EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES THAT PROMOTE COMPLETION: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SINGLE-PARENT COMMUNITY COLLEGE
STUDENTS IN NONCREDIT PROGRAMS

by

Esther Campbell

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University
2021
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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college in East Texas named Pine Tree College (PTC). The theory guiding this study was Tinto’s (1975) theory of student departure as it explains experiences that lead a student to dropout of higher education and not persist to completion. The student departure theory (Tinto, 1975) provided the theoretical framework for the study to answer the central research question and sub-questions: (a) What are the experiences that support noncredit program completion among single-parents in the community college context? (b) What are the successes described by single-parents who completed noncredit programs at a community college? (c) What are the barriers overcome by single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college? Participants who successfully completed a noncredit program within the last three years at PTC were selected using purposeful sampling and snowball sampling. Data was collected through individual interviews, a projective technique, and an artifact analysis and was analyzed using Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach. Data collection results revealed common experiences among single-parents who completed courses in a noncredit program at a community college. The themes that emerged were instructor support, financial support, cohort model, intrinsic motivation, and support from others. Empirical, practical, and theoretical implications of the data analysis and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Keywords: noncredit, single-parent, community college, dropout, persistence, integration
Acknowledgments

I would like to express my appreciation to the committee. Thank you, Dr. Marrero and Dr. Pannone for your wisdom, suggestions, feedback, encouragement, and support. Without your guidance, I would not be where I am today.

A special thanks to those that participated in this study. I am hopeful that community college administrators will use this information to improve the learning experiences of nontraditional and single-parent students.

Above all, I would like to thank my family. My children, Gage and Georgia, have selflessly given up spending time with me while I focused on this long educational journey. Jeff, my husband, has always had confidence in me and pushed me to keep going. My parents have always believed in me and inspired me to do my very best in all that I do.
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List of Abbreviations

American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC)
Career Technology Education (CTE)
College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ)
Continuing Education (CE)
El Camino County Career & Education Center (ECCCEC)
English as a Second Language (ESL)
General Educational Diploma (GED)
International Review Board (IRB)
Liberty University (LU)
National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
Pine Tree College (PTC)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

College completion has positive individual and societal outcomes, such as increased community involvement, reduced poverty, and decreased crime (Trostel, 2015). Students who complete college have better job prospects increased earning potential, and more assets over their lifetimes than comparable students who did not graduate from college (Long, 2018).

Nevertheless, many Americans do not complete their college degree. Even though the United States (U.S.) has the strongest system of higher education in the world, the U.S. ranked sixth in the world for adults, aged 25-64, in completing the tertiary education level [two-year or four-year degree or vocational program] (Brint, 2018; OECD, 2020). Students 25 years of age or older are referred to as nontraditional students and typically have other responsibilities, such as work or family (Deil-Amen, 2011; Meeuwisse et al., 2010). A subgroup of nontraditional students is single-parents. Throughout the U.S., 15% of students enrolled in community colleges are single-parents (Fast Facts, 2020). Balancing family, work, and school makes it more difficult for student parents to graduate (Carnevale & Smith, 2018; Douglas & Attewell, 2019; Kirp, 2019).

A better understanding regarding why some student parents complete college, while many do not complete, is needed (Dwyer, 2017; Shenoy et al., 2016). Wladis et al. (2017) determined that student parents experience time poverty, the lack of available time that can be spent towards accomplishing a goal. Student parents had approximately 10 hours per day to dedicate to college, eating, sleeping, and extracurricular activities; traditional students had approximately 21 hours per day (Wladis et al., 2017).

By comparison to universities, community colleges provide an affordable and accessible college education (Thelin, 2019). They offer credit programs that lead to a certificate or associate
degree, as well as noncredit programs, or continuing education, that teach specific skills (Miller & Kissinger, 2007; Xu & Ran, 2020). The noncredit programs are generally shorter in duration than a certificate or associate degree (D’Amico, et al., 2015). Due to their shorter duration, noncredit programs could be a good fit for nontraditional student parents who want to further their education or learn a specific skill since they experience time poverty (Mayombe, 2017; Wladis et al., 2017; Xu & Ran, 2020). While these programs benefit student parents because of their flexibility, a deeper understanding is needed of the experiences of successful student parents. Results of this study could help college leaders and instructors create or strengthen programs that promote and improve college completion rates for student parents. Also, study results may provide expansion of noncredit programs among students with dependents, as well as contribute to the literature in the field of noncredit programs in higher education.

**Background**

One of the strongest predictors of having a low-paying job is a lack of a college education (Torpey, 2018). Since 2004, the College Board has reported on the economic benefits of higher education for individuals and society (Ma et al., 2019). Belfield and Bailey (2017) shared that students with an associate degree earned an average of between $4,640 and $7,160 per year more than students who dropped out of college. Although college completion improves the lives of individuals and society, some college students do not graduate (Ma et al., 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). According to Hussar et al. (2020), the 6-year university graduation rate of students who started in fall 2012 was 62%. The 3-year community college graduation rate of students who started in fall 2015 was 33%. Low completion rates are indicative of attrition. Overall, more students enter community college than graduate (Hussar et al., 2020). This is especially true for adult community college students who are parents (Blumenstyk, 2020; Cruse
Past research demonstrates why some students dropout of college and why some students stay enrolled (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). As a result, college completers have been segmented by demographics, such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity (Ross & Bateman, 2019). Traditional students are typically 24 years of age or younger (Hussar et al., 2020). Nontraditional students are typically 25 years of age or older and have family and/or work responsibilities that can interfere with college completion (Deil-Amen, 2011; Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Examples of responsibilities that interfere with college completion among nontraditional students include childcare, household duties, work obligations, finances, and poor technical skills (Fortin et al., 2016; Koh et al., 2017; Shenoy et al., 2016; Witkowski et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2017). Thus, many nontraditional students have limited time to spend towards completing a college credential (Wladis et al., 2017). Student parents are considered nontraditional students, and therefore have a higher risk of dropping out before completing a college degree (Strauss, 2016; Xu & Ran, 2020).

Approximately two million people enter college in the U.S. each year for the first time (Shapiro et al., 2019). Around 67% of those that enter college in the U.S. each year become non-completers, or individuals who start college but do not earn a credential and are no longer enrolled, within eight years (Shapiro et al., 2019). Thirty-three percent of non-completers started and dropped out of a university, while 67% of non-completers started and dropped out of community college (Shapiro et al., 2019). Of the community college non-completers, 29% attended college for one term (Shapiro et al., 2019).

The Educause 2020 Horizon Report predicted increasing numbers of nontraditional students enrolled in higher education (Brown et al., 2020). Nontraditional students have been identified as being over the age of 25 (Deil-Amen, 2011; Glowacki-Dudka, 2019; Meeuwisse et
al., 2010; Woods & Frogge, 2017). In addition, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015) correlates characteristics of nontraditional students with age. These characteristics include being financially independent, being a single caregiver for one or more dependents, delaying entry into higher education, being employed full-time, attending college part-time, and having a general education diploma (GED) instead of a high school diploma (Deil-Amen, 2011; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; NCES, 2015; Woods & Frogge, 2017). Thus, single-parent students are a subgroup of nontraditional students. Although nontraditional student enrollment in higher education has grown, so have dropout rates (Giancola et al., 2009; Xu & Ran, 2020).

Research on nontraditional college students exists, yet little research regarding single-parent students exists (Deil-Amen, 2011; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Shenoy et al., 2016). Being a parent, working full-time, and going to school part-time can contribute to the decision to dropout of college (Giancola et al., 2009). Although the number of single-parent students enrolling in college is increasing, research is absent regarding single-parent students in higher education (Shenoy et al., 2016). Yet, single-parent students are often unnoticed.

**Historical Context**

Community colleges in America originated with the Morrill Act of 1862, also known as the Land Grant Act (Carmichael, 1951; Drury, 2003). Individuals who had been unable to access higher education for various reasons, such as agricultural and industrial workers and those less academically prepared than their peers, gained access to public education through the Morrill Act of 1862 (Carmichael, 1951; Drury, 2003). In 1890, the second Morrill Act expanded access to public colleges for minorities (Drury, 2003). As a result, the individuals who gained college admission from the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 benefited from improved social and economic conditions and educational advancements (Carmichael, 1951).
In 1901, the first independent community college in America, Joliet Junior College, was established in Chicago, Illinois by William Rainey Harper and J. Stanley Brown (Drury, 2003). By 1920, the American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC) was founded (About Us, 2020; Drury, 2003). In 1930, the AAJC established the *Junior College Journal*, which promoted research about training the mass population and the importance of vocational training (Brint & Karabel, 1991; Drury, 2003). Beginning in the 1930s, business people were consulted to determine vocational education needs for their employees (Drury, 2003). Consequently, cooperative relationships were established to form advisory committees (Drury, 2003). The community college movement grew the most in the 1960s after the baby-boomer generation became college-aged (Drury, 2003; Cohen et al., 2014).

Although community college improves the lives of Americans (Boone, 1992), only about one-third of adults 25 or older in the United States have a college degree (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Furthermore, Bailey et al. (2015) calculated that less than 40 percent of community college students complete a degree or certificate within six years. In fact, just 28% of single-parents graduate from college with a degree or certificate within six years of enrolling (American Enterprise Institute, 2018). Giancola et al. (2009) and NCES (2015) found the most likely to dropout of college are those who work, are single-parents, or are enrolled part-time. To help single-parents, part-time students, and full-time workers complete a college credential, noncredit programs have been developed (Grubb et al., 2003; Xu & Ran, 2020). Noncredit programs are short-term educational programs, and some prepare adults for industry-recognized certifications that lead to employment (D'Amico et al., 2015).

**Social Context**

The pursuit of a college education is critical to the economic success of adults in the U.S.
(Konstam et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2019). Adults who lack education and training beyond high school have a higher risk of living in poverty and being unemployed or underemployed (D’Amico et al., 2015; Mayombe, 2017; Xu & Ran, 2020). Single-parents have a greater risk of living in poverty than married couples or adults without children (Koh et al., 2017). Consequently, some adults enrolled in higher education to improve the lives of themselves and their children (Koh et al., 2017). Through education and training, single-parents can be prepared for the workforce and obtain a job earning a livable wage (Koh et al., 2017; Lynch, 2019; Stuart et al., 2014). Yet, many single-parents struggle, experience hardships, and have low levels of self-esteem and confidence, causing them to leave higher education before obtaining a credential (Damasceno, 2018; Koh et al., 2017; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018).

**Theoretical Context**

Since 1975, researchers have examined student departure (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). Experiences that lead a student to decide to dropout, fail to integrate into the college community, and leave higher education, have been blamed on a lack of positive social and academic relationships (Stuart et al., 2014; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). Support programs and services exist on college campuses, yet colleges still struggle with completion rates among nontraditional and underrepresented student populations, such as single-parents (Damasceno, 2018; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018). Much of the current literature on nontraditional student persistence support Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1992) student departure model. Many higher education institutions offer programming and services meant to build social and academic integration, ultimately resulting in persistence. However, many of those models are focused upon the more traditional college student. This study seeks to identify experiences that promoted completion among single-parents who completed courses in a noncredit program at a community college. As a
result, the study should reveal effective programs and services that will support and encourage these students to persist to completion, and expanding Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) model to nontraditional community college students.

**Situation to Self**

My parents, brother, and husband all have college degrees. Out of my grandparents, my maternal grandfather was the only family member to have a graduate degree. I found it inspiring to know he was able to attain a graduate degree from Columbia University after earning his GED. Although my dad has a graduate degree, neither of his parents did. I found it motivational to see how far my dad was able to come even though his parents did not. My paternal grandfather had an 8th-grade education and my paternal grandmother had one year of college. Although I never knew my maternal great-grandfather, I remember hearing a story that he did not know how to read or write, so he used an “X” as his signature. This has always stood out in my mind. When I was young, I could not imagine how someone could not know how to read or write. I thought everyone had the same learning and educational experiences as me. I was naïve to the fact that some people do not have the same familial support and access to resources as I did until I became a working adult and a parent.

Throughout my career, I have worked in both university and community college settings. I have witnessed students at all stages make the difficult decision to dropout and not complete a certificate or degree. I recognized that underrepresented student populations, especially single-parents, need additional support and access to resources that traditional students do not require. Single-parent student dropouts do not want to make that decision, but many are led to that choice because the college cannot provide the flexibility or support needed for them to successfully complete. Through my work experiences, I have become very aware of what a privilege it is to
be able to go to college, have family support, and earn a certificate or degree.

My personal and professional experiences combined with my philosophical assumptions serve as my motivation for conducting this study. I believe colleges have an opportunity to provide support and resources for single-parent students that will contribute to the successful completion of a college credential. The ontological philosophical assumption, where individuals construct their own perceived reality, led to this choice of research because each single-parent trying to further their education has different circumstances and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My goal in research is to convey the participants' perceptions of their lived experiences as closely as possible (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). I embrace each participant’s idea of reality by exploring various forms of evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The epistemological philosophical assumption, where researchers try to get as close as possible to the participants being studied, can only occur if participants feel comfortable with me (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). For this research study, I will not have the ability to spend long periods with the participants. Therefore, research participants might not feel completely comfortable with me, and the perceived experiences regarding the phenomenon might not be obtained (Moustakas, 1994). The axiological philosophical assumption occurs when researchers actively state their values, views, and biases within their study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Throughout this study, I plan to practice Epoché and make an intentional effort to rid my mind of my own biases and views regarding the phenomenon so that I sincerely learn about the phenomenon of single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college (Moustakas, 1994).

The social constructivism interpretive framework, where individuals attribute multiple meanings to the same lived experience, helped shape this study in hopes to find solutions to
problems single-parent students face (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By understanding the experiences that promote course completion among single-parent community college students enrolled in noncredit programs, I will be mindful of supports colleges can provide to better serve this underrepresented student population. My intent for conducting this qualitative research study is to communicate the participants' perceptions of their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This will be done by conducting individual interviews, a projective technique, and artifact analysis, and (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

**Problem Statement**

The problem is single-parent students are more prone to dropout of college than traditional students, and little is known about the experiences of single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college (Damasceno, 2018; Giancola et al., 2009; Koh et al., 2017; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018). Many single-parents live at or below the federal poverty level (Nomaguchi & Johnson, 2016; Shenoy et al., 2016). Thus, due to income levels, single-parent families are disadvantaged (Lynch, 2019; Shenoy et al., 2016; Stuart et al., 2014). Similarly, in educational settings, single-parent students are disadvantaged and face significant risk of dropping out of college before completing a degree (Damasceno, 2018; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018). Single-parent students face different problems and challenges than other adults enrolled in higher education (Safford & Stinton, 2016). For example, single-parent students have responsibilities, such as childcare and household obligations, that other students do not experience (Koh et al., 2017; Shenoy et al., 2016; Woods & Frogge, 2017). Additionally, due to low-income levels, some single-parent students are unable to afford technology resources, such as a computer or home internet (Anderson & Kumar, 2019). The increased levels of stress caused by these familial responsibilities can cause single-parent
students to fall behind, become discouraged, and decide to dropout of college (Koh et al., 2017; Nomaguchi & Johnson, 2016; Shenoy et al., 2016; Witkowski et al., 2016; Woods & Frogge, 2017). When single-parent students do not persist to completion in a noncredit program, the parents remain unemployed or underemployed and are unable to better their life or the life of their child (Shenoy et al., 2016). Earning a noncredit credential could help a single-parent student rise out of poverty, providing a better life for both the parent and the child (Koh et al., 2017).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. Noncredit programs are postsecondary education courses that do not count towards a college credential, cost less than traditional credit courses, and are aimed at individuals seeking a vocational certification (Xu & Ran, 2020). The theory guiding this study is Tinto’s student departure theory (1975) as it relates to the characteristics that cause students to leave higher education and not persist to completion. At this stage in the research, experiences that prevent success, and potentially lead to dropout, will be generally defined as barriers (Tinto, 1975). Experiences that contribute to program completion will be generally defined as integration and persistence (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993).

**Significance of the Study**

The participants of this study described the experiences that promoted completion in noncredit programs while having the pre-existing barrier of being a single-parent student at a community college. The findings of this study are significant because they could inform community colleges of programs and services aimed at promoting single-parent student college
completion (Shenoy et al., 2016). A better understanding of the types of support single-parent students require to successfully complete a noncredit program exists (Safford & Stinton, 2016). Furthermore, the findings could help college administrators and faculty improve noncredit programs that have high enrollment of single-parent students (Deil-Amen, 2011; Stuart et al., 2014).

**Theoretical Significance**

The theory guiding this study is the theory of student departure (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). This theory examines the traditional college student, not nontraditional students. However, almost half of the enrollment in community colleges is made up of nontraditional students (Fast Facts, 2020). Examining experiences that lead to dropping out (Stuart et al., 2014; Tinto, 1975), and positive social and academic student interactions (D’Amico et al., 2015; Deil-Amen, 2011; French, 2017; Tinto, 1987, 1993), could provide significant updates and expand upon the existing theory. Additionally, the results of the study could result in a better understanding of the experiences that contribute to noncredit program completion.

**Empirical Significance**

The purpose of this research study is to fill a gap in the literature to address the problem that single-parent students are more prone to dropout than traditional students, and little is known about the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college (Damasceno, 2018; Giancola et al., 2009; Koh et al., 2017; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018). As a result, little research exists regarding single-parent students in noncredit programs (Ryder & Hagedorn, 2012; Xu & Ran, 2020). The study’s themes, subthemes, and phenomenological descriptions have empirical significance because they contribute new information to the literature and support the existing literature. The findings from
interviewing single-parent students who successfully completed a noncredit program at a community college may provide significant empirical results to educational leaders that can be change agents and advocates for this underrepresented student population.

The current literature on single-parent students avers that these students, like other nontraditional students, need to experience academic and social integration to persist to completion (Shenoy et al., 2016). However, the literature lacked a study that could confirm or refute the need for academic and social integration for single-parent students in noncredit programs (Carpenter et al., 2018; Shenoy et al., 2016). Results of this study could lead to college programming geared specifically toward single-parent students (Shenoy et al., 2016). This study’s findings could offer guidance to community colleges to better serve and support single-parent students to complete a noncredit program, and possibly continue on a pathway to a credit program (Prins & Clymer, 2018). Furthermore, the results could add to the growing body of literature regarding experiences that contribute to the success of single-parent students (Cruse et al., 2019; Koh et al., 2017; Nomaguchi & Johnson, 2016; Shenoy et al., 2016).

**Practical Significance**

Students who have work, home, financial, and school responsibilities are the most likely to dropout (Shapiro et al., 2017; Woods & Frogge, 2017). Thus, single-parent students are at significant risk of dropout because of pre-existing barriers (Lynch, 2019). The results of this study could improve programs that promote persistence and completion among single-parent students. Furthermore, programs, services, and interventions that have not been considered could be developed by colleges using the results of the study to improve the educational experience of single-parent students, increasing completion rates (Shenoy et al., 2016; Stuart et al., 2014).
Research Questions

Positive social and academic interactions are important experiences students need to persist and earn a college credential (Tinto, 1987). Because single-parent students have multiple responsibilities and limitations with availability, additional methods of integration need to be examined so single-parent students can gain similar social and academic interactions as traditional students (Deil-Amen, 2011; French, 2017; Woods & Frogge, 2017). Although noncredit programs are relatively short, single-parent students still struggle to complete them because of reasons such as home and work responsibilities (D’Amico et al., 2015; Woods & Frogge, 2017). To better understand the phenomenon of single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college, research questions addressing this phenomenon were developed to guide the study.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences that support noncredit program completion among single-parents in the community college context?

Single-parent students are considered nontraditional students. The term 'nontraditional student' refers to older students, first-generation, work, and have familial responsibilities (Deil-Amen, 2011; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Woods & Frogge, 2017). A single-parent is defined as being unmarried and caring for a child (Shenoy et al., 2016). Nontraditional students are typically high-risk, low-income, and have limited abilities to obtain and comprehend essential information (Strauss, 2016). Access to support programs, services, and faculty, as well as opportunities to utilize resources, such as technology and the internet, can alleviate some stress single-parent students feel and promote student success (Deil-Amen, 2011; French, 2017; Stuart et al., 2014). The central research question was developed to address the current gap in the
research literature.

**Sub-question 1**

*What are the successes described by single-parents who completed noncredit programs at a community college?*

Nontraditional students are often academically underprepared in one or more subjects (Lynch, 2019). As nontraditional students, single-parent students are sometimes first-generation college students (Deil-Amen, 2011). Thus, family members do not know how to support or encourage single-parent students while earning a college credential (Deil-Amen, 2011; French, 2017; Shenoy et al., 2016). Community colleges can contribute to the success of single-parent students while enrolled in a noncredit program by providing programs and services that support and encourage these students (Shenoy et al., 2016). As a result, some of the barriers that prevent success are removed and increased numbers of single-parent students complete and earn a credential (Stuart et al., 2014). This sub-question could provide a better understanding of supports colleges can provide to promote success and persistence to completion.

**Sub-question 2**

*What are the barriers overcome by single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college?*

Most single-parent students have work and home responsibilities, in addition to school responsibilities (Woods & Frogge, 2017). These responsibilities cause stress and coursework can become a low priority (Shenoy et al., 2016; Witkowski et al., 2016). Additionally, these responsibilities could prevent positive social and academic integration from occurring, which could lead to dropout (D’Amico et al., 2015; Deil-Amen, 2011; French, 2017; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). This sub-question could provide a better understanding of programs and services colleges
can provide that could alleviate the stress of some barriers single-parent students face. Furthermore, this sub-question could provide a better understanding of how single-parent students who successfully completed a noncredit program overcame barriers.

**Definitions**

1. *Certification* – A time-limited credential awarded by a certification body proving specific job skills can be performed by an individual (NCES, n.d.).
2. *Community* – Positive, encouraging, and supportive relationships (Tinto, 1993).
4. *Integration* – The ability for college students to assimilate both academically and socially (Tinto, 1987).
5. *Livable Wage* – A financial status where an individual earns a fair income and can maintain an acceptable standard of living (Thompson et al., 2019).
6. *Non-Completer* - Individuals who start college but do not earn a credential and are no longer enrolled (Shapiro et al., 2019).
7. *Noncredit Program* - Targeted, fast-track industry-recognized educational programs that prepare adults for in-demand jobs (D'Amico et al., 2015).
8. *Nontraditional Student* - Students who are older than 25, first-generation, work, and have familial responsibilities (Deil-Amen, 2011; Meeuwisse et al., 2010).
9. *Persistence* – The ability of a student to continue with educational goals (Tinto, 1993).
10. *Poverty* – A financial status where an individual does not earn a livable wage or maintain an acceptable standard of living (Thompson et al., 2019).
11. *Single-parent* – A person who is unmarried and caring for a child (Shenoy et al., 2016).
12. *Time Poverty* – The lack of available time that can be spent towards accomplishing a goal (Wladis et al., 2017).

**Summary**

Investigating the problem that single-parent students are more prone to dropout than traditional students supports the purpose of this study, which is to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students enrolled in noncredit programs at a community college. In this chapter, a summary of relevant research literature, theoretical frameworks, and research questions was presented. The results of the study will describe the experiences of single-parent students and capture clusters of commonalities from individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research will have a specific focus on academic preparedness and programs and services that might influence single-parent students learning success. Studying this phenomenon seeks to fill the gap in the research literature regarding single-parent students.

This dissertation is organized into five chapters, a bibliography, and appendices. In Chapter One, the study was introduced. In Chapter Two, the literature is reviewed. The methodology is explained in Chapter Three. Chapter Four discusses the research findings. Chapter Five, a summary, conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research are presented.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this literature review is to examine what research has been conducted regarding the experiences of single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. A systematic review of the literature was conducted to describe the experiences of those single-parent students. College student dropout is a widely studied topic in the current research literature (Carnevale et al., 2018; Kirp, 2019). However, most of this research focuses on traditional students and degree programs and the experiences that contribute to persistence and completion. Although some experiences identified in current research can be applied to single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college (Fortin et al., 2016; Koh et al., 2017; Lynch et al., 2017; Shenoy et al., 2016; Witkowski et al., 2016; Woods & Frogge, 2017), Bohl et al. (2017), Ellis (2019), and Witkowski et al. (2016) suggest further research is needed that specifically targets single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college to ensure their experiences that lead to completion are represented.

Theoretical Framework

The theory guiding this study is the theory of student departure (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). This theory offers a perspective into the experiences that lead to dropout and the importance positive social and academic interactions play in promoting persistence and college completion. This theoretical lens inspired the research question and sub-questions that sought to uncover the experiences of single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. The data collection and analysis processes were also influenced by this theoretical lens, with attention being given to the experiences that promoted completion. The
theoretical framework, in addition to the related literature, suggests a framework for better understanding the experiences that promote course completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college.

When an individual decides to pursue higher education, institutions categorize an individual as either a traditional student or a nontraditional student (Deil-Amen, 2011; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Shenoy et al., 2016). Traditional students are under the age of 25 (Woods & Frogge, 2017). Nontraditional students have a higher risk of dropout (Strauss, 2016; Xu & Ran, 2020). As a result, institutions have intentional support programs and services for nontraditional students that are intended to prevent dropout and promote college completion (Prins & Clymer, 2018). These programs and services are intended for nontraditional students in degree programs (Dwyer, 2017; Shenoy et al., 2016). However, many nontraditional students enroll in noncredit programs hoping to receive continuing education units instead of college credit (Xu & Ran, 2020).

Noncredit programs do not have the same support programs and services as degree programs. As a result, more than half of nontraditional students enrolled in noncredit programs dropout before completion (Xu & Ran, 2020). Thus, understanding the experiences of single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college could result in student success.

Noncredit programs appeal to working adults because an extensive time commitment is not required like degree programs require (D’Amico et al., 2015; Xu & Ran, 2020). Between 2007 and 2012, around 38% of students enrolled in community colleges were enrolled in noncredit programs (Xu & Ran, 2020). Although noncredit programs enrolled a significant number of students, these students were not the focus of Tinto’s (1975) research. Tinto’s (1975)
theory of student departure emphasizes the impact positive social and academic relationships play in traditional student college completion. Nonetheless, using the theory of student departure as a framework should support programs and services intended specifically for nontraditional single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college (Angelle, 2017; Dwyer, 2017; Shenoy et al., 2016).

**Theory of Student Departure**

Tinto (1975) stated the purpose of the study developing the theory of student departure was to understand the characteristics of the dropout process, including what led students to this decision. To determine the reasoning behind dropout, Tinto (1975) believed a difference needed to be made between voluntary dropout and permanent dropout. An example of voluntary dropout would be when a student transfers to another institution (Tinto, 1975). An example of a permanent dropout would be when a student is forced to leave an institution due to poor academic achievement (Tinto, 1975). Additionally, Tinto (1975) believed the level of commitment a student had concerning academics, goals, and the institution where the student was enrolled, should be examined. The theory of student departure was expanded to include integration (1987), and persistence (1993).

Tinto’s (1975) departure model was based on Durkheim’s theory of suicide (1961). Durkheim’s theory stated suicide occurred more when individuals did not have meaningful relationships with others (Durkheim, 1961). In other words, if an individual lacks meaningful interactions with others, their personal values could diverge from society and lead them to the decision to commit suicide (Durkheim, 1961). Tinto (1975) described colleges as being both academic and social systems where students could develop meaningful relationships and
integrate into. Consequently, dropout could occur when college students did not have meaningful social and academic relationships with others at the college they attended.

Both academic interactions and social interactions should be focused on preventing dropout (Tinto, 1975). Academic integration is the student’s ability to develop intellectually and become secure with the academic part of college. Indicators of academic integration are grades and the ability to develop higher academic levels. Social integration occurs when a student develops relationships and obligations outside of the classroom. For example, indicators of social integration are extracurricular activities and social functions.

Social and academic interactions help explain factors that prevent dropout and contribute to completion (Tinto, 1975). As a result of poor academic and social integration, students might voluntarily withdraw from college, be dismissed due to poor grades, transfer to another institution, or permanently dropout (Tinto, 1975). Thus, Tinto (1975) concluded positive academic and social interactions and relationships were critical to preventing dropout and promote persistence and college completion.

Tinto (1987) further developed the student departure model focusing on institutional exchanges. The results indicated that students who become dedicated to a college, both academically and socially, are expected to persist and earn college credentials. Institutional integration occurs when faculty and staff are informed of the importance that social and academic interactions have on students. Individuals in a group must accept and affiliate with others in the group to persist (Tinto, 1987). However, Tinto (1993) believed that even if students were fully integrated into a college, they might not persist to completion if external conflicts arise. For example, nontraditional students are the first in their families to attend college (Deil-Amen, 2011). In addition, many are enrolled part-time, spend limited amounts of time on
campus, and are parents (Deil-Amen, 2011; Shenoy et al., 2016). This causes problems when developing relationships with classmates and finding a balance between academic and social expectations (French, 2017). Therefore, it can be difficult to develop and maintain relationships with peers and faculty (French, 2017; Tinto, 1987).

Tinto added to the student departure theory by comparing persistence between undergraduate and graduate students, and proposed student persistence depended on how individuals function within social and academic systems (Tinto, 1993). Interactions with students who have similar external responsibilities and experiences and interactions with the college play an important role in integration (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) found that, in specialized programs and with specialized groups of students, smaller communities exist within the larger campus community. One such community is single-parent students. They are a smaller community of students that exist within the larger nontraditional student campus community. However, single-parent students have external responsibilities, such as work and family, that other nontraditional students do not typically experience (Koh et al., 2017; Shenoy et al., 2016; Woods & Frogge, 2017). Indeed, single-parent students could be at higher risk of dropout if these academic and social interactions are nonexistent (Tinto, 1993).

In fact, Tinto (1997) expanded his theory by discussing the importance of student engagement and integration within the classroom, which could further support nontraditional students. Students that interact and collaborate with the instructor and other students within the classroom could feel academically and socially integrated (Tinto, 1997). Students should be committed to actively engage with others in the classroom, not just simply show up to class (Tinto, 1997). Thus, students with various characteristics and backgrounds, such as traditional students, nontraditional students, part-time students, and full-time students could collaborate,
learn from each other, and gain a sense of community and belonging, which could promote persistence, and lead to graduation (Tinto, 1997).

**Tinto’s Model of Departure**

Tinto’s model of departure is highly respected and provides a framework for understanding student dropout behavior (Kember, 1995). It can be viewed as a longitudinal process of interactions between an individual and the college (Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto (1993), a student decides to persist or dropout as a result of pre-existing individual characteristics, such as skills and prior educational experiences, and their sense of academic and social integration to the college. The topics in Tinto’s (1993) model include pre-entry attributes, goals and commitments, institutional experiences, and academic and social integration. These topics speak to the importance that integration, positive experiences, and support programs and services play in supporting single-parent students persist to completion. (Tinto, 1993)

Pre-entry attributes include family background, skills and abilities, and prior educational experiences (Tinto, 1993). Although post-entry attributes also play a significant role in the persistence of single-parent students, the pre-entry attributes provide insight into understanding how an individual will respond to the college environment, and ultimately whether or not an individual will persist to completion (Tinto, 1993). Pre-entry attributes of students were examined to gain an understanding of what influences learning and persistence (Tinto, 1993).

Goals and commitments include intentions, educational and career goals, motivation, and external commitments (Tinto, 1993). The goals and commitments of an individual, such as intrinsic motivation, family, and work responsibilities, affect the student throughout their college experience (Tinto, 1993). Supportive influences increase the student’s level of commitment and promote persistence (Tinto, 1993). The goals and commitments of a student determine how the
various experiences that are encountered while in college are responded to (Tinto, 1993). Thus, student goals and commitments were examined to understand how those factors impact persistence (Tinto, 1993).

Institutional experiences include academic and social experiences and interactions (Tinto, 1993). Academic and social interactions within the college affected a student’s decision to persist or dropout (Tinto, 1993). Positive interactions within the college, such as with college staff and faculty, increased student satisfaction, promoted student integration, and reinforced students’ academic commitment (Tinto, 1993). Likewise, experiences outside of the college can affect a student’s decision to persist or dropout (Tinto, 1993). A student could be negatively influenced if those the student interacts with externally do not see value in college (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, institutional experiences played an important role in the persistence of students (Tinto, 1993).

Academic and social integration included a student’s engagement, involvement, and sense of belonging within the college (Tinto, 1993). Student integration impacted persistence and graduation. Positive college integration promoted persistence, while negative college integration reduced a student’s personal desire to persist to completion (Tinto, 1993). Academic and social integration influenced a student’s decision to persist (Tinto, 1993).

Community College Students

Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) studied university students, not community college students. Community colleges differ from universities that serve traditional-age students. In addition to serving traditional-age students, community colleges serve diverse populations, noncredit or continuing education students, high school students enrolled in dual credit, senior citizens committed to lifelong learning, and working adults (Xu & Ran, 2020). Open-admissions policies
at community colleges offer opportunities for all adults to study post-secondary education courses (Iloh, 2018). The diverse student population deserves to be examined further.

One subset of this diverse population is single-parent students. Those enrolled in noncredit programs could be considered one of the specialized groups of students within the larger community. Noncredit programs are industry-recognized certifications that prepare adults for employment (D'Amico et al., 2015). Thus, student persistence is strongly grounded in community (Tinto, 1993). Although Tinto (1993) did not intend to explain the development of community, his research provided a foundational lens to view social and academic systems. Tinto (1993) proposed that student persistence depended on how individuals function within social and academic systems (Zahl, 2015). The extent and quality of the interactions in the social and academic systems determined the degree to which students became integrated and ultimately persisted to college completion (Tinto, 1993).

Yet, Tinto’s theory of student departure only considered the nature of interactions confined within the institution where the student is enrolled (Stuart, et al., 2014; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 1993). Tinto's (1993) model focused on students who live on campus, not on students who live off-campus and must commute, like some nontraditional students (Dwyer, 2017; Walker & Okpala, 2017). Nevertheless, nontraditional students, specifically single-parent students, have external interactions and obligations, such as family and work, in addition to interactions within the institution. These external relationships were not considered by Tinto’s theory (1975, 1987, 1993). In fact, these relationships influence a students’ decision to persist or dropout (Stuart et al., 2014).

Thus, Tinto’s theory of student departure could be used to predict experiences that promote course completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at
a community college. Positive relationships with peers and faculty serve as a source of encouragement and support persistence for students (Dwyer, 2017; Tinto, 1993; Zahl, 2015). Yet, building relationships and a sense of community can be difficult for students (French, 2017; Tinto, 1987). Therefore, interactions within the classroom become even more important for students to persist to completion (Dwyer, 2017). Encouraging meaningful interactions between faculty and students within the classroom and providing convenient opportunities for academic and social interactions outside of the classroom, show institutional commitment to promote persistence for all students (Dwyer, 2017).

The following review of related literature synthesizes how positive social and academic relationships promote persistence and college completion. Furthermore, this study will attempt to provide additional support for Tinto’s theory of student departure. Experiences of single-parents who completed courses in a noncredit program at a community college will be examined.

**Related Literature**

As the theory of student departure (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993) provided a theoretical framework for the study, the related literature offers a contextual background for this study. A variety of experiences have been identified that contribute to college completion among nontraditional students. Each of these experiences promoted the academic or social integration of these students. Single-parent students fall under the nontraditional student umbrella (Glowacki-Dudka, 2019; Rabourn et al., 2018).

Although many colleges focus on recruiting students into degree programs, some students might be better suited to begin their college experience in a short-term noncredit program (Xu & Ran, 2020). Because noncredit programs are relatively short and end with the student earning an industry-recognized credential, noncredit programs might be perceived as more attainable than
degree programs that take multiple years to achieve (D’Amico et al., 2015). Single-parent students who enroll in a noncredit program can earn an industry-recognized credential and enter the workforce after dedicating a short amount of time to their education (Koh et al., 2017; Stuart et al., 2014; Xu & Ran, 2020).

Nontraditional students are defined as being over the age of 25, might attend college part-time, are employed, could have dependents, and delayed postsecondary enrollment (Deil-Amen, 2011; Glowacki-Dudka, 2019; Meeuwisee et al., 2010; NCES, 2015; Woods & Frogge, 2017). Almost half of community college enrollment is made up of nontraditional students (Fast Facts, 2020). In fact, Brown et al. (2020) predict nontraditional student enrollment will continue to increase. Thus, noncredit students on college campuses will become a more prominent group. Yet, these students are at higher risk of dropout than traditional students (Strauss, 2016; Xu & Ran, 2020). Xu and Ran (2020) found more than half of the nontraditional students in noncredit programs dropout of college after the first term. Understanding the experiences of nontraditional students who completed community college could prevent future nontraditional student dropout and improve college graduation. Furthermore, a better understanding of single-parent students in college could promote program completion, and improve the economic and social status of single-parent families (Horn et al., 2018).

Community Colleges

Community colleges have contributed greatly to the communities they serve and to American higher education by providing academic courses, career technology education (CTE), and continuing education (CE) (D’Amico, 2017; Xu & Ran, 2020). Any adult student can enroll in community college classes since the colleges have an open-admissions policy (Iloh, 2018). Thus, community colleges cut “across ethnic lines, socioeconomic classes, educational interests,
geographical boundaries, and generations and bring people together so that not only their
differences but also their common interest and needs can be acknowledged and valued” (Witt &

Initially, community colleges offered transfer courses to universities (Xu & Ran, 2020). Over time, CTE courses and CE courses were added (Stevens et al., 2019). CTE classes are a partnership between community colleges and employers in the private sector to train workers for careers that meet local needs (Xu & Ran, 2020). This job training was found to have positive, long-term effects on employment (Card et al., 2015). CE courses are noncredit and teach specific skills which grant professional credentials, such as allied health, protective services, business, and industry (Xu & Ran, 2020). Consequently, individuals who are employed and want to advance in their career field may enroll in CE classes (Cicutto et al., 2017; Mayombe, 2017; Xu & Ran, 2020). In addition, CE may teach adult basic education, developmental, remedial, and college-preparatory courses (D’Amico, 2017).

**Noncredit Programs**

Although vast amounts of research exist regarding credit programs, little research exists regarding noncredit programs (Ryder & Hagedorn, 2012; Xu & Ran, 2020). Noncredit programs serve multiple purposes for community college students (Grubb et al., 2003). First, noncredit programs provide targeted, fast-track industry-recognized educational programs that prepare adults for in-demand jobs (D’Amico et al., 2015; Grubb et al., 2003). Second, these industry-recognized training programs can upskill and reskill adults with low education levels or those who might be stuck in a low-paying job, reducing unemployment and poverty levels (Mayombe, 2017; Xu & Ran, 2020). Third, noncredit programs provide adult basic education, such as high school equivalency/GED preparation for those who left high school prematurely or did not earn a
diploma, and English as a second language (ESL) classes (Grubb et al., 2003; Ryder & Hagedorn, 2012; Xu & Ran, 2020). Finally, these programs provide personal enrichment opportunities to adults who want to improve or learn new skills (Grubb et al., 2003; Xu & Ran, 2020). Undoubtedly, noncredit programs provide adults with access to higher education and marketable skills that speak to employers (Grubb et al., 2003; Xu & Ran, 2020).

**Noncredit Program Pathways**

After completing a noncredit program, students might decide to continue on a pathway to earn a degree (Xu & Ran, 2020). The industry-recognized credential earned in the noncredit program allows the student to obtain a job earning a livable wage (Horn et al., 2018) and gives the individual a strong foundation to be successful in a degree program (Fouts & Mallory, 2010). For example, a single-parent student could enroll in the Nurse Aide noncredit program. At the end of the program, the student could become a Certified Nurse Aide and gain employment in a nursing home. After gaining employment in the nursing home, the single-parent might decide to continue his or her education and enroll in the Registered Nurse credit degree program. The single-parent student would be able to work alongside healthcare professionals as a Certified Nurse Aide while enrolled in the Registered Nurse credit degree program, and could apply what is being learned in class with what the individual does at work. Noncredit program pathways that lead to a degree promote greater social and economic mobility (Horn et al., 2018; Xu & Ran, 2020).

**Adult Learning**

Adult learners, also known as nontraditional students, wear many hats throughout the day, such as a parent, employee, and head-of-house (Glowacki-Dudka, 2019). Thus, adult learners must focus their time, energy, and finances on multiple areas (Glowacki-Dudka, 2019;
Although the number of adult learners in college continues to increase, adult learners continue to face barriers to success because higher education institutions continue to develop programs and services that favor traditional students (Fortin et al., 2016; Rabourn et al., 2018). Examining subgroups of nontraditional students might identify ways to assist and support persistence to completion (Glowacki-Dudka, 2019; Rabourn et al., 2018).

**Andragogy**

The adult learning theory, also known as andragogy, is a term used to describe the art and science of adult education (Knowles, 1973; Knowles et al, 2015). Adult learners are over the age of 25 and are sometimes financially independent, work, are the single caregiver of dependents, and have delayed postsecondary enrollment (NCES, 2015). Knowles (1973) suggested that adult students are more self-directed in learning than their younger peers. In other words, once integrated into campus, adult learners typically take responsibility and initiative when it comes to their educational experience (Knowles, 1973). Due to the differences between traditional students and adult learners, educators should consider andragogy and pedagogy when planning and organizing programs and services intended to promote student success (Zerquera et al., 2018).

**Adult Learner Needs**

In educational settings, adult learners lack confidence, need additional support and training, and require a structured program (Damasceno, 2018; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018). Perhaps, this is because nontraditional students are typically high-risk, low-income, and have limited abilities to obtain and comprehend essential information (Strauss, 2016; Xu & Ran, 2020). Working adults enter college programs because they seek promotion with their current job, or have a minimum wage paying job and want to further their education to obtain a job.
paying a livable wage (Horn et al., 2018; Koh et al., 2017; Lynch, 2019; Stuart et al., 2014). As well, many single-parents enter higher education because they want to better their lives and the lives of their children (Shenoy et al., 2016).

Community colleges provide training to adult learners, yet challenges exist when assisting these students (Glowacki-Dudka, 2019). Specifically, some adult learners lack technology skills (Lynch, 2017; Rabourn et al., 2018) and have poor time management abilities (Prins & Clymer, 2018). Mallows (2018) found that these students needed the institution to provide support, such as tutoring and guidance, to persist to completion. Moreover, Prins and Clymer (2018) found that many college programs are not structured for students with limited education. Consequently, to be successful in a college program, nontraditional students require additional forms of support and training and perform best with a structured program (Damasceno, 2018; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018).

**Adult Learner Skill Levels**

Challenges exist for nontraditional students who enter higher education (Safford & Stinton, 2016). Supporting students in multiple ways is a challenge faced by higher education leaders. Many of the nontraditional students in noncredit education programs are digitally illiterate and are considered low-income (Anderson & Kumar, 2019; Safford & Stinton, 2016; Xu & Ran, 2020). For this reason, many do not own a computer, tablet, or have access to broadband internet at home (Anderson & Kumar, 2019). In other words, they cannot find, evaluate, or share information, and barriers to success exist from the start (Lynch, 2017). To integrate, retain, and support nontraditional students in persisting to completion, Rabourn et al. (2018) and Stuart et al. (2014) suggested community college leaders implement and manage changes to help resolve this issue.
Past Experiences

When an adult enters higher education, they bring life experience and diverse knowledge, such as work experience, that they can share with others (Glowacki-Dudka, 2019; Sun, 2019). Although traditional students could learn from nontraditional students' past experiences, some adult learner students do not feel their experiences are welcomed by the campus community (Witkowsky et al., 2016). Some adult learners have previous higher education experience but were unable to graduate (Bohl et al., 2017). Many adult learners enter or re-enter higher education after the age of 25 (Deil-Amen, 2011; Glowacki-Dudka, 2019; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Woods & Frogge, 2017). Thus, gaps in education exist for adult learners that do not exist for traditional students (Bohl et al., 2017). As a result, these students must overcome learning curves and adapt to technology to keep up with their traditional student classmates (Bohl et al., 2017). Thus, the feeling of being unwelcome, the gap in the educational experience, and the deficit in technological skills, cause some adult learners to feel disconnected and disinTEGRATED to the institution (Fortin et al., 2016; Tinto, 1975; Witkowsky et al., 2016).

Single-parent Students in Higher Education

An Educational Attainment (2019) Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau found over 28% of adults between the ages of 25 and older had a high school diploma, and over 9% had less than a high school diploma. The American Association of Community Colleges Fast Facts (2020) found 15% of students enrolled in community colleges throughout the United States were single-parents. Crabtree and Kluch (2020) and Cruse et al. (2019) found single-parents are likely to have housing and food insecurities. Consequently, parent students that pursue a higher education seek greater social and economic mobility, and understand the best path to secure a job that pays a living wage is to earn a postsecondary credential, such as a noncredit industry-
recognized certification (Horn et al., 2018). Although some nontraditional students take longer than traditional students to complete college, they are motivated to persist to completion to improve their children's lives (Cruse et al., 2019; Horn et al., 2018; Koh et al., 2017).

Reducing Poverty

The U.S. Census Bureau found some single-parent homes live below 200% of the federal poverty level (Vespa et al., 2013; Xu & Ran, 2020). Undoubtedly, many single-parents are disadvantaged and would benefit from successfully completing a noncredit program that could lead directly into employment (Shenoy et al., 2016; Stuart et al., 2014). Completing a noncredit program could improve the social and economic status of a single-parent (Shenoy et al., 2016; Vespa et al., 2013). Additionally, when a single-parent can successfully complete a higher education program, a positive impact will be made on the educational attainment of the completer’s children (Koh et al., 2017).

Dropout Predictors

Retaining students in a college program is a challenge for many higher education institutions (Fortin et al., 2016; Stuart et al., 2014). Nontraditional students are at higher risk of dropout than other students (Strauss, 2016). Multiple barriers to success exist for these students, such as increased stress levels, childcare, household duties, and work obligations (Koh et al., 2017; Shenoy et al., 2016; Witkowski et al., 2016). Additionally, other factors, such as finances, lack of knowledge of institutional support programs and services, poor technical skills, and deficits in learning, contribute to experiences that lead to dropout (Fortin et al., 2016; Shenoy et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2017). Sadly, the pressures felt by nontraditional students, and the multiple roles they must play can cause classwork to slip and become a low priority (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Shenoy et al., 2016).
Factors that Promote Single-parent Student Persistence

Nontraditional students are more likely to attend college part-time and spend less time on campus due to non-academic responsibilities, such as parenting and home responsibilities (Beeler, 2016; Deil-Amen, 2011; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Shenoy et al., 2016; Woods & Frogge, 2017). Obviously, nontraditional students have the same academic responsibilities as their counterparts (Deil-Amen, 2011; French, 2017). The non-academic responsibilities, on top of academic responsibilities, can add stress to students, negatively impacting their mental health and well-being (Nomaguchi & Johnson, 2016; Shenoy et al., 2016; Witkowski et al., 2016; Woods & Frogge, 2017). Although nontraditional students have additional responsibilities that could be perceived as barriers, many of these students are highly motivated to persist to completion because they want to improve the lives of their children (Cruse et al., 2019; Horn et al., 2018; Koh et al., 2017).

Mental Health and Well-Being of Single-parent Students

All members of an institution play a significant role in the well-being of the institution and those the institution serves (Crippen, 2010; Greenleaf, 1977). The common good of all students, regardless of student need, should be the goal of an institution (Crippen, 2010). Educators have a moral obligation to influence not only students' minds but also their hearts, by encouraging students to grow into morally grounded leaders as they interact in the world beyond the college (Campbell, et al., 2017). Yet, college can be very difficult for single-parent students due to the lack of support systems (Shenoy et al., 2016). Positive interactions within a classroom and on campus build trust between faculty and student, as well as build confidence and motivation within the student (Campbell et al., 2017; Crippen, 2010). Additionally, these positive interactions make a positive impact on the life of a student and promote a caring and
supportive learning community (Campbell et al., 2017; Crippen, 2010). When single-parent students believe in themselves, they are more likely to believe they can persist to completion (Campbell et al., 2017; Shenoy et al., 2016).

**Motivation**

Nontraditional students exhibit different motivational factors than traditional students (Johnson et al., 2016). In fact, Johnson et al. (2016) stated that understanding the differing motivational factors between nontraditional students and traditional students could be useful to higher education institutions when developing and improving programs and services. Students who feel integrated, both socially and academically, and have a sense of belonging, are more motivated to persist to completion (Fortin et al., 2016; Tinto, 1975). Furthermore, students who persisted to completion listed professional growth, personal goals, and internal motivation as impacting their desire to complete college (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Yang et al., 2017). Above all, many nontraditional students stated their children were the driving force motivating them to persist to college completion (Bohl et al., 2017; Cruse et al., 2019; Horn et al., 2018; Koh et al., 2017; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Lovell, 2014; Woods & Frogge, 2017).

**Factors that Promote Academic Integration**

Institutions face issues of recruitment, attrition, retention, and completion of nontraditional students. Encouraging adults who are unemployed or underemployed to further their education is an important mission of many colleges (D’Amico et al., 2015; Mayombe, 2017; Xu & Ran, 2020). Students who feel integrated into an institution are more likely to persist to completion (Tinto, 1975; Walker & Okpala, 2017). Resources provided by institutions can help with persistence when students feel like a support system and a community exist. Tinto
(1975) stated dropout could occur when college students lacked meaningful relationships within the college and resources from the college.

**Community College Leadership Practices**

The ideal leader in higher education has been described as possessing and implementing a set of characteristics and practices that improve the institution and encourage continuous improvement (Angelle, 2017; Walker & Okpala, 2017). When educational leaders created and cultivated an inclusive learning environment, students felt integrated and a part of the campus community (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Tinto, 1993; Walker & Okpala, 2017). Yet, some faculty and staff might have biases, or unconscious biases, towards nontraditional students (Zerquera et al., 2018). These pre-conceived notions can negatively impact the experience of students (Zerquera et al., 2018). Consequently, a negative experience can negatively impact the student perception of the college, which, in turn, could negatively impact retention and persistence (Fortin et al., 2016; Rabourn et al., 2018; Tinto, 1993). Colleges that understand the unique needs and challenges of nontraditional students are more effective in serving those students (Damasceno, 2018; Glowacki-Dudka; 2019; Mallows; 2018; Prins & Clymer; 2018; Sun, 2019).

In higher education settings, some nontraditional students lack trust and confidence, needing additional support and training (Damasceno, 2018; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018). A supportive learning environment for students lacking trust and confidence can be built (Campbell et al., 2017; Sahawneh & Benuto, 2018). According to Sahawneh and Benuto (2018), trusting relationships are achieved when faculty show behaviors, such as personal interest, empathy, and motivation to students. In programs where an educator has built the classroom on mutual respect and trust, students are more inclined to share genuine thoughts and feelings (Campbell et al., 2017). An atmosphere of inclusion, collaboration, and innovation is developed
when students feel comfortable to state ideas and opinions, ask questions, and make suggestions (Norris et al., 2017; Walker & Okpala, 2017).

**Course Delivery and Content**

Traditional college programs do not fit the time constraints and non-academic responsibilities of nontraditional students (Prins & Clymer, 2018; Rabourn et al., 2018; Sun, 2018; Woods & Frogge, 2017). Coursework due dates, attendance policies, and policies regarding children in the classroom and on campus do not cultivate a campus culture that considers different groups of students and their various needs (Beeler, 2016; Mkhatshwa, & Hoffman, 2019). Beeler (2016) recommended changes to campus policies be made to consider and support nontraditional student success.

When creating course schedules, some institutions offer course options that accommodate nontraditional students, such as weekend programs and blended programs (Beeler, 2016; Rabourn et al., 2018). Weekend programs offer classes on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday to accommodate working adults. Blended programs allow students to participate in both synchronous and asynchronous class activities (Mkhatshwa, & Hoffman, 2019; Rabourn et al., 2018). For example, if the child of a student becomes ill, the student can still participate and not get behind in coursework (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Shenoy et al., 2016). Additionally, when faculty include multiple learning platforms as part of their class, class participation increases (Mkhatshwa, & Hoffman, 2019; Rabourn et al., 2018; Vie, 2017). Utilizing multiple platforms, such as lectures, books, videos, social media, and articles allowed students to gain knowledge and seek out more information (Khaisang & Koraneekij, 2019; Rabourn et al., 2018; Vie, 2017). The ability to learn from multiple platforms built confidence for nontraditional students
As a consequence, students were more comfortable in the learning environment (Damasceno, 2018).

**Faculty and Staff Mentorship**

Mentors impacted the performance, engagement, and motivation of students (Tomal, 2016; Witkowski et al., 2016). The concept of a faculty or staff mentor is usually perceived as positive and optimistic (Heyler & Martin, 2018). Mentorship programs increase the faculty-student or staff-student relationship (Heyler & Martin, 2018; Rabourn et al., 2018). Mentees gained a sense of belonging (Norris et al., 2017). Through mentorship programs, faculty and staff invested time in the lives of students outside of the classroom (Heyler & Martin, 2018; Norris et al., 2017), and encouraged students to persist (Dwyer, 2017; Shenoy et al., 2016). Mentorship connected students to the college, added value to their college experience, and encouraged retention and college graduation (Norris et al., 2017).

**Institutional Services**

Some institutions have implemented changes and managed services to support single-parent students (Shenoy et al., 2016). This was achieved through professional development opportunities that specifically trained college employees on how to guide, assist, and serve nontraditional students (Bohl et al., 2017; Sun, 2018; Witkowski et al., 2016). Many nontraditional students need a structured program and access to faculty and campus resources, such as computer labs and the library (Dwyer, 2017; French, 2017). Furthermore, Rabourn et al. (2018) and Sun (2018), recommended faculty and campus offices offer virtual office hours to increase access and availability for nontraditional students who are unable to spend time on campus. Additionally, this allowed faculty and staff to check on students, and remain updated on their well-being (Bohl et al., 2017; Rabourn et al., 2018).
Factors that Promote Social Integration

Many nontraditional students are at higher risk of dropping out of college and have responsibilities beyond academics (Damasceno, 2018; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018; Strauss, 2016; Xu & Ran, 2020). Enhanced institutional support systems geared specifically towards nontraditional students lowered the risk of dropping out of college and lessened the burden of some of the nontraditional student responsibilities (Carpenter et al., 2018; French, 2017; Shenoy et al., 2016). For example, a college that worked with the local workforce board to find jobs allowed nontraditional students the flexibility to take care of their children while attending college (Carnevale & Smith, 2018).

Childcare

Many nontraditional students listed adequate childcare as the biggest barrier they faced while attending college (Bohl et al., 2017; Mkhatshwa & Hoffman, 2019; Xu & Ran, 2020; Witkowsky et al., 2016). Breaks in college enrollment and attendance occurred when students did not have childcare for their children (Cruse et al., 2019; Horn et al., 2018; Koh et al., 2017). To help students complete college on time, some colleges created more child-oriented spaces and affordable child-oriented programs around campus (Beeler, 2016; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018). These students did not have to choose between their educational goals and their children (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018). Progressive college experiences positively influenced the life and educational attainment of both the parent and the child (Beeler, 2016; Shenoy et al., 2016).

Institutional Influence on Student Engagement

Students who have a connection to the campus community and are engaged in the academic environment are more motivated to persist to completion, know where to seek out resources and support, and understand the importance that higher education plays towards their
future life and career goals (Walls, 2016; Xerri et al., 2018). Active student engagement positively impacted skill development, self-image, and moral and ethical development (Walls, 2016). Furthermore, students who were actively engaged in the campus community and academic environment experienced greater academic success, higher levels of motivation, and fewer behavioral and health issues (Sanders et al., 2018; Sulkowski, 2016). Positive academic outcomes resulted when students gained a sense of belonging and felt supported and cared for from the academic environment (Sander et al., 2018; Walls, 2016; Xerri et al., 2018).

**Institutional Influence on Persistence**

Many institutional programs are targeted to students in degree programs (Bohl et al., 2017). Consequently, services promoting successful completion for single-parent students are lacking. These services include flexible class schedules and campus resources, such as the library and computer labs remaining open during evenings and weekends (Rabourn et al., 2018; Sun, 2018). Access to faculty outside of the classroom helped some nontraditional students succeed (Dwyer, 2017). Adequate and affordable childcare services and child-friendly study spaces helped students (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018). Creating awareness of family-friendly spaces on campus and scheduling family-friendly activities helped nontraditional students and their children feel welcome and integrated on campus (Bohl et al., 2017; Witkowski et al., 2016).

**Community Influence on Persistence**

Some community organizations provide support and resources for college students who need assistance with nonacademic barriers, such as rent, food, transportation, utilities, childcare, and healthcare (Waters et al., 2019). The provided support and resources benefit students, their families, and the community by improving academic performance, strengthening the workforce, promoting healthy lifestyles, and reducing potentially dangerous student behaviors (Rogers et al.,
Some community organizations require students who qualify and accept assistance to participate in required activities and programming (Waters et al., 2019). The required activities and programming include classes that develop leadership skills, conflict resolution training, positive parenting, financial literacy, and career readiness (Rogers et al., 2018). As a result, students are provided opportunities to build their sense of community by connecting with students and mentors in a positive, encouraging atmosphere (Waters et al., 2019). Consequently, students experienced a higher sense of self-worth because they were able to maintain everyday necessities, which promoted academic persistence and completion (Gupton, 2017; Waters et al., 2019).

Experiences of Single-parent Students

The above review of the literature included a synthesis of experiences that have been identified that contribute to college completion among traditional and nontraditional students, including single-parent students. However, it is important to separate the information to fully understand the similarities and differences between these groups of students. Furthermore, vast amounts of research regarding nontraditional students exist, but research is absent regarding single-parents who completed courses in a noncredit program at a community college (Deil-Amen, 2011; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Shenoy et al., 2016).

The Single-parent Student Profile

Nontraditional students who completed courses in noncredit programs are underserved and face multiple barriers to college success (Damasceno, 2018; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018; Yakabowski, 2010). Barriers include adequate and affordable childcare (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018), campus resources, such as course schedules outside of traditional campus hours (Rabourn et al., 2018; Sun, 2018), and family-friendly spaces on campus (Bohl et al.,
These barriers to college success could negatively impact student college experiences, and if not addressed, could cause students to dropout of college (Austin & McDermott, 2003; Stuart et al., 2014; Yakabowski, 2010). By addressing these barriers, single-parents who enroll in courses in a noncredit program at a community college could experience increased support and guidance that could lead to college graduation, resulting in greater retention and completion rates for the institution (French, 2017).

**Benefits of Enrolling in a Noncredit Program**

Noncredit programs provide training for industry-recognized certifications for in-demand jobs (D'Amico et al., 2015; Grubb et al., 2003). These industry-recognized training programs can upskill and reskill individuals (Mayombe, 2017; Xu & Ran, 2020). Through adult basic education, noncredit programs can prepare individuals for a high school equivalency, a GED, or ESL, which improves English language reading, writing, and speaking skills (Grubb et al., 2003; Ryder & Hagedorn, 2012; Xu & Ran, 2020). Completing noncredit programs can build confidence in adults who might have low levels of confidence and feel that college is not attainable (Damasceno, 2018; Koh et al., 2017; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018). Thus, noncredit programs are the beginning of an educational path (Xu & Ran, 2020).

**College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ)**

Tinto (2012) recommended topics for colleges to focus on that could improve student retention, persistence, and completion. The topics include expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement (Tinto, 2012). As a result of focusing on these topics, improvements could be made that would promote student success (Tinto, 2012).

First, to promote success, students should set high expectations for themselves, and instructors should set high expectations for students (Tinto, 2012). Second, academic support,
financial support, and social support should be provided to students to remove barriers that arise (Tinto, 2012). Barriers mentioned by Tinto (2012) include lack of social integration and academic integration. Next, colleges should communicate regularly and provide frequent feedback to students to encourage continuous improvement and learning (Tinto, 2012). Finally, students should be encouraged to get involved in curricular and co-curricular activities (Tinto, 2012). Tinto (2012) asserted that when all four topics were addressed and met, students would be more likely to persist to successful completion.

Using Tinto’s (2012) suggested college actions, the College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) was developed. To determine what characteristics of the student college experience were associated with retention and persistence, large-scale student sample studies utilizing the CPQ have been conducted to evaluate freshman student persistence (Davidson et al., 2009; Davidson et al., 2015; Muller et al., 2017). Additionally, researchers have used the CPQ to learn more about how student involvement impacted retention, and how meaningful campus interventions could increase retention (Muller et al., 2017). By assessing a student’s perspective of persistence, colleges improved institutional practices and student outcomes (Davidson et al., 2015; Muller et al., 2017). The CPQ consists of 69 questions that are rated on a five-point Likert scale (Davidson et al., 2015). Factors and item topics include institutional commitment, academic integration, financial strain, social integration, scholastic conscientiousness, motivation to learn, degree commitment, collegiate stress, advising effectiveness, and academic efficacy (Davidson et al., 2015).

**Student Experiences**

The CPQ measures institutional commitment, academic integration, financial strain, social integration, scholastic conscientiousness, motivation to learn, degree commitment,
collegiate stress, advising effectiveness, and academic efficacy (Davidson et al., 2015; Muller et al., 2017). The value a student places on earning a degree is referred to as degree commitment (Davidson et al., 2009). To gain an understanding of how a student's degree commitment is related to persistence, the CPQ asks questions regarding a student's intentions to complete a degree and degree completion obstacles (Davidson et al., 2015). Additionally, the CPQ asks questions regarding how a student perceives the thoughts and feelings family members might have if the student decides to dropout, and the support and encouragement desired from family and friends while earning a degree (Davidson et al., 2015). Since these questions have been proven valid and reliable, they should be taken into account when interviewing single-parent students (American Educational Research Association, 2014). An understanding of validity and reliability allows the interviewer to use questions that may result in meaningful data that higher education administrators can use to make decisions that could improve the lives and experiences of single-parent students (American Educational Research Association, 2014).

Academic integration refers to how a student perceives the curriculum provided by a college, and how it contributes to their educational goals (Davidson et al., 2009). To understand how academic integration is related to persistence, the CPQ asks questions regarding a student's perception of the accuracy of course descriptions, course offerings, classroom engagement, and testing (Davidson et al., 2015). Additionally, student perceptions regarding instructor quality, instructor feedback, perception of the sense of belonging and growth within the classroom, and understanding instructor expectations are asked to understand academic integration (Davidson et al., 2015).

Social integration is related to a student’s sense of belonging with fellow students and the college environment (Davidson et al., 2009). To see how social integration relates to persistence,
the CPQ asks students questions regarding their perception of experiences that occur outside of the classroom (Davidson et al., 2009). For example, questions regarding the impact other students play on personal and intellectual growth, commonalities with classmates, sense of community, social life satisfaction, and feelings and impressions of other students are asked (Davidson et al., 2015).

Support services, such as academic advising, have been found to play an important role in student persistence (Davidson et al., 2009). To gain an understanding of how advising effectiveness impacts persistence, the CPQ asks questions regarding a student's personal experiences with academic advising, including satisfaction and effectiveness of services (Davidson et al., 2015). Additionally, questions regarding communication from the academic advising center and the efficiency of academic advising processes are asked (Davidson et al., 2015).

Scholastic conscientiousness, motivation to learn, and academic efficacy refer to personal academic awareness and intrinsic motivation (Davidson et al., 2015). To learn how scholastic conscientiousness is related to persistence, the CPQ asks students questions about their personal timeliness or tardiness of assignment submissions, class attendance, and awareness of responsibilities (Davidson et al., 2015). Similarly, to understand how motivation to learn is related to persistence, the CPQ asks students questions about their personal average weekly study time, educational enrichment, utilizing required and recommended course resources, tutoring, enthusiasm to complete academic assignments, proofreading and editing written assignments, and coursework workload (Davidson et al., 2015). To learn how academic efficacy relates to persistence, the CPQ asks questions about students’ personal experiences related to test preparation, awareness of grading scales and expectations, perceived effectiveness of study
habits and methods, and self-confidence in submitting acceptable coursework (Davidson et al., 2015).

To gain an understanding regarding student collegiate stress and how it relates to persistence, the CPQ asks students questions about how they feel about coursework, pressure to meet deadlines, sacrifices that have to be made to attend college, personal barriers and responsibilities, and academic performance. Consequently, students who experienced financial strain report higher levels of stress and feelings of inadequacy (Davidson et al., 2009). To understand how financial strain affects student persistence, the CPQ asks students questions regarding college costs, purchasing course materials, paying for personal needs, and making course enrollment decisions based on cost (Davidson et al., 2015).

**CPQ Findings**

The CPQ findings do not suggest any retention method measured by the questionnaire to predict persistence (Muller et al., 2017). However, the CPQ findings suggest there is value when colleges focus on more than one retention method area to promote persistence (Muller et al., 2017). In fact, the CPQ results found some retention method areas are closely related (Muller et al., 2017). For example, possible connections were found with the measured retention method areas of sense of belonging and institutional commitment (Muller et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the CPQ results found that students with structured programs and access to academic and social support services provided by the college had a higher sense of belonging to the institution, which promoted higher levels of persistence (Muller et al., 2017). Additionally, CPQ results found institutional commitment to retention and social integration could play a significant role in student retention and persistence (Muller et al., 2017). Above all, the CPQ results suggest that colleges should ensure student supports are available to all student
populations and should intervene with targeted support methods to high-risk students (Muller et al., 2017).

The CPQ results suggest that student retention and persistence should begin at the top administrative level of the institution (Muller et al., 2017). For example, both student involvement and motivation to learn cannot be improved by one campus department (Muller et al., 2017). In other words, a single area of campus cannot be responsible for student retention and persistence because it may not work (Muller et al., 2017). Change begins with the highest-ranking officials within an institution and filters down to other administrators, faculty, and staff (Muller et al., 2017).

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of single-parent students who completed noncredit programs at a community college. Currently, there is a problem of academic underachievement in noncredit higher education classes among single-parent students who are at significant risk due to poverty, low income, academic under-preparedness in one or more subjects, inadequate technology skills, and less access to a home computer and Internet. Nevertheless, single-parent students without an education need to persist and complete a noncredit program leading to an industry-recognized certification and job, which contributes to society.

The theoretical framework guiding this study regarding single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college is Tinto’s theory of student departure (1975, 1987, 1993). Students’ dropout of college as a result of their characteristics and the extent of their academic, environmental, and social integration in an institution of higher education (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). Focusing on the experiences that promoted social integration,
academic integration, and completion, rather than the barriers that lead to dropping out, could improve positive interactions between the student and the institution (Tinto, 1993). Thus, colleges that establish support programs and services intended for single-parent students could see higher completion rates among this student population.

Best practices for student persistence and completion in the research most often relate to traditional students. Although these practices can be emulated with nontraditional and single-parent students, higher education institutions need ways to develop programs and services that cater specifically to nontraditional and single-parent students using the traditional student programming model as a guide. Strengthening program persistence and improving community college graduation rates for single-parent students might result in the expansion of noncredit programs among underserved populations, as well as contribute to the literature in the field of noncredit program education.

The problem is single-parent students are more prone to dropout than traditional students, and little is known about the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college (Damasceno, 2018; Giancola et al., 2009; Koh et al., 2017; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018). Academic and social integration can impact enrollment, persistence, and completion of single-parent students (Beeler, 2016; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018). There have been studies on nontraditional students who completed courses in a noncredit program at a community college, but there is little research on single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college (Bohl, et al, 2017; Ellis, 2019; Witkowski, et al 2016).

Thus, a gap in the literature has been identified. Furthermore, a need to conduct a study examining the experiences that promoted course completion among single-parent students who
completed a noncredit program at a community college has been identified. The results of this
study could contribute to improving support programs and services that are directed towards the
single-parent student population by contributing empirical, theoretical, and practical significance
for the field of student completion at community college.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. In this chapter, the design was identified, research questions were presented, and the rationale for the setting and selection of participants were discussed. The procedures for conducting the study were outlined, and the researcher’s role was explained. Data collection and data analysis techniques were detailed, trustworthiness was addressed, and ethical considerations were discussed. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Design

A transcendental phenomenological approach was used to describe the experiences of single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. Phenomenology is used to understand a phenomenon and the lived experiences of a particular group of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Edmund Husserl founded the transcendental phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality, noema, and noesis are vital concepts of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality refers to the consciousness of how experiences are interconnected (Moustakas, 1994). Noema and noesis refer to the meanings of experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Noema refers to the external perception of what was experienced, and noesis refers to the internal perception of what was experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Understanding and unifying the intentionality, noema, and noesis allows the researcher to arrive at essences, or “textural and structural meanings of an experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 60).
The researcher’s objective in a transcendental phenomenological study is to describe, rather than interpret or explain, the lived experience of a participant (Moustakas, 1994). To achieve this, I created a “relaxed and trusting atmosphere” so the “participant felt comfortable and responded honestly and comprehensively” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). As a result, through individual interviews and data collection, I understood the lived experience of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). By describing the lived experience, the participants’ perception of reality is accurately portrayed (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, a researcher can describe a participant’s rich, in-depth lived experience by using a transcendental phenomenological design approach.

The phenomenological approach is valid for this research design because the study focuses on the lived experiences of this particular group of individuals (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). While there is lots of research regarding nontraditional students, little research regarding single-parent students exists. Yet, the number of single-parent community college students is rapidly growing (Shenoy, et al, 2016). A qualitative method was used to describe why these students had successful outcomes, while many others fail. Asking open-ended questions lead to an understanding of participants’ lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

A quantitative method is not appropriate for this study because little research exists regarding single-parent students. Researchers do not have enough information to understand the experiences of single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. Quantitative research seeks to measure attitudes, opinions, and behaviors into practical statistics that can apply to a large population (Gall et al., 2006), while qualitative phenomenological research seeks applicable meanings from gaining an understanding of specific experiences from individuals who have lived through them (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas,
In other words, qualitative research is appropriate when an experience needs to be further understood so it can be described (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, a qualitative method is the right choice for this study so the experiences of single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college can be better understood (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Research Questions**

**Central Research Question**

What are the experiences that support noncredit program completion among single-parents in the community college context?

**Sub-question 1**

What are the successes described by single-parents who completed noncredit programs at a community college?

**Sub-question 2**

What are the barriers overcome by single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college?

**Setting**

The setting for this study was a community college in East Texas called Pine Tree College (PTC) (pseudonym). The city where the PTC main campus is located is home to over 35,000 people. The county where PTC is located is home to over 87,000 people. PTC serves a total of 12 counties, which reaches a population of over 335,000 people. Although the city where the PTC main campus is located is considered remote (IPEDS, 2020), it is within close driving distance to some major metropolitan cities that can be easily reached in just a few hours by car. In addition to the main campus, PTC has one off-campus teaching center, but PTC holds classes at community locations spread throughout the twelve counties, such as public schools, libraries,
and churches.

At PTC, the Board of Trustees sits at the top of the administrative level. The board has formal authority and assumes responsibility for college policies and procedures, budgets, contracts, and faculty and staff appointments. The top administrative level under the Board is the President of the college, reporting directly to the Board. Then, three Vice Presidents and two Executive Directors report directly to the President. The President, Vice Presidents, and Executive Directors form the executive council. The executive council members supervise various teams made up of full-time and part-time employees who work together to make the college run smoothly.

Each area of the college plays a vital role in the success of the college and community. The college serves the community in multiple ways. First, it helps satisfy the demand to develop a skilled workforce through educational opportunities. Second, it provides a way for some students to transition to a four-year university (Lucas, 2006). Third, it provides full-time and part-time employment opportunities for the community. Moreover, PTC provides extra-curricular and entertainment opportunities to the community.

PTC improves the lives of the community it serves by providing quality educational opportunities. Of the twelve counties PTC serves, between 16.1% and 24.7% of individuals that live within those counties lived below poverty between the years 2014 and 2018 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). During the 2017-2018 school year, 76% of PTC students were awarded federal, state, local, institutional, or other sources of grant aid to help pay for college (IPEDS, 2020). An Educational Attainment Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019) indicated, from 2018 to 2019, 11.5% of adults who have a high school diploma but no college lived in poverty, and 7.8% of adults who had some college education lived in poverty. The official U.S. poverty rate in 2019
was 10.5% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Obviously, PTC community members could benefit from increased education levels, as individuals with a college credential experience lower poverty rates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

The setting of PTC is appropriate for this study because the college serves nontraditional students. In fact, 21% of students enrolled in the Fall 2018 semester were over the age of 25 (IPEDS, 2020). Additionally, PTC offers a wide variety of noncredit programs focused on various industries, such as Allied Health, Business, Industry, and Protective Services. These programs comprise 39% of PTC student enrollment (IPEDS, 2020). Participants eligible for this study will have successfully completed a noncredit program at PTC.

**Participants**

Participants who successfully completed a noncredit program at PTC within the last three years, while being a single-parent student, were selected to participate in this study. All participation in the study was voluntary. The participants were selected using purposeful sampling in hopes to better understand the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Purposeful sampling ensured that only individuals that can provide the best information regarding the phenomenon are selected for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, snowball sampling was utilized to recruit participants. Snowball sampling is applied when participants recruit acquaintances who meet the study participant criteria until data saturation is met (Burns et al., 1993).

Phenomenological study size can vary from five to 25 participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, to obtain a rich, in-depth description of the participants' lived experiences, 13 participants were examined (Mason, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative sample sizes must ensure perceptions that might be important are uncovered, yet not too large so that data becomes
redundant (Mason, 2010). Maximum variation of participants was attempted during recruitment to purposefully select diverse individuals and to reinforce transferability (Polkinghorne, 1989).

After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received, I requested PTC noncredit program directors and instructors recommend qualified current students near completion, as well as qualified completers to participate in this study. After the noncredit program director and instructor recommendations were received, potential participants were emailed a survey consisting of six questions to seek volunteers and confirm eligibility. There were no limitations placed on a participant’s age, gender, ethnicity, or noncredit program area. Pseudonyms were used for each participant. The screening survey is found in Appendix C.

**Procedures**

Site permission was obtained from PTC, and IRB approval was obtained from both Liberty University (LU) and PTC to protect study participants (see Appendix A). Before recruiting participants, a pilot interview to determine the clarity of the questions and wording was conducted with a peer who has qualitative research experience. After IRB approval was received, a meeting with PTC noncredit program directors and instructors to seek assistance with recruiting eligible participants for this study was conducted (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, snowball sampling was utilized so potential participants recommended by program directors and instructors could recruit acquaintances who met the study participant criteria (Burns et al., 1993). The recruitment letter can be found in Appendix B.

Individual interviews were set up with interested respondents who met the participation criteria. A demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E) and a consent form were sent to each participant when scheduling the interviews (see Appendix D). Additionally, each participant was asked to email at least one artifact, a form of visual representation, which represented their
motivation to complete a noncredit program (Douglas et al., 2015). There were no limitations placed on a participant's artifact. The artifact analysis guide can be found in Appendix I and was printed before each interview.

Before the individual interview, the participant was asked to respond to a projective technique word association with three to four sentences (see Appendix F). The data gathered from the word association activity was analyzed. Coding was used when analyzing the word association data to note similarities between participant statements.

Before each interview, an interview guide was printed (see Appendix G). During the individual interviews, participants were asked open-ended interview questions, and follow-up questions based on responses. The semi-structured, open-ended, individual interviews were recorded and transcribed (Patton, 2015). The interviews were recorded using a recording application on my cell phone. Memoing was used during the interviews to note similarities between participant statements (see Appendix H). The memoing was recorded on the interview guide to ensure researcher notes made regarding participant experiences did not get misplaced or confused with other participants.

Throughout the data collection process, all data collected was stored on a password-protected external USB drive. After each interview was completed, the recording was saved on the external USB drive. This was done before the next individual interview began. Per federal regulation, data will be deleted after three years.

After individual interviews were completed and transcribed, member checking occurred. During member checking, a copy of the transcript was given to the participant to ensure accuracy and allow them to edit or add information regarding their personal experience (Patton, 2015). After participants reviewed and validated the transcripts, the data was analyzed using
Moustakas’s (1994) data analysis steps.

**The Researcher's Role**

My role as the researcher was to accurately relay the lived experiences of the participants and ensure a reliable transcendental phenomenological study is conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). First, IRB approval from LU and PTC had to be secured. Then, participants were recruited, consent forms were obtained, and data was collected and analyzed. Finally, as the human instrument in the study, I was responsible for interpreting the lived experiences of the participants to help describe the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Personal biases and preconceived notions were bracketed throughout the data collection and data analysis process to ensure the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college are only being described (Patton, 2015).

I gained interest in this phenomenon as I observed single-parent students struggle to complete a noncredit credential. The single-parent students had responsibilities, which caused some of them to get behind on coursework and not be successful. Unfortunately, these extra responsibilities created barriers that some single-parent students could not overcome, ultimately leading them to the decision to dropout of college. After witnessing some single-parent students dropping out of college and some single-parent students persisting to completion of a noncredit credential, I began to wonder what experiences contributed to their success.

Currently, I am employed full-time at PTC as an administrator, and I recognize there are personal biases I have regarding noncredit programs and experiences that I feel help guide a student to be successful. I do not work directly with students in noncredit programs. There could be a possibility that I have interacted with some of the participants at campus events, but I should have no formal connection to the participants in this study.
Data Collection

Projective techniques, interviews, and artifact analysis were data collection methods to gain rich, in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon, (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). Data collection in qualitative studies involves various techniques to obtain rich, in-depth descriptions of participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological research approaches seek to describe the lived experiences around a specific phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The data collected provided the researcher with an understanding of the participants’ common experiences surrounding the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Projective Technique

Before the individual interview, each participant was asked to respond to a word association with three to four sentences (see Appendix F). The word association exercise was designed to enable participants to describe their memories from their individual experiences regarding the phenomenon by responding to specific words related to the research study (Ludueña et al., 2014). Each participant received a worksheet with instructions to read each word, think about their life and experiences from when they were in a noncredit program, and write a three to four sentence response to each word. The following words were used during the word association exercise: single-parent college student, childcare, support system, and career. This exercise prompted honest participant responses, and additional data emerged. The documents gathered from the word association activity were analyzed. Coding was used when analyzing the word association data to note similarities between participant statements.

Interviews
An exploratory qualitative one-to-one, semi-structured, individual interview was conducted to gather information from the study participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Questions were framed around academic integration, social integration, and persistence experiences that may have contributed to noncredit program completion (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). A semi-structured design allowed participants to elaborate on the questions in the interview, giving the researcher richer descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The open-ended questions focused on understanding the central phenomenon of the study. Individual interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Pseudonyms were used to provide anonymity to study participants. After IRB approval was received, and before conducting individual interviews, one pilot interview was conducted with a peer who has qualitative research experience to determine the clarity of the questions and wording.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opening Questions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduce yourself by stating your name, the noncredit program you completed, and the age of your child when you completed the noncredit program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What noncredit certification or license do you have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Please tell me why you decided to enroll in a noncredit certification or license program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What have been the benefits of completing the noncredit certification or license program?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions Related to Academic Integration
5. What were your past educational experiences before becoming a noncredit college student?

6. Please explain if you feel your past educational experiences prepared you to be successful in a noncredit certification or license program.

7. What were your academic responsibilities during your time as a noncredit college student?

8. What academic assistance, such as Adult Education & Literacy, tutoring, or access to study spaces on campus, did you utilize during your time as a noncredit college student?

9. If you did not utilize any academic assistance services, please explain why you did not utilize those services.

10. What academic assistance services would have been beneficial to you during your time as a noncredit college student?

11. What additional noncredit certification or license programs, two-year or four-year degrees have you completed?

Questions Related to Social Integration

12. What were your personal responsibilities during your time as a noncredit college student?

13. What support services, such as the Student Food Pantry, Campus Closet, or gas vouchers, did you utilize during your time as a noncredit college student?

14. If you did not utilize any support services, please explain why you did not utilize those services.
15. What support services would have been beneficial to you during your time as a noncredit college student?

Questions Related to Persistence

16. What challenges did you experience as a single-parent student in a noncredit program?

17. What support did you receive from your family during your time as a noncredit college student?

18. In what ways did the college support you as a single-parent student?

19. In what ways did your instructors support you during your time as a single-parent student?

20. In what ways did your fellow students support you during your time as a single-parent student?

21. What experiences stand out in your mind that lead you to successfully complete a noncredit program?

22. As a single-parent student, what support would you suggest colleges provide for future single-parent students?

Closing Questions

23. I appreciate the time you have given to this interview. I have one final question for you. Is there additional information would you like to add about your experience as a single-parent student in a noncredit program that we have not discussed yet?

Additional open-ended questions might be asked to have participants expand on their response, such as:

1. Could you explain that?

2. You stated … Could you give me an example of …?
3. Could you describe that experience in more detail?
4. What did you do to overcome that barrier?

Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) theoretical lens inspired the research questions, and subsequently the interview questions. The questions are framed around academic integration, social integration, and persistence. Nontraditional students are underrepresented and are at higher risk of dropping out of college, so understanding the levels of academic and social integration of single-parent students, as well as the experiences that promoted persistence, will allow the researcher to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon (Damasceno, 2018; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018; Strauss, 2016; Xu & Ran, 2020).

Questions one through four are opening questions designed to provide background information and make the participant comfortable with the interview process (Patton, 2015). Questions five through 11 are related to academic integration. Academic integration refers to how a student feels and assimilates with the academic part of college and includes passing grades and the development of higher academic levels (Tinto, 1975). The purpose of questions five through 11 is to understand if the participants were positively integrated into the college academically (Tinto, 1975). Additionally, questions five through 11 were designed to understand if the participants were aware of institutional programs geared specifically towards supporting academics (Rabourn et al., 2018; Sun, 2018; Woods & Frogge, 2017). Questions 12 through 15 are related to social integration. The purpose of questions 12 through 15 is to gain a better understanding of how single-parent students interpret responsibilities they experience that can cause stress and can cause coursework to become a low priority (Shenoy, et al, 2016). Furthermore, questions 12 through 15 were designed to understand if the participant was
positively integrated on campus and aware of institutional support systems (Carpenter et al., 2018; French, 2017; Shenoy et al., 2016). Questions 16 through 22 were designed to understand experiences that promoted persistence. Question 16 was designed to understand challenges single-parent students experience (Safford & Stinton, 2016). Questions 17 through 21 were designed to understand support single-parent students felt they received, which could encourage the student to persist to completion (Deil-Amen, 2011; French, 2017; Shenoy et al., 2016). Question 22 allows the participants to offer additional comments and suggestions on how colleges can improve experiences for single-parent students (Shenoy et al., 2016; Stuart et al., 2014). Question 23 allows the participant to provide additional information they feel is relevant and significant to their individual experience regarding the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

**Artifact Analysis**

To gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences surrounding the phenomenon, each participant was asked to email a minimum of one artifact, or form of visual representation (see Appendix I) (Douglas et al., 2015). Each participant was instructed to pick a minimum of one artifact, such as a picture or a quote, which represented their motivation to complete a noncredit program at a community college as a single-parent student, to elicit a rich, in-depth description from the participant (Douglas et al., 2015). The participants were asked to state via email what the artifact is, explain why they chose the artifact, and describe how the artifact served as a motivating factor that led to the completion of a noncredit program at a community college. This method of data collection was used to verify alignment with the participants’ artifact and their interview responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Each participant had the opportunity to discuss their artifact via email. During the data analysis, the responses regarding the artifacts were coded for significant statements (see
Appendix I). The coding was based on whether the participant indicates academic integration, social integration, or persistence when describing their artifact. Furthermore, this data collection elicited new meanings regarding the individuals’ experiences that would not be prompted through the traditional interview technique (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Douglas et al., 2015; Patton, 2015).

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis procedures for this study followed Moustakas’ (1994) modifications made to van Kaam’s method of analysis. Before collecting data from participants, the researcher first practiced Epoché, or “refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). Then, the researcher moved to horizontalization, part of the phenomenological reduction process, where all data collected is reviewed for relevant statements, and statements irrelevant to the research questions were eliminated (Moustakas, 1994). The relevant statements were clustered into themes for each participant (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, through the imaginative variation process, individual participant perspectives of their experiences were unified into common “textural and structural” descriptive themes so the essence of the underlying experiences of the group of participants is described (Moustakas, 1994, p. 60).

**Epoché**

The first step in the data analysis process was Epoché. The process of Epoché allowed the researcher to reveal preconceived notions regarding the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) explains that, although challenging, a researcher must be transparent and rid oneself of prior knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon. As a result, the researcher can be “naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the
phenomenon being investigated” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). To practice Epoché, as the researcher, I made an intentional effort to clear my mind of preconceived notions and biases regarding the phenomenon before and after each encounter with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). As a result, I genuinely learned about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

**Phenomenological Reduction**

The next step in the data analysis process was phenomenological reduction. The data collected were transcribed and reviewed. All expressions were further reviewed to determine if the expression is vital to the understanding of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). By coding, or analyzing, and reducing expressions, significant themes and commonalities, or frequently used words and phrases, were identified (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2016). Invariant commonalities that emerged from coding were clustered into themes and validated against the data collected for each participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Valid and relevant themes that emerged from coding were used to create a rich description of the participant’s individual experience (Moustakas, 1994). The valid and relevant themes compiled from the individual experiences were merged to create horizons, or “textural” descriptions of the phenomenon that represented the group of study participants (Moustakas, 1994, p. 60). Textural descriptions of the phenomenon describe *what* the participants experienced (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). The themes essential to the phenomenon were synthesized into a coherent textural description (Moustakas, 1994).

**Imaginative Variation**

The last step of the data analysis process is imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). During imaginative variation, the themes that emerged from the phenomenological reduction process were used to describe the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher
developed “structural” themes so the shared experiences of the participants were described (Moustakas, 1994, p. 60). How the participants experienced the phenomenon was described (Patton, 2015). Structural themes “precipitate feelings and thoughts with reference to the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99). Through imagination, the researcher identified structural qualities within the textural themes to develop a description of the phenomenological experience (Moustakas, 1994). As a result, the essences and synthesis of the meanings of the phenomenon being studied were revealed (Moustakas, 1994).

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was established by incorporating validation strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation was utilized to analyze the data from different sources and validate the themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were implemented (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

**Credibility**

Credibility refers to the extent to which the study findings accurately describe the participants’ perception of reality, depending on the richness of the data gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Member checks allowed participants to review their transcript, ensure accuracy, and allow them to edit or add information regarding their personal experience (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, member checks validated the credibility of the study findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rich descriptions were used to present the analysis of the study interpretations. Participants were allowed to review the interview transcript to ensure accurate information is concluded (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, participants were able to review their responses and submit revisions or further explanations to the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018).
**Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability and confirmability deal with consistency and is addressed through the establishment of rich details regarding the study. When researchers can show the research process is consistent, logical, and clearly documented, dependability occurs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell, et al, 2017). Dependability was addressed through an audit trail (see Appendix J). The audit trail was used to ensure consistency in the data collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study steps were thoroughly documented and the transcripts were reviewed for mistakes. Confirmability ensured researcher neutrality by establishing that the study findings were shaped from the data, not researcher bias or motivation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell, et al, 2017). An outside peer familiar with qualitative phenomenological research, who is not invested in the research, audited the research data and analysis to address confirmability, provided an additional examination on the study, and ensured the findings are valid (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the possibility that what was found in one context applies to another context, and refers to the responsibility researchers have to provide rich, thick descriptions so that others can transfer the results to their site and judge transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell, et al, 2017). In this study, transferability was addressed by the ability to transfer the findings of this study to other studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By providing rich, in-depth descriptions of the participants' lived experiences of single-parent students in a noncredit program at PTC, transferability occurred (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). Readers of the study will be able to understand the phenomenon and transfer it to their setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation was addressed by ensuring accurate inferences are made by the
researcher through utilizing multiple data sources, such as a projective technique, individual interviews, and artifact analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015).

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were maintained throughout this study to protect the human participants (Moustakas, 1994). IRB approval from both LU and PTC was obtained and participant consent forms were received before data collection took place. Furthermore, participation in the study was voluntary. Consent forms, transcriptions, and data will be stored on a password-protected external USB drive and will be deleted after three years per federal regulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Only I have access to these recordings. Pseudonyms were used for the setting and the participants to ensure confidentiality, and all identifying information was removed from the setting and participants.

**Summary**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. This chapter explained in detail the methods and design of the transcendental phenomenological study. Research questions that guided the study were presented. The setting and participants were described. The procedures for conducting the study were outlined, and the researcher’s role was discussed. Data collection and analysis were explained in detail. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations were presented. Chapter Four discusses the research findings. Chapter Five provides a summary, conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. This chapter will introduce the thirteen study participants who met the criteria for participation in this study through descriptive portraits of their experience with the phenomenon. The findings were cultivated through data analysis of the projective technique, individual interview, and artifact analysis. Then the themes that emerged during data analysis will be presented, and the research questions will be answered. Finally, a summary of the findings is included.

Participants

The unique individual experience that promoted completion of a noncredit program at a community college as a single-parent student was shared by each participant. Each participant is considered a nontraditional student at the time of their completion because they were 25 years of age or older and had other responsibilities while studying, such as work and family (Deil-Amen, 2011; Meeuwisse et al., 2010).

The noncredit programs are shorter in length than programs that lead to a degree and can be completed in one 16-week semester or less. These programs develop a skill that prepares individuals for in-demand industry-recognized certification, which is immediately applicable to a job. The profiles below describe the students as they entered the noncredit program. Their quotes describe what happened during the program and afterwards.

Of the 13 participants, four completed a bachelor’s degree before completing a noncredit program at a community college. Moreover, three participants first enrolled at PTC to complete
their GED, then once they earned a GED, they continued their educational path into a noncredit program. The other 10 participants had a high school diploma or high school equivalency before enrolling in the noncredit program. Of the 13 participants, three of them completed the noncredit program at an off-campus PTC site. In addition, two of the 13 participants completed programs that were 100% online. Eleven of the 13 participants completed the noncredit program in a traditional face-to-face classroom setting. The participants of this study represent various ages, ethnic backgrounds, and genders.

Each participant followed the study recruitment process and completed all requirements detailed in Chapter Three. The individual interviews were transcribed verbatim. To protect the anonymity of each participant, pseudonyms are used, and specific program names, such as Phlebotomy or Heavy Equipment Operator, are not used. Instead, general program areas, such as allied health and industry, describe the noncredit program completed by the single-parent student. The descriptive participant profiles offer a glimpse into the personal circumstances surrounding each participant’s experience with the phenomenon of being a single-parent student who completed a noncredit program at a community college. Participant characteristics are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Information of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single-Parent Student</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>White Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effie</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewell</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonell</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karla</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abigail

Abigail is a 45-year old white female with four children, aged 14 to 25, employed full-time as a recruiter, with an additional part-time job as a remote chatbox customer service representative. Two of her children, ages 16 and 14, live with her. She followed PTC on social media on Facebook and Instagram and saw a post for the customer service certification. As a result, Abigail enrolled in a customer service certification because she “felt this [program] at PTC would be beneficial for me in that role.” She said the customer service noncredit program gave her “the flexibility to complete my coursework online on my own time, earning the new certification enhanced my bachelor’s degree, and made me more marketable with employers.” Furthermore, completing the certification gave her the confidence to “explore other job opportunities which would utilize this certification.”

During her time completing the noncredit customer service certification as a single-parent student, Abigail was responsible for taking care of her family while working a full-time job, as well as another part-time job. Abigail’s past educational experiences prepared her to be successful in the noncredit program. The academic assistance services offered by PTC were not needed because she “was able to complete the program at home with my home computer…and the instructor made herself readily available…if there were any questions over content, I was able to go directly to [the instructor] as opposed to going to the tutoring center.” Although Abigail did not need to utilize academic and support services, she said she would have utilized those services if her children were younger, if she had not had a computer at home with internet
access, if the instructor was not responsive and available after normal work hours, and if the class was not flexible “as far as getting the coursework done.”

Throughout her time as a noncredit student, Abigail received support from her family, her full-time employer, the instructor, and fellow students. In each of the data analysis methods (the projective technique, individual interview, and artifact analysis), Abigail stated her children were her greatest cheerleaders and her motivation to complete the noncredit program. Abigail said her full-time employer supported her because they allowed her to enroll in the noncredit program and paid her tuition. Abigail believes she successfully completed the noncredit business program because of “the support my employer gave me and the support the instructor gave with flexibility in working with students on their schedule.”

Ann

Ann is a 25-year old white Hispanic female with one child, aged ten months, and is unemployed. She and her child live with her aunt and uncle, who invited her to live with them after she got pregnant. After Ann had her baby, her aunt and uncle encouraged her to think about a career field to complete a college program and get a job in a field where she could support herself and her child. They helped her set up an advising appointment at PTC. During the advising appointment, the advisor, Ann, and her aunt and uncle determined it would be best for Ann to first work with the PTC Adult Education and Literacy program and then enter a noncredit certification program. She knew she wanted to work in the medical field but had no applicable skills that could “get my foot in the door.” As a result, Ann enrolled in the Adult Education and Literacy program for two months, earned a 100% scholarship for a noncredit certification, completed an allied health certification, and is now employed in a medical office. In the
individual interview and the projective technique, Ann shared that “I had to finish the program so I could get a job and support myself and my child.”

During her time completing the noncredit certification as a single-parent student, Ann took care of her child and helped take care of her aunt and uncle’s household. She did not work. Her aunt and uncle supported her financially and watched her child so she did not have to worry about childcare expenses. Ann’s past educational experiences did not prepare her to be successful in the noncredit program, so she went to tutoring sessions hosted by PTC Adult Education and Literacy. She shared that she “wished there would have been a tutoring class specifically for [the allied health program] that me and my fellow classmates could attend.” Additionally, she did not need to utilize the campus study spaces because her “aunt and uncle got me a laptop, and we had internet at home.” In the individual interview, Ann shared that she did not utilize any support services. However, she “would have utilized the food pantry, but did not know it was available.”

As a noncredit student, Ann received support from her aunt and uncle, PTC Adult Education and Literacy, the instructors, and fellow students. Ann stated her family, specifically her aunt and uncle, supported her and her child financially and provided childcare. PTC Adult Education and Literacy supported her because they provided academic assistance and paid for her tuition, uniforms and supplies, and textbooks. The instructors supported Ann by going above and beyond to ensure she was successful by coming in early or staying late to help her master skills or “get caught up if I had to miss class if my child got sick.” As she described it, the instructors “were understanding that I had a baby and knew my baby had to be put first.” The allied health program in which Ann enrolled was set up as a cohort, so the students completed the program as a group in the same class sequence. Ann believes she completed the noncredit
program because of “the support from my aunt and uncle, the support from PTC Adult Education and Literacy, and the support the instructors gave with being flexible and understanding and wanting each student to be successful.”

Ariel

Ariel is a 25-year old white female with two children, aged 3 and 1, and is employed full-time in a doctor’s office. After she had her first child, she wanted to get a job earning a higher wage, so she enrolled in an allied health noncredit certification at PTC when her first child was an infant. Completing this program gave Ariel applicable skills to enter the medical field, earning a higher wage, which improved her life and the life of her child. Ariel shared, “When it came time to renew my [allied health] license, I started talking to my supervisor about getting a higher level [allied health certification].” After talking it over with her supervisor for a few days, she decided to enroll in the higher level allied health program because she “wanted to feel like I was a bigger part of the [medical] team.” As a result, Ariel successfully completed an additional allied health certification, is now employed in a higher-level position in the medical field, and feels like she is “part of the team.”

During her time completing the noncredit certification as a single-parent student, Ariel was responsible for taking care of her two children, their home, and working full-time. Ariel shared that her past educational experiences and her work experience in the medical field prepared her to be successful in the noncredit program. Throughout the allied health noncredit program, Ariel studied on her own by making flashcards and taking “lots of notes.” She also got to speak to her coworkers and get help from them. Ariel shared she could not take advantage of any additional academic assistance because she “didn’t have time with working full-time and taking care of my kids.” Fortunately, she was “able to do the majority of the work on my own
and get help from the instructors before or after class.” She did not utilize the campus study spaces because “when I was not at work or in class, I had to take care of my kids. I am basically doing everything on my own.” In the individual interview, Ariel shared that she did not utilize any support services, such as the student food pantry, campus closet, or gas vouchers, because she “had no idea they were available.” If she would have known about the support services, she “would have used all of them.” Additionally, she suggested additional services, like “counseling and a campus daycare with employees with a clear background check, would have been really helpful.”

As a noncredit student, Ariel received support from her family, her instructors, classmates, and her employer. In all three data collection methods (the projective technique, individual interview, and artifact analysis), Ariel stated that her children were her greatest motivation to complete the noncredit program because she “has to be able to provide for them and give them a good life.” Ariel received help from her mom and sister when they were available. In fact, Ariel's sister works at a higher level job in the medical field and “wouldn't let me quit when I was ready to give up.” The instructors supported Ariel by understanding her children came first and by helping her be prepared for class or clinical if she had to leave class early or skip class altogether. Her employer supported her by allowing her to complete her clinical rotations while at work, so she did not have to take time off from work and get a lower paycheck. The allied health program in which Ariel enrolled was set up as a cohort, which allowed the students to get to know each other, and they would “text each other and study with each other outside of class.” Ariel shared that “it was hard to find the time to go to the study groups with her kids, but I made it work when I could.” Ariel believes she completed the
noncredit program because of “the support and encouragement from my family, the instructors, and my employer.”

Effie

Effie is an unemployed 39-year old white female with one child, aged 15. She and her child live with her mother and share one car. Since her child is older, Effie does not have to worry about childcare. Sadly, Effie’s husband and father of her child passed away five years ago when Effie was 34-years old, and their child was 10-years old. As a result of her husband passing away, she decided to quit her job in the medical field because “it was really stressful, I was on call often, and my job was soul-sucking,” and she and her child moved in with her mother. In the individual interview and the projective technique, Effie shared that she “enjoyed working in the medical field, but I had to get a new certification so I could move into a different area.” Effie said:

After taking an almost four-year break from working, at the age of 38, I decided it was time to get back into the workforce. I live right across from PTC, so I decided to go see what programs I might be interested in and learned I could enroll in a program, earn a full-ride scholarship, and get back into the medical field pretty quick.

As a result, Effie enrolled in the PTC Adult Education and Literacy program so she could earn a scholarship for the [allied health noncredit program]. After working with the Adult Education and Literacy program, Effie earned the scholarship and was enrolled in the next program that was scheduled to begin. Effie started the [allied health] noncredit program at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, successfully completed the allied health certification, and got a job in a freestanding emergency room.
During her time completing the noncredit certification as a single-parent student, Effie was responsible for taking care of her child and helping her mother maintain their household. Effie’s past educational experiences prepared her to be successful in the noncredit program because she had “knowledge of medical terminology, knew how to deal with patients, and knew how to interact with doctors, nurses, and [other employees] in the medical field.” Although she felt her past educational experiences prepared her to be successful in the noncredit program, Effie had not been in school for over ten years, so “there were things I had to learn, like using [the learning management system], and I had to remember how to do certain types of math, like fractions, so I could learn how to complete dosage calculations.” The Adult Education and Literacy instructors were “very helpful” and ensured Effie was academically prepared to be successful in a college program. She shared that she had “a lot of reading and memorization” each week, and the program “became my career.” During the individual interview, Effie said that, although she did not need childcare services:

Several of the girls I completed the program with had little ones that could have benefited from childcare available at [PTC], and I wish the lab we practiced skills in would be available to students outside of class time.

Furthermore, Effie shared that when it came time to complete clinical rotations, “it was hard to work from eight to five when I was used to being at home since I hadn’t worked for the last few years.” In the individual interview, Effie shared that she did not utilize any support services, such as the student food pantry or campus closet, because she “felt the food should go to someone in more need than I was.”

Throughout her time as a noncredit student, Effie received support from her mom, PTC Adult Education and Literacy, the instructors, and fellow students. In the individual interview
and the projective technique, Effie stated her mom supported her and her child financially and provided a place for them to live. PTC Adult Education and Literacy supported her because they provided academic assistance and gave her a full-ride scholarship. In the artifact analysis, Effie described lyrics from a song by the Steve Miller Band called “Jet Airliner.” As she described it, the lyrics “you know you got to go through hell before you get to heaven” taught her that “every situation will change. Nothing is permanent. The hardship of being a mom with a child and in school will pass.” Effie believes she successfully completed the noncredit program because of “the support from my mom, the support from the Adult Education instructors, and the support the [allied health] instructors gave me by being responsive and wanting each student to be successful and get a job.”

**Hope**

Hope is a 43-year old white female with two children, aged 24 and 14, and is employed full-time in a doctor’s office. She and her youngest child live in a home with her mom and brother, who are both disabled. After high school graduation, Hope enrolled in college and graduated four years later with a bachelor’s degree in business. After graduating from college, Hope began working full-time in an accounting firm. Later, she became “certified for inside and outside audits and quality control.” Hope worked in the accounting firm for over 20 years but shared she “was not fulfilled by my job.” As a result, she decided she wanted to change career fields because she longed to “have a career helping others,” and entering the medical field was the “best and quickest way to do that.” Additionally, she “wanted my [children] to understand the importance of serving others, and I hoped my example of changing careers and going back to college would help instill this.”
At the age of 43, Hope “went to PTC to see what programs I could complete in a relatively short amount of time that would get me a job in the medical field relatively quickly.” Hope met with the workforce development advisor, who meets with current and prospective students in noncredit programs, and they came up with a plan where Hope could complete two allied health certifications in one semester. Furthermore, she would enroll in an additional allied health certification in the summer. Within a year, Hope successfully completed all three allied health certifications, gained three in-demand allied health industry-recognized certifications, and is now employed full-time in the medical field, serving the community every day.

Hope enrolled in the noncredit program during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although many programs moved online, the allied health noncredit programs remained face-to-face. During her time as a student, she shared:

I utilized the library for assistance with [the learning management system] because I had not been in college for over 20 years, and things had changed a lot regarding how the courses were delivered, but they changed for the better because there are more diverse learning tools for students to use now.

In the individual interview, she shared:

I wish the college had a way to provide internet access to students away from campus because, where I live, I have internet, but because I live in a rural area, it is not the best. Access to better internet at home would have helped a lot.

She also shared, “The college does so much for students, with the food pantry and all of the online help, but one thing the college does not provide is childcare for students, and that would help a lot of students.”
Throughout her time as a noncredit student, Hope received support from her mom, the instructors, and fellow students. In each of the data analysis methods (the projective technique, individual interview, and artifact analysis), Hope stated she had two forms of motivation to complete the noncredit programs. The first form of motivation was her children, and the second form of motivation was getting into a career field where she could serve the community and help others. Her mom supported her by being encouraging, supporting her dream of changing careers, and supporting her financially. The instructors in all three programs supported Hope by being easy to get in touch with and responsive to emails and by ensuring the students had everything they needed to be successful. Hope believes she successfully completed all three noncredit programs because of the support of her mom and the instructors and the “experiences I gained by just wanting to help people.”

Jenna

Jenna is a 27-year old white female with one child, aged 1, and is employed full-time in a school district. After high school graduation, Jenna enrolled in college and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice. When Jenna became a single-parent, she realized she needed a job that would have similar hours as her child’s daycare facility. As she shared in her projective technique, Jenna took a lower-paying job as an administrative assistant so she could “be off when the daycare is closed.” She enjoyed working for the school district but needed to find a way to make more money “so I could have the financial security to not worry about how I would pay for our next meal or how I would pay our bills.” Jenna informed her supervisor that she was interested to learn what she could do to receive a promotion and earn a higher-paying job within the school district. Her supervisor suggested she call PTC to get more information regarding the business certifications, and after speaking to the workforce development advisor,
she felt “it actually would be helpful, and I would be able to help my supervisor become more efficient with her every day tasks.” As a result, Jenna enrolled in an online business certification. After she completed the business certification, Jenna’s supervisor encouraged her to enroll in an additional online customer service certification. She enrolled in the online customer service certification because she felt “it would give me tools to be able to help parents and students better.” As a result of completing both noncredit certifications, Jenna received a promotion within the school district.

During her time completing the noncredit certifications as a single-parent student, Jenna was responsible for taking care of her child while working a full-time job. Jenna’s past educational experiences prepared her to be successful in the noncredit programs, and she did not feel the need to utilize any academic assistance offered. Additionally, she did not utilize any support services because the city she lives in is about an hour away from the main PTC campus. She shared, “I would have used the food pantry if it would have been available to students where I lived, but it was only available to students that could get to the [main] campus.” The academic assistance services were not needed because she “was able to complete the programs during the day when I was at work with my work computer and with my work internet.” Additionally, “the instructors were easy to get in touch with if I had questions or needed additional assistance with any of the coursework.” Jenna said she would have utilized study spaces on campus “if I could bring my [child] and if they were available on nights and weekends.”

Throughout her time as a noncredit student, Jenna received support from her employer, instructors, and fellow students. Jenna stated her employer supported her because they encouraged her to enroll in the noncredit programs, paid her tuition, and allowed her to complete the coursework while at work. The instructors in both programs supported Jenna by being easy to
get in touch with by responding to emails quickly, willing to schedule phone and virtual meetings to further explain course material, and were “lenient” when it came to turning in assignments. As she described it, the instructors “would allow the students to submit work after the due date and not take off late points as long as [the students] communicated that an extension was needed.” She added that “…the instructors recorded themselves demonstrating lessons so the students could follow along with them.” The online business program and online customer service program in which Jenna enrolled were set up as a cohort, and the cohort model allowed the students to get to know each other. Jenna believes she successfully completed both noncredit programs because of “the support my employer and supervisors gave me and the support the instructors gave with the understanding that life happens and assignment extensions are sometimes legitimately needed.”

**Jewell**

Jewell is a 25-year old black female with one child, aged 2, and is employed full-time in a nursing home. She and her child live with her mom, dad, and seven younger siblings in her parent’s home. Jewell’s parents and seven siblings encouraged her to continue her education so she can achieve her career goals. When her child was 2, Jewell decided to enroll in the allied health noncredit program so she could get a better job in the medical field. As a result, Jewell successfully completed an allied health certification and is now employed in a higher-level position in the medical field. Eventually, she wants to further her education and become an office manager in a medical setting.

During her time completing the noncredit certification as a single-parent student, Jewell was responsible for taking care of her child and working full-time. Throughout the allied health noncredit program, Jewell studied on her own by making flashcards and having her family quiz
her. She would go to study groups with classmates when time permitted and received tutoring from PTC Adult Education and Literacy. Jewell shared that she was able to work with PTC Adult Education and Literacy enough to earn a scholarship and academic assistance throughout the program, but was unable to get as much tutoring and academic enrichment as she would have liked because “I was working seven days a week on top of being a single-parent and couldn’t fit it all into my schedule.” Her “parents paid for my laptop and my Wi-Fi so I could study and complete my coursework at home.” In the individual interview, Jewell shared that she did not utilize any support services, because “the Adult Education program provided the scrubs needed, and I, fortunately, did not need food because I was able to live with my parents.” However, she shared that:

- Gas vouchers would have been really useful, especially when traveling to the clinical sites, and childcare on campus during class time would have been really helpful. Because of the pandemic, my child’s daycare was closed a lot, and I didn’t always have a family member available to watch my child.

Jewell also shared that “the instructors gave me hope. They were willing to come in early or stay late if I needed extra study time, tutoring, or hands-on skills work.”

Throughout her time as a noncredit student, Jewell received support from her family, PTC Adult Education and Literacy, the instructors, and classmates. In the projective technique and individual interview, Jewell stated breaking her family cycle of dropping out of high school and the desire to be an example to her younger siblings were her greatest motivation to complete the noncredit program. She “wanted to show them there are better opportunities available.” In the artifact analysis, Jewell provided a picture of an office and stated “my dream job is to be a medical office manager, so the picture of the way my dream office looks motivates me to keep
going and working hard.” Jewell stated her family was “awesome” and did whatever they could to help her be successful. PTC Adult Education and Literacy supported her because they provided academic assistance and paid her tuition, uniforms, supplies, and textbooks. The instructors supported Jewell by always being willing to provide extra assistance and learning opportunities. The allied health program in which Jewell enrolled was set up as a cohort and allowed students to get to know each other. As a result, Jewell shared “we would have study groups and group messages with each other and help each other.” Jewell believes she successfully completed the noncredit program because of “the support from my family, PTC Adult Education and Literacy, and the instructors, who gave me hope and opened the door to new opportunities.”

Jonell

Jonell is a 31-year old black female with three children, aged 12, 9, and 7, and is employed part-time as a substitute teacher at her children’s school. When Jonell was a senior in high school, she was unable to graduate with her class because she did not pass an assessment required by the state to graduate from high school. A few years ago, Jonell applied to be a substitute teacher at her children’s school, was hired, and soon found she was passionate about teaching. Soon after becoming a substitute teacher, a teacher’s aide position became available at her children’s school. She applied but did not get the job because she did not have a high school diploma or GED. In the individual interview, Jonell shared, “I was upset about not getting the job, but I understood I could not get the job because I didn’t graduate from high school.” As a result, one of the administrators at the school suggested she look into getting her GED from PTC Adult Education and Literacy since PTC taught classes at the El Camino County Career & Education Center (ECCCEC) (pseudonym), which is supported by her children’s school district,
El Camino Independent School District (ISD) (pseudonym). El Camino ISD and PTC have an agreement, and PTC provides college classes at the ECCCEC.

Jonell started to work on completing her GED, but she “did not go to classes on a regular basis.” She shared “I always tell my [children] that education is important, they are going to graduate high school and go to college.” However, when Jonell's oldest child asked, “Why do we have to graduate high school and go to college when you didn't?” she knew she had to complete her GED and go to college. Consequently, she started attending GED classes at the ECCCEC regularly, and she successfully completed all four parts of the GED test and received her high school equivalency. Jonell’s PTC Adult Education and Literacy instructor suggested she meet with the PTC workforce development advisor, who meets with current and prospective noncredit students at the ECCCEC once a month, to discuss workforce education and degree opportunities. As a result of this meeting, Jonell enrolled in a noncredit business program that did not require a high school diploma and continued taking GED classes. Jonell completed the noncredit business program and shared completing the business program “gave me the confidence to want to enroll in another college program, and I’m getting help from the advisor to get in the teacher program.”

While completing the GED program and the noncredit business certification as a single-parent student, Jonell was responsible for taking care of her three children and their household while working as a substitute teacher. Throughout the GED and noncredit business program, Jonell went to GED class and tutoring sessions hosted by Adult Education and Literacy at the ECCCEC. The ECCCEC provided evening childcare for the children of the adult students. Jonell shared, “that helped a lot because I didn’t have to worry about where my kids were because they were down the hall, and I knew they were safe and with people I could trust.” During her time working on the GED and the noncredit business program, Jonell never went to the main PTC
campus because she was able to do everything from the ECCCEC. Although she did not get to know the students well in the GED program because it is not set up as a cohort, she did get to know the students in the noncredit business program. She shared “we would give each other encouraging words like you got this or we’re going to do this together, and that was helpful to know we all wanted everyone to do well.” Jonell believes she successfully completed the GED and noncredit programs because of “the support the PTC GED and business instructors gave, and the support from the ECCCEC with having classes close to where she lived and providing childcare.”

**Karla**

Karla is a 52-year old black female and is employed full-time in a doctor’s office. She lives in a house with her mother, five adult children, and three grandchildren, aged 5 and twins aged 2-months old. When Karla was 16, she dropped out of high school and got married. By the time she was 21, she had five children. At the age of 22, she and her husband got divorced, and Karla and her five children moved in with her mother and grandmother. When Karla and her children moved in with her mother and grandmother, she shared:

> I had to do something to get a job, but I didn’t graduate from high school, so I didn’t have many opportunities. The quickest way for me to get a job was to get a certification, and I was able to get an [allied health] certification at [PTC] without a high school diploma. So that’s what I did so I could get a job to help provide for my children and to help with the bills.

Karla worked in the medical field with the certification she earned without a high school diploma for over 20 years. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Karla’s work hours increased, and her job became more demanding. She shared:
I loved my job, but they were calling me to come in seven days a week. I was in my 50’s, and I couldn’t do that anymore. I knew the only way I could get a job where I wasn’t getting called in on my days off was if I got a GED and finished a program that would allow me to have time with my kids and grandkids. I decided it was time for me to show my kids and grandkids that you can go back to school at any age. So, I went back to [PTC] to complete a GED so I could enroll in the [higher level allied health noncredit certification].

At the age of 51, Karla completed a GED and earned a scholarship to enroll in the allied health noncredit certification. Karla’s previous allied health certification helped her understand how “how things work in the field,” and the work she did to complete the GED helped prepare her academically for the program. Karla successfully completed the allied health certification and found full-time employment in a doctor’s office. Finally, she was able to spend more time with her kids and grandkids.

During her time as a student, Karla helped support her grandchildren and children. Karla did not utilize any of the support services because she did not know about them. She shared, “the gas vouchers would have been helpful, especially when it came time to go to clinical rotations.” Furthermore, she shared:

Some sort of childcare on campus would have been helpful. When we studied in our group, we always had to go to a church or somewhere we could bring our kids…We got our studying done, but I think we would have been able to do more work if we didn’t have to watch kids and study at the same time.

In addition to childcare services, Karla shared that support on campus, such as counseling, would have been helpful because “it is nice to have someone to lean on.”
As a noncredit student, Karla received support from her family, the instructors, PTC Adult Education and Literacy, and fellow students. Karla's family supported her by giving her encouraging words and pushing her to keep going. The instructors supported her by “providing direction and telling us we could do this, and they wanted us to be successful.” The allied health noncredit program Karla completed was set up as a cohort. Karla believes she successfully completed the GED program and the noncredit program because of the intrinsic motivation she had to want to be a good grandparent.

Lucy

Lucy is a 29-year old white female with three children, aged 6, 9, and 10, and is employed at a medical lab. She and her children live in special housing for single-parent students that provides counseling, financial assistance, spiritual growth, and case management services, in addition to a safe and secure living environment. (Some single-parent students are allowed to live in special housing while completing a vocational program or degree). The only familial support she has is her dad and step-mom, who live an hour and a half away. She shared:

School has always been hard for me, so I didn’t think I could go to college. I completed cosmetology school but felt like I still needed something to be able to fall back onto. When I learned about the [allied health] program, my counselor where I live said I should go to [PTC] to see if I could enroll. I met the [allied health] program director, and she helped me go through the application and enrollment process so I could start when the next program began. I qualified for financial assistance, and my dad paid for what the financial aid wouldn’t pay.

While completing the allied health noncredit program, Lucy “was excited to go to class each day.” Completing the allied health program gave Lucy applicable skills to enter the medical
field, earning enough money to support herself and her three children. Lucy completed the program and was offered a job at one of the clinical sites where she had participated in clinical rotations.

During her time completing the noncredit certification as a single-parent student, Lucy was responsible for taking care of her three children and their home. Lucy admitted, “I had to study a lot and get help outside of class from my instructor.” Throughout the allied health noncredit program, Lucy shared she “studied a lot by taking notes and making flashcards.” She and her classmates got together as a group outside of class and had study groups. In the individual interview, Lucy said she did not utilize any support services because “I have food stamps and did not feel right getting more food from the student food pantry, and I didn’t know the other services were available.” As she described it, she did not utilize the campus study spaces because “I couldn’t bring my kids to campus, so I studied at home.” Additionally, she shared:

Childcare on campus during the weekends would have been helpful. My kids were able to stay at the Boys and Girls Club after school, but I didn’t have anywhere to take them on the weekend if we had a study group, so they went to study group if we could find a place where kids could go, but if I couldn’t bring my kids, I stayed home and studied.

In the projective technique, Lucy shared the counseling she received through her housing arrangement was beneficial, and her housing counselor “was my main form of support. She helped me a lot in our weekly therapy sessions.” In the individual interview, Lucy explained that the instructors knew her kids had to come first and were understanding if she “had to leave class early or miss, as long as I let them know what was going on, they would work with me. They always told me they wanted me to be successful. That meant a lot.”
Throughout her time as a noncredit student, Lucy received support from her family, her instructors, classmates, and her housing facility. In all three data collection methods (the projective technique, individual interview, and artifact analysis), Lucy stated that her children were her greatest motivation to complete the noncredit program. Lucy received financial support and encouragement from her dad and step-mom. The instructors supported Lucy by being understanding that her children came first and by always being willing to help her outside of class. Her housing facility supported her by providing a safe and secure place for her and her children to live, as well as counseling services. Lucy believes she successfully completed the noncredit program because of “the support from her counselor at [the housing facility] and from the encouragement and guidance from the instructors because they helped me start my career.”

Marilyn

Marilyn is a 34-year old white female with one child, aged 15, and is employed full-time working for three doctors who share a medical practice. When Marilyn was 18, she got married and completed an allied health noncredit certification that gave her applicable skills to enter the medical field. When Marilyn’s [child] was 12, her husband passed away. In both the individual interview and the projective technique, Marilyn shared that, when her husband died, she knew she had to get a higher-paying job, so she went to PTC, enrolled in the nursing program, and completed three semesters. Yet:

It was just too much. My husband passed away, so it was just me and my [child], and it was just too much to handle going to college, working full-time, raising a kid, so I had to dropout. So, after I dropped out of nursing school, I figured the certificate course would be the fastest route for me in order to get me a job making more than what I was currently making.
After making the decision to dropout of nursing school, Marilyn met with her success coach, who provides advising services to PTC students in degree programs, to discuss alternatives. The success coach referred her to the PTC workforce development advisor, who meets with current and prospective noncredit students. At her appointment with the workforce development advisor, Marilyn “learned about the scholarship opportunity for some of the certificate programs through [PTC] Adult Education and Literacy.” She enrolled in the Adult Education and Literacy program, completed the work to earn the scholarship, and was enrolled in an allied health noncredit program. Marilyn completed the allied health noncredit program and is now able to support herself and her child, and her “pay is a lot better than what it used to be.”

During her time as a student, Marilyn was financially responsible for both herself and her child. Marilyn’s past educational experiences, her work experience, and the academic assistance she received from the Adult Education and Literacy program prepared her to be successful in the noncredit program. Marilyn did not utilize any of the support services because she was not “aware of the services.” In the individual interview, Marilyn shared that the allied health program had a set schedule so students knew their class and clinical schedule in advance. This helped her because:

I was able to work around that, but even though it was a set schedule, some of the other students still struggled with childcare and their kids’ schedules. Fortunately, my family lives here and I could get help from them, but not everyone has family close by like I did.

Throughout her time as a noncredit student, Marilyn received support from her family, the instructors, PTC Adult Education and Literacy, and fellow students. In each of the data analysis methods (the projective technique, the individual interview, and the artifact analysis), Marilyn stated that to get a job earning more money to support herself and her child was her
biggest motivating factor for enrolling in the allied health noncredit program. In the artifact analysis, she also shared the Bible verse, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” as a motivating factor to complete the allied health noncredit program (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017, Philippians 4:13). As Marilyn described it:

> This Bible verse is important to me because it means to me that I should never give up because I have God on my side and He will keep me strong when I am weak. I can achieve anything if I try. God is not going to give up on me, so I can’t give up on myself. I have to keep going.

Marilyn shared that the instructors were a “big influence” on her because they were “always very, very encouraging. Anytime any of the students had any questions, she would help us, even if she wasn’t on campus. That made a world of difference.” As Marilyn described it, her classmates supported each other by having study groups and helping each other. The allied health noncredit program Marilyn completed was set up as a cohort. Marilyn believes she successfully completed the noncredit program because of the emotional support from her family, the scholarship and support she received from Adult Education and Literacy, the support she received from the instructors, and the support she received from the other students.

**Michelle**

Michelle is a 25-year old white female with two children, aged 5 and 1, and works part-time for her dad and brother’s trucking business. Michelle and her husband got divorced shortly after their second child was born. When Michelle was 16, she dropped out of high school to get married. At the age of 20, she had her first child. She always wanted to get a GED, but she explained:
My ex-husband wouldn’t let me go to school to get a GED. He told me I wasn’t smart enough, and I believed him. After I had my second child, I finally had enough courage to file for divorce. He put me through the wringer. He was horrible. Fortunately, my grandparents, my dad, and my brother helped me and my kids get out of that situation. He was so horrible to us.

After Michelle and her children were safe from her ex-husband, she decided to enroll in the PTC GED classes at the El Camino County Career & Education Center (ECCCEC), which is supported by her oldest child’s school, El Camino ISD, because “I wanted to prove him wrong and I wanted to get a GED for my kids.” El Camino ISD and PTC have an agreement, and PTC provides college classes at the ECCCEC. She started to work on completing the GED and went to classes at ECCCEC for six hours every week. After completing two parts of the GED test, her GED instructor encouraged her to enroll in an allied health noncredit program that would be offered at ECCCEC. Michelle’s dad agreed to pay for the tuition and her grandparents agreed to pay for her scrubs and other supplies, so she was able to enroll. She explained:

While I was excited to get to start the college program, it was hard because I took GED classes for six hours during the week, and then I had [allied health] classes for eight hours a week. I was tired. The days were long. My [oldest child] was out of school and my [youngest child] is still a baby, so I had to make sure my grandparents were able to watch them.

Michelle completed the allied health noncredit program and passed the last two GED tests. In fact, Michelle said, “My GED instructor told me my GED test scores were the highest she had ever seen. She told me I had to get a degree. So, now I am working with PTC to get into [a degree] program.”
While completing the GED program and the allied health noncredit certification as a single-parent student, Michelle was responsible for taking care of her two children and their household while working part-time for her dad and brother’s trucking business. She went to classes at the ECCCEC, and they provided evening childcare for the children of the adult students. Michelle explained, “The childcare in the evening was helpful because my grandparents only had to watch my baby and not both of my kids.” During her time working on the GED and the noncredit allied health programs, Michelle never visited the main PTC campus because she was able to do everything from the ECCCEC. In the individual interview, Michelle shared she did not utilize any of the support services because:

My kids get food stamps and my mom buys their clothes. My brother or my dad helps me with gas so I can come to class, and my grandparents pay for my house. I know there are others worse off that can use the services more than me.

Michelle also shared that her PTC instructors and ECCCEC “did everything they could to help students.”

Throughout her time as a noncredit student, Michelle received support from PTC Adult Education and Literacy, ECCCEC, fellow students, and the instructors. In each of the data analysis methods (the projective technique, individual interview, and artifact analysis), Michelle stated she wanted to complete a GED for her children and to prove her ex-husband wrong. She shared PTC Adult Education and Literacy supported her because they helped her believe in herself.

**William**

William is a 51-year old white male with one child, aged 19, and is employed full-time as a manager over a training unit in a corrections facility. After William graduated from high
school, he went to college but, he did not graduate. After working a few years, he decided to go back to college and completed a bachelor's degree. During his time as a single-parent student, his child was 16 and lived about an hour and a half away with his ex-wife during the week. William traveled each Friday to visit his child for the weekend and came home on Sunday. As William reported:

- My ex-wife and I co-parent well, and I was able to stay in the guest room every weekend, spend time with our child, and have family time. But, I had to make sure I got all of my work done during the week so that on the weekend, I could focus on my [child]…I wanted to be active in my [child's] life, which being an hour and a half away made that difficult.

William's employer asked him if he would be willing to complete noncredit risk management and safety certification at PTC. Because his employer would allow him to go to class during his normal workday, complete the coursework during his typical workday, and pay for the certification, William agreed to take on the additional responsibility. William shared he “felt this [program] would be beneficial for me in my job role.” He also shared that the risk management and safety program gave him “the confidence to render aid and guide others to safety in emergency situations.” Furthermore, William knew this certification could help him “in any job role I might have in the future.” William's past educational experiences prepared him to be successful in the noncredit program. The academic assistance services were not required because:

- I was able to complete all of the coursework during each class. The instructors made sure we mastered each skill that was taught…and they encouraged the students to work
together during class breaks to ensure each student could successfully execute the skills, which created a more engaging learning environment.

He did share that “looking back, I wish I would have taken advantage of tutoring services because it would have made me feel more confident performing the skills learned outside of a controlled classroom environment.” As a result of receiving the noncredit risk management and safety certification, William received a promotion and currently serves as the director over the unit he previously managed.

**Results**

The results from data analysis described in Chapter Three are presented in this section. The themes and subthemes related to the phenomenon are presented as they were developed through the data analysis of the projective technique, the individual interview, and the artifact analysis (Moustakas, 1994) (see Appendix H). The research question responses offer conclusive answers to the questions that guided this study.

Data was collected through a projective technique, individual interviews, and artifact analysis. Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach was used to analyze the data. Data collection results generated commonalities that single-parents who completed a noncredit program at a community college experienced. Five themes emerged from the data analysis of the projective technique, individual interviews, and artifact analysis. The five themes that emerged were: (a) instructor support, (b) financial support, (c) cohort model, (d) intrinsic motivation, and (e) support from others. As themes emerged, subthemes developed and provided a greater understanding of the participants’ lived experiences with the phenomenon. Appendix F provides the data analysis of the projective technique. Appendix H provides the data analysis and
memoing of the themes and subthemes. Appendix I provides the data analysis of the artifact analysis.

**Instructor Support**

The first theme recognized through data analysis was *instructor support*. Each of the 13 participants mentioned how support from instructors helped them successfully complete the noncredit program. The instructors promoted academic integration and persistence. In the projective technique, Effie, Jonell, and Michelle shared their instructors were a part of their support system (see Appendix F). The instructors supported Effie by going above and beyond by being responsive outside of class and by “giving me pep talks when I wanted to quit.”

**Instructor Behaviors**

According to the participants, the instructors supported their students by being responsive, flexible, and adaptable. Abigail shared the instructor in her online class was responsive in multiple ways, including instant messaging, emails, and was available for virtual or face-to-face meetings. Ann, Ariel, and Jenna shared their instructors were flexible “as far as getting the coursework done” as long as the students were communicating with the instructor on their progress. Hope and Lucy shared the instructors were willing to do whatever they could to help the students be successful.

Seven of the participants shared the instructors provided academic enrichment outside of the classroom, which contributed to their persistence and completion. Jenna shared the instructors “recorded themselves demonstrating lessons” so students could follow along outside of class while completing coursework and studying. Ann, Jewell, and Karla shared the instructors would help students outside of class because they wanted students to understand what they were learning so they could be successful. If anyone had questions, Karla said, “The
instructors went out of the way to make sure everyone understood and would give us extra time to practice skills.” Karla shared that some of the students struggled with learning skills, such as blood pressure, so the instructors would tell the students, “We are going to practice until you get it because I want you to get it. They never gave us an excuse to not understand something.”

In the individual interview, 11 of the participants shared instructor encouragement contributed to their persistence (see Appendix H). Jewell shared, “the instructors gave me hope,” and Effie shared the instructors gave her pep talks when she wanted to quit. Jonell said the instructors supported her by being encouraging and giving her confidence to believe in herself. The instructors supported Michelle by “constantly encouraging me to keep going and not give up.” Positive experiences with the instructors provided the needed support for the single-parent students to persist and complete the noncredit programs.

Financial Support

The second theme recognized through data analysis was financial support. Many single-parent students are financially responsible for themselves and their families. Karla explained that as a single-person: “Everything falls back on me. Repair of my car, putting the gas in my car, making sure my grandbabies had what they needed. Making sure the utility bills are paid so everybody can be comfortable. Rent. Everything.” Marilyn shared:

I was struggling at the time. I mean, I would go my whole day of school without eating until I got home because I couldn’t afford to stop and get something to eat. I was struggling to provide for me and my [child].

Nine participants received full-ride scholarships from either PTC or their employer. Each of the nine participants that received financial support from PTC or their employer shared that, without the financial support, they would not have been able to afford the program on their own.
Further, receiving financial support from PTC or their employer removed some barriers that would have existed because they did not have to worry about paying for the noncredit program in addition to their other financial responsibilities.

*Tuition Assistance*

Six of the participants received full-ride academic scholarships through the Adult Education and Literacy program to complete a noncredit program. Ann, Effie, Jewell, Karla, Marilyn, and Michelle shared the PTC Adult Education contributed to their academic integration and persistence. Without the academic scholarship, they believed they would have been less likely to successfully complete a noncredit program as a single-parent student.

Three of the participants received employer tuition assistance scholarships to complete a noncredit program. In fact, in the projective technique, two of the participants, Jenna and William, shared their employers were a part of their support system because of the tuition assistance they received. The tuition assistance promoted their persistence and successful completion (see Appendix F).

*Cohort Model*

The third theme recognized through data analysis was the *cohort model*. Each of the noncredit programs successfully completed by the single-parents, whether online or face-to-face, was set up as a cohort model. Thus, the students completed the program as a group in the same class sequence. The cohort model allowed the students to get to know each other. In fact, in the individual interview, all 13 participants shared a sense of community that was built with their classmates, which promoted social integration and persistence (see Appendix H).

As Jenna described it, “we helped each other out, especially when it came time to completing assignments because we would message back and forth in the class discussion board.
and share helpful tips.” Ariel shared she and her classmates had a group chat and would send each other their notes to help each other study. Hope explained that her classmates supported her by being “helpful if I didn't understand something, and by being very encouraging.” As Karla described it, her classmates supported each other by “studying together, encouraging each other, and helping each other out as best as we could.”

The three participants who completed the GED first did not experience the cohort model until they began the noncredit program. The GED program was not set up as a cohort, so Jonell, Karla, and Michelle “saw students come and go.” To complete the GED, the participants worked independently with the guidance of an instructor to complete their work. When the participants moved to the cohort model program, they were able to meet their peers and get to know each other. Jonell, Karla, and Michelle shared that getting to know their classmates, both inside and outside of the classroom, contributed to their persistence and completion. As Michelle described it, “even though we didn’t see each other every day, we all wanted each person to complete the program together.”

Each participant that completed an allied health noncredit certification shared that the students would study in groups outside of class. As Abigail described it, “if one [student] did not understand something, we could discuss it as a group, which made navigating through the course more enjoyable and more beneficial for learning.” Ann said, “When we studied together outside of class, we would bring our kids and help each other with studying and watching kids.” Hope shared that the cohort model allowed the students “to get to know each other, even during a pandemic.” In the projective technique, Michelle noted her classmates were a part of her support system, which promoted her persistence and successful completion (see Appendix F).

**Intrinsic Motivation**
The fourth theme recognized through data analysis was *intrinsic motivation*. Each of the 13 participants was personally motivated to complete the noncredit program. Thus, the intrinsic motivation of each participant contributed to academic integration and persistence (see Appendix I). Of the 13 participants, nine shared their children served as their greatest motivator to complete a noncredit program as a single-parent student. In all three data analysis methods (the projective technique, individual interview, and artifact analysis), Lucy shared “my kids are the reason for everything I do, and every goal I make, I have them in mind.” As she described it:

I felt like my kids thought I was putting them on hold because they couldn’t understand that I had to study for my [allied health] class. That was hard because I wanted to spend quality time with my kids, but I had to study. They didn’t understand that the whole purpose of all of this was really them in the end.

**Types of Motivation**

Nontraditional students share motivational factors, such as professional growth and personal goals, as reasons to persist to completion (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Johnson et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2017). Similarly, the participants of this study shared motivational factors, such as their children, as reasons to persist to completion. In the projective technique, when asked to describe their experience of being a single-parent, Hope, Jewell, and Jonell used the same specific words of “role model” (see Appendix F). In the artifact analysis, Abigail, Ann, Ariel, Hope, Jenna, Jonell, Lucy, Michelle, and William shared a picture of their children to visually explain their motivation behind completing a noncredit program as a single-parent student (see Appendix I). In the individual interview, each of these participants shared they wanted to be a role model for their children, and they believed furthering their education was a way to do this.
In each of the data analysis methods, some of the participants shared their families were worthy of more. The word ‘more’ meant various things for the participants, such as financial stability or better home life. Abigail, Ann, Ariel, Hope, Jenna, Jonell, Lucy, Michelle, and William indicated their families were worthy of more. As a result, to improve their lives, they had to successfully complete a noncredit program as a single-parent student. Ann shared “I had to finish for [my child]. I could not fail.” Jenna shared she had “aha thoughts” and knew she had to “get it together and better myself and my [child].” Jewell shared, “I came from a poor family and needed to show my siblings that they could accomplish things.” As she described it:

I wanted to break the cycles my family has had for generations, such as dropping out and not completing school. I felt I had to break the cycle and give my siblings and my child a decent outlook on life, give them hope, and let them know there are better opportunities. Enrolling in the [allied health noncredit certification] was the way I thought I could do this.

In each of the data analysis methods (the projective technique, individual interview, and artifact analysis), Jonell stated that her children were her greatest motivation to complete the noncredit program. She felt she had to complete for herself and set a good example for her kids. The desire to improve their own lives and those of their families contributed to the persistence and successful completion of a noncredit program as a single-parent student for nine of the participants.

**Support from Others**

The fifth theme recognized through data analysis was *support from others*. Support, in the form of assistance and encouragement, was received by the students from family, co-workers, employers, fellow students, instructors, and a counselor. The support received
contributed to the academic integration, social integration, and/or persistence, which promoted the single-parent student to successfully complete a noncredit program.

**Assistance and Encouragement**

Assistance was received from others, such as family, friends, co-workers, and fellow students, by each of the 13 participants (see Appendix F). The participants received assistance in the form of childcare, academic support, and financial resources. This additional assistance promoted the persistence of each of the participants, ultimately leading to the successful completion of a noncredit program. Karla received academic support from the Adult Education and Literacy program and said:

> They would help me study for tests, they would help me make note cards, and they helped me learn how to be a better student. I dropped out at 16, so I never learned how to study or quiz myself or take notes. I had to learn all of that. If they wouldn’t have been there to help me, I don’t know if I could have done it on my own.

Marilyn also received academic support from the Adult Education and Literacy program. She shared that “anytime I was having issues, I would reach out to my adult education instructor, and I could go to the library to work with her, or I could make an online appointment to work with her, and she would help me. It was very beneficial.”

In addition to instructor encouragement, each of the participants received encouragement from others, such as family, co-workers, employers, counselors, and classmates during their time as a single-parent student in a noncredit program (see Appendix F). Ariel believed she successfully completed the noncredit program because of “the support and encouragement from my family, the instructors, and my employer.” Lucy believed she successfully completed the noncredit program because of “the support and encouragement from her counselor at [the
housing facility].” Ann and Jewell shared the encouragement from their family pushed them to successfully complete the noncredit program, and Jenna shared the encouragement from her employer drove her to persist through both of her noncredit programs. Marilyn’s family supported her by giving her emotional support and helping her with her child. However, she explained that she “tried not to ask them for help too much because I know they’ve got their own life.” Thus, the encouragement received outside of the classroom contributed to the persistence and successful completion of each of the 13 participants.

**Outlier Data and Findings**

Three unexpected findings were discovered when analyzing data. First, two of the participants completed classes at a county career and education center that provided support to the students. The support provided by the county career and education center, in addition to the other forms of support the students received, contributed to their persistence and successful completion. Second, all participants, whether they had younger children that required childcare, or older children that did not require childcare, mentioned childcare on campus would be a beneficial service that colleges could provide. Third, all participants shared that their career has benefited from successfully completing the noncredit program. These findings warrant attention.

**Outlier Finding #1**

Two of the 13 participants completed noncredit programs at a county career and education center supported by an independent school district. ECISD and PTC have an agreement that PTC will provide adult education, workforce education, and college classes at the ECCCEC. In return, PTC can use the facility. As a result, PTC can serve more individuals within its service area.
ECISD provides the ECCCEC building, technology, and internet while the students are at the facility. Additionally, the students were allowed to check out the ECCCEC laptops and hotspots so they could study from home. Moreover, ECISD provided childcare at the ECCCEC for the children of the adult students. While the children are in the ECCCEC childcare room, the children work on educational activities, such as homework, reading to volunteers, playing educational games on tablets, coloring, and completing puzzles. ECISD does not charge for childcare services. Appendix F shows the data analysis of the projective technique where the participants indicated how the ECCCEC promoted academic integration and persistence.

**Outlier Finding #2**

Each of the 13 participant’s shared childcare services on campus would have been beneficial. Abigail, Effie, and Hope shared that, although they did not need childcare services, they knew classmates would have benefited from childcare available at PTC. Ann, Karla, and Lucy shared they had to bring their children or grandchildren to their study groups because they lacked childcare. Jenna shared she would have utilized more of the campus resources “if I could bring my [child] and if they were available on nights and weekends.” However, since childcare was not available, and because the services, such as study spaces and computer labs, were not available during the evenings or on weekends, she was unable to take advantage of those services. Although some of the participants did not need childcare services, they still made a point to suggest childcare services would help single-parent students. Notably, childcare services on campus during the evenings and weekends might play an important role in removing barriers and promoting program completion.
Outlier Finding #3

All 13 participants shared their career benefitted from completing a noncredit program (see Appendix F). Effie shared that her “career is booming,” and Hope shared she now works in a career that is fulfilling and gives her purpose. Successfully completing the noncredit program allowed the participants to earn a job in their desired field or earn a promotion making a higher salary. Thus, completing the noncredit program improved their lives, as well as the lives of their families.

Research Question Responses

Three research questions were developed to guide the purpose of this study, which was to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students enrolled in noncredit programs at a community college. The themes that surfaced during data analysis informed responses to each research question. The answers revealed the essence of the underlying experiences of the group of participants through textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences that support noncredit program completion among single-parents in the community college context? This central research question reflects the purpose of the study, which was to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who successfully completed a noncredit program at a community college. In addition to academic responsibilities, single-parent students have family responsibilities traditional students do not have (Deil-Amen, 2011; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Woods & Frogge, 2017). Additional responsibilities cause stress and feelings of defeat and failure and may lead to dropout. However, this study found that access to instructors, financial assistance, positive interactions with fellow
students, intrinsic motivation, and support outside of academics alleviated some of the stress single-parent students experience, ultimately promoting persistence and completion.

Having access to instructors, both inside and outside of the classroom promoted persistence and completion. Abigail shared her instructor had instant messaging on the PTC email platform, so as students were completing coursework, they could easily see if the instructor was available. Ann and Ariel shared the instructors were understanding that they had a child and would come in early or stay late to get them caught up on the learning that was missed. Effie shared:

I wouldn't expect an instructor to work after business hours, like after 5, but if I emailed my instructor at 7 in the evening when my instructor would respond pretty quick. The instructors are the only reason that I completed and am working where I am now in an emergency room because they gave me the skills to know what to do.

The participants all commented that their instructors were responsive to emails and messages, flexible with assignment submission, and adaptable when working with the students around their schedules. Furthermore, 11 of the participants shared that encouragement from their instructors helped motivate them to persist throughout the program. Without the flexibility and adaptability of the instructors, the participants would not have been able to overcome the barriers that arose or complete the noncredit programs.

Participants in this study received financial assistance from academic scholarships, employer tuition assistance, and family. The financial assistance alleviated some of the stress single-parent students’ experience, ultimately promoting persistence and completion. Each of the participants who received financial assistance through academic scholarships and employer tuition assistance stated that without that assistance, they would not have been able to afford the
classes to complete the program. Jenna shared, “If my employer would have not paid the tuition, I would have never enrolled.” Effie summed it up by sharing that the financial assistance received from the academic scholarship “meant everything to me.”

The cohort model built a community for the participants. Since the students went through the program in the same course sequence, the positive interactions with fellow students alleviated some of the stress single-parent students’ experience, ultimately promoting persistence and completion. As Abigail, Jenna, and Jonell shared, the cohort model allowed the students to get to know each other, even in an online program. Ann said, “When we studied together outside of class, we would bring our kids and help each other with studying and watching kids.” Karla shared that the instructors encouraged the students to study in groups. As a result, the students worked together inside and outside of the classroom. As she described it:

My group was awesome. If anyone got stuck on something we learned, we would work together to help that person. I feel like with the study group; no one could fail because we were there for one another. One of the girls had a baby and didn’t have hardly any help. So since she was in our group, we told her to bring her baby to our study sessions. We all had to bring children with us to at least one study session. Even though I had my grandkids with me sometimes, and even though some of the other girls had their kids with them, we were all willing to step in and help her with her baby. We all wanted each other to make it to the finish line, and that’s what it’s all about.

Each participant of this study was intrinsically motivated by the desire to better their lives and the lives of their children. Some were intrinsically motivated by the desire to be a good role model for their children. Ariel said:
My kids are the only thing I have, they have made me want to get a better job, and I don’t want to screw up and let them down. Before I had my kids, I didn’t care if I quit or let anyone down…if I didn’t want to do something, I didn’t.

In each of the data analysis methods (the projective technique, individual interview, and the artifact analysis), Ann shared her child was her greatest motivation to complete the noncredit program because “I had to do it and could not fail.” Others were intrinsically motivated to obtain a new job making a higher wage. In all three data analysis methods (the projective technique, individual interview, and the artifact analysis), Jonell shared that her previous attempts at completing the GED never worked because:

I would always have thoughts in my head or this little voice telling me I can’t do it. So, I had to get over all my fears so that I can be successful for the kids and myself. The thought of letting my kids down is not an option. I was never comfortable taking the classes before. But this time, what’s been beneficial to me is being able to come to the ECCCEC, a place where I’m comfortable, I have the help that I need, I have the people that motivate me and tell me I can do anything that I want to do.

Thus, the intrinsic motivation of each participant was a factor that promoted them to persist to completion.

Each participant received support outside of academics, such as encouragement and childcare. Non-academic support was given by family, co-workers, and a counselor. Encouraging words motivated the participants to persist and not dropout. Stories shared included families babysitting children of students while the students studied. Co-workers encouraged participants by letting them know their hard work would pay off and it was worth it to persist. A counselor listened to the student and gave her referrals to available resources. The non-academic
support received alleviated some of the stress single-parent students experience, ultimately promoting persistence and completion.

**Sub-Question One**

What are the successes described by single-parents who completed noncredit programs at a community college? Sub-question one reflects the successes that resulted from the single-parents who successfully completed a noncredit program at a community college. Single-parent students have a greater risk of living in poverty than traditional students (Koh et al., 2017). Thus, single-parent students who complete a noncredit program that could lead directly into employment could improve the social and economic status of a single-parent (Shenoy et al., 2016; Stuart et al., 2014; Vespa et al., 2013).

Ann said the allied health noncredit certification “was the quickest way to get my foot in the door and get a job.” Although Ariel was already working in the medical field, she completed the allied health noncredit certification because she wanted to feel like a more valuable member of the team. Completing the noncredit certification gave Ariel additional applicable skills to get a better job earning a higher wage in the medical field. As a result, she was able to receive a promotion, is working in the job she wants and feels like she is a valuable member of the team. Effie said completing the noncredit certification gave her the confidence to reenter the workforce. In each of the data analysis methods (the projective technique, individual interview, and the artifact analysis), Jenna shared:

I knew that if I could complete these certifications, I would gain applicable skills related to my job with the school district, and I would have a better chance of getting a promotion, which would allow me to have less stress and be a better mom.

All 13 participants shared the main success of completing a noncredit program at a
community college was getting a new job or earning a promotion that lead to an increase in pay and a better work-life balance. Some participants received a promotion and a raise at their current job. Some participants entered a new career making more money and working fewer hours, improving their work-life balance and allowing them to spend more time with their children. Some participants started their careers earning a living wage that met their basic needs. By getting a better job, the participants were able to improve their personal life and career work life, as well as the lives of their families.

Sub-Question Two

What are the barriers overcome by single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college? Sub-question two reflects the barriers that the single-parents had to overcome to successfully complete a noncredit program at a community college. Single-parent students are at significant risk of dropout because of pre-existing barriers, such as home and work responsibilities and finding adequate childcare (Lynch, 2019).

When asked what support services would have been beneficial during her time as a noncredit college student, Marilyn said:

When you enroll in college, you’re just thrown in. Here you go. You’re in college. This is what you need to do. But, they don’t really take the time to look at the person and what they’re going through. Are they a single-parent, are they working, what services are available that could be offered to them? If [PTC] took the time to do that, it would be very beneficial.

Furthermore, when asked this same question, Effie, Hope, Jewell, Karla, and Lucy suggested childcare on campus in the evenings and weekends would be beneficial. In that way, while studying, student-parents would know that their children have a safe place to stay.
Each of the 13 participants shared that they overcame barriers to complete the noncredit program. Barriers included maintaining the household, ensuring children were safe and healthy, and needing more time during the day to get everything done. Not surprisingly, these barriers cause stress which may result in missed classes. As a result, student-parents may fall behind in their studies.

**Summary**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. The participants' stories granted others access to their lived experiences and provided an understanding of the phenomenon. Two findings stand out: encouragement and community. Each of the participants attributed their desire to persist to completion through the encouragement they received both inside and outside of the classroom. A sense of community was built for each of the participants through the cohort model the noncredit programs followed. As a result, each single-parent student developed positive relationships with classmates. Thus, an additional support system was developed for the students, that otherwise might not have formed. Although each single-parent student had to overcome barriers, each persisted to successful completion. As a result, each of the 13 participants has a better job and has improved their life and the life of their family.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. This study addresses the gap in the research literature to address the problem that single-parent students are more prone to dropout than traditional students, and little is known about the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. Chapter Five interprets the findings, outlines implications for practice, discusses the findings of the research in their theoretical and empirical contexts, notes the study’s limitations and delimitations, and recommends related areas for future research.

Discussion

This section presents a discussion of the findings. I discuss the findings in relation to the theory of student departure (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993), the primary theory that guided this study. Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) theory offers a perspective into the experiences that lead to dropout and the importance that positive social and academic interactions play in promoting persistence and college completion. Furthermore, I discuss how the findings relate to persistence, academic integration, and social integration.

Interpretation of Findings

Three major themes emerged from the analysis of the study. Each theme aligns with the central research question: What are the experiences that support noncredit program completion among single parents in the community college context? The themes were: (a) positive and
meaningful support, (b) cohort program model, and (c) intrinsic motivation. In the following section, the summary of the thematic findings with interpretations are discussed.

**Summary of Thematic Findings**

Participants in this study expressed an awareness of the experiences that promoted completing a noncredit program as a single-parent student. Findings suggest the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who successfully completed a noncredit program at a community college were: (a) positive and meaningful support, (b) program set up as cohort, and (c) personal intrinsic motivation. Each participant shared that these experiences contributed to their persistence and successful completion of a noncredit program while having the obstacle of being a single-parent student.

As a result of the positive and meaningful support, program set up as a cohort, and personal intrinsic motivation, some of the barriers that prevent student success were removed and these single-parent students completed a noncredit certification (Stuart et al., 2014). Even though the nontraditional students in this study were not similar to the students Tinto (1973, 1987, 1993) studied, they completed, as Tinto’s study predicted, since they were integrated academically and socially, and had developed a sense of community. Thus, the findings of this study support the existing theory of student departure in relation to their experience.

**Positive and meaningful support.** Colleges create intentional support programs and services for nontraditional students that are intended to prevent dropout and promote college completion because nontraditional students have a higher risk of dropout (Prins & Clymer, 2018; Strauss, 2016; Xu & Ran, 2020). Noncredit programs are appealing to some adults because an extensive time commitment is not required (D’Amico et al., 2015). Further, some enroll in noncredit programs to receive skills that lead to employment and a higher paying wage (Xu &
Although support programs and services exist, colleges still struggle with completion rates among nontraditional single-parent students (Damasceno, 2018; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018). Findings in this study corroborated the importance for the need of positive and meaningful support for single-parent students. Each participant received positive and meaningful support, both inside and outside of the classroom, from family, co-workers, employers, fellow students, instructors, and counselors.

Positive support the single-parent students received inside the classroom while completing a noncredit program included: the cohort model, encouragement from the instructor, college staff, and classmates, and academic enrichment. The support received inside the classroom was provided by instructors, college staff, and classmates. Instructors can contribute to the success of single-parent students while enrolled in a noncredit program by encouraging these students (Shenoy et al., 2016). Further, access to instructors and academic resources alleviated some stress single-parent students feel and promoted student success (Deil-Amen, 2011; French, 2017; Stuart et al., 2014).

Positive support the single-parent students received outside of the classroom while completing a noncredit program included: encouraging words, childcare, and financial assistance. The support received outside the classroom was provided by family, classmates, and counselors. Additionally, a community education center for two of the participants positively supported them. The community education center supported the two participants by providing childcare, technology, encouraging words, and a place closer to home to attend college.

Similar to Tinto’s (1975) findings, this study also found positive academic and social interactions and relationships were critical for single-parent students in a noncredit program. The positive and meaningful interactions contributed to preventing dropout and promoting
persistence and college completion. As a result, this study contributes to the theoretical literature by endorsing Tinto’s theory of student departure (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993).

**Cohort program model.** Building relationships and a sense of community can be difficult for single-parent students (French, 2017). This is due to the time poverty, or limited availability, single-parent students experience (Wladis et al., 2017). Therefore, for single-parent students to persist to completion in a noncredit program, interactions within the classroom with instructors and classmates become even more important (Dwyer, 2017). The results of this study support previous findings that, to be successful in a college program, nontraditional students perform best with a structured program, such as a cohort model (Prins & Clymer, 2018).

Single-parent students have non-academic responsibilities, such as parenting and work (Beeler, 2016). Therefore, these students spend less time on campus, preventing the ability to develop meaningful relationships with peers and a sense of belonging (Deil-Amen, 2011; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018). Each participant enrolled in a program that was set up as a cohort, a group of students who complete a program in the same course sequence. The cohort model promoted the development of meaningful relationships with peers and created a sense of belonging. Further, the cohort model promoted persistence, social integration, and academic integration, which led to the participants successfully completing a noncredit program. Each of the 13 single-parent participants indicated completing the noncredit program as a group in the same class sequence allowed the students to get to know each other, built a sense of belonging, and created community, even in an online program.

**Intrinsic motivation.** Each participant was personally motivated to complete a noncredit program. Similar to traditional students, the single-parent students in this study listed personal goals and professional growth as forms of personal motivation (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Yang
et al., 2017). The main motivator for each participant of this study was the desire to improve their life and the life of their family. The intrinsic motivation of each participant lead to the successful completion of a noncredit program.

Additionally, each participant had supportive influences that increased the student’s motivation and promoted persistence (Tinto, 1993). The supportive influences included: family, co-workers, employers, fellow students, instructors, and counselors. As a result of the supportive influences, each participant had an increased sense of confidence and personal motivation (Campbell et al., 2017). The support each participant received from family, co-workers, employers, fellow students, instructors, and counselors, pushed each participant to persist and stay motivated.

Results of this study support that the goals, commitments, and motivation of an individual, such as family and career goals, affect the student throughout their college experience (Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, the goals and commitments of a student determine how the various experiences that are encountered while in college are responded to, ultimately leading to the decision to persist or dropout (Tinto, 1993). Each of the 13 participants shared that they persisted to completion in the noncredit program because they were personally motivated. Thus, this study contributes to the theoretical literature by endorsing Tinto’s (1993) model of student departure confirming that student goals and commitments impact persistence.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings from this study warrant further consideration and investigation for policy and practice. The research regarding the experiences of single-parent students who successfully completed a noncredit program at a community college is deficient. Policies and practices should
be implemented by various stakeholders to change the educational landscape of single-parent students.

**Implications for Policy**

The participants in this study were part of the PTC service area, which includes 12 counties in Texas. This study presented four areas of college-community collaboration for a shared understanding of what a quality education looks like. The four goals include: increase student persistence and completion, improve communication, train instructors, and collaborate with community partners.

**Increase student persistence and completion.** All participants in this study persisted to completion of a noncredit program. Unfortunately, this is not the norm. Improving participation and completion could be measured by student enrollment, attendance, and completion of noncredit programs. Community colleges could ensure that every student has the opportunity to achieve their educational goals, thus increasing completion rates. This can be accomplished through offering flexible course scheduling, partnering with employers hiring students, and determining which services students may need, such as childcare, technology, and food, at the beginning of each term.

Rarely are students asked to state their needs. At the beginning of each term, students could be asked about the services which could support them. This could be done through a survey or through interviews that use open-ended questions to uncover unacknowledged needs. Additionally, the survey could be updated throughout the term since unexpected barriers could arise. Ultimately, students could feel more welcomed to community college when their needs are satisfied, and they realize their life and the lives of their families are being improved.
**Improve communication.** Many of the participants of this study were unaware of the resources available to them, such as the student food pantry. Further, many participants shared that, if they would have been aware of the resources available, they would have taken advantage of them because they were needed during their time as a single-parent student. Increasing the awareness of resources available to students through direct and frequent communication could improve the experience of students (Bohl et al., 2017).

Direct and frequent communication with current and prospective students could be an effective way of improving student persistence and completion. For example, benefits, costs, and quality of local higher education could be communicated. Targeted communication campaigns about the benefits of enrolling in college could include persisting in college results in higher earnings, encouraging family members to support adult learners, and identifying resources available to college students. Additionally, communication campaigns that explain various services available to students could be an effective way of improving enrollment, persistence, and completion because prospective and current students will learn about the resources available to them while they are a student and feel integrated on campus (Witkowski et al., 2016).

**Train instructors.** Many instructors are trained on their subject matter, not on influencing student persistence. However, in this study, each of the 13 participants shared their instructor behaviors engaged students and influenced student persistence. The behaviors included encouraging students, extending deadlines, being responsive outside of the classroom, answering emails within 24 hours, and communicating by texts, email chats, emails, and phone calls. The positive interactions between the participants and their instructors built confidence, and motivation (Campbell et al., 2017; Crippen, 2010). Additionally, trust was built between the
single-parent student and the instructor because the instructors showed personal interest and empathy, as well as encouragement (Sahawneh & Benuto, 2018).

Thus, successful instructors, such as in this study, could be identified by reviewing retention and completion numbers. Once the instructors are identified, they could be interviewed to determine a list of behaviors and best practices to show instructors how to care for and support students. Then, a training plan could be developed so that other instructors could be trained in these caring behaviors. Measurements could be taken pre-training and post-training to see the improvements and make necessary changes.

**Collaborate with community partners.** Some nontraditional students experience barriers, such as limited means of transportation, lack of access to a computer and internet at home, and need for childcare outside traditional school and daycare hours (Waters et al., 2019). For example, many people in the 12 counties PTC serves do not have the transportation means to get to the central PTC campus. The communities that comprise the community college service areas might work together to develop effective strategies and policies to increase the resources to better serve single-parent students. Furthermore, the strategies and policies could increase awareness of community college programs and services. As such, community colleges could partner with community stakeholders in supporting community members in furthering their education. This could be done by developing policies that provide accessible learning spaces and by providing resources that could improve academic performance (Rogers et al., 2018; Waters et al., 2019).

Two of the successful completers benefited from access to the same local community education center that is owned by the independent school district housed within one of the 12 counties served by PTC. The community education center provided access to technology,
childcare, advising, and tutoring. Transportation was not an issue because the community education center was centrally located within the county. Furthermore, if an employee of the community education center knew a resident had transportation issues, they could use independent school district vehicles to transport the student.

Since community colleges can control important factors for current and prospective students within its service area, such as the types of programs offered, delivery method of programs offered, and the amount budgeted for instruction and student services, one actionable step that community colleges can take to improve the economic circumstances of current and prospective students in its service area is to make the most of the partnerships within its service area, such as the one previously mentioned that is owned by the independent school district. In addition to independent school district partnerships, other partnerships might include business members of the chamber of commerce, regional or county economic development centers, churches, libraries, and nonprofit organizations. Thus, the collective power of a community that supports and motivates individuals who have education and career goals will emerge. While it is clear that establishing partnerships within PTC’s service area is an important finding for this community college, it may also be effective for all community college settings and their current and prospective students.

Implications for Practice

The goal of this study was to identify experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. By studying the stories of people who experienced the phenomenon of completing a noncredit program as a single-parent student, college personnel, community leaders, and other groups are better equipped to meet the needs of this population and to promote their persistence. College leaders
and partners can adopt and use strategies, including offering programs in a cohort model, training instructors to adopt caring behaviors, and informing students of services that could provide additional non-academic support. Conclusions drawn from this study can contribute to institutions, instructors, and single-parent students by assisting in the improvement and awareness of existing programs and services available.

**Implications for institutions.** Results indicate that offering programs in a cohort model build community and a sense of belonging for single-parent students. Additionally, the results indicate that structuring programs as a cohort allow students to get to know each other, even in an online program (Dwyer, 2017; French, 2017). Each of the 13 participants of this study was positively impacted by completing a program structured as a cohort. While it is clear that the offering of programs structured as a cohort model is an important finding for PTC, it may also be effective for all community college settings and students.

**Implications for instructors.** The noncredit instructors in this study were found to be encouraging, flexible, adaptable, and responsive. These interactions positively impacted the single-parent students in a noncredit program. Furthermore, these interactions influenced each of the 13 single-parent students’ persistence and completion. Community college instructors in other settings might consider adopting these behaviors to effectively assist single-parent students with the completion of a noncredit program.

Informing students of services could provide additional non-academic support that some single-parent students require. Since single-parent students spend limited time on campus due to personal responsibilities, colleges could find ways to communicate about the resources offered to students in various forms, such as in the syllabi, through social media, and campus-wide emails. Further, students should be encouraged to ask questions and to request services that are needed.
Some of the participants of this study were unaware of student services, such as the food pantry, campus closet, and gas vouchers. It is clear that finding more effective means of creating awareness and communicating the support services offered to its students is needed. Also, it may be effective for all community colleges to improve communication and awareness regarding support services.

**Theoretical and Empirical Implications**

The theory that guided this study was the theory of student departure (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993), which describes the process that a traditional university student experiences when making the decision to dropout or persist. Tinto’s theory (1975, 1987, 1993) provided a perspective regarding the importance of positive social and academic interactions and how those positive interactions promoted persistence and college completion. Further, Tinto’s theory (1975, 1987, 1993) provided a perspective into the experiences that lead some students to dropout. In fact, many higher education institutions use Tinto’s model (1993) as a reference to prevent dropout. However, Tinto’s theory (1975, 1987, 1993) examined the traditional college student at a university, not nontraditional college students at a community college.

More recently, in 2020, almost half of community college enrollment was made up of nontraditional students (Fast Facts, 2020). Any student with children is considered a nontraditional student. By examining the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students in a noncredit program at a community college, this study updates and expands the existing theory of student departure (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). Similar to traditional students, this study found single-parent students are more likely to persist to completion if they establish positive social and academic relationships (Stuart et al., 2014; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993).
Additionally, the results of this study provided a better understanding of the experiences that contributed to noncredit program completion.

**Theoretical Implications**

Single-parent student research avers that these students, like other nontraditional students, need to experience academic and social integration to persist to completion (Shenoy et al., 2016). However, the literature lacked a study that could confirm or refute the need for academic and social integration for single-parent students in noncredit programs (Carpenter et al., 2018; Shenoy et al., 2016). This study’s findings can offer guidance to community college leaders to better serve and support single-parent students to complete a noncredit program (Prins & Clymer, 2018). Furthermore, the results will add to the growing body of literature regarding experiences that contribute to the success of single-parent students (Cruse et al., 2019; Koh et al., 2017; Nomaguchi & Johnson, 2016; Shenoy et al., 2016).

The nontraditional students in this study were not similar to the students Tinto (1973, 1987, 1993) studied. Unlike Tinto’s students, these participants were 25 years of age or older, single-parents, and had other responsibilities, such as work. However, they completed their program, as Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) study predicted, because they were integrated academically and socially and had developed a sense of community. As a result, the participants of this study extended the existing theory of student departure in relation to the nontraditional students’ experiences. Thus, this study contributes to the theoretical literature by endorsing Tinto’s theory of student departure (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993).

The results of this study diverge from previous research because the participants were single-parent students who completed a noncredit program. Single-parent students have additional non-academic responsibilities that traditional students do not have. As a result, they
have less time to study, spend less time on campus, and are unable to develop a sense of community with their peers. However, the participants of this study were able to overcome these barriers by being part of a cohort model, receiving additional support, and having intrinsic motivation. Consequently, this study contributes to the theoretical literature by extending Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of student departure to single-parent students.

**Empirical Implications**

The purpose of this research study was to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. Single-parent students are more prone to dropout than traditional students (Damasceno, 2018; Giancola et al., 2009; Koh et al., 2017; Mallows, 2018; Prins & Clymer, 2018). Yet, little research exists regarding single-parent students in noncredit programs (Ryder & Hagedorn, 2012; Xu & Ran, 2020). The study’s themes (instructor support, financial support, cohort model, intrinsic motivation, and support from others), subthemes, and phenomenological descriptions have empirical significance because they supported the existing literature, as well as contributed new information to the literature.

The findings from interviewing single-parent students who successfully completed a noncredit program at a community college provided empirical results to community college leaders that can be change agents and advocates for this underrepresented student population. Similar to Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) findings, the positive academic and social interactions and relationships, such as enrolling in a program set up as a cohort, receiving encouragement from both inside and outside of the classroom, and having a sense of intrinsic motivation, were critical for the single-parent students in this study. The positive academic and social interactions and relationships contributed to preventing dropout and promoting persistence and college
completion. Community college leaders could use these findings to create programs and services geared specifically toward single-parent students (Shenoy et al., 2016).

Limitations and Delimitations

A limitation of this study was the role of the researcher. I followed Moustakas' (1994) process of practicing Epoché and made an intentional effort to rid myself of my own biases regarding the phenomenon. However, as the primary instrument of data analysis, I brought personal biases into this study concerning the phenomenon. The themes that emerged were formed off of my unbiased perceptions based on my attempt to understand the participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon.

Further, only 13 participants were interviewed. This sample may not be representative of single-parent students in noncredit programs at a community college because one male and 12 females participated. However, for this study, time, and setting, data saturation was met (Burns et al., 1993). A challenge of this study included collecting data from the participants. Due to the limited availability of the participants because of home and work responsibilities, I had to be extremely flexible and adaptable to conduct the interviews at convenient times for the participants. More than one email, phone call, and follow-up phone calls were necessary to schedule the interview. The data collection of the consent form, projective technique, and artifact analysis were not as challenging because the participants were able to complete those on their own time with their cell phones. However, receiving the completed forms from a participant who completed the forms on their phone presented a challenge to the researcher to read the results.

Delimitations I created when conducting this study were site selection and utilizing purposeful sampling, and snowball sampling. The participants of this study had to meet the criteria of being 18 years of age or older and having completed a noncredit program at a
community college within the last three years as a single-parent student. However, the delimitations were chosen to ensure the participants experienced the phenomenon of completing a noncredit program as a single-parent student at a community college.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The goals and strategies presented in this chapter show that collaboration between community colleges and community partners has an important role to play in improving adult education. First, community colleges can contribute to the success of single-parent students while enrolled in a noncredit program by surveying students at the beginning of a term to determine their needs. Second, community colleges can match programs and services to align those needs and communicate those services to the community. Third, community colleges can contribute to the success of single-parent students by training instructors to work with underrepresented student populations. Instructors need to know how to support their students through teaching good learning habits, encouraging students to persist to completion, and ensuring students have the tools they need to be successful learners. To do this, instructors with high retention and completion rates could be selected to share their best practices regarding promoting successful learners. These successful instructors could be surveyed about their practices to develop training materials and train other instructors in these successful behaviors. Finally, community colleges can contribute to the success of single-parent students by collaborating with community partners to transform and improve their educational systems. By developing a shared vision, community colleges and community partners can work together to provide educational and career opportunities. The community college can provide instruction to the students at locations that are easily accessible. Equally important, community partners can provide access to technology, childcare, advising, and tutoring. As a result, of surveying
students, communicating with the community, training instructors, and collaborating with community partners, some of the non-academic and academic barriers that prevent success are removed, and single-parent student completers could be increased.

Future researchers might want to review the experiences of single-parent students from other community colleges. Researchers could also review the experiences of single-parent students in credit programs. Therefore, it is recommended that replication of this study be done with single-parent students at other community colleges as well as with single-parent students in credit-bearing programs. This study filled a gap in the research and could be transferred to a quantitative study because the research study’s findings could be applicable to other contexts, situations, times, and populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college within the last three years. The ultimate goal is that students, no matter their background or geographical location, can get a high-quality education. The learning they need should give them the ability to earn an industry-recognized certification that leads them to a career making a livable wage.

Single-parents in this study included one male and 12 females. The participants were single-parents because some were never married or lived with their partners, some were divorced, and some were widowed. They ranged in age from 25 – 52. The number of children per single-parent ranged from one child to five children. Some had family support; others did not. Before enrolling in a noncredit program at a community college, some participants worked
in entry-level positions. After successfully completing a noncredit program at a community college, some participants were promoted and some gained employment.

Data was collected through individual interviews, a projective technique, and an artifact analysis. Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach was used to analyze the data. In the interviews, participants shared their journey towards completion of a noncredit program, which ended successfully. However, it was not easy for them because they had to overcome barriers to persist to completion. Barriers included limited means of transportation, lack of access to computers and internet at home, and a need for childcare outside traditional school and daycare hours. Motivation to complete came from their children, positive interactions with instructors, staff, and peers, and support from others. In the projective technique, positive words associated with successful completion included: family, determination, classmates, co-workers, instructors, and employers. The artifacts shared included family pictures, a Bible verse, a song lyric, and career inspiration.

Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model explains the experiences that lead to dropping out for traditional students. But, nontraditional students are different, and they need different resources to be successful. The findings of this study demonstrate that nontraditional students, specifically single-parent students, can successfully complete a noncredit program at a community college. These students were intrinsically motivated by the desire to better their lives and the lives of their children. They were supported both inside and outside of the classroom by college resources, instructor encouragement, and cohort cohesiveness. All of the single-parent students in this study completed a noncredit program, which led to a new job or promotion. As a result, these students made more money and had a more balanced life.
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Appendix A

Liberty University and Pine Tree College International Review Board Approval

[External] IRB-FY20-21-1006 - Initial: Initial - Exempt
do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>
Fri 7/30/2021 2:13 PM
To: Campbell, Esther
Arbelo Marrero, Ronalba (School of Education)

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

July 30, 2021

Esther Campbell
Florabia Arbelo Marrero

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-1006 Examining the Experiences that Promoted Completion: A Phenomenological Study of Single Parent Community College Students in Noncredit Programs

Dear Esther Campbell, Florabia Arbelo Marrero,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46.104(d): Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office
June 09, 2021

Esther Campbell
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University
School of Education

Dear Esther Campbell:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled Examining the Experiences that Promoted Completion: A Phenomenological Study of Single Parent Community College Students in Noncredit Programs, I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study at [Redacted] College for your research study.

☒ I grant permission for Esther Campbell to contact noncredit students to invite them to participate in her research study.

☒ I am requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

Dr. [Redacted]
Vice President of Academic Affairs
Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Dear Graduate:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and have completed a noncredit program or continuing education certification/license at a community college within the last three years as a single-parent student. Noncredit programs are certification or license programs offered through a college that prepare adults for in-demand jobs. Students in noncredit programs receive continuing education units instead of college credit. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire via email (5 minutes), complete a projective technique document via email (30 minutes), participate in an interview (either face-to-face or virtually) (1 hour), discuss one or more personal artifacts that represented your motivation to complete a noncredit program via email (30 minutes), and review the transcript of your interview to check for clarity via email (1 hour). The interview will be audio-recorded if it is conducted in person and video-recorded if it is conducted online. The participant will photograph the artifacts and email the photographs to the researcher. It should take approximately 3 hours and 5 minutes for you to complete the procedures listed. Your name and/or other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at the email address provided below.

If you meet the participation criteria, a consent form will be sent to you via email. The consent form contains additional information about my research. Please sign and date the consent form and return it to me by email. Once the consent form is signed and returned, you will be contacted to schedule an interview.

Participants will be compensated with a $20 gift card to a local restaurant for volunteering to take part in this research study.

I truly appreciate your consideration to participate in this study, and I look forward to working with you and learning about your experience.

Please feel free to forward this invitation to any individuals you know who qualify and might be interested in participating in the study.

If you have any questions before choosing to participate in the study, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Sincerely,
Appendix C

Screening Survey

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. Noncredit programs are certification or license programs offered through a college that prepare adults for in-demand jobs. Students in noncredit programs receive continuing education units instead of college credit. This survey is designed to determine your eligibility to participate in the study.

1. Are you 18 years of age or older?
   Yes/No

2. Did you complete a noncredit program at a community college within the last three years?
   Yes/No

3. Were you a single-parent while completing the noncredit program?
   Yes/No

4. Would you like to participate in a research study about the experiences that promoted completion among single-parents who completed courses in a noncredit program at a community college?
   Yes/No

5. Are you willing to participate in an individual interview and share your experiences that promoted noncredit program completion at a community college while being a single-parent, complete a projective technique, or word association document, where you respond to specific words related to the study in three to four sentences, discuss a personal artifact, or form of visual representation, that represented your motivation to complete a noncredit program, and review the transcript of your interview to check for clarity?
   Yes/No
Yes/No

6. Contact phone number to call and/or text: ____________________________.
Appendix D

Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: Examining the Experiences that Promoted Completion: A Phenomenological Study of Single Parent Community College Students in Noncredit Programs
Principal Investigator: Esther Campbell, Liberty University, School of Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and have completed a noncredit program at a community college within the last three years while being a single parent student. Noncredit programs are certification or license programs offered through a college that prepare adults for in-demand jobs. Students in noncredit programs receive continuing education units instead of college credit. Taking part in the research project is voluntary.

Please read this entire form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

What is the study about and why is it being done?
The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college.

What will happen if you take part in this study?
If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Complete a questionnaire, via email, that includes demographic information. This will take approximately 5 minutes.
2. Complete a projective technique, or word association, by responding in three to four sentences to four words via email. This will take approximately 30 minutes.
3. Participate in an interview with the researcher. The interview will take approximately one hour and will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and location. The interview may be conducted in-person or virtually. The interview will be audio-recorded if it is conducted in person and video-recorded if it is conducted online.
4. Discuss a personal artifact, or form of visual representation, via email. You will be asked to photograph the personal artifact and email the picture(s) to the researcher. The artifact will represent your experience or motivation as a single parent who completed courses in a noncredit program and may include photographs, journals, or other personal items. The original personal item will not be kept by the researcher. This will take approximately 30 minutes.
5. Review the interview transcript, via email, to ensure the accuracy of the information. The review and feedback process will take approximately one hour.
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 informing policies and programs at community colleges that help single parent students in noncredit programs be successful and complete their educational and career goals.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?
There are risks involved in any study. However, 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. In any sort of report that might be published, information that will make it possible to identify a participant will not be included. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses and the community college attended will be kept confidential through the use of assigned pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected, external USB drive and will be deleted after three years, per federal regulation.
- Paper copies will be scanned and saved on a password-protected, external USB drive and will be deleted after three years per federal regulation. The original paper copies will be shredded after they are scanned.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-protected external USB drive and will be deleted after three years. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?
Participants will receive a $20 gift card to a local restaurant for participating in this study. Gift cards will be emailed once the questionnaire, projective technique, interview, personal artifact, and interview transcript review have been completed.

Is study participation voluntary?
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the community college you attended. 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 Esther Campbell. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at (call or text) and/or . You may also contact the researcher’s faculty sponsor, Dr. Floralba Marrero, 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.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

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 researcher 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- or video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date
Appendix E

Demographic Questionnaire

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences that promoted completion among single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college. This questionnaire is designed to capture demographic and descriptive information. Prospective participants will be emailed the demographic questionnaire and will email the completed document back to me.

1. Name: _____________________________________________________________

2. Gender: Male/Female

3. Race/Ethnicity: American Indian or Alaska Native | Asian/Black or African American | Hispanic or Latino | Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander | White

4. Noncredit certification or license earned: ________________________________

5. Year you completed the certification or license: __________________________

6. How many children under the age of 18 lived in your household while you were in the process of earning the certification or license? __________________________

7. Did you receive a scholarship? Yes/No

8. Did you receive federal or state grants, i.e. Pell Grant or TPEG? Yes/No

9. List any colleges you attended before completing the certification or license:

______________________________________________________________

10. If you attended college before completing the certification or license, did you graduate? Yes/No
Appendix F

Projective Technique Guide

Prior to the individual interview, each participant was asked to respond to a word association, or projective technique, with three to four sentences. The word association exercise is designed to enable participants to describe their memories from their individual experiences regarding the phenomenon by responding to specific words related to the research study (Ludueña et al., 2014). Each participant received a worksheet with instructions to read each word, think about their life and experiences from when they were in a noncredit program, and to write a three to four sentence response to each word. This exercise promoted honest participant responses, and additional data emerged. The documents gathered from the word association activity were analyzed. Coding was used when analyzing the word association data to note similarities between participant statements. There were no right or wrong responses.

The words used for this study will be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Data</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>Single-parent College Student</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Lucky to have reliable childcare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support System</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Benefited from noncredit program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Single-parent College Student</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Childcare</td>
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<td>Career</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Support System</td>
<td>-Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Co-workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Benefited from noncredit program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effie</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Benefited from noncredit program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>Support System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Benifited from noncredit program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>Expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-Employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Co-workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Benefited from completing noncredit program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewell</td>
<td>Single-parent College Student</td>
</tr>
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<td>Childcare</td>
<td>Family</td>
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<td>Career</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jonell</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Family provided help</td>
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<td>Lucy</td>
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<td>Childcare</td>
<td>-School</td>
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<td>-Boys and Girls Club</td>
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<td>-Hard to find</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support System</td>
<td>Counselor from single-parent housing facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Benifited from noncredit program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn</td>
<td>Single-parent College Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>Hard to find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support System</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Benifited from noncredit program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
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<td>-Hard to find</td>
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<td>-ECCCEC</td>
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<td>Support System</td>
<td>-Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-parent</td>
<td>Lack of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Student</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support System</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total          | 19      | 1           | 38           |         |   |   |   |
PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUE

Read each word or phrase below, think about your life and experiences from when you were a single-parent community college student in a noncredit program, and write a three to four sentence response to each word. Please be honest with your responses. There are no right or wrong responses. Email the document back to me once you have read and responded to each word or phrase below.

Name: ________________________________________________________________________

1. Single-parent College Student: ______________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

2. Childcare: _______________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

3. Support System: __________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

4. Career: __________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
Appendix G

Interview Guide

An interview guide will be printed before each individual interview is conducted.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences that support noncredit program completion among single-parents in the community college context?

Sub-question 1

What are the successes described by single-parents who completed noncredit programs at a community college?

Sub-question 2

What are the barriers overcome by single-parent students who completed a noncredit program at a community college?

Interview Questions

Opening Questions

1. Introduce yourself by stating your name, the noncredit program you completed, and the age of your child when you completed the noncredit program.

2. What noncredit certification or license do you have?

3. Please tell me why you decided to enroll in a noncredit certification or license program.

4. What have been the benefits of completing the noncredit certification or license program?

Questions Related to Academic Integration
5. What were your past educational experiences before becoming a noncredit college student?

6. Please explain if you feel your past educational experiences prepared you to be successful in a noncredit certification or license program.

7. What were your academic responsibilities during your time as a noncredit college student?

8. What academic assistance, such as Adult Education & Literacy, tutoring, or access to study spaces on campus, did you utilize during your time as a noncredit college student?

9. If you did not utilize any academic assistance services, please explain why you did not utilize those services.

10. What academic assistance services would have been beneficial to you during your time as a noncredit college student?

11. What additional noncredit certification or license programs, two-year or four-year degrees have you completed?

Questions Related to Social Integration

12. What were your personal responsibilities during your time as a noncredit college student?

13. What support services, such as the Student Food Pantry, Campus Closet, or gas vouchers, did you utilize during your time as a noncredit college student?

14. If you did not utilize any support services, please explain why you did not utilize those services.
15. What support services would have been beneficial to you during your time as a noncredit college student?

Questions Related to Persistence

16. What challenges did you experience as a single-parent student in a noncredit program?
17. What support did you receive from your family during your time as a noncredit college student?
18. In what ways did the college support you as a single-parent student?
19. In what ways did your instructors support you during your time as a single-parent student?
20. In what ways did your fellow students support you during your time as a single-parent student?
21. What experiences stand out in your mind that lead you to successfully complete a noncredit program?
22. As a single-parent student, what support would you suggest colleges provide for future single-parent students?

Closing Questions

23. I appreciate the time you have given to this interview. I have one final question for you. Is there additional information would you like to add about your experience as a single-parent student in a noncredit program that we have not discussed yet?

Additional open-ended questions might be asked to have participants expand on their response, such as:

5. Could you explain that?
6. You stated … Could you give me an example of …?
7. Could you describe that experience in more detail?

8. What did you do to overcome that barrier?
## Appendix H

### Memoing

Outline of Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open-Code</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Enumeration of Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Enumeration of Subtheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Integration</td>
<td>Instructor Support</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Responsive/Flexible/Adaptable</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Enrichment</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor Encouragement</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial Support</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Academic Scholarship (Adult Education &amp; Literacy)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Employer Tuition Assistance</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>Social Integration</td>
<td>Cohort Model</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sense of Community</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>Intrinsic Motivation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Role Model</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Worthy of More</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support from Others</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Assistance Received</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td>13</td>
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</table>
Appendix I

Personal Artifact Guide

Each participant had the opportunity to describe and discuss at least one personal artifact, or form of visual representation. The personal artifact represented the participants experience as a single-parent who completed courses in a noncredit program at a community college to elicit a rich, in-depth description from the participant.

This method of data collection verified alignment with the participants’ personal artifact and their interview responses. Furthermore, this data collection elicited new meanings regarding the individuals’ experiences that were not prompted through the traditional interview technique.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Personal Artifact Selected</th>
<th>Personal Artifact Significance</th>
<th>Academic Integration</th>
<th>Social Integration</th>
<th>Persistence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>Picture of participants four children</td>
<td>“These faces are the reason I decided to better myself and our lives by obtaining a college education”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Picture of participant and her child</td>
<td>“I had to finish for my [child] and I could not fail”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>Picture of participants two children</td>
<td>“My kids are the only thing I have”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effie</td>
<td>Song lyrics</td>
<td>“Every situation will change. Nothing is permanent.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>1) Picture of participant and her two children 2) Stethoscope</td>
<td>1) “I want to be a good role model for my kids.”  2) “This represents my desire to help others and give back to the community”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>Picture of participant and her child</td>
<td>“This photo started my aha thoughts, my get it together and better myself for my [child] moment”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewell</td>
<td>Picture of participant’s dream office</td>
<td>“My dream job is to be a medical office manager, so the picture of the way my dream office looks motivates me to keep going and working hard”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonell</td>
<td>Picture of participant and her three children</td>
<td>“I have to get over my fears so that I can be successful for the kids and myself”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karla</td>
<td>Picture of the main textbook used for the program</td>
<td>“Learning more in healthcare was very personal for me. It was something I needed to accomplish”</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Picture of the participant her three children</td>
<td>“My kids are the reason for everything I do”</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn</td>
<td>Philippians 4:13 Bible verse</td>
<td>“I should never give up because I have God on my side”</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Picture of the participant and her children</td>
<td>“I want to show them that, no matter what challenges you face, you can push through them”</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>Picture of the participant, his ex-wife, and their child</td>
<td>“Even though we aren’t married, our family is still the most important thing to both of us. So, every decision we make, we make it as a family”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
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</table>

**PERSONAL ARTIFACT**
Each participant will describe and discuss at least one personal artifact, or form of visual representation, such as a quote or picture. The personal artifact will represent the participant’s experiences that promoted completion of a noncredit program at a community college as a single-parent student.

Participant: ____________________________________________________________________

Personal Artifact(s) Selected: _____________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Personal Artifact(s) Significance: ________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
## Appendix J

### Audit Trail

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 30, 2021</td>
<td>Received IRB approval to conduct study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 31, 2021</td>
<td>Reached out to pilot study participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2, 2021</td>
<td>Conducted pilot study interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 6, 2021</td>
<td>Met with program directors to seek assistance with participant recruitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 7, 2021</td>
<td>Conduct first interview</td>
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<td>August 7, 2021</td>
<td>Transcribe first interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 8, 2021</td>
<td>Conduct second interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 8, 2021</td>
<td>Transcribe second interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 9, 2021</td>
<td>Conduct third and fourth interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 9, 2021</td>
<td>Transcribe third and fourth interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 10, 2021</td>
<td>Conduct fifth and sixth interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 10, 2021</td>
<td>Transcribe fifth and sixth interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 11, 2021</td>
<td>Conduct seventh interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 11, 2021</td>
<td>Transcribe seventh interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 13, 2021</td>
<td>Conduct eighth interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 13, 2021</td>
<td>Transcribe eighth interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 14, 2021</td>
<td>Conduct ninth through eleventh interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 14, 2021</td>
<td>Transcribe ninth through eleventh interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 16, 2021</td>
<td>Conduct twelfth and thirteenth interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 16, 2021</td>
<td>Transcribe twelfth and thirteenth interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 18, 2021</td>
<td>Sent transcriptions to each participant for member checking. No edits needed to be made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 21 – 22, 2021</td>
<td>Complete analysis of all three data analysis methods for all thirteen participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 21 – September 23, 2021</td>
<td>Write Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 24 – October 2, 2021</td>
<td>Write Chapter 5 and submit draft to Dr. Marrero for review</td>
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