face, and I haven't seen their full face since school started. It's from the nose up."

Having to be physically distanced from others has also been a major limitation on building caring relationships because it has limited the interactions that people have with each other. Paul explained how the restrictions on the number of students allowed in a classroom had cut back on the number of interactions he had with students especially in the newsroom. He said that the students worked in rotations, and they were in a larger room now so that they could spread out. Paul stated the result was, "I'm just not interacting with things as much as I used to. The students aren't interacting as much as they used to." Kathy had experienced the same thing in her classroom. There were usually a lot of activities in her classroom that promoted team building. However, they were not able to do any of that this year due to COVID. Because of this, "a lot of kids are very indifferent right now because they haven't formed that that sense of community," which made fostering relationships much more difficult. Jose liked to move around the classroom, but due to COVID restrictions, he was unable to do this, which he felt had been a major hindrance in building relationships with his students.

It's just being restricted to to behind my my podium behind the glass shield. I don't like that. I don't think that I can build as close of relationship with my students as I think I

should. You know, like I said, I like to walk around, and you know, I like to see what they're looking at on their computers. And you know, I mean if I see something interesting that they're looking at, hey, what's this? So, the past year, I feel like I've been restricted from trying to develop the relationships that I think I should.

In addition to the limitations caused by COVID in the classroom, there were also limitations outside the classroom as well. Paul voiced his disappointment that he was not able to go to sporting events or performances to watch his students. "I think it's important for them to see me supporting them in that way." He did watch his students on Zoom, but he felt that it was not the same because the students did not see him being there physically.

However, not all of the participants thought COVID was completely bad for building relationships with their students. In fact, Ann thought it helped. She explained,

I work in an institution that stayed in person, but reduced class size, forced masks, forced distancing, enforced a bunch of like disinfecting and so it has, it may have helped, um, helped me form relationships with students because it kept the students on campus more. We got rid of breaks. We also had a very big shared experience, um, that we could talk about and how it was affecting us and you know, it was very apparent that we were going to have to check in on each other's mental health as well as physical health.

Mason also found certain aspects to be helpful, especially the use of Zoom for his international students. With the increasing use of Zoom to communicate, Mason adapted to using Zoom for his classes. He found it to be a better option than email for his international students who struggled with writing in English. Therefore, he would suggest to those students that they meet on Zoom, which "has been a huge asset in in forming relationships and helping to really quell their their fears of like having to work with English and all that on that front."

**Research Question Responses**

One central question and three sub-questions guided this study. The themes and sub-themes discussed above contributed to the answering of the research questions. The answers below provide a description of the overall essence through the textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon of adjunct faculty members' experiences in forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships.

***Central Question: How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their experiences forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships in an effort to increase student engagement?***

The purpose of this central question was to gain an understanding of the overall experience that adjunct faculty members have of forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships. The themes and sub-themes that emerged in the data are directly related to this question. The simplest explanation of the participants' experience is that an instructor needs to make an effort to learn about the students. Once the instructor knows the student, it is easier to engage the students in the classroom, and the instructor is more apt to show care for the students because there is the foundation of a relationship in place. However, the participants made it clear that forming relationships with students was not an easy task due to many limitations placed on the adjunct faculty member.

The formation of the instructor-student relationship often starts on the first day of class when instructors take the time to get to know a little bit about their students through icebreaker activities. Many of the participants used this method as a means of learning about their students from the beginning. Paul and Tony stated that they did not ask just general questions like what is your name, where are you from, what is your major, and why are you taking this class. Rather,

they liked to get to know their students on a deeper level. For example, Paul liked to ask students, "If they're stuck on a desert island for the rest of their life, which CD would they take with them." Ann and Kathy both expressed the importance of learning the students' names, so the students felt like they were more than just a number or a body in the classroom. After the first day, most of the participants indicated that they continued to seek out opportunities to get to know their students by arriving to class a few minutes early to talk with students before class started, having office hours, and stopping to chat with students if they saw them on campus, to name a few.

As instructors get to know their students, it becomes easier to engage them in the classroom. There are several tools that the participants pointed out that they used to engage their students, including making the course material applicable to the students, having students collaborate, sharing about themselves, and using humor. They could make the material more applicable to their students by creating examples that were relatable to students' interests or personal experiences. Lisa explained that in the discussions in her class they were often "applying our own personal lives into the discussion." Mike explained a situation where he used a student's interest in music to create an example that would be of interest to the student. Not only did interest increase a student's engagement, but it also can help to increase the student's understanding of the topic. Another way mentioned that increases engagement is having the students collaborate. The most discussed type of collaboration was small group discussions. These group discussions allowed the students to engage with the material and each other; however, it also allowed the instructor to walk around and work more closely with individual students. This often leads to the instructor getting to know a little bit more about the student and helps to form relationships as the instructor takes an interest in what the student is saying. Jose

stated that sharing information about himself also helped to engage students and helped to "build strong bonds with them." When students see their instructor as a person with a life outside the classroom, they are often able to connect with him on a personal level. This connection can in turn make the student want to please the instructor by making more of an effort to engage. Another way that some of the participants mentioned to engage students and make a connection with them was through the use of humor. By using humor, the instructor can break down a barrier that often exists between an instructor and student, especially when a student sees the instructor as unrelatable. Furthermore, it is easier for a student to engage with material when the situation is enjoyable. However, as previously mentioned, the use of humor must be used with caution because there is the possibility of humor being misunderstood or offensive. Instructors must have an understanding of their students and how they might react to the humor being used. These tools, which are used to engage students, also help to build and maintain instructor-student relationships because they provide opportunities for positive interactions.

While knowledge about the students helps instructors engage students, it also helps instructors show care for the students. Knowing about a student's situation provides instructors with the opportunity to show compassion and empathy. Mason stated, "All life is chaos, and we can't account for all the events, especially it's, that line has really hit home over this past year." There are many situations that occur that are out of a student's control, and it is in these situations that the participants indicated that it was important to show compassion and empathy. Tony explained that the care has to be genuine. If a student tells the instructor that a family member or close friend has died, it is not enough to say "sorry." The instructor must show compassion or empathy. For example, the instructor might excuse the student from an assignment or test or allow an extension of a deadline. Additionally, the instructor may follow up

with the student a couple of day or weeks later to see how they are coping with their situation. These actions show that the instructor cares about the student as an individual outside of the classroom. Another way that instructors show that they care about their students is by showing up for them in other areas of the students' lives. Many participants mentioned going to their students' sporting events, performances, recitals, contests, competitions, or organizations. They also mentioned just taking the time to sit down with a student informally and discuss what was going on in the student's life. That discussion could be related to academics or the student's personal life. What is important is that the instructor shows a genuine interest in the student's success as an individual.

All of the participants agreed on the importance of building relationships with their students. However, they commented that there were many things that stood in the way of their ability to foster these relationships. Some of the biggest limitations were a lack of time, lack of campus presence, lack of resources, class size and space, and COVID. These hindrances all limited the opportunities to have positive interactions with students. A lack of time was due mostly to the fact that the participants either had full-time jobs outside of adjuncting, taught at multiple institutions, or had other commitments that prevented them from devoting more time to their students. Due to these, they were often not on campus much outside of their class time or office hours. Another limitation mentioned was a lack of resources. This included such things as not having sufficient support from departments or personnel on campus, not knowing what resources were available, not knowing what was happening on campus, and not having training. Participants mentioned that these issues often took the focus off of the student because they were focusing their attention on other things. Class size and classroom space is another thing that can hinder relationships. Adjunct faculty often teach introductory classes, which tend to have larger

class sizes in bigger classrooms, such as an auditorium style lecture hall. With the larger number of students, instructors are not able to focus their attention on individual students because there are just too many of them, and as Lisa and Kathy mentioned, it is important not to show favoritism. Additionally, a large classroom is not conducive to one-on-one conversations because of the physical distance that can separate an instructor from the student. Finally, COVID was mentioned as a hindrance due to the protocols put in place by many institutions such as wearing a mask, socially distancing, and moving to completely virtual classes. These protocols were not conducive to forming relationships and often resulted in a feeling of isolation.

***Sub-Question One: How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their ability to develop caring relationships through positive interactions with students inside and outside the classroom?***

The key to developing caring relationships through positive interactions inside and outside the classroom is engaging the student. In order to engage the student, the adjunct faculty member must first learn about the student. Thus, Jose's first piece of advice to a new adjunct faculty member is to get to "know the students on a personal level" as students will respond in a more favorable way. Ann explained in her letter of advice that when students perceive their instructor as genuinely wanting to know them on a personal level, they are more willing to engage with the instructor. There were several ways mentioned to get to know students on a personal level. Most of the participants indicated that they arrived a few minutes early to class to talk with students. These conversations focused on the personal lives of students and not on the course material. For example, Ann, Kathy, Lynn, Mike, and Tony mentioned asking questions about the students' interests; their job; their weekend plans; their family; and extracurricular activities like recitals, games, or competitions. In addition to talking with students before class,

many of the participants incorporated small group discussions in their classes. While the students were discussing course material in small groups, the instructor walked around the classroom and was able to engage with students individually. These interactions can allow instructors to get to know more about how the students learn and what their interests are. Instructors also make use of out-of-class time to get to know their students better. Many hold office hours. Students may share more personal information with instructors during this time. For instance, a student may come to an instructor's office hours to explain a personal issue that is causing a hinderance to getting an assignment completed. In addition to office hours, Jose, Mike and Paul all mentioned meeting students at a coffee shop or food court on campus and spending time talking with them. By being available to students outside of the classroom time, the instructors are showing that they genuinely have an interest in their students. Showing an interest in students indicates to the student that they are valuable. When students feel valuable, they tend to engage, or interact, more with the instructor. The participants indicated that these interactions tended to be primarily positive and helped to foster caring instructor-student relationships.

Once instructors get to know their students on a personal level, they are better able to create positive interactions. There were several ways that participants mentioned to create positive interactions. One way was by being accommodating or flexible with students' needs. The most common way of accommodating students is by being flexible on due dates. Oftentimes, students will ask for an extension because of either something going on in their personal life or they are overwhelmed with work in other classes. Mike acknowledged this when he said that it was important for instructors to realize that their class was just one of many that the student was taking. Lisa said that it is a reminder that students "have things going on in their lives" that may interfere with their ability to get their assignments in on time. When this happens,

an instructor needs to show compassion and empathy. As John mentioned, it is important to "understand that sometimes life can get in the way and, and impact what your students doing and they expect you to have some sense of compassion and empathy."

Another way to create positive interactions is through the use of collaboration in the classroom. By allowing students to have a voice in the classroom, instructors are showing the students that they have something valuable to contribute. Paul made a point to tell his students every semester, "Every one of you guys knows something that nobody else in this class knows. I want to know what it is or I would like to learn from you." Furthermore, by asking the students to collaborate, instructors are helping to build a sense of community where everyone is included. Ann stated that "being inclusive of people and their thoughts and their willingness to participate is important." The feeling of being valued and included in the classroom contributes to positive interactions.

Finally, the use of humor can promote positive interactions leading to caring instructor-student relationships. Generally, a fun, entertaining atmosphere elicits positive interactions. However, caution must be used. It is important to know the students on a personal level, especially when implementing the use of humor because an instructor needs to know how a student might perceive the humor. The student might not understand the instructor's type of humor or might find it offensive. Another potential downfall for the use of humor is that if an instructor uses humor too liberally, students might think poorly of the instructor or think the instructor does not take the job seriously.

*Sub-Question Two: How do adjunct faculty members describe their ability to cultivate an ethic of care with their students?*

Paul said he had a quote in his planner that said, "Nobody cares what you know until they

know that you care." He saw his job not only as imparting knowledge to his students, but also creating a caring relationship with them. As Noddings (1984, 2005, 2010, 2012a, 2012b) explained, an ethic of care is made up of three stages: engrossment, where the one caring is attentive and receptive to the expressed needs of the one being cared for; motivational displacement, where the one caring prioritizes the needs and objectives of the cared for above their own; and receptivity, where the one being cared for responds to the act of caring. The basis for cultivating an ethic of care with students relies on the adjunct faculty member learning about the student, being accommodating and flexible, showing compassion and empathy, being fair, and showing up and following up.

As previously mentioned, it is important for adjunct faculty members to get to know their students in order to learn about what their needs might be. Once those needs are understood, the instructor has the ability to prioritize those needs and act in some way to meet those needs through accommodations or by being flexible. By being accommodating or flexible, the instructor portrays a sense of compassion or empathy, which in turn leads the student to feel valued or cared for. However, it is not always possible to give the students what they want, which can cause a strain on the formation or maintenance of the instructor-student relationship. If an instructor is unable to give the student exactly what they want, the instructor should respond in such a way that does not form a negative interaction. It is important for students to know that their instructor cares for and wants the student to be successful and that the instructor values them as individuals. It is equally crucial for students to see that they are being treated fairly and no favoritism is being shown to individual students. Ann, Chad, Lisa, John and Kathy all stressed the significance of this because any sign of favoritism can hinder a relationship with a student who feels they have been slighted.

In addition, many participants pointed out the value of showing up and following up with students in an effort to foster caring relationships with their students. There are multiple ways to show up. One way, which was mentioned by both Chad and Lynn, was showing students that they wanted to be there to teach the students, that it was not just a box to check. Mike explained that he had plenty of colleagues who were more focused on their own personal research than on teaching students and it showed in the classroom. The students sensed this and often gave those professors bad reviews because they did not feel valued as a student or a person. Another way of showing up is being visible at students' extracurricular activities such as sporting events, recitals, performances, competitions, and organizations. Students who see their instructors cheering them on outside the classroom feel a sense of care from the instructor. In addition to showing up to these events, the participants mentioned following up by discussing the events with the students afterwards, whether that is remarking on the music played at a recital or consoling the basketball player whose team lost the game the previous night. Ann explained that this shows the student that you acknowledge that they are more than just a student. They have a life outside the classroom, and that other part is equally important to the one that is the student. John put it this way, "If you genuinely listen to people and and show genuine interest in them and their life and and again that why of what they're doing, um it it it begins to build that relationship." Another way participants mentioned helped them to cultivate an ethic of care with their students was by following up with students when they had a personal struggle or situation. This might be something as simple as checking in on a student who is sick or has not been in class for a couple of days or making sure that a student who did not do well on an assignment understands the material. It may also include situations where there is a major crisis happening in the student's life such as the death of a family member or friend. Again, it is about caring about the student as

a whole person and not just about what is going on in the classroom.

***Sub-Question Three: What contextual factors affect residential adjunct faculty members'***

***experiences forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships?***

While all of the participants scored moderate to high in the Nyberg Caring Assessment (Nyberg, 1990, 2019), there were a multitude of factors that participants identified as affecting their ability to form and maintain caring instructor-student relationships including a lack of time, campus presence, lack of resources, class size, physical classroom space, and COVID.

The most mentioned factor that affected an adjunct faculty member's ability to foster caring relationships with students was a lack of time. The participants indicated that they lacked time because of either having a full-time job, adjuncting at additional institutions, or having other personal commitments. Ann described working in higher education as a teacher as a "side hustle kind of a job." Because of this time constraint, adjuncts often do not have extra time outside of the designated class time to meet with students. As a result, many of the participants indicated that if they did meet with students, it was often just before or directly after class. Due to the lack of time outside the classroom, many instructors found it difficult to find opportunities to show care for their students.

A related factor to a lack of time is a lack of campus presence. Because adjunct faculty members have other commitments taking up their time, they often do not stay on campus outside of the time they teach with the exception of right before or after class. Therefore, they do not have a presence on campus as full-time faculty do. Mike explained, "You know you're not on campus most of the time now, so so I don't have those interactions outside of the classroom." Lisa also pointed out,

I really feel like it's just hard to, for probably almost all adjuncts, to spend a lot of time at

that institution unless unless they were to have some high number of classes, but there's limits, you know, so almost everyone is doing something else.

As a result of not being on campus outside of the classroom time, adjunct faculty have fewer opportunities to have interactions with students such as meeting them at the campus coffee shop or food court; attending student recitals, sporting events, or performances; or joining students in organizations or clubs. This limits the adjunct faculty's ability to form relationships with students.

Another factor that affects the adjunct faculty member's ability to form relationships with students is a lack of resources. However, this is not due just to a lack of resources available. It may just be a case where the adjunct faculty member is not aware of the resources that are available, or the resources are harder to get as an adjunct faculty member. Lynn mentioned the example of adjuncts having difficulty in getting the technology they needed or the passwords to use the technology. This becomes especially difficult due to "limited access to support staff" when teaching in the evenings when most of the office people have left for the day. Paul explained that as a new adjunct faculty member, he was not sure where everything was, which made it harder to acquire the resources needed. Tony pointed out that he had an advantage over most adjunct faculty members at his institution because he worked full-time on campus. In his full-time job, his office had counselors and community resources available to him. This provided him with extra opportunities to have caring interactions with his students because he could point them towards resources that they might need.

The size of the class and the physical classroom space can also affect adjunct faculty member's experiences fostering caring relationships with their students. As previously mentioned, it is very difficult to be able to have personal interactions in a classroom when there

are a lot of students. It is much easier to do when the class is small in number. The same is true of the classroom space. A large lecture hall is not conducive to walking around and talking with students on an individual basis. As Kathy pointed out in a smaller classroom,

> You have an opportunity to come around and ask them how are you doing? Do you have any questions? And again, that just shows them that you have an interest in what they're doing, and you care about what they're doing.

COVID has also had major effects on adjunct faculty member's experiences in forming relationships with their students. With all of the restrictions that were put into place such as socially distancing, wearing masks, and even requiring virtual learning only, many adjunct faculty struggled to form relationships with their students. Chad, Mason, Paul, and Tony indicated that students wearing masks or having virtual class caused an issue because the instructor could not read the students' facial expression or body language. This was an issue because they could not tell if a student was struggling with the material. Without this knowledge, there were missed opportunities to show students that they cared about their success. Jose also stressed his struggle with having to socially distance behind a shield. This put both a physical and psychological distance between him and his students, which did not bode well for forming relationships. Kathy also mentioned that since the COVID restrictions had been put into place, she had found that her students had become indifferent.

## Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the results of this study focusing on the experiences of residential adjunct faculty members forming and maintaining caring relationships with students in an effort to increase student engagement. The chapter started off with a brief profile of the 11 participants and was followed by a thorough review of the themes that emerged

from the data, which was collected through a questionnaire, one-on-one in-depth interviews, and a letter of advice to new adjunct faculty members. There were four themes that emerged from the analysis of the data: learning about the student, engaging the student, showing care for the student, and limitations in building and maintaining caring relationships. Within these themes, several sub-themes were identified and discussed. The discussion of the themes and sub-themes were supported with participants' quotes and survey data. Finally, a narrative was provided for each of the research questions based on the themes and sub-themes that emerged.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experience of fostering caring instructor-student relationships for residential adjunct faculty members at accredited degree-granting institutions in the Southern United States. This chapter provides a summary of the findings; a discussion of how the findings relate to the theoretical and empirical literature; and the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the findings. Next, a description of the delimitations and limitations are provided, followed by recommendations for future research.

### Summary of Findings

There was one central question and three sub-questions that guided this study. Data was gathered from 11 participants through three different methods including questionnaires, one-on-one in-depth interviews, and letters of advice to a new adjunct faculty member. The data was analyzed using the method outlined by Moustakas (1994) and was aided by the Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) program NVivo 12 Mac. From the analysis of the data, four themes and multiple sub-themes were identified, which were used to answer the central question and three sub-questions that guided this study.

The central research question was: How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their experiences forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships in an effort to increase student engagement? As described in Noddings' (2010, 2012b) ethic of care theory, a caring instructor-student relationship can be defined as a relationship in which the instructor is attentive and receptive to the needs of the student, the instructor responds in such a way to satisfy the need or provides an alternative goal, and the student recognizes, or receives, in some way the

efforts of the instructor to show caring. While each participant described their own unique experience of fostering instructor-student relationships, there were several themes, which emerged that were shared by the participants. The participants agreed that the foundation of the formation of instructor-student relationships is getting to know the students and their situations. Many of the participants made use of icebreakers on the first day of class, arriving early to class to talk with students, making use of small group discussions in class, having office hours, and meeting students outside the classroom to spend time getting to know the students.

Another important aspect of forming and maintaining relationships with students was using the knowledge they learned about the students to engage them and to show care for them. One way that was mentioned to engage students was by making the material applicable to the students and their situations. Not only does this engage the students, but it also shows the students that the instructor cares enough about them to tailor the material to them. This shows a level of care that helps to foster the instructor-student relationship. In addition, knowing students' situations provides opportunities to show care for the student, especially in instances where the student may be struggling with something. The instructor can show compassion and empathy, provide accommodations that might be needed, and follow up with students to see how they are progressing. When the student recognizes that the instructor is making an effort to provide for their needs as students, the caring relationship is realized.

Even though the participants expressed the importance of fostering relationships with their students, they all recognized the difficulties in doing so, especially as an adjunct faculty member. There were a number of limitations they faced such as a lack of time and resources, the absence of a presence on campus, large class sizes and less than ideal classroom space, and issues related to COVID.

The first sub-question was: How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their ability to develop caring relationships through positive interactions with students inside and outside the classroom? The first step in developing a caring relationship with a student through positive interactions is by learning about the student. To learn about the student, instructors must ask questions and listen. There are several ways to approach this. Inside the classroom, instructors can do an icebreaker activity during the class early in the semester, go to class early to talk with students, and incorporate small group discussions in class. Outside of the classroom, instructors can hold office hours, meet with students in an informal setting such as at the food court or coffee shop on campus, or attend club gatherings. Not only do these approaches give the instructor the ability to learn about the student, but it also gives them the opportunity to interact with their students academically and personally. The participants explained that these interactions tended to be positive in nature. The more positive interactions an instructor has with a student, the more likely a relationship will start to form.

The second sub-question was: How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their ability to cultivate an ethic of care with their students? In order to cultivate an ethic of care, instructors must know what their students' needs are. By getting to know the students, these needs are realized. The instructor must prioritize those needs and act in a way to meet them. The participants emphasized the need to be compassionate and empathetic toward the students. Often, this compassion or empathy results in the instructor providing an accommodation or support for the student. The most common accommodation is an extension of a deadline. Another example that was provided by several participants was when a student experiences a difficult situation in their life. The consensus was that the instructor must show genuine concern and provide support for the student. This support may come in the form of a listening ear or a resource that the

student can use to help them in their situation. It is also important for the instructor to follow up with the student to make sure that they are okay. Instructors are also able to cultivate an ethic of care by showing up. This was explained in a couple of ways. One way was to show the students that the instructor wanted to be in the classroom and was excited to be able to help the students succeed. Another way was to be visible at students' activities outside of the classroom, such as at sporting events or performances.

The third sub-question was: What contextual factors affect residential adjunct faculty members' experiences forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships? There were six main factors that the participants mentioned as affecting their ability to form and maintain caring relationships with their students. A lack of time was the most common factor mentioned. Participants said that having a full-time job outside of teaching, adjuncting at multiple institutions, or having other commitments prevented them from spending much time fostering caring relationships with their students.  A related issue was a lack of presence on the campus where they were teaching. For example, a few of the participants mentioned that they worked full-time during the day and then came to campus to teach in the evenings. Because of this, they were not able to be on campus outside of their assigned class time. This limited their opportunities to interact with students to times right before class, during class, or right after class. Another factor affecting the ability of adjunct faculty from fostering caring relationships with students was a lack of resources. Often, adjunct faculty are not informed of the resources available on campus for students or for themselves. Even if they are aware of the resources available, they can be difficult to obtain outside of normal business hours. Therefore, those instructors that teach in the evenings might not be able to access the resources needed to support the student, which affects their ability to focus on caring interactions. Two other related factors

that affect an adjunct's ability to foster caring relationships with students is class size and classroom space. Many times, adjunct faculty teach lower-level introductory courses, which tend to be large in number. It is difficult to connect with students individually and form relationships when there are 40 or more students in a classroom. Additionally, those classes tend to be held in auditorium or lecture style classrooms, which are not conducive to one-on-one interactions. The instructor is usually at the front of the room behind a lectern, causing a physical distancing from the students. The last factor that was mentioned was COVID. Many of the participants expressed the difficulty that the restrictive protocols placed on building relationships with students. The instructors were not able to interact with students the way they normally would, which often caused a physical and psychological distancing between the instructor and students.

## Discussion

Student engagement has been a focus for decades (Burke, 2019; Groccia, 2018; Tight, 2020). One area that has gained attention is instructor-student relationships. Much of the current literature on this topic focuses on the students' perspective of the importance of these relationships for student engagement (Groves et al., 2015; Zhou & Cole, 2017) and the ways instructors can build positive relationships with students (Arghode et al., 2017; Groves et al., 2015; Marx et al., 2016; Turner, 2016). The limited literature that explores the instructor's experiences of fostering relationships with students focuses on the full-time professor's point of view, while overlooking the adjunct faculty's experience. This study fills that gap using Astin's (1999b) student involvement theory and Noddings' (1984) ethic of care theory as the theoretical framework.

### Theoretical Literature

Astin (1999b) explains that student involvement is comprised of both qualitative and

quantitative features, and both of these features are important when looking at how interactions can affect student engagement. However, Astin's (1999b) theory focuses on what the student does. When looking at how interactions affect the formation and maintenance of caring instructor-student relationships, the responsibility cannot solely lie on the student. Rather, both parties involved must take ownership of their part. It is important to understand what a caring relationship involves, which is why Noddings' (1984) ethic of care theory was used as the second theory guiding this study. Noddings (1984, 2005, 2010, 2012b) explained that relationships require two agents, the one caring and the one being cared for, and both agents have a part to play in the relation. In unequal relations, like a teacher and student, the teacher is most often the agent caring and the student is the agent being cared for. An act of caring requires three steps: engrossment, motivational displacement, and receptivity (Noddings, 1984, 2012a). While Noddings' (1984) ethic of care in education focused on K-12, Barrow (2015) argued that the ethic of care is also applicable in higher education. However, the act of instructors caring for students looks different in HEIs than in K-12 schools. Samuel (2017) described caring in HEIs as providing students with respect, recognition, and reciprocity.

The findings of the current study confirm and build upon these theories. The participants in the current study indicated that one of the first steps in building a relationship with a student was getting to know the student. This was done through repeated interactions with the student both inside and outside the classroom. The participants generally described these interactions as positive. This points to Astin's (1999b) theory that both quantity and quality are involved in engaging students. Furthermore, the participants stated that the information they gleaned from these interactions assisted in engaging the student. One way to do this is by making the course material more applicable to students' specific interests or situations. This aligns with Noddings'

(1984, 2010, 2012a) engrossment stage because the instructor is being attentive and receptive to the students' needs. In the second stage, motivational displacement, the one caring prioritizes the needs and objectives of the one being cared for (Noddings, 1984, 2010, 2012a). The participants explained that in order to show care for students, they must show compassion and empathy and make accommodations for students. One example provided was allowing a student an extension on an assignment. This exhibits motivational displacement as the instructor is prioritizing the need and objective of the student. They allow the student the extra time in order to get the assignment done even if this is not convenient for the instructor. The final stage in an act of caring according to Noddings (1984, 2010, 2012a) is receptivity, which would be when the student recognizes that the instructor is allowing them extra time to do their assignment. The current study builds upon Astin's (1999b) student involvement theory by showing how both the instructor and the student play a role in the quantity and quality of interactions. It also builds upon Noddings' (1984) ethic of care theory by showing how it can be extended to an HEI.

**Empirical Literature**

The findings in the current study align with and build upon what has been found in the literature. The participants in the current study underscored the importance of learning about the students, as this forms the foundation of a relationship with them. Hawk (2017) suggested having students complete a questionnaire on the first day of class to gather a variety of information about the students that could be used to get to know the students. Many of the participants indicated that they use an icebreaker on the first day to get to know their students. Paul and Jose used a survey that asked students about themselves, while Ann and Kathy stressed the importance of learning the students' names. In the literature, it was suggested that one way to build a relationship with students is by creating a sense of community in the classroom, and one

easy way to do this is by learning and using student names (Estepp & Roberts, 2015; Gardner et al., 2017; Hawk, 2017; Samuel, 2017). Other ways participants got to know their students was by arriving to class early to talk with the students or meeting with students during office hours, which according to Estepp and Roberts (2015), Glass et al. (2015), and Hoffman (2014) are some of the most common forms of contact between instructors and students outside the classroom. Another means of getting to know the students that the participants used was incorporating small group discussions in class. During these discussions, the participants walked around to the different groups and interacted with them. The literature confirms that the use of small groups can increase student engagement and allow for opportunities for instructors to get to know the students (Bonet & Walters, 2016; Hall & O'Neal, 2016; Wirt & Jaeger, 2014; Yamauchi et al., 2016).

The participants in the current study explained that they used the information they learned about their students to help engage the students in the classroom. One way they did this was by making the material relevant to their students' specific needs or situations. By doing this, the instructors were acknowledging that the students come with their own experiences and those individual experiences are valuable (Como, 2007; Masika & Jones, 2016; Owolabi, 2018; Samuel, 2017). Another way participants engaged students in the classroom was by making use of collaboration most often in the form of group discussions or group projects. Lynn expressed that she liked to have students participate in discussions because it added so much to the material being discussed. Tony added that he liked to take what students were saying in their small groups and incorporate it into his lessons. The use of student contributions helps to connect students to the lessons they are learning, which increases student engagement (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Samuel, 2017; Yamauchi et al., 2016). Another thing the participants did

to engage students was to share information about themselves. Jose, Lisa, Lynn, and Tony described how they shared their experiences and information about their personal lives to connect with students and to draw them out. By sharing about themselves, instructors lessen the power gap, which Sybing (2019) explained can be an obstacle to building rapport and having students engage with their instructor. This also allows students to see their instructors as someone who may share some similarities with them, making them more approachable. Another aspect that helps to engage students while also making instructors more approachable is the use of humor (Dean, 2019; Hoffman, 2014). Humor has been found to help increase student engagement and to help foster instructor-student relationships (Smith & Wortley, 2017). Jose, Lynn, Paul, and Tony mentioned that they liked to use humor and found it to be an effective way to connect with their students. However, Paul expressed that it did not always work. Anderson (2020) and Smith and Wortley (2017) stated that humor should be used cautiously as it has the potential to be inappropriate or offensive to some, and the overuse of humor can undermine the instructor's credibility.

Students expect their instructors to be helpful (Groves et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014; Marx et al., 2016; Turner, 2016) and caring (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Glass et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014; Jorgenson et al., 2018). The participants in the current study offered several ways they showed students that they cared, which could also be seen as being helpful. The first way was by being accommodating or flexible. Ann, Chad, Jose, Kathy, Mason, Mike, Paul, and Tony specifically mentioned offering students extensions on assignments, and Mike and Paul mentioned allowing students to retake the first exam of the semester if the student did not do well on it. Gregory and Korth (2016) explained that the formation of instructor-student relationships may result in students being given special privileges. Lisa and Paul mentioned

being careful not to show favoritism. Forming relationships with students has the potential to lead to the perception of favoritism, which can negatively affect the classroom environment (Chory & Offstein, 2017b). If other students see someone getting special treatment, they might feel a sense of unfairness or feel like they are being ignored (Gregory & Korth, 2016; Martin & Collie, 2016). Therefore, instructors must make a concerted effort to act professionally and not show favoritism (Barrow, 2015; Stark, 2017). Ann and Kathy expressed concern about making sure that accommodations were fair and to not show favoritism toward any student. It is important to note that being fair does not equate to all students receiving the same treatment; rather, being fair means that each student has an equal opportunity to succeed. The concept of fair treatment is often associated with students with disabilities. These students may need the support of a disability resource office, which can provide them with accommodations such as providing the student with a separate testing room or having a test read out loud to them. This may be problematic as these accommodations must be initiated by the student. Lisa indicated that the only time that she knew if a student needed such accommodations was if the roster she had was flagged. However, Scott and NCCSD (2019) found that the stigma associated with having a disability causes barriers for these students. Therefore, students might be hesitant to request such accommodations.

Another way the participants showed they cared about their students was by being compassionate and empathetic. The participants expressed compassion and empathy in a number of ways such as listening to a student who had an issue, providing them with resources, or making accommodations. However, as Tony remarked, the key was to be genuine in your response. It is not enough to say "I am sorry that you are going through a tough situation;" rather, you must act in some way to show support for the student. Finally, the participants indicated that

when showing care, it was important to show up and follow up with students. In other words, the instructor needs to be available, present, and engaged. The students need to see that their instructor is there for them and wants to see them be successful both in their academics and their personal lives. In fact, students expect their instructors to be accessible and willing to engage in conversations outside of academic content (Dean, 2019; Hoffman, 2014; Turner, 2016). Several of the participants mentioned that they made every effort to be visible at their student activities such as competitions, sporting events, and recitals.  hey also liked to follow up with them after the events to discuss how things went. As Ann explained, this showed the student that the instructor recognized that the student had a life outside of the confines of the classroom.

The participants provided a number of factors that they saw as limiting their ability to form relationships with their students. The most significant factor mentioned was a lack of time. This is also true of full-time faculty. However, the difference is that full-time faculty lack time because of other commitments that are related to their other roles at the institution, such as scholarly activity or a leadership role (Chory & Offstein, 2017b; Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016; Hoffman, 2014). On the other hand, the participants mentioned time constraints due to a full-time job outside of their adjunct position, an adjunct position at multiple institutions, or other commitments not related to their job at the institution. Many of the participants mentioned that they taught in the evening after working their full-time job. Therefore, they did not have extra time to meet with students outside of the classroom time.

Another constraint that related to the participants' other commitments was a lack of presence on campus, which was specific to adjunct faculty members. Many times, adjunct faculty are excluded from things that full-time faculty are included in, such as participating on committees, participating in training, advising clubs or organizations, being listed on the

institution's website, or having an office space to meet with students.

Participants also mentioned a lack of resources as being a limiting factor. Many of the participants taught at night after the support staff had already gone home. Therefore, they may not have had access to the resources they needed when they were in the classroom. Lynn mentioned that when she taught in the evening and had a problem getting the technology in the classroom working, she was more focused on that than on connecting with the students. Jose and Tony both worked full-time for the institution they adjuncted for in other roles. They said that was a huge benefit because they were aware of the resources that the campus had, whereas adjunct faculty who did not work in another role would not necessarily know all that was available. Another resource that multiple participants mentioned was lacking was an office space where they could meet with students. Tony said that there may have been an adjunct office on campus, but in the 16 years he had taught there, he had never been in it and did not even know where it was located.

Another issue that limits the ability to foster caring relationships with students is the class size. Adjunct faculty are likely to teach lower-level courses that are required by a large number of students (Landrum, 2009; Marklein, 2017), and often these class sizes are large, some even exceeding 100 students. Instructors who teach large classes face difficulty when trying to build individual relationships with students (Fox & Powers, 2017; Lynch & Pappas, 2017; Marx et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2019). Furthermore, the classrooms are often large auditorium style rooms, where instructors are placed behind a podium. These types of classrooms are not conducive to personal interactions with students.

The last major limitation mentioned by the participants was COVID. Most of the participants indicated that the protocols that many institutions have put in place to protect people

from contracting COVID have created a huge barrier to forming relationships with students. Some institutions have switched to full virtual classes, while others have remained in person. However, those institutions that have allowed students to come to class on campus have required students to wear masks and socially distance. Instructors were no longer allowed to have students working in groups. They were no longer allowed to walk around the room and interact with students. They could not see a student's face to read facial expressions. These restrictions not only placed a physical distance between instructors and students, but it also placed an emotional and psychological distance between them.

## Implications

The aim of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how adjunct faculty members experience fostering caring instructor-student relationships. The findings of this study are significant because they provide a voice for an often overlooked population, adjunct faculty. Furthermore, there are theoretical, empirical, and practical implications, which can be deduced from the findings.

### Theoretical

Astin's (1999b) student involvement theory posits a student's involvement is measured in both qualitative and quantitative terms focusing on the energy the student puts forth toward these interactions. The more frequent and better quality the interactions the student has, the more likely the student is to persist. However, what this theory fails to consider is that these interactions may require the energy of someone other than the student. This is true in the case of instructor-student relationships. The student can put much energy into interacting with the instructor, but if the instructor does not reciprocate, it will not be successful. The quantity and quality of the interactions are dependent on both the instructor and the student. For example, if a student

arrives to class early every day and attempts to speak with the instructor, but the instructor ignores the student, the likelihood of persistence is not dictated by the student's efforts. Rather, the likelihood of the student's persistence is dictated by the lack of the instructor's efforts. Therefore, the burden must be placed on both the instructor and the student.

Noddings' (1984) ethic of care theory supports the idea that both instructor and student have a role to play in the instructor-student relationship. While the relation is unequal in the sense that the instructor is doing a majority of the caring, the student must respond to the effort of care in order for it to be considered a relation (Noddings, 1984). While Noddings' (1984) ethic of care theory focused on relationships between teachers and students in K-12, this study supports the idea that an ethic of care is also applicable and essential in higher education (Barrow, 2015). Noddings' (1984, 2010, 2012a) explained that instructors must prioritize the needs of the students over their own. This study expanded on Noddings' (1984) ethic of care theory by identifying factors that adjunct faculty must face when prioritizing their students' needs over their own. One of the biggest factors is time. Unlike the K-12 classroom, adjunct faculty spend much less time with their students. Therefore, they are often required to sacrifice time away from other activities outside of the normal class period in order to fulfill an act of care.

**Empirical**

The literature on instructor-student relationships is robust. However, the focus tends to be on the student perspective. There is a lot of research on the importance of these relationships for student motivation and engagement (Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016; Grove et al., 2015; Parnes et al., 2020), academic success (Barrow, 2015; Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016; Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Hao et al., 2018; Musser et al., 2017; Parnes et al., 2020), and persistence (Dwyer, 2017;

Owolabi, 2018; Quin, 2017; Robinson et al., 2019; Xu, 2017). There is also much research on

what students expect from instructors in a relationship including being approachable (Dean,

2019; Gallop & Bastien, 2016; Groves et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014), being accessible (Turner,

2016), being helpful (Groves et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014; Marx et al., 2016), and caring

(Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Glass et al., 2015; Jorgenson et al., 2018). The

research that focuses on the instructor part of the relationship tends to focus on full-time faculty

and what they can do to build relationships such as promoting a sense of community in the

classroom (Glass et al., 2017; Glass et al., 2015; Sybing, 2019), adapting the curriculum to the

students (Arghode et al., 2017; Barkaoui et al., 2015; Yamauchi et al., 2016), using humor

(Anderson, 2020; Gardner et al., 2017; Smith & Wortley, 2017), or meeting with students

outside of class time (Estepp & Roberts, 2015; Glass et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014). Some

research also touches on the hesitancy that faculty have toward fostering relationships with

students (Anderson, 2018; Chory & Offstein, 2017b; Martini et al., 2019; Samuel, 2017;

Strachan, 2020).

However, the literature has a significant gap. The voice of the adjunct faculty is all but

ignored in the literature, which is significant because they make up nearly 50% of the faculty in

HEIs (NCES, 2019b). While the findings in this study support many of the claims in the current

literature, there are some issues that are specific to the adjunct faculty member such as a lack of

presence on campus and time restrictions due to holding other jobs or commitments outside of

the institution. Another major finding, which contributes to the literature, is how COVID

protocols have affected instructors' ability to foster caring relationships with their students in a

number of ways. Many institutions decided to require classes to be fully virtual. This took away

the instructor's ability to interact with students face-to-face, which meant that it was much harder

for the instructor to read non-verbal cues such as body language. In other words, it became difficult to determine if a student understood the material, was bored, or was frustrated. Furthermore, it was harder to form a sense of community in an online format. Another protocol that affected instructors' ability to foster caring relationships was social distancing. This highly restrictive protocol meant that individuals could not come within six feet of each other. This prohibited instructors from utilizing small group discussions, lab work, and other community building activities. It has been found that creating a sense of community increases student engagement and provides instructors with opportunities to get to know their students better (Bonet & Walters, 2016; Hall & O'Neal, 2016; Wirt & Jaeger, 2014; Yamauchi et al., 2016). Kathy explained that without these activities, her students were left feeling indifferent. In addition, because of the social distance protocols, many institutions did not allow spectators at extracurricular activities and events if they even allowed the events to take place. As Paul explained, this prevented him from going to support his students at their sporting events, recitals, competitions, and other events, which was one way he used in the past to make a connection with students.

**Practical**

Evidence shows that students benefit greatly from having caring instructor-student relationships (Dwyer, 2017; Hoffman, 2014; Owolabi, 2018; Quin, 2017), which is why many researchers have focused on this topic. Unfortunately, the research has failed to focus on a significant population involved in this phenomenon, namely the adjunct faculty member. The findings from this study provide significant practical implications for adjunct faculty members and administrators at HEIs.

*Recommendations for Adjunct Faculty*

The participants in this study stressed the importance of getting to know students personally in an effort to engage students and foster caring instructor-student relationships. While this may seem daunting especially for an adjunct faculty member who has a large number of students, it is perhaps the most important aspect of fostering caring instructor-student relationships. One of the major concerns that adjunct faculty have is that they just do not have the time to do a lot of extra things to foster relationships with students because of other commitments. This is completely understandable. However, this does not have to be something that takes a lot of extra time or effort. The participants offered several suggestions on how to do this in the classroom.

Kathy said the first thing that should be done is to learn the students' names. By learning the students' names, the instructor is showing that he or she sees each student as an individual. Paul expressed that he was terrible with names, but thought it was extremely important to learn the students' names or nicknames along with the correct pronunciation. He explained that this was one way that he showed students that he cared about them.

Another way to start learning about students is to ask students to fill out a survey on the first day of class. Instructors can be creative with the survey to include things that might be helpful to know throughout the semester. For example, in a music appreciation class, the instructor could ask students to list their favorite songs or artists. During the semester, the instructor could then bring up the different songs or artists during relevant discussions.

Participants also suggested that instructors show up to class a few minutes early to talk with students. These discussions should focus on getting to know the students and not necessarily on course material. For example, many participants asked their students about their

family, job, extracurricular activities, and interests. Again, this information can be used during relevant discussions in class or to provide examples that are applicable and relevant to students.

Having students work in small groups provides another opportunity for instructors to get to know their students. While the groups are working together, the instructor can walk around to the groups and listen to or talk with the small groups. This allows for more one-on-one interactions inside a classroom, particularly when there is a large number of students. Moreover, the instructor can take some of the points given by students and interweave them into a larger class discussion. This shows students that the instructor values them and their opinions.

There are also ways that adjunct faculty members can get to know their students outside of the classroom, such as having office hours. While adjunct faculty members might not have a designated office to meet with students, they can usually find some place on campus where they could meet with a student. Students usually take advantage of office hours when they have questions about their coursework or have an issue that they need to discuss with the instructor. This can also be a great opportunity for instructors to learn a little bit more about the student. Instead of asking what the student needs right away, the instructor can ask the student how they are doing and make small talk. Often, these types of interactions allow for opportunities for the instructor to show they care about the student. Additionally, the student may open up about an issue that might be related to why they are coming to see the instructor.

Another way adjunct faculty can interact with students outside of the classroom is by being present on campus. This could be something as simple as getting a cup of coffee in between classes and sitting in the student center where students congregate. If students walk by, the instructor could say hi and ask the students how they are doing or invite them to sit down and talk for a few minutes. Instructors can also show up to campus activities such as sporting events

or recitals. By participating as a spectator for the students' events, the instructor is showing an interest in what the students are doing. The instructor then has an avenue to connect with the student over something that is of interest to the student.

The participants in this study voiced many factors that hinder their ability to form relationships with students, such as a lack of time. As previously mentioned, there are many ways that adjunct faculty can interact with students in a meaningful way inside the classroom that does not take up a lot of extra time. Furthermore, while it would be beneficial to meet with students outside the classroom, it is not required in order to foster caring instructor-student relationships. What is important is that instructors take an interest in the student.

Another major factor affecting the adjunct faculty's ability to form instructor-student relationships is COVID restrictions. While there is not much that an adjunct faculty member can do when it comes to the protocols put in place by institutions, it is important to remember that what students need most is positive interactions. Lisa shared her experience dealing with the COVID restrictions early on. Her institution decided to offer virtual classes only. Lisa stated that she held Zoom meetings outside of normal class hours. What she found was that students just wanted to interact with other people. They were less concerned with the course material. Ann explained that one of the benefits of COVID was that everyone had a shared experience to which they could relate. Therefore, instructors should take advantage of this as a means of connecting with students and forming a bond with their students.

### Recommendations for Administrators

Administrators or policy makers also have an important role to play in supporting adjunct faculty members fostering caring relationships with their students. Perhaps one of the most important ways they can do this is by making the adjunct faculty feel as important as the full-

time faculty. In 2017, the percentage of adjunct faculty in degree-granting institutions was 47%

(NCES, 2019b). While adjunct faculty make up almost half of the teaching population, they are

often overlooked and rarely included in decision-making. For example, curriculum decisions are

often made by full-time faculty, and the adjunct are given little freedom in what they teach.

However, many adjunct faculty members work in industry and have valuable knowledge to

share. If they were allowed to be a part of the decision-making process, there is a chance that

they would be able to push for curriculum that was more relevant to the field and to their

students. Another thing that adjunct faculty are often excluded from is being an advisor for a

student club or organization. This takes away the opportunity for adjunct faculty to have

additional interactions with students outside the classroom. Jose shared his experience of being

told that he could not be the advisor for the Spanish club even though he had experience working

with student organizations and taught Spanish for the institution. Not only was he qualified to be

the advisor, but he was also willing and excited for the opportunity. The only qualification he

lacked was being a full-time professor. Another way to make adjunct faculty an equally

important part of the campus community is to include them on the institution's website.

Oftentimes only the full-time faculty are listed on the website. Not only does this send the

message that adjunct are not equally valued, it can also make it more difficult to contact them.

Another way the administration can support the fostering of caring relationships between

adjunct faculty and students is to provide adjunct faculty with the resources they need to be

successful. Many of the participants noted a lack of knowledge about the resources available or a

lack of access to those resources. There are a few ways that the administration can address this

issue. First, they should offer an orientation every semester for new and returning adjunct faculty

members. This orientation should be more than just an overview of how to log in to the email

and learning management systems. Instead, the orientation should be an in-depth review of all of the resources available on campus such as the library, technology support, and student resources to name a few. In addition, adjunct faculty members should be assigned a mentor who can help them navigate the system and check in with them throughout the year. There may be times when an adjunct faculty member has an issue, but they do not know who to go to in order to resolve the issue. Another way that the institution can help support adjunct faculty is to have resources available beyond the normal nine to five office hours. Many adjunct faculty teach at night when the offices have already closed. This becomes a major issue if they run into problems in the classroom such as the audio-visual equipment not working. If the office is closed, the instructor cannot get the support needed. The instructor is then focused on the technology not working instead of focusing on the students. Another resource that is often lacking for adjunct faculty is a private space where they can meet with students. While some institutions do have an adjunct faculty office, it is often shared with many individuals, it is not conveniently located, or the adjunct faculty member does not know of its existence.

Another hindrance that adjunct faculty face when trying to foster relationships with their students is large class sizes (Fox & Powers, 2017; Lynch & Pappas, 2017; Marx et al., 2016). It is very difficult for an instructor to make personal connections when they have 50 to 100 students in a classroom. Therefore, administrators should consider reducing class sizes to a more manageable number. While there is not an agreed upon number, many of the participants stated that less than 30 would be ideal. Along with having smaller class sizes, the physical classroom space should be taken into consideration. A smaller, more intimate classroom is more conducive to personal interactions than a large lecture hall where instructors are placed behind a lectern that physically separate them from the students. Instructors need to be able to walk around and

interact with students.

## Delimitations and Limitations

This study was delimited to adjunct faculty members who had taught a minimum of one year in a traditional face-to-face setting within the last five years. The reason behind having participants who have taught in a traditional face-to-face setting was teaching in an online atmosphere adds to the complexity of forming relationships. It was also a requirement that participants had taught within the last five years, because this researcher wanted to make sure that the participants in the study were able to recall specific examples. Another delimitation was that the participants had to have taught lower-level courses, which was defined as first or second year undergraduate courses. The rationale behind this decision was forming relationships within these first couple of years can have a substantial impact on a student's decision to persist. Additionally, as Landrum (2009) explained, it is fairly common for adjunct faculty members to teach lower-level courses. This study was also delimited to participants who had a moderate to high level of care as assessed by the Nyberg Caring Assessment (Nyberg, 1990, 2019) because the focus of this study was forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships. Those who score high on the caring assessment would most likely be more successful at fostering these types of relationships. Finally, the study was delimited to participants who taught in an institution in a specific metropolitan area in the Southern United States. This geographic location was purposefully chosen because of its low higher education persistence and graduation rates. The rates in this metropolitan area were substantially lower than the national averages (NCES, 2019c; Oklahoma State Regents, 2019; United States Census Bureau, 2019).

There were also some limitations to this study. In a phenomenological study, the researcher gathers and analyzes data from a small, purposefully chosen group of participants who

have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study 11 participants were chosen who met specific criteria. While a detailed description of the participants and the setting was provided, the generalizability of the study may be limited. There was another limitation based on participants. This researcher strove for maximum variation in participant gender, age, race, number of years teaching, and department for which they taught. Maximum variation was achieved in most of these; however, a majority of the participants were Caucasian. Another limitation of this study was only 10 of the 11 participants completed all three forms of data collection. The participant who did not complete all three forms failed to complete the letter of advice to a new adjunct faculty member. While saturation of the data was met, the missing data could have provided additional information.

## Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provided some significant findings, there are some areas that still need to be explored. The participants in this study taught in a metropolitan area in the Southern United States. The Southern culture may affect how people interact with each other. Therefore, future research could look at how adjunct faculty describe fostering caring instructor-student relationships in other geographical locations such as the Midwest, West Coast, or East Coast. Additionally, the culture of living and teaching in a metropolitan area is different than living and teaching in a rural area. A couple of participants indicated that they taught at small rural institutions, where there was a much smaller campus community. Those participants felt that it was much easier to form caring relationships with students at those institutions because they would see the same students semester after semester.

Another possible area of research is to see if there are differences between fostering caring instructor-student relationships in a two-year institution versus a four-year institution. The

student population at a two-year institution is often markedly different than the student population at a four-year institution. Two-year institutions tend to have more non-traditional students and more commuter students who may have different expectations of their instructors than students at a four-year institution.

The participants in the current study indicated that COVID created obstacles in forming instructor-student relationships. Many institutions put protocols in place that limited interactions between instructors and students including social distancing, limiting the number of students allowed in a classroom, or requiring classes to be completely virtual. With this in mind, an area for future research may be on the impact that COVID has had on fostering instructor-student relationships. With the possibility that institutions will continue to have these restrictive protocols, future research should also focus on how different online technologies and pedagogies can be aligned to provide opportunities for positive interactions, engaging students, and fostering a sense of community.

## Summary

The intent of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of residential adjunct faculty forming and maintaining caring instructor-student relationships. This study is significant because it gives a voice to a population that is often ignored, yet has the potential to make a big impact on student engagement through these relationships. The adjunct faculty population continues to increase at a higher rate than full-time faculty (NCES, 2019b). Additionally, adjunct faculty members often teach lower-level classes taken during students' first two years, where students can benefit the most from having a caring relationship with their instructors (Landrum, 2009; Tinto, 2009). Therefore, it is crucial that administrators in HEIs understand the unique situations that the adjunct faculty members face, so they can support the

efforts of adjunct faculty in fostering instructor-student relationships in an effort to increase

student engagement. Unfortunately, adjunct faculty are not given the same kind of support that

full-time faculty are given. As Lynn pointed out, "I think they're out there on their own…there's

no support system." This researcher's hope is that this study and others like it will point out the

need for more institutional support for adjunct faculty members.

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**APPENDIX A: Questionnaire**

   The purpose of this study is to describe the experience of fostering caring instructor-student relationships for residential adjunct faculty members at degree-granting institutions.  This questionnaire is composed of two sections intended to gather demographic information and assess your degree of caring.  Furthermore, this questionnaire will be used to verify that you meet the criteria for participation in this study.  Please answer the following questions.

1.  Name:

2.  Gender:

3.  Age:

4.  Race/Ethnicity:

5.  Where do you teach?  Please list all institutions.

6.  Do you have a job outside of teaching?  If so, what is it?

7.  What department do you belong to at your institution(s)?

8.  What level of classes do you teach or have you taught within the last five years?  Please circle all that apply.

  100-200     300-400     500-600     700-900

9.  If you circled multiple levels in the previous question, the majority of the classes you teach is at which level?

10. How many classes do you teach in a typical semester?

11. Do you teach online, face-to-face (residential), or both?

12. How long have you been teaching?

13. Do you have experience in forming positive instructor-student relationships?

## Nyberg Caring Assessment (CAS)

**DIRECTIONS:** Circle the number that indicates the degree of your agreement with the importance of each of the following in your job as an instructor:

|  | Not important | Slightly important | Somewhat important | Very important | Extremely important |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Have a deep respect for the needs of others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Not give up hope for others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Remain sensitive to the needs of others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Communicate a helping, trusting attitude toward others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Express positive and negative feelings. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Solve problems creatively. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Understand that spiritual forces contribute to human care. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Consider relationships before rules. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Base decisions on what is best for the people involved. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Understand thoroughly what situations mean to people. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Go beyond the superficial to know people well. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Implement skills and techniques well. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Choose tactics that will accomplish goals. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Give full consideration to situational factors. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Focus on helping others to grow. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Take time for personal needs and growth. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Allow time for caring opportunities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Remain committed to a continuing relationship. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Listen carefully and be open to feedback. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Believe that others have a potential that can be achieved. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

<center>APPENDIX B: Informed Consent</center>

# Consent Form

Residential Adjunct Faculty Members' Experiences Forming Instructor-Student Relationships:
A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

<center>
Kristine Murray<br>
Liberty University<br>
School of Education
</center>

## Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study.  In order to participate, you must meet all of the following criteria:

- Teach or have taught within the last five years a minimum of one year in a traditional face-to-face setting
- Teach or have taught lower-level courses (100-200)
- Have experience fostering instructor-student relationships
- Have a moderate to high level of care as assessed by the Nyberg Caring Assessment

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

## What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to describe the experience of fostering caring instructor-student relationships for residential adjunct faculty members at accredited degree-granting institutions in the Southern United States.

## What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Complete a questionnaire, which includes questions about demographic information and Nyberg's Caring Assessment.  This will take about 10 minutes to complete.
2. Participate in a one-on-one interview, which will either be in person or via the videoconferencing platform Microsoft Teams.  The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes.  If you choose to participate in an in-person interview, it will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription.  If you choose to participate in a videoconference interview, it will be video recorded by the platform for the use of transcription.
3. Member checking of interview transcript.  I will send you the transcript of the interview for you to verify that your words matched your intended meaning.  This should take about 15-30 minutes.
4. Write a letter of advice to a new adjunct faculty member.  This should take about 15-30 minutes.

**How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include providing adjunct faculty members the opportunity to voice their experiences of fostering instructor-student relationships. The findings of this study can also provide new adjunct faculty members with strategies for forming caring instructor-student relationships. Furthermore, the findings can provide administrators with valuable information about these experiences, which may help to create and implement policies and procedures that can promote or incentivize caring instructor-student relationships. These benefits, in turn, may lead to higher student retention rates in higher education.

**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- All hard copies of data will be kept in a locked file cabinet, and all digital data will be kept on a password locked computer. After five years, all hard copies of data will be shredded and all digital records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for five years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

**How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants who complete all aspects of the data collection tasks as listed above will be entered into a raffle to receive one of three $25 gift cards.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Kristine Murray.  You may ask any questions you have now.  If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ██████████ You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Lucinda Spaulding, at ███████████

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study.  Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign.  You will be given a copy of this document for your records.  The researcher will keep a copy with the study records.  If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information.  I have asked questions and have received answers.  I consent to participate in the study.*

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

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| | | Rightsholder | Springer Publishing Company, Inc. |
| | | Publication Type | Book |
| Author/Editor | Sitzman, Kathleen | | |
| Date | 03/19/2019 | | |

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| Title | Residential Adjunct Faculty Members' Experiences Forming Instructor-Student Relationships: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study | Institution name | Liberty University |
| | | Expected presentation date | 2021-12-03 |
| Instructor name | Kristine Murray | | |

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| Editor of portion(s) | N/A | Author of portion(s) | Sitzman, Kathleen |
| Volume of serial or monograph | N/A | Issue, if republishing an article from a serial | N/A |
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**APPENDIX D: Interview Questions**

*Central Research Question*

How do residential adjunct faculty members describe their experiences forming and maintaining

caring instructor-student relationships in an effort to increase student engagement?

*Opening Questions*

1. Please tell me about yourself – where you grew up, your family, and your educational

   background.

2. Please tell me about where you work and what you teach.

3. When did you first know that you wanted to teach?

4. Why did you decide to become a teacher?

*Questions related to promoting positive student interactions*

5. Describe the interactions you have with your students inside the classroom.

6. What types of interactions, if any, do you have with students in the classroom that are not

   directly related to course material?

7. Describe the frequency and quality of these interactions.

8. Describe the interactions you have with students outside the classroom.

9. Describe the frequency and quality of these interactions.

10. What types of interactions inside and outside the classroom help you to better understand

    your students and their individual situations?

11. How do these interactions help you to better understand your students?

*Questions related to cultivating an ethic of care*

12. Describe your relationship with your students.

13. What do you do to form relationships with your students? Please give specific examples.

14. How do you show your students that you care about them?  Please give specific examples.

15. How are you able to communicate a helping attitude toward your students?

16. How are you able to build trust with your students?

17. In what ways do you show sensitivity to the needs of your students?

18. Please give me an example of a relationship you had with a student that you thought was especially caring.  What made it caring?

19. What characteristics would you attribute to a caring instructor-student relationship?

*Questions related to contextual factors affecting formation and maintenance of relationships*

20. What contextual or situational factors have positively affected your ability to form relationships with your students?

21. What contextual or situational factors have negatively affected your ability to form relationships with your students?

22. What limitations do you have as an adjunct faculty member that hinder your ability to foster caring instructor-student relationships?

23. What specific institutional factors have hindered your ability to form relationships with your students?

**APPENDIX E: Reflective Journal Excerpt**

March 8, 2021

I had an interview with Mike at 9:00am. I was a bit nervous about conducting the interview as this was the first one. At about 8:30am I sat down and reviewed Mike's questionnaire and the interview questions I had prepared. I briefly thought about how I would answer the questions and reminded myself that I would need to keep my thought and feelings to myself. I needed to focus on what Mike's experiences were. I said a brief prayer before meeting with Mike on the Teams meeting.

At the beginning of the interview, we briefly chatted about what a coincidence it was that two different people that I knew had recommended him as a participant and made some small talk. I think this really helped us both feel a little more comfortable. During the interview, I was intent on really trying to understand Mike's point-of-view and kept reminding myself not to interject my opinions. I constantly reminded myself to keep quiet and let Mike do most of the talking. I tried to keep to the questions that were on the guide; however, I did need to ask a few additional questions to clarify what Mike had said or to have him expand on something he said.

March 8, 2021

I had an interview with Ann at 11:30am. I was a little less nervous since I had conducted an interview earlier this morning. At about 11:00am I started reviewing Ann's questionnaire and the interview question guide. I again thought about how I needed to focus on understanding Ann's point-of-view and to keep my thoughts and feelings to myself. I prayed a few minutes before starting the Teams meeting.

Ann was such a friendly and supportive person. She recently finished her doctorate and offered any assistance that I might need. We talked a little bit about the process, and she told me that after the interview, if I needed anything, she would do what she could to help. I think this helped put us both at ease. Ann has had a lot of experience in many different areas. She has worked as both a full-time instructor and an adjunct instructor. She oversaw adjunct faculty for a while as well, so she was able to see things from a variety of perspectives. I felt like she provided a lot of good data. She really took the time to think through the questions before answering. I also really appreciated when she asked for clarification on the questions I asked. I was a bit surprised by some of her answers, especially how she thought COVID actually helped her build relationships with her students. That was not what I was expecting at all. This is a good example of how I need to be open-minded to the opinion of those I am interviewing.