A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF GRADUATES FROM AN

EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL IN THE SOUTH ON THEIR TRANSITION TO A

FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY

by

Mikki Curtis

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of graduates of an early college high school (ECHS) in the South on their transition to a four-year university. During this research a students' experiences with a transition was generally defined as their transition to a four-year university after they graduate high school with their associate degree. The theory guiding this study was Schlossberg's transition theory, which explores how people cope with transitions. The central research question examined during this study is "How do graduates of an ECHS in the South describe their experiences with their transition to a four-year university?" The three sub-questions in this study examined students' experiences of moving in, moving through, and moving out of the four-year university. A transcendental phenomenological research design was used to study the research questions. The study included 11 participants that graduated from the southern collegiate high school located on the Southern Community College campus. Data was collected using a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, letter-writing, and focus groups. The data was analyzed using phenomenological reduction, which includes horizontalization, imaginative variation, and synthesis. Several themes emerged including 1) Self-Awareness 2) Academic Preparation 3) College Awareness and 4) Relationships. Each of these primary themes have several sub-themes that also emerged. These themes and sub-themes informed the answers to the research questions regarding the experiences of graduates from an ECHS and their transition to a four-year university.

Keywords: early college high school, high school transition, Schlossberg's transition theory, qualitative study

Copyright Page

Dedication

I would like to thank God for his guidance throughout this research. Without him, this journey would not have been possible. I am thankful for his continuous presence and the fact that he was always there with me throughout this process. I look forward to seeing how he uses this degree to further his kingdom and his purpose.

To my husband, Casey, I cannot express how thankful I am for your encouraging words and your support throughout this long process. You were the calm that I needed on the difficult days. You will never know how much your hugs during the stressful times, your uplifting smile, your prayers, and your many words of encouragement meant to me. I will forever be thankful for you and what you have placed aside for me to finish this degree. I love you.

To my parents, thank you for your many phone calls checking on my progress. Your support and belief in me helped push me throughout this difficult process. I thank God every day that he gave me you both as my parents. I can only hope that I can become half the person that either of you are. Thank you for everything and for being my biggest cheerleaders.

Finally, to my family, friends, church family, and work colleagues. I would like to say thank you for your encouraging words throughout this process. I am appreciative of all the love and support you have given me.

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Advanced Placement (AP)

Early College High School (ECHS)

International Baccalaureate (IB)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

A student's transition from high school to college may present some challenges. Many school districts have college preparatory programs to help prepare students for the transition to college. The different college preparatory programs examined in this study included advanced placement courses, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment courses, early college high schools, and summer bridge programs. The problem that will be examined during this study deals with students struggling with transitioning from traditional high school to college (Duncheon, 2020; Lile et al., 2018; Mollet et al., 2020; Troutman et al., 2018). This phenomenological study aims to understand the experiences of graduates of an ECHS in the South on their transition to a four-year university. The findings of this study will provide important information regarding a student's experience at an ECHS and their transition to a four-year university based on the four S factors included in Schlossberg's transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981). This chapter will examine the background which will look at the historical, social, and theoretical contexts. Next, the problem statement, purpose statement, and the significance of the study will be described. Finally, the research questions will be identified.

Background

Students taking college courses in high school is not a new concept; instead, it is popular in secondary education. Many school districts offer dual enrollment courses for their students, including advanced placement courses. Some schools provide their students the opportunity to participate in an ECHS program. ECHS programs have continued to grow in popularity in several states because they are designed to smooth a student's transition to a four-year university (Walk, 2020). ECHSs provide an environment where students learn that college courses are

different than high school courses (Duncheon, 2020), learn time management skills (Adams et al., 2020; Calhoun et al., 2018), and realize that college expectations are different than high school expectations (Mollet et al., 2020). The skills and information students learn by attending an ECHS benefit them by assisting in degree completion (Britton et al., 2020; Song et al., 2021) and college preparedness (Zeiser et al., 2019). Students who attend an ECHS attend a program that provides acceleration, which ultimately helps students to be more successful in college (Taylor & Yan, 2018).

Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory will be used to examine a high school student's transition from an ECHS to a four-year university. Schlossberg (1981) has several components that make up his theory, but ultimately, it explores how a person copes and adjusts to a new environment. Research has examined the effects of preparatory programs on high school students and their transition, but there is little completed research on the experiences of an ECHS graduate and their transition to a four-year university. Since there is an increase in ECHSs across the United States, it is essential to understand the experiences of students who have graduated from these programs on a student's transition to a four-year university, specifically concerning the student's situation, support, self, and strategies. The information gained from this research will help secondary and postsecondary educators make adjustments to their programs, such as providing more resources, if needed, based on feedback from students who have participated in these programs.

Historical Context

The idea of starting college early began with Elizabeth Blodgett, who founded Simon's Rock in Great Barrington, Mass., which was a residential college for 16-year-olds (Walk, 2020). In 1979, Simon's Rock was taken over by Bard College, which would eventually play a

significant role in the rise of ECHSs. Leon Botstein was the president of Bard College, and he graduated high school and entered the University of Chicago at the age of 16 (Walk, 2020). In the mid-1990s, Leon Botstein felt that high schools were not meeting the needs of their students (Botstein, 1997). Botstein's solution to the current condition of high schools was for students to graduate after 10th or 11th grade, around the age of 16, and enter college at that time.

In New York City, Chancellor Harold Levy had Leon Botstein try his idea of high school ending early, which resulted in BHSEC, a New York City public high school where students would earn both a high school diploma and an associate degree in four years at no cost (Walk, 2020). This idea was different than anything presented before because the students would graduate college before they turned 18 and take college courses while in high school. Over the years, BHSEC has served more than a million students. As of 2016, 60% of students in Bard's network of early college programs qualified for free or reduced cost (DeRuy, 2016).

The rapid expansion of ECHSs across the United States was started in 2002 by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Walk, 2020). They were developed to give underrepresented students the opportunity to gain college credits in high school while receiving support from high school faculty (Adams et al., 2020). Most ECHSs immerse the students on a community college campus, merging the secondary and postsecondary experience into one (Edmunds et al., 2020). Students who attend an ECHS work toward a high school diploma and associate degree simultaneously. Research shows that 22% of students who attend an ECHS complete an associate degree in two years (Zeiser et al., 2020;2021).

Social Context

Gaining a bachelor's degree, associate degree, or credential in a skilled trade helps students have greater access to higher-paying jobs that include benefits (Carnevale et al., 2018).

High school students need to have a smooth transition to college after high school to gain these degrees and credentials. In 2020, 62.7% of high school graduates enrolled in college (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Students who participate in college preparatory programs while in high school, such as advanced placement courses, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment courses, ECHSs, or summer bridge programs, are on an acceleration track and tend to do better not only in high school (D'Anna et al., 2019) but also in college (Taylor & Yan, 2018). The benefits of college preparatory programs include higher college enrollment and retention rates (Morgan et al., 2018; Song et al., 2021; Taylor & Yan, 2018), a higher college GPA (Warren & Goins, 2019), more college completion (Britton et al., 2020; D'Anna et al., 2019), and exposure to college academics and environment (Lile et al., 2018; Witkowsky & Clayton, 2020). The preparatory programs also help students save money (Adams et al., 2020; Troutman et al., 2018).

Transitioning to college is a challenging experience for many high school students. Research shows that students who participate in any form of acceleration have greater success during their transition and retention (Taylor & Yan, 2018). To help better prepare high school students for the transition to college, many schools provide preparatory programs to their students, such as advanced placement courses, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment courses, ECHSs, or summer bridge programs. For schools that have ECHSs and those interested in starting one in their area, this study will provide insights into the experiences of students of an ECHS in the South regarding their transition. The experiences can provide educators with feedback regarding ECHSs so that these college preparatory programs can be improved for all students.

Theoretical Context

Changes and transitions are experiences that people go through nearly every day. Multiple theories can be applied to this area of study, including human ecology, Erikson's identity development theory, and Chickering's theory of identity development. These various theories can help colleges understand the critical period of adjustment that students face when they transition and whether or not they will be successful after their transition. The ecology theory examines the interaction between a student and their environment (Banning, 1989). The environment for this study is an educational setting that facilitates the growth and development of the student. The ecological theory is not specifically used in student development and affairs (Evans et al., 2010), but it does provide an example of the transition between different environments and how individuals interact with the environment they develop. Banning (1989) discusses the two environments that play an essential role in a transition: the "sending environment" and the "receiving environment." The high school environment is the "sending environment," and the four-year university is the "receiving environment." ECHSs combine both environments to help with the stress students experience as they transition to college.

Erikson's (1968) identity development theory consists of eight stages of development that are each considered a "turning point," where stability must be settled between the internal person and the external surroundings (Erikson, 1968). The eight stages include basic trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus identity diffusion, intimacy versus isolation, generatively versus stagnation, and integrity versus despair (Evans et al., 2010). These eight stages of identity development and how students move through the different phases of life are what Chickering (1969) used to develop the seven vectors of development. Chickering (1969) described them as vectors of development

"because each seems to have direction and magnitude even though the direction may be expressed more appropriately by a spiral or by steps than by a straight line" (p. 8). The seven vectors include competency, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature and interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering (1969) also included environmental influences that can impact a student and their development, including institutional objectives, institutional size, student-faculty relationships, curriculum, teaching, friendships, student communities, and student development and services (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Each of these theories looks at factors and influences that affect a person as they develop and undergo transitions. Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory is similar to these theories because it looks at transitions and how people handle those transitions as they go through them. Schlossberg (1981) has four S factors that impact how an individual copes with a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies. This study is built on the theoretical context of transitions, focusing on a student's transitions from an ECHS to a four-year university, primarily using Schlossberg's (1981) four S factors.

Problem Statement

The problem is that students struggle with the transition from traditional high school to college (Duncheon, 2020; Lile et al., 2018; Mollet et al., 2020; Troutman et al., 2018). There are several differences between the expectations of high schools and the expectations of colleges (Duncheon, 2020; Lile et al., 2018; Mollet et al., 2020), and because of the disconnect, many students do not feel prepared for the transition between the two (Troutman et al., 2018). Many incoming first-year college students transfer without the skills, basic content knowledge, and

understanding of how to perform well on college-level work (McGhee, 2020). Research shows that students who successfully transition from high school to college have a greater sense of belonging because of peer-group interaction, faculty interaction and support, parental support, and the college's supportive culture (Mu & Cole, 2019). Most high schools provide preparatory programs to help better prepare students for the transition, including advanced placement courses, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment courses, ECHSs, or summer bridge programs. These different preparatory programs provide students with acceleration, which research shows helps students have greater success with their transition and retention (Lile et al., 2018; Taylor & Yan, 2018).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of graduates of an ECHS in the South on their transition to a four-year university. The theory guiding this study is Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, which looks at how people cope with the transitions, specifically a person's situation, support, self, and strategies (Schlossberg, 1981). At this stage in the research, students' experiences with a transition will be generally defined as their transition to a four-year university after they graduate high school with their associate degree.

Significance of the Study

This study included students who attended an ECHS called the Collegiate High School on a Southern Community College campus. Specifically, the study examined the experiences of students who attended the ECHS on their transition to a four-year university. The findings of this study provided important information regarding a student's experience at an ECHS and their transition to a four-year university based on the four S factors included in Schlossberg's

transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981). The findings provide meaningful feedback to the Collegiate High School on the Southern Community College campus and other ECHSs. The findings also help educators better understand the quantitative data concerning a student's transition from an ECHS (Hutchins et al., 2019) by looking at a student's experience.

Theoretical Significance

The theory guiding this study is Schlossberg's transition theory (1981). Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory examines how an individual copes with a change and transitions to a new environment. Schlossberg (1981) examines the characteristics of the transition, the pre-and post-transition environments, and the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition (Schlossberg, 1981). There are four main factors that Schlossberg (1981) explores during a person's transition: their situation, support, self, and strategies (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Out of the students who graduate from an ECHS, 71% transition to college, and 86% persist to the second year of college (Song et al., 2021). Looking at the students' experiences regarding attending an ECHS and their transition could provide more information to support previous quantitative research and help expand the theory and understanding of transitions.

Empirical Significance

ECHSs have become popular throughout the United States. There have been many benefits discovered concerning ECHS in previous research, including students' gaining more college credits (Zeiser et al., 2019), helping students learn how to navigate college campuses and their expectations (Lile et al., 2018; Troutman et al., 2018; Witkowsky & Clayton, 2020), helping first-generation and low socioeconomic students overcome the barriers they face that prevent them from getting a college credential (Edmunds et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2018), helping students be more prepared for college (Mokher et al., 2018), and completing a degree

(Britton et al., 2020; D'Anna et al., 2019; Song et al., 2021; Zeiser et al., 2019). Previous research on ECHS examined statistical data, but little research has examined students' experiences in the program on their transitions to a four-year university.

As noted earlier, research has focused on the benefits of ECHS gathered through quantitative data, but there is little research on the students' experiences with attending an ECHS on their transition to a four-year university. The information gathered in this research can help researchers better understand the quantitative data that has already been collected regarding students who have attended an ECHS. Looking at the students' experiences will also help us better understand their transition to a four-year university and their experiences as they went through the transition regarding their situation, support, self, and strategies.

Practical Significance

This study could bring about changes to the ECHS model by looking at the experiences of students who attended an ECHS and their transition to a four-year university. It provides feedback to the Southern Community College and its specific ECHS. The study gives feedback regarding college preparatory programs and how they affect students and their transitions to college. The information gathered could help schools make positive changes that better prepare students for their transition to college and reaffirm what they are already doing in their programs.

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Research Questions

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Transitions and change are something with which all people struggle. According to Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, four components need to be considered when looking at a transition: a person's situation, support, self, and strategies (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The transition to college is a significant change for high school students. Most school districts have implemented college preparatory programs in their high schools to help prepare students for their

transition (Jett & Rinn, 2020) and help align secondary and postsecondary systems (Nodine et al., 2019). ECHSs are college preparatory programs that provide students with the opportunity to graduate high school with their high school diploma and associate degree simultaneously. Students who attend an ECHS have a head start on their college education which helps them obtain a higher degree sooner (Zeiser et al., 2019).

Central Research Question

How do graduates of an ECHS in the South describe their experiences with transitioning to a four-year university?

Sub-Question One

Considering situation, support, self, and strategies according to Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, how do ECHS graduates experience the time prior to enrollment, called the moving-in process?

Sub-Question Two

Considering situation, support, self, and strategies according to Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, how do ECHS graduates experience the period of enrollment, called the moving through process?

Sub-Question Three

Considering situation, support, self, and strategies according to Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, how do ECHS graduates experience the time after their first semester, called the moving out process?

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Definitions

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1. *Early College High School (ECHS)* – Early college high schools are small schools located on campuses of two- or four-year universities that provide high school students

the opportunity to graduate high school with their high school diploma and associate

degree simultaneously at no charge to the student (Zeiser et al., 2020;2021).

2. *Dual Enrollment* – Dual enrollment programs are collaborations between high schools

   and colleges that provide students the opportunity to enroll in college courses while in

   high school and get both college and high school credit (Troutman et al., 2018).

3. *Situation* – The situation is a time of transition and examines whether it was anticipated,

   unanticipated, or nonevent (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

4. *Support* – Support is the support system, including people and assets, which a person has

   that helps them during a transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

5. *Self* – Self is the identity of a person and their optimism level (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

6. *Strategies* – Strategies are the coping resources a person has during a transition

   (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Summary

ECHSs are on the rise in the United States, and research shows that students benefit from

completing these programs (Edmunds et al., 2020; Zeiser et al., 2019). The student experiences

at an ECHS on a student's transition to a four-year university will provide insight into how the

students see the benefits of their transition. The feedback provided by the students give ECHSs

information that they can use to adjust their programs and help them see ways that their

programs benefit their students. The feedback also provides insight into a student's transition

regarding their situation, support, self, and strategies. In this chapter, a summary of relevant

literature, Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, and research questions were presented.

Studying this topic helps fill the gap in the research literature regarding high school students'

transitions to college.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A review of the literature was completed to examine students' transitions from high school to college, as well as the college preparatory programs that school districts implement to help with the transition. In the theoretical framework, the theory that is most relevant to the study is Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory. In this study, Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory will be applied to approaching transitions, taking stock of coping resources, and taking charge of the resources. After the theory, this study will include a synthesis informed by empirical research that covers the transition to college, including academic preparation. The academic preparation will examine the differences between the high school and college curricula, specifically the rigor. The synthesis will also cover college preparatory programs, including advanced placement courses, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment courses, ECHSs, and summer bridge programs. The benefits and disadvantages of each college preparatory program will be examined. After the research and theories are synthesized, a gap in the literature will be identified, which supports the need for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

People experience transitions throughout their lives, and one major transition is the transition from high school to a four-year university. Most high schools provide preparatory programs in hopes of making the transition easier for their students. This chapter will begin with an overview of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, which is the theory that will guide this study through its examination of students' transitions, as well as an overview of current literature related to students' transitions from high school and college preparatory programs. This chapter

will examine the existing literature and identify the gap in the literature that this study will address. A summary of the content and the need for this study will conclude this chapter.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

People will experience changes and transitions as they go through life. Each person handles these changes and transitions differently, even if two people are going through the same situation, such as a job loss, moving to another state, or transitioning to college. Transitions also prompt individuals to develop new assumptions about themselves and their future. Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory examines how a person copes and adjusts to a new environment by examining three steps: "the characteristics of the particular transition, the characteristics of the pre- and post-transition environments, and the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5).

Additionally, it is crucial to understand where students are in their transition, whether they are moving in, moving through, or moving out of the transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The moving in part of a transition is the planning period; the moving through part of a transition is when the student learns a large amount of information, and the moving out part of a transition is when the student successfully transitions to the next part of their life. As a person is going through a transition, they define and determine the meaning of the change. One person's perception of a transition can be completely different from another person going through the same transition. Understanding how a person sees their transition can help others figure out the best way to help.

Approaching Transitions

Transitions can be anticipated, unanticipated, or nonevent based on the amount of hope that a person attaches to them (Goodman et al., 2006). A transition is considered an anticipated

transition when a person expects it to occur, such as marriage, starting a new job, retiring, or transitioning to college. A transition is considered an unanticipated transition when something happens unexpectedly, such as getting fired, premature death of a spouse, giving up work because of an illness, or natural disasters. A nonevent transition includes transitions that someone expects but does not occur, such as a marriage that never occurs or a child that is never born (Anderson et al., 2012).

Taking Stock of Coping Resources

Schlossberg (1981) believed that someone could navigate transitions better if they went through a process called taking stock. Following this process helps individuals better understand the transition. Taking stock consists of four components to help students cope with their transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The first factor, "situation," dissects the transition into eight smaller aspects. The "situation" factors include the trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience with a similar transition, concurrent stress, and assessment of the transition (Goodman et al., 2006). The second factor, "support," deals with whether a person has a robust support system to help them physically and mentally with the transition. The third factor, "self," deals with the personal characteristics of the person going through the transition and how they view the transition. It is essential to understand whether the person considers the transition to be positive, negative, or benign during this factor. Schlossberg (1981) believed that a person needs to be self-aware of their beliefs, abilities, perceptions, and attitudes in order to have a smooth transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The fourth factor, "strategies," deals with the coping mechanism a person brings into the transition.

Taking Charge

A person takes charge of their transition by strengthening their resources and support. Each person has different psychological resources, including personality characteristics, that they use to help them go through complex changes or transitions. These various resources are based on a person's outlook, commitments, and values. Social supports are also key to how a person handles transitions and stress. Social support comes from different relationships and communities in which a person is involved, including family, friends, and peer groups. The stronger a person's social support is, the better they can handle the transitions they face (Cahyadi & Rohinsa, 2020; Calhoun et al., 2018; Dahal et al., 2018; Rahinsa et al., 2020).

Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory will frame and guide this study while looking at the experiences of students who attended an ECHS and their transitions to college. Specifically, the theory will guide the study through the research questions that will examine the resources and social support the students had before and during their transition to help them cope with the transition. It will be essential to see how they cope with these transitions after going through an ECHS, which provides the students with experience on a college campus and with college standards.

Related Literature

Literature regarding a student's transition to college is extensive. This section will provide a synthesis of the most recent literature including the history of higher education in America, a student's transition to a four-year university specifically a student's academic preparation and college readiness, and finally college preparatory program including advanced placement courses, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment courses, ECHSs, and summer bridge programs. This study is developed based on the gap revealed in the literature that follows.

The most recent literature has focused on high school students in general and their transition. It also has focused on the different college preparatory programs that school districts implement to help their students transition. The literature includes both quantitative and qualitative studies; however, the literature has a gap regarding the experiences of students who attended an ECHS and their transition to a four-year university.

Higher Education in America

Higher education is continually evolving to adapt to the current world and students. The traditional model is changing to provide training and education to students based on the needs currently in the United States. Because the choice of higher education is not limited and many sources offer instruction, universities have to change to the ever-evolving world to keep their doors open (McCaffery, 2019). To better understand current universities, we first must consider the early universities and the changes that occurred over the years.

Initially, the early universities were founded to provide education to those going into the ministry, but after the American Revolution, they began to broaden their focus to include education for medicine and law (Clearly University, 2020). White males were the only ones who could attend college at this time (Bradley, 2018). The small number of degrees offered and the male-only limitation led to low enrollment (Hutcheson, 2019). Even though the enrollment was low, the history of the early universities provides insight into the ultimate evolution of the many universities that exist today.

The first university to be chartered was Harvard in 1636 (Bevis, 2019), with several other colleges following closely behind, including the College of William and Mary and Yale College (Hutcheson, 2019). Due to the development of the early colleges occurring without the financial support from England, many individuals were not able to attend due to the price (Bevis, 2019).

The curriculum taught in the universities continued to change throughout the year as more universities were developed. At first, the focus was on religion (Bevis, 2019), but over the years, the focus moved more towards secular topics, including practical knowledge that prepared students for employment in technical fields (Hutcheson, 2019).

Over the years, there were some challenges that the early universities faced, including low enrollment numbers due to men being the only ones who could attend (Bradley, 2018; Hutcheson, 2019; Nash, 2018), student violence which led to the development of student extracurriculars (Geiger et al., 2018), and the curriculum changes (Bevis, 2019; Clearly University, 2020). Men were not only allowed to attend the early universities but also the only ones allowed to be instructors (Ambar et al., 2020; Bradley, 2018; Hutcheson, 2019; Nash, 2018). Women were first only considered part-time instructors, but as the years went by, they were being employed as full-time instructors and even leading their departments (Ambar et al., 2020).

One of the main challenges of higher education is the universities' relationships with the federal government. The relationship between higher education and the federal government resulted in the development of financial aid for students with financial needs, which also resulted in a rise of student loans (Koch, 2019). Today, many students struggle with the loan debt they accumulated while going to school, which also results in students determining if it is worth the debt to go to school (Adams et al., 2020; Koch, 2019). A rise in private institutions also occurred, which included higher tuition rates for students but a promise of high-quality education (Hutcheson, 2019). Due to this, many students attended private institutions, leading them to an even higher school debt amount than those who attended public institutions (Koch, 2019).

Even though some students question whether going to college is the right decision for them, many of the early universities saw an increase in enrollment numbers due to women and African Americans being allowed to attend the universities (Hutcheson, 2019; Levy, 2019; Nash, 2018), the development of residence halls (Hutcheson, 2019), and the development of the GI Bill which resulted in large numbers of community college students and young people attending college (Geiger, 2019; Levy, 2019). Universities have gone from extremely limited enrollment and education to the diversity seen today. Higher education has continually changed and has ultimately provided a way for all students to get some form of higher education or vocational training to better their future.

Transition to College

A student's transition to college comes with many changes academically and socially. Students with at least one parent who attended college are nearly twice as likely to enroll in college than those whose parents did not (Bird, 2018). Many students are unprepared for the transition to college because of the differences between the expectations of high schools and colleges (Duncheon, 2020; Duncheon & Relles, 2020; Nodine et al., 2019; Troutman, Hendrix-Soto et al., 2018; Walk, 2020). These differences, such as rigor, class times, and higher expectations, cause some students to struggle with the transition (Duncheon, 2020; Duncheon & Relles, 2020). Research shows that students have a greater sense of belonging when they have more peer-group interactions and support, faculty interactions and support (Calhoun et al., 2018), and parental support (Cahyadi & Rohinsa, 2020; Dahal et al., 2018; Rahinsa et al., 2020). In order for students to have a greater sense of belonging, they need to get involved in campus activities with other students and organizations (Calhoun et al., 2018; Mu & Cole, 2019). Students who have a greater sense of belonging or feel that the college to which they transfer has

a supportive culture prove to be proactive and more successful than other students (Mu & Cole, 2019). Students often receive support from home during high school, but when transitioning to college, they need to develop a support system in their new environment to be more successful.

Additionally, school-related communication between students and their families starting in the ninth grade helps students receive higher grades while in high school and feel more ready for the transition to college (Lessard & Juvonen, 2022). This communication also helps students stay enrolled in postsecondary education after one year (Lessard & Juvonen, 2022). Not only did the students who engaged in school-related communication feel more prepared, but many of the students were also more likely to enroll in a four-year university compared to other types of postsecondary institutions because of the increase in academic communication (Lessard & Juvonen, 2022). Some parents struggle with talking to their students about school-related topics, including going to and transitioning to college, because they did not attend college (Duncheon & DeMatthews, 2018). Some parents also have limited resources and information on how to navigate college applications (Duncheon & DeMatthews, 2018). It is essential that schools offer parental resources to help with discussions at home about college and academics, especially if the parents have never attended college. Even though some students have parents who have not attended college, they can benefit from talking with their friends about school-related topics (Lessard & Juvonen, 2022).

The disconnect between secondary and postsecondary education has resulted in students' not feeling prepared for the transition between the two (Nodine et al., 2019; Troutman, Hendrix-Soto et al., 2018). Notably, many incoming freshmen enter college without the skills, basic content knowledge, and understanding of how to perform well on college-level work (Adams et al., 2020; Calhoun et al., 2018; Walk, 2020). Most secondary schools have eight class periods

that are fifty minutes long, which is completely different than a student's college schedule. Another difference is the semester-long courses in college compared to the year-long courses in high school. Students are used to having time to make the grades they need to pass or having time to recover from bad grades while in high school because of the year-long courses. In college, students have a single semester to make the grades needed to pass the course. As such, there is less time to recover from a student's bad grades. The expectations for students also tend to differ between secondary educators and postsecondary education (Duncheon, 2020; Duncheon & Relles, 2020). There is typically more leniency in high school, while more responsibility is placed on the students while they are in college. These students are expected to follow a syllabus and deadlines. To help better prepare high school students for the transition to college, many schools provide preparatory programs to their students, such as advanced placement courses, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment courses, and ECHS models.

Likewise, many colleges provide programs to help smooth the transition for incoming freshmen, including freshman seminar classes and summer bridge programs. The idea behind these programs is to help students learn the skills necessary to be successful in college and introduce them to the different resources on the college campus. Research shows that summer bridge programs provided students with resources that made the transition to college easier (Dorime-Williams, 2022). These various programs can be beneficial to an incoming freshman, but research shows that students who participate in any form of acceleration have greater success during their transition and retention (Taylor & Yan, 2018).

Academic Preparation

A significant concern among educators and researchers is whether high school students who transition to college are academically prepared. According to Conley, a student is

considered college- and career-ready if they possess the skills, content, and knowledge to succeed in any postsecondary setting (Conley, 2014). Not all students will have the same abilities, but they will need the skills necessary for their field of study. Research shows that high school students who were prepared academically for college tend to get into college and become successful (Mokher et al., 2018). Many school districts' focus is to help prepare their students for college or a career by utilizing college preparatory programs like advanced placement courses, International Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment or by starting ECHSs.

Research shows that students from ethnic minority groups tend to face more educational barriers than Caucasian students (Adams et al., 2020; Fitzpatrick, 2019), which causes the teachers to be prepared to differentiate the curriculum and instruction so that all student ability levels are reached (Gilson & Matthews, 2019). Girls usually receive higher grades at the end of their high school careers but feel like they are less prepared for college than boys (Lessard & Juvonen, 2022). Research shows that students with a good GPA at the beginning of high school ended high school with good grades and were better prepared to transition to college and have a higher chance of staying enrolled after one year (Lessard & Juvonen, 2022).

As students transition to college, they also lack specific skills, such as time management (Adams et al., 2020), and underestimate how much time college coursework requires (Calhoun et al., 2018). During a student's first semester, some do not spend enough time on their assignments, but they quickly learn by the second semester that they need to spend more time on their coursework to succeed. Students have to overcome the difference between the length of college courses and the length of high school courses. They tend to spend less time on their assignments because they are used to their courses lasting one year and having time to complete assignments; however, in college, their courses last one semester, and deadlines arrive more

quickly. They also do not initially realize the rigor of college courses, which adds to the amount of time needed to complete their assignments successfully (Adams et al., 2020).

During the first semester of college, most students have to learn how to balance their academic and social lives. When a student transitions to college, this is usually the first time they are on their own and allowed to make decisions for themselves. Some students struggle with wanting to socialize more with friends and participate in different college events instead of spending equal amounts of time on their academics. Once they understand the concept of balancing their time, it is easier for them to figure out that they need to spend more time on their assignments. It is evident that when high school students transition to college, many struggle, which results in some students dropping out.

On the other hand, the students who enter college with college hours tend to have an advantage because they have already been introduced to the rigor and college standards (Adams et al., 2020; Lile et al., 2018). Students who enter with college hours have participated in advance placement courses, International Baccalaureate, or dual enrollment courses or attended an ECHS. Each of these different programs provides the students with the experience of college-level rigor and standards. Research shows that students exposed to college-level rigor and standards while in high school are ultimately more successful when transitioning to a four-year university (Troutman et al., 2018).

Specifically, secondary and postsecondary education have many differences. The differences include classroom expectations, academic expectations such as rigor and higher expectations (Adams et al., 2020; Walk, 2020), and policies including discipline, grading, and attendance (Troutman, Hendrix-Soto et al., 2018). Researchers feel that the differences between high schools and colleges are part of why students struggle as they transition (Nodine et al.,

2019). There are several skills with which students struggle when they transition to college, including time management skills (Adams et al., 2020; Calhoun et al., 2018), study skills, and communication skills (McGhee, 2020), but dual enrollment courses help expose students to these different skills (Troutman et al., 2018).

Research shows that a rigorous high school curriculum is a predictor of college success for students, regardless of demographic factors or socioeconomic status (Morgan et al., 2018). Furthermore, there is a debate between college instructors on whether dual enrollment courses are rigorous enough, especially the courses taught on the high school campus by high school instructors (Field, 2021). To help ensure that the courses on the high school campus are held to the same standards as the courses on the college campus, the high school instructors are mentored by a college instructor. The same syllabus and content have to be covered in the course taught on the high school campus. The college instructor also attends the class to ensure the rigor and expectations are being held to a college standard. Even though these standards are followed for college courses taught on a high school campus, some still feel the dual enrollment courses are not rigorous enough (Hooker, 2019). Some four-year universities even question whether courses on a community college campus provide the rigor necessary to prepare high school students for the transition to college. Some question how a high school student can be college-ready before attending college.

College Readiness

College readiness is a hot topic in higher education and secondary education. Conley (2010) defines college readiness as "the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution" (p. 21). Each state has different regulations for a student to be considered college-ready (Mokher et al., 2018; Ohlson et

al., 2019). These regulations evaluate the student's academic knowledge, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, social and emotional learning, communication, perseverance, and community involvement (Mokher et al., 2018). Most policies that attempt to improve students' college readiness only consider one indicator of college readiness: whether a student is eligible for postsecondary admission or not (Mokher et al., 2018). These policies have a negative effect on students who are first-generation, lower socioeconomically, or belong to a minority because these students tend to underperform on college readiness benchmarks compared to their peers (Duncheon, 2018).

Additionally, many high school students who enter college are not prepared for the transition. Nearly two-thirds of those who enter community colleges and 40% of those entering four-year institutions are assigned to at least one remedial course, which delays their enrollment into college-level courses (Barnett, 2018). Remedial courses are courses for students who do not have the test scores to take college-level courses. Remedial courses are provided in English and Math. Each college has different protocols, but most allow students to continue to the college-level course once they successfully complete the remedial course. The remedial courses were developed to close students' gaps between where they currently are and where they need to be in order to succeed in the college-level courses.

Higher education and secondary education implement many programs to help students become college-ready, including college preparatory programs and remedial courses such as co-reqs. Remedial courses also allow students to start college even when they do not have the test scores they would generally need to do so. Once the students pass the remedial course, they are moved through a sequence of courses that ultimately lead them to the credit-bearing courses, including English and Math. Unfortunately, some students enrolled in the remedial courses do

not finish and never move on to credit-bearing coursework (Ganga et al., 2018). Some feel that evaluating a student's social and cultural contexts is essential to help prepare them for college (Kolluri & Tierney, 2020).

Researchers have examined what students feel that they need to be college-ready. Many students think that they need specific transition skills, including time management, note-taking, and writing, while others believe they need to know the logistics of college life, such as how to select courses, how to communicate properly with professors, and how to navigate the college environment (Francis et al., 2018). Some students feel that adjusting to the class schedules and time differences in college helped them be successful and college-ready (Lane et al., 2020). Even though there are many opportunities that students believe helped them prepare for college, there are some aspects of college for which they still feel unprepared after making the transition.

College Preparatory Programs

College preparatory programs are increasing in popularity in secondary education. Many high schools in the United States aim to get students college- and career-ready. School districts fulfill this goal by offering dual enrollment college preparatory programs, such as traditional dual enrollment courses, advanced placement courses, International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, ECHSs, and summer bridge programs. Each of these dual enrollment college preparatory programs allows students to gain college credit hours while in high school (Lile et al., 2018; Troutman et al., 2018). Policymakers view dual enrollment as a program that helps align the disconnect between secondary and postsecondary systems (Duncheon & Relles, 2020). They provide students with a pathway to gain a head start on their future while working towards technical certificates or associate degrees.

Also, college preparatory programs reduce the financial cost to students by shortening the time to a degree (Adams et al., 2020; Walk, 2020; Zeiser, 2019) and providing students with the opportunity to advance in their education either at a low tuition rate or completely free. Many school districts even pay the cost for their students to take college credit courses. Not only do college preparatory programs help students from different backgrounds, but they also help under-represented students (Adams et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2018). There are many benefits for students who participate in college preparatory programs, including the realization that college is achievable (Woods et al., 2018), being exposed to the college academic environment and rigor (Adams et al., 2020; Taie & Lewis, 2020), and obtaining a deeper understanding of what it means to be a college student (Lil et al., 2018). Students can also experience positive results with college enrollment, persistence, and graduation (D'Anna et al., 2019; Field, 2021; Morgan et al., 2018).

Students need to be introduced to college standards while in high school so that they will be prepared for those standards when they make the transition. According to Woods, Park & Betrand (2019), students who are given an authentic college experience while in dual enrollment courses leave high school with a better understanding of how college works. Most dual enrollment courses have to follow the standards of a traditional college course as if the course were being taught on the college campus. As such, students are introduced to college standards, rigor, and expectations, which give them the college experience that helps them better understand how college works. Specifically, the best student results come from college preparatory programs that are set up like a traditional college course, including assessments, grading policies, syllabi, textbooks, and placement requirements into the course (Woods et al., 2018). To qualify to take most of the college-level courses a student has to be college-ready in

reading and writing, and eventually has to be college-ready in math to earn an associate degree (Moreno et al., 2022). Students who participate in college preparatory programs feel that they are being introduced to specific skills like time management, study skills, communication skills (Adams et al., 2020; Calhoun et al., 2018; Troutman et al., 2018), and academic behaviors that will better prepare them for the culture of the college.

Even though college preparatory programs are set up differently across the United States, they all have the same goal: to provide students with the opportunity to gain college credit while in high school. They also aim to help students become semi-independent; in this way, when students transition to college, they are not totally dependent on their parents and know how to advocate for themselves (Witkowsky & Clayton, 2020). Overall, there are many benefits to college preparatory programs, but there are also some disadvantages. For example, if a student's preferred institution will not accept all or any of their earned credits, they would have to choose between their preferred institution and entering college with the credits they earned (Lile et al., 2018). Another possible disadvantage is that some students choose to not continue their education at a four-year university if they complete their associate degree but instead choose to enter into the workforce (Zeiser et al., 2020;2021). If the students come from low-income households sometimes they have to go immediately to work to help support their families and benefit from the economic returns that resulted from their college credentials or associate degree. Even though there are some disadvantages, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

Advanced Placement Courses

Advanced Placement courses are rigorous courses taught on the high school campus. Each year, the number of AP students that enroll to take AP exams increases (Beard et al., 2019). Advanced placement courses are offered to high-achieving students and students who have a

greater probability of passing the AP exam (Clayton, 2021) and are taught by high school instructors. The high school instructors must go through professional development each year, specific to the content they will be teaching, to ensure that they follow all standards and rules regarding advanced placement courses. These advanced placement courses provide students the opportunity to earn college credit by passing a standardized test (Burns et al., 2019). The increase in students taking AP courses results from federal funds awarded to school districts to pay for the development of the courses and the exam fees for low-income students. Research shows that a student who completes one or more AP courses in high school sees a positive effect on their first semester GPA in college (Warren & Goins, 2019).

Additionally, students receive college credit for their AP courses if they score three or higher on the standardized test. Some school districts reward their students with cash prizes for passing their AP exams as an added incentive. A small percentage of colleges have opted out of accepting AP test scores for college credit, though the majority of colleges still accept them. Even though most colleges still take AP test scores, they each require different scores in order to give college credit. AP courses provide students with rigorous courses, which is beneficial, but there is some discussion among educators on whether that is enough to prepare students for the transition to college (Judson et al., 2019). These courses do not give students the college experience they need to provide them with the skills necessary for success. Consequently, many educators wonder if there needs to be a limit on the number of AP courses a student takes before they start taking dual enrollment courses through a college (Judson et al., 2019).

Furthermore, some advanced placement courses are taught for both AP credit and high school credit. This model is seen in some school districts, especially if the high school teacher has the credentials necessary to teach college credit as well. In most states, teachers must have a

master's degree and 18 graduate hours in the content they want to teach for college credit. In the AP courses, which automatically give students college credit, the students experience the rigor that comes with AP courses without giving up the guarantee for college credit. The students still take the AP test, but if they do not receive the score necessary for college credit, they will still receive college credit because the course was taught simultaneously as advanced placement and concurrent credit course.

International Baccalaureate

The International Baccalaureate (IB) program provides a rigorous curriculum for 11th and 12th-grade students, but some schools have a pre-IB program for their 9th and 10th-grade students. The mission of the IB program is to encourage students to think critically, be internationally-minded, ask challenging questions, and develop research skills proven to help them in higher education (IBO, 2022b). Another focus in an International Baccalaureate program is for the students to be lifelong learners who understand that people can have differences and are both right (IBO, 2022b).

During the 2021 school year, there were 165,884 candidates in the International Baccalaureate program across the world, with 83,369 students in the United States. Out of the 165,884 candidates, there were 88,518 that graduated from the program, which is an increase from the 2017 school year with 80,300 graduates (IBO, 2022a). For students to receive their diplomas, they must complete several tasks, including extended essays, projects, and oral presentations. Some of the courses students take in the International Baccalaureate program provide college credit if the student passes an end-of-course exam.

Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment courses are for high school students either at their high school or college campus. These courses allow students to gain college credit. Students who take dual enrollment courses at their high school tend to still feel like high school students even though they are in a college course because they are taking the course in a high school environment (Lile et al., 2018). Since the course is taught on the high school campus, students are missing out on the experience of the college campus, which could help better prepare them for a college transition. Depending on the district, these courses are paid for either by the district or by the student and their families. Some colleges provide scholarships for concurrent students and special tuition rates to make the courses more affordable. Students fit these courses between other high school courses in their schedule. If passed, the concurrent courses give the student college credit and fulfill a high school credit.

Additionally, most dual enrollment programs at high schools provide students with the opportunity to earn high school credit and college credit simultaneously. The students are required to have specific test scores to take the courses, and remedial courses are not available for high school students in most states except for their senior year. Dual enrollment was never developed to move students toward an associate degree but instead was designed to provide students the opportunity to get some of their basic core classes. The advising provided to students who take dual enrollment is done by the high school counselor and a concurrent credit coordinator on the college campus. Some schools even use concurrent credit to allow students to take elective college courses in fields in which they are interested.

Moreover, students who enroll in dual enrollment courses see many positive benefits. Research shows that students who take concurrent credit courses tend to have higher levels of

academic motivation, higher GPAs, and higher levels of college readiness after their first year in college (Mokher et al., 2018). These courses also help students not be placed in remedial classes (Mokher et al., 2018) and boost student outcomes, including high school graduation rates, college enrollment, college persistence, completion, and time to a degree (Field, 2021). First-generation students who take concurrent credit courses are eight percent more likely to graduate from college (Troutman et al., 2018).

Although there are many benefits to concurrent credit courses, some students feel they have less time to explore their options. Others think their opportunities are restricted because they meet specific course requirements while in high school and have a shorter time in college (Troutman et al., 2018). Another drawback to dual enrollment is its effect on a student's transcript, especially if they earn lower grades in their college courses than in a high school course. Concurrent credit courses allow students to take college-level courses in high school, which ultimately shows many students that they can handle college-level courses. Furthermore, dual enrollment also helps minority students and students of low socioeconomic status have a better chance of completing their degrees.

Early College High Schools

Over the last several years, more ECHSs have opened across the United States. ECHSs provide students with the opportunity to graduate with their high school diploma and associate degree or postsecondary credential simultaneously or with a large number of college credits (Calhoun et al., 2019; Edmunds et al., 2020). ECHSs were launched in 2002 by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation under the Early College High School Initiative. The ECHS model became popular in 2001-2002 when the Bard High School Early College opened in New York City. By 2015, there were 80,000 students enrolled in more than 280 ECHSs (Walk, 2020).

ECHSs are defined under The Every Student Succeeds Act as "A partnership between local educational agencies and institutions of higher education where students earn both a high school diploma and no fewer than 12 college credits at no cost to families and as part of an organized course of study" (Walk, 2020, p. 125).

Additionally, ECHSs were developed to give underrepresented students in higher education the opportunity to gain college credits in high school while receiving support from high school staff (Adams et al., 2020; Atchinson et al., 2019; Mollet et al., 2020; Moreno et al., 2019). ECHSs are different from traditional concurrent credit courses because they merge the secondary and postsecondary experiences into one (Edmunds et al., 2020) instead of making them two distinct programs. Students are allowed to participate in both secondary and postsecondary events, including extracurricular activities, athletics, and clubs (Adams et al., 2020). Most ECHSs immerse the students in the college environment on a community college campus (Vargas et al., 2019). They offer a smaller school environment with smaller class sizes and a limited enrollment of 400 students or fewer (Moreno et al., 2019). Some ECHSs use college instructors to teach any high school courses that students need to complete before they start the college-level courses, while others use high school instructors.

Notably, ECHSs have great student results, including higher graduation rates than the national average, as well as greater persistence and completion rates (Mokher et al., 2018). Students who attend ECHSs attain degrees at a higher level than those who attend a traditional high school (Edmunds et al., 2020), especially minority and low-income students (Adams et al., 2020; Atchinson et al., 2019; Mollet et al., 2020; Moreno et al., 2019). Many students will graduate with an associate degree or be a few hours short of one, which allows them to have a head start at attaining their bachelor's degree. There are many benefits that students experience

while participating in an ECHS, including learning time management and organizational skills (Adams et al., 2020; Duncheon, 2020), accumulation of more college credits (Edmunds et al., 2020), and becoming better prepared for a transition to college due to being immersed in the college environment (Song et al., 2021). Even though the students who participate in an ECHS gain many credits and graduate college faster, some students experience difficulty because they lack time to grow in maturity and independence from their parents (Witkowsky & Clayton, 2020). Some students feel that leaving friends from their previous high schools and sacrificing extracurricular activities is a cost they make to attend an ECHS (Adams et al., 2020; Calhoun et al., 2018; Jett & Rinn, 2019).

Specifically, the students who graduate from an ECHS with their associate degree are two years ahead of their peers who attend a traditional high school. When they transfer to a four-year university, they take junior-level courses with students several years older than they are. The majority of these students will be less mature than their older classmates, but through the early college model, they are prepared for these differences. They are also prepared for the transition to junior-level courses because they were challenged with rigorous courses while in the ECHS. Students are also more accustomed to the college environment and expectations due to attending an ECHS (Walk, 2020).

ECHSs provide students with a rigorous curriculum and an environment that teaches them how to be college students while in high school (Adams et al., 2020). Many students who choose to attend an ECHS rather than their traditional high school give up many benefits that traditional high school students get to enjoy, such as some social and extracurricular activities (Adams et al., 2020; Calhoun et al., 2018; Jett & Rinn, 2019). Moreover, students who participate in an ECHS setting face many challenges. Since ECHSs are on college campuses, the

students are not around the traditional high school activities. The students find themselves more involved in the events on the community college campus than on their high school campus. These students also experience more stress, which results in a lack of sleep due to increased rigor, homework, expectations (Adams et al., 2020), a new environment, and pressures from parents, friends, and faculty (Calhoun et al., 2018). These students must quickly adapt to the new environment and find friends with whom they can connect and persevere. According to research, students also need to develop individual and social assets to help them with the differences between traditional high school and the early college high school setting including knowing how to seek help, learning how to manage the workload, and have self-determination and motivation (Calhoun et al., 2018).

Furthermore, research shows that 22% of students who participate in ECHSs complete an associate degree in two years (Zeiser et al., 2020;2021). The students at an ECHS are strategically scheduled into their college courses so that the courses they take work toward their associate degree while also taking the place of high school graduation requirements. Students who participate in ECHSs are better prepared for college than students who attend a traditional high school (Edmunds et al., 2020) because the students learn how to behave like college students and develop the college skills necessary to be successful (Song et al., 2021).

However, funding ECHSs can be expensive. ECHSs cost more to plan and operate than a traditional high school. The cost can vary for each ECHS, but the average is around $1,000 per student per year (Atchison et al., 2019). Because of the end of the Gates Foundation funding, some schools looked at ways to have the ECHS model across an entire school district instead of separating it. This approach is called "early college for all" and was a collaboration between Jobs for the future and three school districts in Colorado and Texas (Walk, 2020). In 2016, the U.S.

Department of Education waived the financial rules for Pell Grants for 44 colleges, which resulted in their being able to give the Pell Grant to high school students. Students who received the Pell Grant because of financial need were then able to use those funds to pay for their college courses, which helped the school districts with the cost of the college courses in the ECHSs (Walk, 2020). Even though there were many benefits to the Pell Grant experiment, it will not be renewed after the 2021-2022 school year, which will result in higher expenses for students and school districts when it comes to students taking college courses.

Summer Bridge Programs

There are many reasons students do not persist and complete their degrees. In 2016, only 60% of students who started college in 2010 finished their bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Research shows that the top reasons students do not finish college involve both personal and external factors, such as not being prepared academically, struggling to adjust to the college academic rigor (Adams et al., 2020), homesickness, not fitting in at the college the student attends, lack of guidance and mentors, and having to work while in school, which takes time that is needed to study (GoCollege, 2019). To help combat the personal and external factors, some schools provide summer bridge programs for their students.

Two- and four-year institutions offer summer bridge programs to ease a student's transition to college. The summer bridge program provides instruction in a student's area of academic need, student supports, and instruction on soft skills (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; Howard & Sharpe, 2019). Students also receive a stipend once they successfully complete the program. Grace-Odeleye & Santiago (2019) show that the summer bridge programs reduced the need for college-level developmental education for the first year and a half. The summer bridge

program also had no significant influence on the accumulation of credits and persistence (Venegas-Muggli, 2019).

However, research shows that summer bridge programs help students prepare for the transition to college by increasing academic readiness, promoting student inclusion and integration on the college campus academically and socially, introducing students to the support staff on campuses, and explaining the support staff's programs and services (Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). These programs also help students learn how to be their own advocates and persist throughout college, even though there will be challenges (Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). Summer bridge programs benefit students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and first-generation students since they typically have a higher chance of not completing their degree because of personal and external factors (Radunzel, 2018).

Each university has a unique way of running its summer bridge programs, but they typically run for two to eight weeks. Students that are first-generation, of low socioeconomic status, or at-risk are chosen to participate in the programs. Some universities require students to complete summer bridge programs before formally being admitted into the college. In this situation, the bridge program is designed to help students develop or refine skills necessary to succeed in college, including understanding college life and the academic rigor (Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). Most summer bridge programs also offer an in-depth orientation for the students, which discusses academics, college life, and the different resources located on the campus (Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). This orientation also teaches the students skills needed for college success, including time management, communication skills, and study skills, as well as providing the students with the opportunity to develop social and peer connections (Odeleye & Santiago, 2019).

Factors that Impact College Completion

The first six months of a student's college career are crucial when examining their persistence and completion of the first year. If students complete their first year of college, they have completed more than half the battle in persistence toward their bachelor's degree (Nicoletti, 2019; Tinto, 1988). As students transition to college, they must find a way to incorporate themselves into the social and academic systems. The students who successfully get involved with the different academic and social systems of college tend to persist past their freshman year (Nicoletti, 2019; Tinto, 1975).

However, some students decide to drop out of college. Tinto (1988) examined how separation, transition, and incorporation between groups of people can affect whether they continue in education or decide to depart. Students first have to learn how to separate themselves from their high school life so that they can transition into the new ways of college life. The separation deals with moving away from their parents, friends and the comfortable habits and way of life to which they were accustomed. The students must be prepared to experience the change which comes with the transition. The different changes include location, environment, people, and the level of independence. Once the students transition, they must learn how to incorporate new approaches and skills into their everyday lives to succeed in college, such as time management, study skills, and communication skills (McGhee, 2020).

Overall, there are many benefits to getting a college degree. Students who graduate with their college degree tend to make more money. The financial benefits of a college degree generally increase as a person ages and stay in the profession (Kim & Tamborini, 2019). Another benefit that comes with getting a college degree is financial compensation, such as health insurance, more vacation hours, and pensions (Kim & Tamborini, 2019). Even if students earn an

associate degree but do not pursue a bachelor's degree, they tend to make more money than students with only a high school diploma (Kim & Tamborini, 2019). Some students graduate high school with an associate degree if they attended an ECHS, while other students who attended an ECHS have some college credits and only lack a few to finish their associate degree.

For some students, completing college can be difficult because of several factors, especially if the students are first-generation students. Different external factors, such as work responsibilities, finances, or enrollment status, impact college completion for many students (Zeiser et al., 2020;2021). First-generation students may struggle to complete their college degrees because of personal and family-related stressful events or because they are not involved in extracurricular activities on the college campus (Adams et al., 2020). According to Zeiser, Song & Atchison (2020;2021), one of the most significant contributors to students' graduating from college on time are the cost of attending and the institutional aid they receive. As such, college students who participated in dual enrollment or an ECHS and accumulated college credits while in high school have a lower cost factor to finishing their degree.

Summary

Higher education has continually evolved since its first development, from providing only a few programs of studies for select individuals to providing an education for all in many fields (McCaffery, 2019). The transition to college from high school tends to be difficult for students because of many differences between high schools and colleges (Adams et al., 2020; Duncheon, 2020; Duncheon & Relles, 2020; Nodine et al., 2019; Troutman, Hendrix-Soto et al., 2018; Walk, 2020). Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory looks at how a person copes and adjusts to a new environment by examining three steps: "the characteristics of the particular transition, the characteristics of the pre- and post-transition environments, and the characteristics

of the individual experiencing the transition" (Schlossberg, 1981, p.5). It is crucial to understand where students are in their transition, whether they are moving in, moving through, or moving out of the transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Schlossberg (1981) believed that an individual could navigate transitions better if they went through a process called taking stock. Taking stock consists of four different components, considered the four Ss – situation, support, self, and strategies – that will help students cope with their transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The first factor, "situation," deals with several different aspects of the transition in order to help a person better understand what they will experience during the transition. The second factor, "support," deals with whether a person has a robust support system to help them physically and mentally with the transition. The third factor, "self," deals with the personal characteristics of the individual going through the transition and how they view it. Schlossberg (1981) believed a person needs to be self-aware of their beliefs, abilities, perceptions, and attitudes so that they can have a smooth transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The fourth factor, "strategies," deals with the coping mechanism a person brings into the transition.

Overall, there are several reasons that some students tend to struggle with their transition to college while others are able to navigate the transition more easily. Students who feel they can turn to their faculty, peers, or parents for support tend to handle the transition better (Calhoun et al., 2018). Students also need to feel a sense of belonging and feel they have a supportive culture to be proactive in their education and be successful (Mu & Cole, 2019). A significant disconnect between secondary and postsecondary education negatively affects students (Troutman et al., 2018). Studies have shown that many high school students struggle with the expectations of being college students and the differences in schedule and rigor of courses (Adams et al., 2020;

Duncheon, 2020; Duncheon & Relles, 2020; Lile et al., 2018; Mollet et al., 2020). The students are also used to having the support of their parents with them in every decision, but once they transition to college, they face the realities of autonomy and independence (Witkowsky & Clayton, 2020). Students also struggle with time management, and many have academic deficiencies because of their academically poor high school curriculum (McGhee, 2020).

Many districts implement college preparatory programs to help prepare their students for college or a career. College preparatory programs include including advanced placement courses, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment courses, ECHSs, and summer bridge programs. These different college preparatory programs help students see that college is achievable (Woods et al., 2018), provide exposure to the college academic environment and rigor (Adams et al., 2020; Taie & Lewis, 2020), and give a deeper understanding of what it means to be a college student (Lile et al., 2018), and increase positive results with college enrollment, persistence, and graduation (D'Anna et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2018). Many colleges provide programs to help smooth the transition for incoming freshmen, including freshman seminar classes and summer bridge programs. The goal of these programs is to help students learn the skills necessary to succeed in college and introduce them to the resources on the college campus. These programs can be beneficial to an incoming freshman, but research shows that any student who participates in a form of acceleration will have greater success during their transition and retention (Taylor & Yan, 2018).

Conley (2010) defines college readiness as "the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution" (p. 21). Many students who transition from high school are not prepared for the transition to college. Nearly two-thirds of those who enter community colleges and 40% of those entering four-year

institutions are assigned to at least one remedial course, which delays their enrollment into college-level courses (Barnett, 2018). Research has examined what students feel that they need to be college-ready. Many students think they need specific transition skills, including time management (Calhoun et al., 2018), note-taking, and writing (Francis et al., 2018). However, others feel that they need to know the logistics of college life, such as how to select courses, communicate properly with professors, and navigate the college environment (Francis et al., 2018). Even though there are many skills that students feel helped them prepare for college, once they make the transition, there are some elements of college life about which they are still unsure.

Many high schools in the United States aim to get students college- and career-ready. School districts fulfill this goal by offering dual enrollment college preparatory programs, such as traditional dual enrollment courses, advanced placement courses, the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, ECHSs, and summer bridge programs. Each of these dual enrollment college preparatory programs provides students with the opportunity to gain college credit hours while in high school (Lile et al., 2018; Troutman et al., 2018; Zeiser, 2019). It provides students with a pathway to gain a head start on their future while working towards technical certificates or associate degrees. Research shows several benefits to acquiring a college degree, including financial compensations such as health insurance, more vacation hours, and pensions (Kim & Tamborini, 2019). Even if the student only earns an associate degree, they tend to make more money than students who just have a high school diploma (Kim & Tamborini, 2019).

A high school student's transition to college and the effects of different college preparatory programs are considered frequently in research. There are several high school

programs where students can gather college credit, including dual enrollment, or attend an ECHS. However, a gap exists in the literature when looking at an ECHS's perceived impact on a student's transition to college. By examining the experiences of students who attend an ECHS in the South, we can more fully understand the transition to college for an ECHS graduate. The information gathered can then help us better understand the impact of Schlossberg's (1981) four S factors – situation, support, self, and strategies – when examining a student's transition.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to present a clearer understanding of the experiences of graduates of an ECHS in the South on their transition to a four-year university. This chapter will examine the research design and why it is a good fit for this study as well as present the research questions. The setting and participants are discussed, and the data collection process is outlined. Data analysis techniques are presented, and the trustworthiness and ethical considerations regarding the study are discussed. At the conclusion of the chapter, a summary will be included.

Research Design

Qualitative research gives insight into people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions (Pathak et al., 2013). Research such as this uses words and open-ended questions to examine individuals' or groups' meaning to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2018). There are several qualitative design options, but phenomenology is the type of qualitative research used for this study because it will look at the experiences of students who graduated from an early college high school and their transition to a four-year university. Phenomenology deals with describing others' perceptions and experiences. Specifically, transcendental phenomenology will be used to look at a person's lived experience and uncover the meaning of their experiences (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018).

Developed by Edmund Husserl, transcendental phenomenology looks at a phenomenon, how it is seen, and how they appear to our consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality plays a big part in transcendental phenomenology. For a person to be intentional, they must be present with themselves and the things in the world. It is essential for the person to recognize that the

world and self are inseparable (Moustakas, 1994). Two things make up intentionality: noema and noesis. Noema deals with the phenomenon and what is being experienced. Noesis deals with the act of perceiving, thinking, and feeling. For there to be a noesis, there first has to be a noema to which it relates. Intuition is also a key component of transcendental phenomenology. Husserl said intuition "is the presence to consciousness of an essence, with all that implies by way of necessity and universal validity" (Moustakas, 1994, p.33).

While there is a great extent of research discussing transitions that people face, there is little research regarding high school students who attend an ECHS, graduate with an associate degree, and transfer to a four-year university. Transcendental phenomenology is an appropriate design for this research because it will examine students' experiences attending an ECHS and their transitions to a four-year university (Moustakas, 1994). Specifically, this study examines the individual (internal) factors and institutional (external) factors that help or hinder a student's transition. The students' experiences detail their transition and provide insight into what the students experienced and the knowledge they gained from their transitions, which makes a qualitative method the right choice for this study.

Research Questions

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of participants of an ECHS in the South on their transition to a four-year university. The research questions are divided into one central research question and three sub-questions.

Central Research Question

How do graduates of an ECHS in the South describe their experiences with transitioning to a four-year university?

Sub-Question One

Considering situation, support, self, and strategies according to Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, how do ECHS graduates experience the time prior to enrollment, called the moving-in process?

Sub-Question Two

Considering situation, support, self, and strategies according to Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, how do ECHS graduates experience the period of enrollment, called the moving through process?

Sub-Question Three

Considering situation, support, self, and strategies according to Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, how do ECHS graduates experience the time after their first semester, called the moving out process?

Setting and Participants

The early college high school, located on the Southern Community College campus, was the location for this study. The participants were students who attended the early college high school, graduated, and transferred to a four-year university. Ten to twelve participants were included in this study, which examined the experiences of students attending an ECHS on their transitions to a four-year university.

Site

The setting for this study was the early college high school located on the Southern Community College campus. The Southern Community College is located in the southern region of the United States with an average enrollment of 1,100 students, with 57% of the students

needing remediation. The student population comprises 68% female and 32% male, with 41% of the students being a minority and 82% receiving financial aid. Only 21% of the students who attend the Southern Community College enter directly from high school.

The Southern Community College partners with several different school districts to provide dual enrollment opportunities for their students, but the collegiate high school is in partnership with two school districts. One of the collegiate high schools is located on the main campus, while the other is located on the satellite campus. The Southern Community College is located in a community with 10,000 people, and several other community colleges and four-year universities are within driving distance. Students can pursue many programs of study, with the Associate of Arts in General Studies being the degree that the collegiate high school students work on completing.

The community college and school district administration work together to make decisions concerning the ECHS. The school district pays for the students to participate in the ECHS, including paying for their college-level courses. The students apply to the collegiate high school and, if accepted, start the program during their 10th-grade year. Students attend classes instructed by college professors and follow a college schedule. A college administrator and district liaison work with the students daily. They support the students to help them navigate the college, stay on track to graduate high school and college, and keep the district and community college administration apprised with how the students are doing as they progress through their courses. The student population of the ECHS includes students of all races, but the majority are considered to be of low socioeconomic status, with several of the students being first-generation college students.

Participants

The participants in this study were students who have graduated from the Southern

Collegiate High School and transferred to a four-year university. These students have transferred

to a four-year university as incoming first-years with at least 60 credit hours, making them

juniors in their coursework. They have participated in an ECHS, which is a college preparatory

program during their 10th- through 12th-grade years. The students comprise different races and

socioeconomic statuses. Some are first-generation college students. The sample size for a study

depends on the type of qualitative design being used. A phenomenological study may vary in

size, from three to four individuals to 10 to 15 (Creswell, 2018). Since this study is

phenomenological, the sample size was at least ten individuals. The sample size of participants

was between 10 and 12 participants. Purposeful sampling was used because the researcher

selects individuals that are convenient and can purposefully provide information to help the

researcher better understand the problem (Creswell, 2018).

<div align="center">

Researcher Positionality

</div>

The social constructivism interpretive framework guided this study in understanding the

students' experiences regarding their transition to a four-year university after graduating from an

ECHS. Three philosophical assumptions are discussed in this section. The different philosophical

assumptions include ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Each of these different assumptions

are addressed, including their roles in the research.

Interpretive Framework

Social constructivism deals with the belief that individuals seek to understand the world

in which they live (Creswell, 2018). The social constructivism interpretive framework guided

this study by examining individuals' multiple meanings to the same lived experience: their

transition to a four-year university (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By understanding the experiences of each participant's individual (internal) factors and institutional (external) factors, this study helps us better understand the meanings the participants have developed about their transition. Through broad, general, and open-ended interview questions, the participants were given the opportunity to present their experiences and the meanings of their transitions to a four-year university.

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions are beliefs about ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Ontology deals with the nature of reality. Epistemology deals with knowledge, what counts as knowledge, and what claims about knowledge are justified. Axiology deals with the role of values in research. Each of these philosophical assumptions are described below as well as how they apply to the current study.

Ontological Assumption

Ontological assumptions deal with the nature of reality and its characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It also deals with the researcher reporting different perspectives about the study as themes develop (Creswell, 2018). There were multiple perspectives gathered from students regarding their transition to a four-year university after graduating from an ECHS. As a result, I used quotes and themes directly from the participant's words and experiences related to their transition from an ECHS to a four-year university.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemological assumptions deal with the researcher trying to get close to the participants to understand their personal views (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to get close to the participants, I got to know them, collaborate with them, and made sure that they understood

the reason for the research. It was essential to ensure that my views were kept out of the study. The only opinions that were important were the participants. This study worked closely with the participants to gather their experiences regarding their transition to a four-year university after graduation from an ECHS.

Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumptions deal with the researcher admitting their values and biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative researchers acknowledge that there is value to their research and that biases are present. As a result, I discussed my roles in research, including my histories, beliefs, assumptions about the topic, and how these different components might influence the narrative. I also presented my interpretations and those of the participants to help the readers better understand the context and study.

Researcher's Role

The researcher's role is to describe the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I collected data from the participants through a student questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, letter-writing, and focus groups. During the study, it was essential that all biases be bracketed out during the data collection and data analysis so that my assumptions, opinions, and biases did not interfere with the study (Moustakas, 1994). Before going into higher education, I worked as a teacher and administrator in secondary education. During my career in secondary education, I noticed many high school students transition to a four-year university while being unprepared to do so. Some were not prepared academically, but the majority were not ready for the expectations and freedoms of being a college student.

After several years, I was given the opportunity to help develop an ECHS on a community college campus. Because of this, I have a strong interest in ECHSs and ensuring that

they provide students with everything needed to be successful. Since I helped develop an ECHS, it is my belief that they provide students great opportunities, such as getting college courses for free, getting ahead in their education, and introducing the students to the college environment. In order to fully understand the experiences of the study's participants, my personal and professional experiences with ECHSs and transitions to college have to be set aside in order to examine the new data with a fresh perspective (Moustakas, 1994).

This study's participants were students I have previously worked with as their administrator in the ECHS. However, since they have transitioned to a four-year university, I have no authority over them. In order to follow Moustakas's (1994) guidelines for the Epoché, my personal and professional experiences with the students must be set aside. Creswell (2018) explained that shared experiences with participants could skew the data. In order to minimize the data being skewed and ensure that the data was being perceived with a fresh perspective, reflexive journaling was used throughout the data collection process.

Procedures

Once approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board, data started to be collected for the study. The participants were selected using purposeful sampling. Consent forms from both the participants and Southern Community College were collected. The participants were contacted, and the data started to be collected through a questionnaire, individual interviews, a letter-writing activity, and focus groups. After the data was collected, it was analyzed using Epoché, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. Textural and structural descriptions were also developed. These descriptions were then put together to give an overall description of "what" the participants experienced and "how" they experienced it (Creswell, 2018).

Permissions

Approval was obtained from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix A) to begin the research and the University of Arkansas Hope-Texarkana which was the location where the data collection process occurred (Appendix B). The participants also received an informed consent form before the research began (Appendix C). The informed consent form gave the purpose of the study to the participants and indicated that participating in the study was voluntary and would not place the participants at risk (Creswell, 2018).

Recruitment Plan

The sample pool for this study was 44 students who graduated from the ECHS at the Southern Community College. The participants were between the age of 18 and 22. They also came from different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. A phenomenological study may vary in size, from three to four individuals to 10 to 15 (Creswell, 2018). Since this study was a phenomenological study, the sample size was between 10 and 12 participants from the 44 that graduated from the collegiate high school. The sampling was purposeful and convenient since the participants were selected based on convenience and could provide information to help the researcher better understand the problem (Creswell, 2018). The number of participants chosen provided the study with saturation. Saturation occurs when there needs to be no new data collected because the themes and categories determined are saturated, and no further data will provide new insights or reveal new themes or categories (Creswell, 2018).

The students who graduated from the ECHS were contacted by email to explain the study's purpose. The emails included detailed information regarding the study and the informed consent form (Appendix C). The students were informed that if they participate in the study by completing the questionnaire, participating in the interview, the focus groups, and writing the

letter, they would be given a $20 Amazon gift card.

Data Collection Plan

To achieve triangulation – that is, the use of multiple different sources to gather evidence and help validate the accuracy (Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) – a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, letter-writing, and a focus group were used. Data was first collected during the study with the informed consent from each participant (Appendix C). Upon gaining informed consent, each participant was scheduled for their semi-structured interview. At the beginning of the semi-structured interview the students answered a questionnaire (Appendix D) to gather demographic and descriptive data, which provided information about the students. Most of the data was collected during the semi-structured interview, which was recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were sent to the participants to check for accuracy and provide clarity. After the data was collected, it was then analyzed using Moustakas's process, which includes the Epoché, horizontalization of the data, developing themes, developing a textural description of the experience, developing a structural description, and developing a composite description (Creswell, 2018).

Individual Interviews

Interviews are the typical data collection procedure for phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2018). Before the interview, I undergone the Epoché process. Epoché deals with a person using a method to eliminate their bias and judgments towards a phenomenon or topic. In transcendental phenomenology, it is essential that the researcher examines the phenomenon through a clear lens and not allow their misconceptions or biases to influence their thoughts regarding the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Even though it is not a new idea, the phenomenon was examined as if for the first time. During the Epoché, a person goes through a process to clear

their mind to ensure that they are challenged to develop new ideas and thoughts regarding a phenomenon. Reflective journaling was used to bracket any previous experiences before the data collection (Moustakas, 1994).

Interviews were used as the first data collection method to allow the information gathered to guide the letter writing and focus group interviews. The interviews were 30-45 minutes long per participant and were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or through a virtual meeting because of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the beginning of the interview, I ensured that the participants gave informed consent, understood the study, and were reminded that the interview would be recorded. After this, I began the introductions to help make the participant feel more comfortable. Then questions were asked about the participant's experiences of graduating from an ECHS and transferring to a four-year university, specifically looking at the four S factors from Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory. During the interviews, I took notes, and the interviews were digitally recorded. The interviews were then transcribed and sent to the participant. The participant was allowed to provide feedback, clarity, or accuracy.

Individual Interview Questions

Moving In: Preparing to transition to a four-year university

1. Situation
    a. Tell me about your experience attending a collegiate high school at Southern Community College. SQ1
        i. How many college credit hours did you have when you graduated high school? SQ1
        ii. Were your college courses online or face-to-face? SQ1

       iii. In what ways did you feel prepared or not prepared for your experiences in college? SQ1

2. Support

    a. Tell me about your family. SQ1

       i. How were they supportive of you while you were in the early college high school? SQ1

       ii. In what ways were they not supportive of you while you were in the ECHS? SQ1

    b. What did your family think about your wanting to transition to a four-year university? SQ1

       i. How were they supportive of your decision to transition to a four-year university? SQ1

       ii. In what ways were they not supportive of your decision to transition to a four-year university? SQ1

    c. What supports did you have while in the ECHS that helped you be successful? SQ1

3. Self

    a. How did you feel about graduating from the ECHS with your associate degree? SQ1

    b. How did you feel about getting accepted to a four-year university? SQ1

    c. Have you experienced any change or transition similar to your transition to a four-year university? SQ1

       i. If so, how did it go? SQ1

        ii.   Was it a successful experience? SQ1

       iii.   What helped you to be successful during the experience? SQ1

4. Strategies

   a.   What strategies did you use to adjust when you first enrolled in the ECHS? SQ1

   b.   What strategies did you use when you first transitioned to the four-year university to help you adjust? SQ1

   c.   How would you describe the ways you coped with change and transitions? SQ1

Moving Through: First Semester at the four-year university

1. Situation

   a.   What was your first-semester at the four-year university like? SQ2

   b.   Was the experience positive or negative? Explain. SQ2

   c.   How was your first-semester at the four-year university different than the ECHS? SQ2

2. Support

   a.   How was your family supportive during your first semester? SQ2

   b.   How was your family not supportive during your first semester? SQ2

   c.   How did the institution offer support? SQ2

   d.   Where else did you find support during your first semester? Explain. SQ2

3. Self

   a.   Describe yourself compared to your peers in your classes. SQ2

   b.   Describe how you tried to stay positive during your first semester. SQ2

4. Strategies

    a. What strategies did you use to help you adapt to your life at the four-year

       university? SQ2

    b. What supports provided by the institution did you utilize? SQ2

    c. What extra-curricular activities were you involved in? SQ2

    d. What was the hardest thing for you to overcome? How did you try to overcome

       it? SQ2

Moving Out: Finishing the first semester

1. Situation

    a. What was it like finishing your first semester at a four-year university? SQ3

    b. Describe your feelings regarding being done with the first semester. SQ3

    c. Describe what you would have done differently about your first semester. SQ3

2. Support

    a. What or who supported you the most as you finished your first semester? SQ3

    b. What supports did you wish you had during your first semester? SQ3

3. Self

    a. How did you feel about being done with your first semester? SQ3

    b. Looking back, how far have you come from when you graduated the ECHS to

       now? Explain. SQ3

4. Strategies

    a. What strategies did you use during your first semester that you plan on using as

       you continue in school? SQ3

    b. What strategies helped you through your first semester? SQ3

c. What strategies do you wish you had used as you transitioned to the four-year university? SQ3

d. If you had to do it again, would you enroll in the ECHS? Why or why not? SQ3

e. What are some things you wish you would have known about transitioning to a four-year university? SQ3

Final Question

1. What are some things that you feel are essential for me to understand that we might not have previously discussed regarding your transition from a collegiate high school to a four-year university?

Each interview question was developed based on the research questions and the information needed to answer those questions. The interview questions allowed the participants to give their experiences regarding attending an ECHS and their transitions to a four-year university. They described their experiences with the transitions based on the four S factors in Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory: situation, support, self, and strategies (Schlossberg, 1981). The interview questions provided valuable information and data for the central research question, sub-question one, sub-question two, and sub-question three. The interview questions were presented and approved by the committee for this dissertation before asking the participants. If there needed to be any revisions to the questions, those edits were made. All interview questions are open-ended, which provides the participants the opportunity to give rich, thick descriptions of their transition experiences (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The data collected during the interview undergone data analysis for a transcendental phenomenology study, including Epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation,

and textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). During the interviews, I used a digital recorder and took notes. Member-checking was used to increase credibility by sending a transcription of each interview to each participant so that they could check for accuracy. After each interview, I completed a reflective journal one to two days after the interview. These reflective journals allowed me to examine the data from the interviews with a clear mind to view the participants' experiences through a new, unbiased lens. The reflective journal allowed me to reflect on the interview and write down my feelings, observations, and potential themes. It also allowed me to write down any biases discovered during the interview, which led to the Epoché. Epoché deals with the researcher bracketing out their experiences or biases towards the phenomenon (Creswell, 2018).

After any personal experiences or biases were bracketed out, the interviews were organized and transcribed using horizontalization. The interviews were first transcribed using horizontalization which included looking at each student's different statements and treating them equally while also finding the irrelevant, overlapping, or repetitive comments, which were then deleted (Creswell, 2018). Relevant expressions to the experience were listed, and then statements that were not relevant to the experience were eliminated. Meaning units were then developed using the horizontalized statements, which were then clustered into common categories, known as themes.

The different themes were then combined with the themes found during the other data collection procedures to develop textural descriptions to synthesize meanings and essences. In order to formulate textural descriptions, imaginative variation was used to create individual structural descriptions. Imaginative variation includes determining the structural and textural meanings, recognizing themes, considering universal structures, and searching for

exemplifications that illustrate the structural themes (Moustakas, 1994). The individual structural description explained how the students experience the transition to a four-year university. Then the textural structural description were developed, which according to Moustakas (1994), is "the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the [meaning and] essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (p. 100). The different textural and structural descriptions helped readers understand what it was like to experience the phenomenon studied. The findings from the individual interviews were discussed with colleagues and peers to gather a different perspective, increasing the study's credibility through the peer debriefing process.

Letter-Writing

Letter-writing was the second form of data collection. The participants were given the prompt at the end of their semi-structured interview. They were given the opportunity to write the letter before they left or had two weeks to write their letter and email it to me. The prompt for the letter was "When discussing your transition from the early college high school to a four-year university, how would you describe it to a senior currently in the early college high school?" (Appendix F). The information gathered from these letters helped answer the central research question and provide details to answer the sub-questions, depending on the answers. The information collected during the letter-writing activity was used to help guide the focus group interview questions.

Letter-Writing Data Analysis Plan

After each participant submitted their letter, they were given a copy so they could go through the member-checking process to check for accuracy, increasing the study's credibility. After the letters were checked for accuracy, I completed a personal reflective journal. I

completed the journal one to two days after reading the letters. The reflective journal allowed me

to reflect on the letters and write down feelings, observations, and potential themes. It also

allowed me to write down any biases discovered during the interview, which led to the Epoché.

Epoché deals with the researcher bracketing out their experiences or biases towards the

phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). The Epoché process allowed me to evaluate the data from the

letters with a clear mind to view the participants' experiences through a new, unbiased lens.

After any personal experiences or biases were bracketed out, a list of significant

statements were developed. The significant statements dealt with how each individual dealt with

the phenomenon. These statements were listed as per the horizontalization of the data, and each

statement was created equally (Creswell, 2018). Once the statements were listed, any comments

irrelevant to the experience were eliminated. Themes were developed based on meaning units,

which helped eliminate any repetition. The different themes were then used to create textural,

structural, and composite descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation were used to

develop the descriptions by looking at the structural meanings, recognizing themes, considering

universal structures, and searching for exemplifications that illustrate the structural themes. After

the imaginative variation process, textural structural descriptions were developed. After

developing the different descriptions, I went through the peer debriefing process to gather

different perspectives from my colleagues and peers.

Focus Groups

A focus group is an effective way to collect data when a group of participants share

similarities and have gone through the same experience, and being in the group helps them speak

about their experiences (Creswell, 2018). One thing to watch for in a focus group is that one

person or several do not dominate the conversation; instead, all participants should be able to

communicate their experiences. The focus group discussion occurred after all the participants

wrote their letters. The focus group consisted of two smaller groups of five to six participants.

The focus groups occurred virtually because all the students were at different universities.

During the focus groups, I took notes and recorded the discussions. The focus group questions

aligned with the individual interview questions but took them further to allow for more in-depth

data to be collected. The focus group questions can be found in Appendix G.

Focus Group Questions

1. Take a look at other letters written by other participants. Which ones do you identify with and why do you identify with them?

2. Based on your experiences, how can the early collegiate high school better prepare students for the transition to a four-year university? CRQ

3. Based on your experiences, what advice would you give an early collegiate high school senior getting ready to transition to a four-year university? CRQ

4. Based on your experiences, what advice would you give an early collegiate high school senior during their first semester of college? CRQ

5. Based on your experiences, how can four-year universities better support their incoming first-year students better? CRQ

6. What are some things you feel are essential for me to understand that we might not have previously discussed regarding your transition from a collegiate high school to a four-year university?

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

During the focus group interviews, I used a digital recorder and took notes. Member-

checking was used to increase credibility by sending a transcription of each interview to the

participants of each focus group so that they could check for accuracy. After each focus group interview, I completed a personal reflective journal which allowed me to reflect on the interview and write down my feelings, observations, and potential themes. It also allowed me to go through the Epoché process, which included writing down any biases discovered during the interviews. Significant statements were listed, and comments that were irrelevant to the experience were removed. Meaning units were developed using the horizontalized statements, and then themes were created. These statements and themes were combined with those acquired after the questionnaire and the individual interviews to develop textural descriptions. Imaginative variation was used to create textural, structural, and composite descriptions. The findings from the focus groups were discussed with colleagues and peers to gather a different perspective, increasing the study's credibility through peer debriefing.

Data Synthesis

After all the data was collected and personal experiences and biases were bracketed out, a list of significant statements were developed. The significant statements examine how each individual dealt with the phenomenon. The questionnaire, interviews, letter writing, focus groups, and reflective journals were used to determine essential statements. These statements were listed using horizontalization of the data, and each statement was treated equally (Creswell, 2018). Once the statements were listed, themes were developed, eliminating repetition.

Three descriptions were developed during the data analysis: textural, structural, and composite. The textural description deals with what happened and what the participants experienced (Creswell, 2018). The structural description deals with the "how," specifically the setting and context in which the phenomenon occurred (Creswell, 2018). The composite description includes taking both the textural and structural descriptions and putting them together

to give an overall description of "what" the participants experienced and "how" they experienced it (Creswell, 2018). The students' experiences were used to help others better understand a student's transition to a four-year university.

Trustworthiness

According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982), qualitative research has received frequent criticism because it failed to show reliability and validation (Creswell, 2018). This transcendental phenomenological study showed reliability and validation through the use of triangulation. Triangulation is using multiple sources to gather evidence and help validate the accuracy (Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). It did this by providing descriptively rich and thick results which can be used in future studies. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability helped support the trustworthiness of the study.

Credibility

For a study to demonstrate credibility, it must have enough evidence to become persuasive (Creswell, 2018). Credibility is accomplished through triangulation, peer debriefing, and member-checking. The use of triangulation helped develop credibility in this study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Triangulation also causes the findings to be transferrable and have a thick description, which helps support credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Peer debriefing involves discussing the study and results with colleagues and peers, which allows them to provide a different perspective. Another way to increase credibility is to send each participant a transcription of their interview. This process is considered member-checking because the participants will be allowed to review their recent interview transcription and judge it for accuracy and credibility (Creswell, 2018).

Transferability

A research study is considered transferable if what was studied and the results found can be used in another study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To develop a transferable study, thick and rich descriptions were used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The results found in this study can be used to do a quantitative study looking at whether ECHSs help prepare students for a transfer to a four-year university. A follow-up study could also compare students who attended an ECHS and their transition to students who attended a traditional high school and gained college hours at that high school on their transition.

Dependability

Dependability shows that the findings are consistent and can be repeated (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The procedures of this study were supported by literature and were described in great detail to allow others to replicate the study. The triangulation of the data also helps provide the study with dependability by showing that the findings are consistent (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Since there were multiple data sources, there were a thick description of the student's experiences regarding their transfer to a four-year university.

Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest an audit trail, triangulation, and reflexivity to establish confirmability. An audit trail is a transparent description of the research steps taken from the beginning to end. Triangulation was used to develop confirmability. Triangulation uses multiple sources to gather evidence and help validate accuracy (Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Gutterman, 2019). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), reflexivity includes an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially the effect of the researcher, at

every step of the research process. In order to achieve reflexivity in this study, I kept a journal to reflect on the study. I also used the journal to bracket any biases I had in the study.

Ethical Considerations

The study of students' experiences regarding attending an ECHS in the South on their transition to a four-year university was filled with personal experiences and stories. The most important ethical consideration for this study was protecting the data that was collected. The data collected was kept in a locked filing cabinet, and only I had access to it. The data was also kept on a computer in a password-protected folder so that only I could access it. The data was transcribed using pseudonyms for the names and places of those involved in the study. The use of pseudonyms was done to ensure that the identity of the participants, ECHS, and community college was protected.

Informed consent was also an important ethical consideration for this study. An informed consent form includes the right of the participants to withdraw from the study at any point, the purpose and procedures of the study, the protection of confidentiality, any known risks, any expected benefits, and the signature of the participant and researcher (Creswell, 2018). The informed consent form gave the participant important information regarding the study. The participant signed the form if they agreed with all the elements.

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Summary

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This transcendental phenomenological qualitative study looked at the experiences of students who attended an ECHS in the southern United States on their transition to a four-year university. I explored participants' experiences attending the collegiate high school and their transition to a four-year university, including how the individual (internal) and institutional (external) resources either helped or hindered the transition. Data was collected using a

questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, a reflective journal, letter writing, and focus groups.

Triangulation of the data was accomplished by using several different data sources. The data was

also analyzed using several other methods, including a reflective journal to start developing an

Epoché, horizontalization of the data, developing themes, developing a textural description of the

experience, developing a structure, and creating a composite description. This data analysis

allowed me to create a trustworthy, credible, dependable, and transferrable study (Creswell,

2018).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of graduates of an early college high school (ECHS) in the South on their transition to a four-year university. This chapter will examine the data collected using pseudonyms for the students who agreed to participate in the study. The data was analyzed to include themes that address the research questions in this study. This chapter concludes with a summary of the study results and composite textural and structural descriptions of the experiences of graduates of an ECHS in the South on their transition to a four-year university.

Participants

This study was conducted with the assistance of 11 participants who had graduated from the Southern Collegiate High School, then transferred and completed a semester at a four-year university. The students transferred to a four-year university as incoming first-years with at least 60 credit hours, making them juniors in their coursework.

Alison

Alison graduated from Southern Collegiate High School in 2021 with 63 hours and transferred to a four-year university with an average enrollment of 26,000 students. She is majoring in anthropology and took 15 college credit hours during her first semester. Her parents are married, and she has three siblings. Her parents attended college, with only her mother completing college and graduate school. Alison shared, "I was not prepared to attend the ECHS because I came from a private school, and the curriculum there did not challenge me at all." While at the ECHS, Alison shared that "I felt challenged, but I didn't feel like I was struggling." At the ECHS, all her classes were face-to-face, with only a few online courses. While in the

ECHS, Alison shared, "My mom was really invested and helpful. Both my parents overall helped provide the resources I needed." When asked about her thoughts on high school students attending an early college high school, she responded:

> I think it is a good and bad idea. I personally felt really burnt out transferring to the four-year university. It was a new area with new people. Going from a small college to a large college and doing all the work made me feel like I had been in school for a long time. If you feel like you are up to the challenge of an ECHS, then do it. However, it is a lot harder than you realize.

Tia

Tia graduated from Southern Collegiate High School in 2022 with 71 hours and transferred to a four-year university with an average enrollment of 9,000 students. She majors in speech communications with a minor in accounting and military science. During her first semester, she was enrolled in 16 college credit hours. Her parents are divorced, and she has a brother and a younger sister. Her mother completed college with a bachelor's degree, and her father completed an associate degree. Tia shared, "The ECHS gave me a sense of discipline, specifically on the online courses. I also participated in a lot of extracurricular activities at the local high school, which taught me time management and responsibility." At the ECHS, all her classes were face-to-face, with only a few online courses. While in the ECHS, Tia shared, "My parents were supportive of me in the ECHS. They understood when I couldn't attend events because I had to study or do homework." When asked about her thoughts on high school students attending an early college high school, she responded, "I think it is a good idea. It gives you a step up. You are also able to network, and you learn the expectations of a college campus."

Kylie

Kylie graduated from Southern Collegiate High School in 2021 with 63 hours and transferred to a four-year university with an average enrollment of 1,120 students. She is majoring in addiction studies/therapy. During her first semester, she was enrolled in 12 college credit hours. Her parents are divorced but remarried, and she has several siblings. Neither her mom nor dad attended college, but both graduated high school. Kylie shared that "I had a really good experience at the ECHS. However, I was not prepared for the homework load at the ECHS compared to my previous school." At the ECHS, all her classes were face-to-face, with only a few online courses. While in the ECHS, Kylie said, "My family was very encouraging and pushed me to do my best." When asked about her thoughts on high school students attending an early college high school, she responded:

> I think for the right student it is a really good idea. The ECHS taught me time management, communication skills, and how to study. However, if you are struggling at the regular high school, I don't recommend trying something harder. The ECHS would not be a good fit for you.

Crystal

Crystal graduated from Southern Collegiate High School in 2021 with 63 hours and transferred to a four-year university with an average enrollment of 8,244 students. She is majoring in nursing, and during her first semester, she was enrolled in 15 college credit hours. Her parents are married, and she has a younger brother. Both parents graduated high school, but her mom was the only one to attend college, and she did not graduate. Crystal shared, "I was not prepared for the course load and the amount of work you have to put in when I transitioned to the ECHS. I was also not prepared for the time management needed to be successful." Crystal

explained, "I went from being a traditional high school student and not having to worry about studying to being an ECHS student, where I had to learn how to study and focus so I could pass the classes." At the ECHS, all her classes were face-to-face, with only a few online courses. While in the ECHS, Crystal shared that "My family was very supportive. Everything that I needed, they either provided it for me or could help me get it. They also encouraged me." When asked about her thoughts on high school students attending an early college high school, she responded, "It is a great opportunity. If a student decides that is what they want to do, they need to be prepared to study and use their time wisely."

Casey

Casey graduated from Southern Collegiate High School in 2022 with 60 hours and transferred to a four-year university with an average enrollment of 26,000 students. He is majoring in computer engineering, and during his first semester, he was enrolled in 15 hours but dropped to 11 hours after he withdrew from a course. His parents are divorced, and he is the only child. Both parents graduated from high school, and his mom took some college courses but didn't finish a degree. Casey shared, "At first, I had to get used to the differences in the workload at the ECHS compared to what I was used to from the traditional high school. The expectations were different from the school district to the ECHS." At the ECHS, all his classes were face-to-face, with only a few online courses. While in the ECHS, Casey shared, "My mom could tell when I was stressed, and she would comfort me in times of need. She was very supportive of me." When asked about his thoughts on high school students attending an early college high school, he responded:

It is something that every high school needs to offer to some extent. Since I transferred with at least 60 college credit hours, I didn't have to take the basic core classes that a freshman has to take, so I could take what I wanted for my major.

Morgan

Morgan graduated from Southern Collegiate High School in 2022 with 62 hours and transferred to a four-year university with an average enrollment of 3,160 students. She is majoring in elementary education, and during her first semester, she was enrolled in 16 college credit hours. Her dad graduated high school and took some college courses, and her stepmom graduated college with a bachelor's degree. She also has a younger brother. Morgan shared:

I enjoyed the small setting at the ECHS. I didn't know what to expect when I first started at the ECHS because it was a different environment with different expectations. I had taken advanced classes at the high school, which helped prepare me for the workload at the ECHS.

At the ECHS, all her classes were face-to-face, with only a few online courses. While in the ECHS, Morgan shared, "My parents were really supportive and definitely wanted me to go to the ECHS so I could get my associate degree for free. They pushed me to make the best grades I could." When asked about her thoughts on high school students attending an early college high school, she stated, "I think it is a good idea because you can get ahead and get the core classes out of the way."

Andrea

Andrea graduated from Southern Collegiate High School in 2021 with 60 hours and transferred to a four-year university with an average enrollment of 26,000 students. She is majoring in studio art, and during her first semester, she was enrolled in 15 college credit hours.

Her biological father passed away. She lives with her mom, who took several college classes but decided to stay home with her and her brother. Andrea shared, "I was not prepared for all the work in the ECHS that I would have to do after class, like studying and homework." At the ECHS, all her classes were face-to-face, with only a few online courses. While in the ECHS, Andrea shared that "My mom would encourage me and tell me that I could do it." When asked about her thoughts on high school students attending an early college high school, she stated, "I think it is a good idea, but it is also very challenging and tough and not for everyone. Some people are just not ready for it."

Amy

Amy graduated from Southern Collegiate High School in 2022 with 66 hours and transferred to a four-year university with an average enrollment of 26,000 students. She is majoring in pre-nursing, and during her first semester, she was enrolled in 12 college credit hours. Her parents are married, and she has one sibling. Her dad went to college and graduated with an associate degree, and her mom took a few college courses but did not finish. Amy shared, "I was not prepared for the workload or homework at the ECHS. At the district school, we didn't have to study, and we didn't have homework." Amy went on to explain, "I absolutely enjoyed the ECHS. I got a free associate degree which saved my family and me a lot of money. I also learned how college life works." At the ECHS, all her classes were face-to-face, with only a few online courses. While in the ECHS, Amy shared, "My parents were very supportive and knew that the ECHS was a great opportunity for my future goals and plans. They were very encouraging." When asked about her thoughts on high school students attending an early college high school, she stated, "I think it is an awesome opportunity."

Sarah

Sarah graduated from Southern Collegiate High School in 2022 with 67 hours and

transferred to a four-year university with an average enrollment of 26,000 students. She is

majoring in nursing, and during her first semester, she was enrolled in 15 college credit hours.

Her parents are divorced but got remarried, and she has several siblings. Her dad never went to

college, but her mom took a few classes and then dropped out when she had Sarah but went back

to finish. Sarah shared, "The regular high school did not prepare students for the jump in rigor

and expectations that came with the ECHS." Sarah went on to explain, "I really liked the ECHS.

There weren't a lot of students, so we were all really close. The teachers were amazing and

helped us out a lot." At the ECHS, all her classes were face-to-face, with only a few online

courses. While in the ECHS, Sarah shared, "My parents were very supportive and showed up to

every event that they could attend. They also understood that I had to stay up late sometimes to

work on assignments to get them done." When asked about her thoughts on high school students

attending an early college high school, she stated:

> I think it is a really good decision not only because you are getting the college classes but
>
> also because in a lot of the public schools, you are not learning what you should be
>
> learning. There is no rigor or preparation for college at the local schools.

Madison

Madison graduated from Southern Collegiate High School in 2021 with 63 hours and

transferred to a four-year university with an average enrollment of 2,352 students. She is

majoring in psychology with a minor in art. During her first semester, she was enrolled in 15

college credit hours. Her parents are married, and she has a sister and a brother. Her mom has her

GED, and her dad did not finish high school. Madison shared, "I was really prepared for the

transition to the ECHS. I felt prepared because I knew what people expected of me and what I was getting myself into." At the ECHS, all her classes were face-to-face, with only a few online courses. While in the ECHS, Madison shared, "My parents were very supportive. Even if they saw me crying, they would support me by encouraging me and telling me I could do it." When asked what her thoughts were on high school students attending an early college high school, she stated:

> I think it is a good idea. It helped me mature faster and see what my teachers expected from me. Some high school students entering college at a young age can benefit, but it doesn't work for some.

Jake

Jake graduated from Southern Collegiate High School in 2022 with 73 hours and transferred to a four-year university with an average enrollment of 9,000 students. He is majoring in mechanical engineering, and during his first semester, he was enrolled in 15 college credit hours. His parents are divorced. His dad took some college courses, but his stepmom completed a graduate degree. He also has a younger stepsister. Jake shared, "I was not prepared for the college environment because I had always been around a regular public school environment." He shared, "The ECHS was a little bit challenging at first, but then it got better after we learned about the college expectations and rigor." At the ECHS, all his classes were face-to-face, with only a few online classes. While in the ECHS, Jake shared:

> My parents were supportive. They would take me to and from school and bring me to different events. They would also help pay for things if they needed to, but the majority of everything was paid for by the school district.

When asked about his thoughts on students attending an early college high school, he stated, "It is a great opportunity. It exposes you to experiences you wouldn't have any knowledge about coming straight from the regular high school regarding the college experience and expectations."

Results

The results of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study are reported in detail using the participants' actual descriptive words as they explained their experiences with the transition to a four-year university after graduating from an ECHS in the South. The research process for this study included a student questionnaire, a one-on-one interview, a letter-writing activity, a focus group, and triangulation of the data to validate the collected data. Data analysis was completed with the research questions as the focus while utilizing the three stages of the transition theory. There were four primary themes, with eleven sub-themes. The four primary themes include 1) Self-Awareness; 2) Academic Preparation; 3) College Awareness; 4) Relationships. Each of these primary themes has several sub-themes, which can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Themes and Sub-Themes of a Student's Transition

Self-Awareness
Accomplished
Mindset
Growth

Academic Preparation
Time Management
Study Skills
Communication Skills

College Awareness
College Environment
College Expectations
College Involvement

Relationships
Family
Friends

Self-Awareness

The participants' self-awareness was different before their transition, during their transition, and after their transition. They each identify in different ways when it comes to graduating with their associate degree, starting their first semester at the four-year university, and finishing their first semester at the four-year university. Each participant figures out more about themselves as they progress through the various changes and transitions. All the participants felt a sense of accomplishment, a change in their mindset, and experienced growth as they moved through the three stages of their transition.

Accomplished

Each participant felt a sense of accomplishment after finishing the ECHS and graduating with their associate degree. Kylie and Madison had doubts that they would make it at times, but once Kylie walked across the stage at graduation, she felt like she had accomplished something. Alison was excited to graduate and was ready to move to a new town. Jake was reminded that graduating with his associate degree was something many high school students could not say they had done, which gave him a sense of accomplishment. At the same time, Kylie stated, "I am proud of myself, and this is a big accomplishment because I don't know anybody else that has done this." Even though Tia was excited to graduate with her associate degree, she stated:

> I felt I had taken advantage of the situation because I remembered all the traditional students I was in classes with and how they were older and still working towards their degrees while I finished high school.

Amy pointed out that she loved graduating with her associate degree but stated, "Some people didn't think it was a good idea because I was young and would be going off to college to take classes with 21-year-old students."

Mindset

The transition to a four-year university had positives and negatives for each participant. Even though all the participants felt that they were academically prepared for the transition, there were some things they figured out about themselves. Casey transitioned to the four-year university with a major in mind, but once he started taking courses, he realized he wanted to major in something else. Tia found that due to her experiences at the ECHS, she was able to help others with their transition. "A lot of freshmen came to me asking questions on how to email instructors or how to handle certain class. I really enjoyed being able to help them and answer

their questions." stated Tia. Many participants expressed that being away from their family and friends was the hardest thing for them when they transitioned. Kylie described this difficulty as, "The hardest part to transitioning was getting acclimated to a new environment and being away from family. Not just family but everybody you are comfortable with and know."

Transitioning to a four-year university can be challenging for students, especially due to moving away from family and being in a new environment. Many participants thought back on past semesters in the ECHS to stay positive during their transition to the four-year. Tia stated, "I would think back on past semesters and what I accomplished and know that I could do it." Some students, including Kylie and Crystal, would take time to do things other than just being a student. Going to the gym, hanging with friends, taking walks around campus, or driving around campus were ways they would take a break when they needed to stay positive. Madison stated, "I would remind myself that this is just temporary. Tomorrow will be a better day." when she would get stressed or needed to remind herself to be positive. Morgan stated, "I would remember how lucky I was to be able to go to college." when she would need to shift her mindset.

Growth

Finishing the first semester for the participants was a time of relief, excitement, and accomplishment. All participants were happy to make it through the first semester, but Tia stated, "I was sad because I enjoyed my classes and the people in them. I didn't know if I would have classes with them again." Even though the first semester was difficult for some of the students, Amy stated, "I was proud of myself for not giving up because it was difficult." Crystal immediately started to think about future classes saying, "I was worried about future classes once I completed the first semester." Some participants felt that completing the first semester boosted their confidence, including Madison, who stated, "I was happy because it made me realize I

could do it." Even though some students felt that the first semester at the four-year university was difficult, Casey stated, "I was glad the first semester was over, but it wasn't too bad and not nearly as difficult as I thought it would be."

Each participant felt they had come a long way from graduating from the ECHS. Many participants, including Andrea, Amy, Morgan, Crystal, and Kylie, described themselves as more mature and confident. Casey stated, "I have grown socially since there are so many people here at the university that I have to interact with every day. My communication skills have also improved." Some participants have jobs while attending school, which has caused them to feel more like adults. Kylie stated, "I'm a grown-up now. I go to work and go to school and pay my own bills. I feel more mature." Several participants, including Alison, Madison, and Casey, know what they want to do as a career and what they want to do with their lives after they finish college and graduate with their bachelor's degrees.

Academic Preparation

During each participant's time at the ECHS, they were taught different skills to help them be successful. These various skills helped the students to feel academically prepared for their transition and their first semester at their four-year university. All the participants expressed that the skills they learned in the ECHS helped them have a smoother transition to the four-year university. According to Kylie, "The ECHS helped me build skills I needed for my transition to a four-year university." The different skills the participants discussed throughout the data collection that helped them be academically prepared for their transition to a four-year university and helped them make it through their first semester included time management, study skills, and communication skills.

Time Management

  Time management was an essential skill that all participants discussed. All the participants felt that time management was a skill they developed in the ECHS that significantly impacted their first semester at their four-year university. Tia stated, "The ECHS taught student time management and responsibility." Jake explained that time management at the four-year university is more crucial than at the collegiate academy. "Time management is more important here at the four-year university because we are held fully responsible. There is no one reminding us to do our assignments or holding our hands," stated Jake.

  A few participants, including Sarah, Crystal, and Kylie, have jobs, so managing their time and keeping up with their schoolwork is crucial for them to pass their classes and keep their jobs. Each participant manages their time in different ways. One way Madison manages her time is by organizing her schedule and assignments. It helps Morgan to write down all of her projects and then place them in a calendar. Many of the participants discussed the use of planners and calendars to keep up with their assignments. Kylie stated, "I make a to-do list that includes blocks of scheduling to keep up with my assignments for my online courses." Amy considers time management when she schedules her courses. She keeps her classes in the morning so that she has the afternoon set aside to work on assignments and her online classes. Being involved in extracurriculars or online courses requires time management. According to Tia, "With the majority of my classes being online, it is crucial to be able to manage my time. I'm also involved in ROTC, and it is important that I make sure to manage my time with assignments and my extracurricular activities."

Study Skills

During the participants' time at the ECHS, they all expressed that they had learned how to study and that they were not accustomed to studying before the ECHS. During the transition to a four-year university, the study skills the students learned in the ECHS were essential for the students during their first semester. Many participants used different study skills, but Crystal explained that she used index cards, rewrote notes, and studied with peers. Study groups with peers and peer tutoring were brought up several times as ways that the participants would study in the ECHS but also used at the four-year university to which they transitioned. Casey explained, "I developed a support group among my peers. I would study more and study with other people more."

When the participants compared themselves to other students their age that just transitioned to college, they explained that they were better prepared because they knew how to study. Many of their classmates their age complained about the workload and didn't know where to begin when it came to studying. Even though the participants knew how to study, social pressures sometimes would get in the way and prevent some from studying. Madison explained, "I wish I would have studied more during my first semester. Once I found my peers, I wanted to hang out with them more which got in the way of my study time." Some participants explained that their study location affected their study time. Sarah explained that she needed to get out of her room to study so she would not get distracted. "I needed to get with friends and study in the library or coffee shops instead of my dorm room," stated Sarah.

Communication Skills

Being able to communicate with instructors, schedule tutoring sessions, and schedule meetings with instructors was mentioned several times by many of the participants. According to Tia:

> I was better prepared for the transition to the four-year university than my peers because I knew how to take notes, ask questions, and communicate with my instructors, which the freshmen in my seminar class did not know how to do.

Tia and Casey discussed being more confident in their communication skills because they attended the ECHS. During the participants' time at the ECHS, they were taught how to email their instructors, visit their instructors during their office hours, and reach out for help when they were struggling with the content. Casey stated, "I was used to meeting with instructors because of the ECHS, and my peers were not." At the ECHS, the participants were used to the same instructors for multiple courses because it was located on a community college campus. Because of this, Kylie explained that it was a little more difficult at the four-year because they had different instructors for each course, and they had to learn each instructor's communication style and expectations.

Due to the size of the four-year university that some of the participants transitioned to, they reached out to their instructors later in the semester than they should have. Several participants expressed that they would communicate with their instructors sooner and ask for help if they could go back and redo the first semester. Casey explained that communicating with instructors and peers helped him figure out what he wanted to do with his life going forward. Some of the participants felt weird asking for help from their instructors due to being in a new environment but realized they had to reach out if they were going to succeed.

College Awareness

While at the ECHS, all the participants expressed that they were taught about the college environment, rigor, involvement, and expectations. During their transition due to their college awareness, all the participants found the transition to a four-year university easier. Morgan stated, "Attending the ECHS made the transition to a four-year university easier because you get the experience of a college environment, how a college schedule is set up, get used to the extra workload, and it gives you a head start." Due to the college awareness the participants experienced through the ECHS, they all felt better prepared during their transition to the four-year university and their first semester.

College Environment

According to many of the participants, getting accustomed to the college environment is one of the benefits of the ECHS. Amy and Tia expressed, "I was used to the environment and expectations of a college campus due to the ECHS." Tia went on to say, "Going to the ECHS helped break the fear of going to a four-year university because I had already done two years of college and was used to the environment." All the participants felt better prepared to transition to a four-year university because they attended the ECHS. Andrea said, "I felt better prepared because I knew what to expect with the college environment and rigor."

Even though the participants felt that the ECHS helped get them accustomed to the college environment, there were still struggles with the transition. Several participants, including Amy, Casey, Sarah, and Alison, explained that they were used to the college environment at the ECHS, but the environment was different at their four-year university because it was much larger. According to Amy, "The classes were bigger, with some classes having 300 students in them." Casey explained, "The change in environment was the hardest for me. Going from a

small community college to a large university was a drastic change." For some participants, there wasn't much difference between the ECHS environment and the four-year university. According to Kylie, "My university is similar to the ECHS in the way that the classes are set up, the teaching style used by the instructors, and the class sizes."

College Expectations

The college expectations between the ECHS and the four-year universities the participants transitioned to had similarities and differences. According to Jake, "I have complete freedom and responsibility for everything that I did at the four-year university. If I mess up, I have to deal with it. Nobody is holding my hand." Sarah explained, "I have more responsibilities at the four-year university. I don't have people reminding me to do things and to study as I did at the ECHS." Even though there is more freedom at the four-year colleges, many of the participants felt the academic expectations were the same. Andrea explained, "The ECHS and my four-year university were similar because of the teacher expectations and academic structure." Morgan said, "The classes and workload at my four-year university were not a struggle because I was used to it due to the ECHS." Tia stated, "Classes at my four-year university were easier because I was used to the college rigor and expectations I learned at the ECHS."

At the ECHS, the instructors understood that the students were still high school students while they were taking their college courses. Madison explained:

> At the ECHS, the instructors knew that we were still high school students at the same time that we were college students. However, when you transition to a four-year university, they are more strict and treat you like an adult. You either turn in your assignments or you don't. It is your responsibility.

Morgan stated, "Your professors will tell you one time about an assignment, and it is up to you to remember. There are no remind messages or reminder emails." Many participants explained the importance of office hours with their instructors if they were struggling or signing up for tutoring sessions to receive assistance. Tia explained, "Developing a relationship with your professors is important. Schedule a tutoring session. Nobody is going to talk bad about you if you need tutoring."

College Involvement

Many participants wished they had gotten more involved on the college campus during their first semester. Each participant explained how the different four-year universities provided a freshman week the first week they moved to campus. During this time, they were taught about the campus, the various resources available, and ways to get involved on campus. Andrea explained:

> During the first week, make sure to get out, meet people, and try things on campus. The first week is usually when everyone comes out to try things. There will be people in the same boat as you. It might be awkward, but you won't be the only one feeling that way. If nothing comes of it, try again.

The participants explained that it was a great time to meet other students their age during freshman week events. Crystal explained, "I met many students that were my age, but since I was a Junior in hours, I never saw those students again because I was taking courses with upperclassmen." Most of the participants were also placed in a freshman seminar course which taught them how to be college students and about the campus. Jake explained that his instructor in his freshman seminar course became like a mentor and was someone he could go to and ask questions and receive advice.

A few of the participants were involved in extracurricular activities, including ROTC, band, robotics, student ministries, and several clubs, while the majority of the participants were not involved in any extracurricular activities on campus. Kylie stated, "If I could go back and do something different, I would join clubs and attend more events to meet people. Students need to make connections. If you don't, it feels like it is hard to catch up and fit in somewhere." Many participants also explained how easy it was to stay in their dorm room instead of going out and getting involved on campus. According to Jake, "It is really easy to stay in your room and do nothing instead of getting involved on campus. One of the hardest things to overcome when you do that is not staying bored."

Relationships

Relationships with family, peers, and friends were essential to each participant's transition. Kylie stated, "Transitioning to a four-year is tough emotionally. School becomes more than a school; it becomes home, your primary socialization spot, and it is still where you have to go to school." All the participants expressed the importance of a strong support system at home and with their peers and classmates.

Family

Family support was expressed as a critical component to the success of the participants before their transition, during their transition, and after their transition. Even though each participant has different family dynamics, they each expressed the importance of their families support. While attending the ECHS, each participant said their parents were very supportive. Tia explained how there were times when she was not able to participate in a family event or outside activities due to schoolwork and needing to study. She stated, "My parents understood there were times I had to stay home and do homework or study for a test that was taking place the next

day." Some participants explained how their parents provided emotional support, including

Casey, who stated, "My mom was very supportive and encouraging. She noticed when I was

stressed and comforted me in times of need." Another word many participants, including Andrea,

Crystal, and Madison, brought up is encouraging, which they used to describe their family's

support while they were in the ECHS. Many participants said they would talk to their parents

daily during the transition to a four-year university. Not only would their parents call and check

in on them, but according to Tia, Alison, and Casey, they would also provide financial support.

Most participants felt their families supported them the most throughout their first semester and

as they finished their first semester.

Friends

Having a support system besides your family while in the ECHS and transitioning to a

four-year university was discussed by many participants. Sarah stated, "Friends and peers were a

big support when I was in the ECHS. We would study together and do homework together."

According to Jake, "Older peers helped me while I was in the ECHS because they had already

been through what I was going through." Crystal also utilized peer tutoring when she struggled

with any of her courses. In addition, the class sizes were also smaller at the ECHS, which,

according to Casey and Sarah, allowed the students to be more like a family and community.

After transitioning to a four-year university, some participants discussed their current

university providing them with peer mentors. "Every two weeks, I would meet with my peer

mentor to discuss how I was doing in my classes. My mentor was an upperclassman assigned to

me by the engineering department." stated Casey. All participants stressed the importance of

leaving your dorm and making friends. Some participants transferred to a four-year university

where they didn't know anyone, while others transferred with a group of friends. Sarah

transferred with several friends and explained how important a strong support system with peers and friends is when you transfer to a four-year university. "Having a strong friend group was very helpful for me. We would make sure that we got with each other once a week to have supper. It helped me with being far away from family," stated Sarah.

The participants that transitioned without friends explained how difficult it was because they had to go out and meet people. Madison stated, "Transitioning to a four-year university will cause you to go out of your comfort zone by making new friends, going to new places, and communicating with different people." Many participants explained that they wished they would have gotten out of their dorm more, talked with more people, and attempted to make friends sooner in the semester. Morgan explained, "I would have gotten out more and made more friends. I didn't leave my dorm much, and I regret that." Kylie stated:

> Everyone needs to go and meet new people. If you need help, ask the people around you. You need to talk to people and get used to talking to people you don't know. The whole time you are trying to make friendships, it might be awkward for everyone. Just keep doing it.

Outlier Data and Findings

Outliers consist of unexpected findings and themes that do not align with specific research questions or themes found in this study. There are two outliers that will be discussed in this section.

Outlier Finding #1

One student in the study transitioned from a private school to the ECHS. Due to this, she was not used to being in the public school setting. There are also several differences in the curriculum and expectations between private and public schools. Since she attended a private

school she had a different experience with her transition to the ECHS. Alison felt that she was not prepared for the transition to the ECHS. She didn't feel challenged at the private school and described learning about content in the ECHS that was not covered in the private school. Due to this she felt at a disadvantage.

Outlier Finding #2

Another outlier was that Sarah was used to transitioning due to going to different schools throughout her public school education. Sarah described her earlier education as involving attending several different public schools. Since she had experienced transitions before, she had a different experience with her transition to the ECHS and her transition to the four-year university. She described that going to the ECHS and transitioning to the four-year university was like moving to a new school which she had done at least seven times. Sarah said, "I was used to experiencing new environments and new people."

Research Question Responses

This research study was guided by a central research question and three sub-research questions. Using the qualitative data that was collected through the student questionnaires, the semi-structured interviews, the letter-writing activity, and the focus group interviews, the central and sub-research questions were addressed. Participant quotes are used throughout this section to support the responses to the research questions.

Central Research Question

The themes and sub-themes discussed previously that were determined by the analysis of the data helped to answer the research questions that were the focus of this study. The central research question of this study asked: How do graduates of an ECHS in the South describe their experiences with transitioning to a four-year university? The sub-questions that used

Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory help answer this central question. The following sections of this chapter provide information on how the themes and sub-themes discussed in the previous section answer the research questions of this study.

Sub-Question One

The first sub-question asked: Considering situation, support, self, and strategies according to Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, how do ECHS graduates experience the time prior to enrollment, called the moving-in process? This question looks at the participants' experiences during the moving-in stage of a transition, specifically through the lens of Schlossberg's four S's (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Situation. The first S deals with the participants' situation at the time of the transition. All the participants have graduated from the southern collegiate high school with at least 60 college credit hours. All the participants discussed how attending the ECHS helped prepare them to transition to a four-year university. Morgan stated:

Attending the ECHS made the transition to a four-year university easier because I got the experience of a college environment, how a college schedule is set up, got used to the extra workload, and it gave me a head start.

Support. The participants' support during the moving-in process came from their family and friends. Each participant expressed that they had strong family support while in the ECHS. They also described how encouraging their parents were during their time at the ECHS. Casey stated, "My mom was very supportive and encouraging. She noticed when I was stressed and comforted me in times of need." All the participants' parents supported them in attending the ECHS due to the benefits they would receive, including an associate degree for free. The

participants also received support from their friends and peers. Jake stated, "Older peers helped because they had already been through what the younger ones were going through."

Self. During the moving-in process, all the participants felt a sense of accomplishment after graduating with their associate degree. Jake was reminded that graduating with an associate degree is something many high school students cannot say they have done. Even though a few students, including Kylie and Madison, had doubts they would finish due to the program's difficulty, they could look back and be proud of what they had accomplished once they crossed the stage. Kylie stated, "I am proud of myself, and this is a big accomplishment because I don't know anybody else that has done this."

Strategies. There were different strategies that the participants used to help them cope with the moving-in process. All the participants felt they were not prepared to start at the ECHS. Due to this, they had to work on different strategies including time management, organization, communication, and study skills to help them succeed. Tia stated, "The ECHS taught student time management and responsibility." Many participants explained different ways to manage their time, including planners, calendars, and to-do lists. Casey explained, "The ECHS helped me learn the college environment, expectations, rigor, and how to talk to my instructors."

Sub-Question Two

The second sub-question asked: Considering situation, support, self, and strategies according to Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, how do ECHS graduates experience the period of enrollment, called the moving through process? This question looks at the participants' experiences during the moving through stage of a transition, specifically through the lens of Schlossberg's four S's (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Situation. During the first semester at the four-year university, all the participants felt that they were better prepared than the other classmates their age. Tia stated:

I was better prepared than the other peers the same age as me. They didn't know how to take notes, were scared to ask questions, and didn't know how to communicate with their teacher.

All the participants felt that they were better prepared because of attending the ECHS. The ECHS taught them skills, including time management, study skills, and communication skills that they needed to be successful at the four-year university. Sarah explained, "I was better prepared. I knew how to work the online platform. I knew how to study, manage my time, and was used to the college environment." The one thing that all the participants found to be difficult during the first semester was being away from their families. Morgan stated, "The first semester was a little hard because I was having to get used to being away from my family." Even though all the participants thought being away from their families was challenging, they mostly thought the first semester was not much different than the ECHS.

Support. The students had several different support systems during their first semester at the four-year university. All the participants explained that their families were very supportive and that they would talk to them every day. According to Tia, Alison, and Casey, their families would also provide them with financial support when needed. The institution also gave support through advisors, instructors, and mentors. "Every two weeks, I would meet with my peer mentors to discuss how I was doing in my classes. My mentor was an upperclassman assigned to me by the engineering department," Stated Casey. Having a support system besides your family was discussed by many participants. Sarah explained, "Having a strong friend group was very helpful for me. We would make sure that we got with each other once a week to have supper. It

helped me with being far away from family." All participants discussed the importance of leaving their dorm rooms, meeting people, and making friends. Kylie stated:

> Everyone needs to go and meet new people. If you need help, ask the people around you. You need to talk to people and get used to talking to people you don't know. The whole time you are trying to make friendships, it might be awkward for everyone. Just keep doing it.

Self. During the first semester, all the participants discussed ways to cope with the transition and ensure they had a positive mindset. Tia explained, "I would think back on past semesters and what I accomplished and know that I could do." Some participants even described ways to take their minds off their stresses by going out with friends, walking around campus, going to the gym, or taking a short drive around campus. Morgan would remind herself of how lucky she was that she could even transfer to a four-year university and go to college. Madison stated, "I would tell myself tomorrow will be a better day; this is only temporary." Even though all the participants felt they were academically prepared for the first semester, some figured out different things about themselves. Casey transitioned with a specific major in mind, but once he started taking courses, he realized he wanted to major in something else. Tia found out that she was able to help others with their transition because of her experiences at the ECHS.

Strategies. There are several different strategies that the participants used during their first semester to help them with their transition. All the participants felt that time management was a skill they learned while attending the ECHS that significantly impacted their first semester. Jake explained, "Time management is more important here at the four-year university because we are held fully responsible. There is no one reminding us to do our assignments or holding our hands." A few of the participants, including Sarah, Crystal, and Kylie, have jobs, so managing

their time is crucial for them to work and keep up with their studies. Study skills are another strategy the participants expressed to be important during their first semester. Many participants used different study skills, but Crystal explained that she used index cards, rewrote notes, and studied with peers. Casey developed support groups among his peers, which helped him study more. Many participants mentioned being able to better communicate with instructors, schedule tutoring sessions, and schedule meetings with instructions several times. According to Tia:

> I was better prepared for the transition to the four-year university than my peers because I knew how to take notes, ask questions, and communicate with my instructors, which the freshmen in my seminar class did not know how to do.

Sub-Question Three

The third sub-question asked: Considering situation, support, self, and strategies according to Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, how do ECHS graduates experience the time after their first semester, called the moving out process? This question looks at the participants' experiences during the moving out stage of a transition, specifically through the lens of Schlossberg's four S's (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Situation. All the participants felt a sense of relief, excitement, and accomplishment when they finished the first semester. Even though the first semester was difficult for some of the students, Amy stated, "I was proud of myself for not giving up because it was difficult." Some participants felt that completing the first semester boosted their confidence, including Madison, who stated, "I was happy because it made me realize I could do it." Some participants felt that the four-year university was a little difficult but not too much. Casey stated, "I was glad the first semester was over, but it wasn't too bad and not nearly as difficult as I thought it would be."

Support. As previously discussed with the other research questions, the primary support

for all the students included their family and peers, even after they finished their first semester.

All the participants discussed the support of their families, whether it was emotional or financial.

The mentors students had during their first semester were also there to assist them. Some

participants discussed the lack of friends but explained the importance of getting out of their

dorm to make new friends. Kylie stated:

> Everyone needs to go and meet new people. If you need help, ask the people around you.
>
> You need to talk to people and get used to talking to people you don't know. The whole
>
> time you are trying to make friendships, it might be awkward for everyone. Just keep
>
> doing it.

Self. Each participant felt they had come a long way from when they graduated from the

ECHS. Many participants, including Andrea, Amy, Morgan, Crystal, and Kylie, described

themselves as more mature and confident. Several participants, including Alison, Madison, and

Casey know what they want to do as a career and what they want to do with their lives after they

finish college and graduate with their bachelor's degrees. Some participants have jobs while

attending school, which has caused them to feel more like adults. Kyle stated, "I'm a grown-up

now. I go to work and go to school and pay my own bills. I feel more mature."

Strategies. All of the participants expressed that they would continue using the same

strategies they learned in the ECHS and utilized during their first semester as they continued

with their education. The various strategies included time management, study skills, and

communication skills. As expressed previously, these different skills helped all the participants

manage the workload and help them be successful during their first semester. There are a few

things that the participants will do differently as they continue their education. Many participants

expressed the importance of getting out of their dorm rooms to meet new people. Morgan stated, "I would have gotten out more and made more friends. I didn't get out of my dorm much, and I regret that." Another thing some of the participants will do differently as they continue their education is not to let social activities get in the way of their studying. Madison stated, "I would limit my social activities. Once I found my peers, I wanted to hang with them more. I don't need to let friends get in the way of my studying." Some participants felt that they needed to make sure they communicated with their instructors more as they continued their education.

Summary

This chapter covers the data that was collected during the student questionnaire, the semi-structured interview, the letter-writing activity, and the focus group interviews with 11 participants. Each participant was described in detail, and subsequently, there were four primary themes, with eleven sub-themes discussed. The four primary themes include 1) Self-Awareness; 2) Academic Preparation; 3) College Awareness; 4) Relationships with each of these primary themes, including several sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes were then used to answer the sub-questions for this study that used Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory to address the central research question.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of graduates of an early college high school (ECHS) in the South on their transition to a four-year university. Most school districts have implemented college preparatory programs in their high schools to help prepare students for their transition (Jett & Rinn, 2020) and help align secondary and postsecondary systems (Nodine et al., 2019). These different college preparatory programs help students see that college is achievable (Woods et al., 2018), provide exposure to the college academic environment and rigor (Adams et al., 2020; Taie & Lewis, 2020), and give a deeper understanding of what it means to be a college student (Lile et al., 2018), and increase positive results with college enrollment, persistence, and graduation (D'Anna et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2018). There have been many studies looking at the quantitative data related to ECHS and a student's transition but minimal studies regarding the experiences of graduates of an ECHS on their transition to a four-year university (Hutchins et al., 2019).

Discussion

The theory guiding this study was Schlossberg's transition theory (1981). Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory examines how an individual copes with a change and transitions to a new environment. According to Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, four components need to be considered when looking at a transition: a person's situation, support, self, and strategies (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The first factor, "situation," deals with several different aspects of the transition in order to help a person better understand what they will experience during the transition. The second factor, "support," deals with whether a person has a robust support system

to help them physically and mentally with the transition. The third factor, "self," deals with the personal characteristics of the individual going through the transition and how they view it. Schlossberg (1981) believed a person needs to be self-aware of their beliefs, abilities, perceptions, and attitudes so that they can have a smooth transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The fourth factor, "strategies," deals with the coping mechanism a person brings into the transition.

The transition to college from high school tends to be difficult for students because of many differences between high schools and colleges (Adams et al., 2020; Duncheon, 2020; Duncheon & Relles, 2020; Nodine et al., 2019; Troutman, Hendrix-Soto, et al., 2018; Walk, 2020). Students who feel they can turn to their faculty, peers, or parents for support tend to handle the transition better (Calhoun et al., 2018). Studies have shown that many high school students struggle with the expectations of being college students and the differences in schedule and rigor of courses (Adams et al., 2020; Duncheon, 2020; Duncheon & Relles, 2020; Lile et al., 2018; Mollet et al., 2020). The students are also used to having the support of their parents with them in every decision, but once they transition to college, they face the realities of autonomy and independence (Witkowsky & Clayton, 2020). Students also struggle with time management, and many have academic deficiencies because of their academically poor high school curriculum (McGhee, 2020).

This research study contributed to the existing literature by gaining insight into the lived experiences of ECHS graduates who have transitioned to a four-year university. Participants from the current study described their experiences that align with Schlossberg's transition theory (1981) and the four S factors. Through their experiences, participants explained their transition

from an ECHS to a four-year university through student identity, preparation, and support systems.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study were detailed in chapter four of this manuscript, but the following sections will describe a brief summary of the Thematic Findings. Following the summary will be a series of significant interpretations from the findings.

Summary of Thematic Findings

There were four primary themes, with eleven sub-themes found during data analysis. The four primary themes include 1) Self-Awareness; 2) Academic Preparation; 3) College Awareness; 4) Relationships with each of these primary themes, including several sub-themes. These different themes and sub-themes were developed based on the current research study, which provided insight into the lived experiences of graduates of an ECHS and their transition to a four-year university. Each student identified in different ways when it comes to graduating with their associate degree, starting their first semester at the four-year university, and finishing their first semester at the four-year university. There were different skills that the participants discussed throughout the data collection that helped them be academically prepared for their transition, including time management, study skills, and communication skills. While at the ECHS, all the participants expressed that they were taught about the college environment, rigor, involvement, and expectations which helped make their transition to the four-year university easier.

Identity. Schlossberg (1981) believed a person needs to be self-aware of their beliefs, abilities, perceptions, and attitudes so that they can have a smooth transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). During the three stages of the students' transition, they all learned about their identity as a

student and as a person. All participants felt a sense of accomplishment, had a shift in their mindset, and thought that they had grown since graduating from the ECHS. The sense of accomplishment was an attitude the students felt once they completed the ECHS and the first semester at their four-year university. Several students had to shift their mindset and remind themselves that they could be successful in college due to past experiences at the ECHS, which helped them believe in themselves. All the participants felt they had grown in maturity after they finished the first semester compared to when they graduated from the ECHS, which shows that they were self-aware of their beliefs, abilities, perceptions, and attitudes.

Preparation. Research shows that attending an ECHS helps participants realize that college is achievable (Woods et al., 2018), exposes students to the college academic environment and rigor (Adams et al., 2020; Taie & Lewis, 2020), and helps students obtain a deeper understanding of what it means to be a college student (Lil et al., 2018). The current study helped support this research based on the participants' experiences with attending an ECHS and transitioning to a four-year university. Being exposed to the college environment, expectations, and rigor helped all the participants see that they could be successful and gave them confidence that their peers their age did not have. All the students felt academically prepared to transition to a four-year university, and many even thought that the workload and academic rigor were no different than what they experienced at the ECHS.

Not only were the students academically prepared for the transition, but all the students felt prepared to handle the college campus and environment. Attending the ECHS helped the students get accustomed to a college campus, including the different resources, online platforms, and the norms expected of a college student, including behavior. Due to this experience, the students could navigate the four-year university to which they transitioned. Some participants

even explained how they were able to help other incoming first-year students with the transition because they were comfortable with the college environment and had previous experience. The confidence and knowledge the students experienced from attending the ECHS support previous research on the benefits of attending an ECHS (Adams et al., 2020; Lil et al., 2018; Taie & Lewis, 2020; Woods et al., 2018).

College Readiness. Researchers have examined what students feel that they need to be college-ready. Conley (2010) defines college readiness as "the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution" (p. 21). Many students think that they need specific transition skills, including time management, note-taking, and writing, while others believe they need to know the logistics of college life, such as how to select courses, how to communicate properly with professors, and how to navigate the college environment (Francis et al., 2018). A few sub-themes in this study indicated that time management, study skills, and communication skills were essential skills that helped the students be successful in their first semester at their four-year university. Even though time management was discussed as a necessary skill, at least one participant found it even more important at the four-year university because students were held fully responsible for their work. Some of the participants had jobs while attending school, and the time management skills they developed while attending the ECHS helped them keep up with their assignments. Some of the strategies the students used to manage their time included planners, calendars, to-do lists, block scheduling, and listing all assignments.

Before attending the ECHS, all the students explained that they rarely had to study, but while in the ECHS, they had to study, which developed the study skills they used at the four-year university. Several of the strategies used to help the students study include index cards, rewriting

notes, and studying with peers. Many students also explained the importance of being able to communicate with their instructors, schedule tutoring sessions, and schedule meetings. Even though all the students knew the importance of communicating with their instructors, a few found it difficult due to the size of their classes. These specific students also realized that if they were going to make it, they would need to start communicating with their instructors.

  Involvement. For students to have a greater sense of belonging, they need to get involved in campus activities with other students and organizations (Calhoun et al., 2018; Mu & Cole, 2019). Some of the students in this study were involved in extracurriculars at their four-year university and, due to this, were able to meet other students and develop relationships. Other students in this study were slow to get involved on campus, resulting in them struggling to be away from home and their families. Many of the participants discussed the importance of making sure that you get out of your dorm and go to meet others. Many even expressed regrets because they did not take full advantage of meeting other students because they did not leave their dorms and attend activities hosted by their four-year university.

  Support System. Having a strong support system is very important for students during their transition to a four-year university. Research shows that students have a greater sense of belonging when they have more peer-group interactions and support, faculty interactions and support (Calhoun et al., 2018), and parental support (Cahyadi & Rohinsa, 2020; Dahal et al., 2018; Rahinsa et al., 2020). All the students expressed the importance of having parental support while they attended the ECHS and during their transition. Their parents and family were crucial to them being encouraged and confident that they could succeed. Having a support system besides your family was also discussed by many participants. Several students noted that having older peers to provide advice helped because they had already been through what the students

were currently going through. A few of the students' four-year universities provided them with mentors within their programs of study. The mentors checked in on the students and helped them during their transition. Advisors were another beneficial support system for some of the participants. The advisors would provide the students with information regarding their degrees and resources on the college campus.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this transcendental phenomenological study have practical implications for the Southern Collegiate High School on the Southern Community College campus, other ECHS, ECHS students, and families dealing with students transitioning to a four-year university. This section will discuss the various implications and provide specific recommendations for the stakeholders previously listed involved in the transition of ECHS graduates to a four-year university.

Implications for Practice

The findings of the current research study prove several implications for the Southern Collegiate High School on the Southern Community College campus, other ECHS, ECHS students, and families dealing with students transitioning to a four-year university. This research study revealed implications for the Southern Collegiate High School on the Southern Community College campus and other ECHS. Academic preparation is essential for students to be successful during their transition. It is crucial that students are provided with the rigor needed to prepare them for the courses at a four-year university. Students also need to be accustomed to the college environment and expectations. By helping students gain confidence in the college setting, they may also be prepared to take on the college setting at a four-year university. Students attending an ECHS are provided with the opportunity to get accustomed to the college environment and

expectations. We have seen with the current research data that it helps them transition to a four-year university.

Academic preparation also includes specific skills that can be learned through an ECHS. The skills include time management, study skills, and communication skills. The students who attended the ECHS from this research developed the skills previously listed and saw that they helped them succeed during their first semester. These skills were developed throughout the participants' time in the ECHS, and then the same strategies were used when they transitioned. There will be times when students will need to work while in college, like some of the participants in this study, and having the skills they learned during their time at the ECHS, such as time management and study skills, they were able to manage their school work and keep their jobs. Students also stressed the importance of communicating with their instructors when they need help or have questions. The communication skills they learned while attending the ECHS gave them the confidence to communicate with their instructors at the four-year university, while their peers their age were not prepared to communicate with their instructors.

The research also has some implications for ECHS students to consider when they transfer to a four-year university. As seen in this research, it is essential for graduates of an ECHS to use the previously discussed skills, including study skills, time management, and communication skills. Students also need to make sure they are taking time to develop their support system at the four-year university by getting involved on campus and making friends. A strong peer support system benefited the students in the current study. One of the issues discussed several times is the importance of students leaving their dorms and getting involved on campus. Involvement on campus may help the students handle being away from home and help

them develop a community on their new campus. Even though making friends is essential, students need to remember not to let their social life get in the way of their studies.

Finally, this research has some implications for the student's families. Throughout the research, family support was discussed and explained as an essential part of students' success. Students need to know that they have their families to turn to in times of need. Family support in the form of encouragement helped the students in this research push through the different components of transitioning to a four-year university. Some family support will also come in the form of financial support, but the majority of the family support seen in this research dealt with the families checking in on their students often. The stronger a person's social support is, the better they can handle the transitions they face (Cahyadi & Rohinsa, 2020; Calhoun et al., 2018; Dahal et al., 2018; Rahinsa et al., 2020).

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The current study's information on ECHS graduates and their transition to a four-year university corroborated Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, specifically looking at the four S factors. Participants provided experiential recollections of their transition to a four-year university in reference to their situation, support, self, and strategies which showed how these different components impacted how the students coped and adjusted to their new environment at the four-year university. The research questions for this study focused on evaluating the four S's of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory at the different stages of the transition. The three stages of a transition that were looked at include the moving in stage, the moving out stage, and the moving through stage.

During this study, themes were developed that looked at the three stages of a transition in relation to the four S factors. Many of the themes determined were the same in each transition

stage, including academic preparation, college awareness, and relationships. The one theme that progressed as the stages changed was the self-awareness theme. As the students went through the different stages of a transition, their identities changed as well. Schlossberg (1981) believed that a person needed to become self-aware of their beliefs, abilities, perceptions, and attitudes to have a smooth transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995), which is what the students were able to do. Ultimately this helped them be able to continue moving forward with their education.

The empirical implications of this study align with previous studies, which specified how college preparatory programs like an ECHS help students transition to a four-year university. Research showed that students who attend an ECHS are better prepared for college than students who attend a traditional high school (Edmunds et al., 2020) because the students learn how to behave like college students and develop the college skills necessary to be successful (Song et al., 2021). This current study supports this research based on the experiences of the participants who graduated from the Southern Collegiate High School on the Southern Community College campus. The participants felt that they were better prepared for the four-year university because of attending the ECHS compared to other students their age. They also described how the college skills such as study skills, organization skills, and communication skills they learned while in the ECHS helped them be successful during their first semester at the four-year university, which supports the research that found that students who participated in college preparatory programs were introduced to specific skills like time management, study skills, and communication skills that helped prepare them for the culture of college (Adams et al., 2020; Calhoun et al., 2018; Troutman et al., 2018). According to Woods, Park & Betrand (2019), students who are given an authentic college experience while in dual enrollment courses leave high school with a better understanding of how college works. This current study supports this research because the

participants attended an ECHS that gave them an authentic college experience, and the participants felt that they had a better understanding of how college works at a four-year university. The participants expressed that they were better prepared to handle the online platforms their four-year university utilized because of attending an ECHS. They were also used to the college schedule because while they attended the ECHS, they were full-time college students and followed the Southern Community College course schedule.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations are obstacles that occur that are out of the researcher's control. One limitation of this study was that the interviews were conducted virtually due to the students attending four-year universities at different locations and being in school at the time of the interviews. Since the interviews were conducted virtually, there could have been limits to the discussion that would not have happened if the interviews had been done face-to-face. Another limitation of this study was the refusal to participate and the lack of response from other students who graduated from the ECHS. Due to their refusal or lack of response, there were fewer participants. Additionally, out of the 11 participants, three did not participate in all the data collection forms. One person did not complete the focus group, and two others did not complete the letter-writing activity. Due to this, some viewpoints and experiences may have been left out that could have impacted the study. A final limitation is the actual participant pool. Due to there being a smaller number of graduates from the Southern Collegiate High School, there was not a large pool of participants to invite to participate in the research.

Delimitations are boundaries set to purposefully limit the scope of the study. Delimitations in this study included site selection and participant selection. Since this was a transcendental phenomenology aimed at understanding the transition of graduates from an ECHS

in the South, the participants were required to have attended the Southern Collegiate High School on the Southern Community College campus. They could not have attended any other ECHS. The participants also had to graduate with their associate degree and transfer to a four-year university. The participants could not have graduated from the Southern Collegiate High School, transferred to a trade school, or continued at the Southern Community College campus towards a trade certificate.

Recommendations for Future Research

As a result of the findings, limitations, and delimitations, this section details recommendations for future research. First, due to the fact that this study was done on an ECHS in the South, future research should consider studies on the transitions of graduates from other ECHS in other parts of the United States. Second, since this study looked at students from different backgrounds, future research should consider a specific group of students, such as a particular race or a specific socio-economic background, and their experiences transitioning to a four-year university after graduating from an ECHS. Next, since this study only looked at students who graduated from an ECHS and transferred to a four-year university, future research could look at students who went into the workforce or transferred to a trade school. Finally, since this study only looked at the student's first semester at a four-year university, future research could look at the students' transition after completing an entire year or any time after their first year up until they graduate from the four-year university.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of graduates of an ECHS in the South on their transition to a four-year university. The transition to college from high school tends to be difficult for students because of many differences between high

schools and colleges (Adams et al., 2020; Duncheon, 2020; Duncheon & Relles, 2020; Nodine et al., 2019; Troutman, Hendrix-Soto, et al., 2018; Walk, 2020). Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory looks at how a person copes and adjusts to a new environment. Schlossberg (1981) believed that an individual could navigate transitions better if they went through a process called taking stock. Taking stock consists of four different components, considered the four Ss – situation, support, self, and strategies – that will help students cope with their transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

There were four primary themes, with eleven sub-themes found during data analysis. The four primary themes include 1) Self-Awareness; 2) Academic Preparation; 3) College Awareness; 4) Relationships with each of these primary themes, including several sub-themes. These different themes will help educational stakeholders, especially those involved with an ECHS, understand the transitions of students that have graduated from an ECHS and transitioned to a four-year university. Future ECHS graduates and current ECHS schools can utilize the results of this study by ensuring that study skills, organization skills, and communication skills are emphasized during a student's time at the ECHS in an effort to prepare students for the expectations of a four-year university. More specifically, ECHS' can ensure that they provide their students with a college experience that includes the college environment, expectations, and rigor so that the students are prepared for the college experience on a four-year university campus. Additionally, helping ECHS students understand the importance of developing a support system at their transitioning school is important. Developing support systems and making connections with others will help minimize the challenges that the participants in this study detailed. Overall, the results of this study provide insight into the experiences of ECHS graduates and their transition to a four-year university.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 4, 2023

Mikki Curtis
Patricia Ferrin

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-575 A Phenomenological Study on the Experiences of Graduates from an Early College High School in the South on their Transition to a four-year University

Dear Mikki Curtis, Patricia Ferrin,

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.(iii). 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 ████████████.
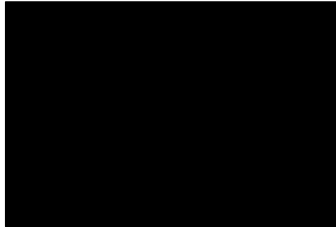
Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Site Permission

July 29, 2022

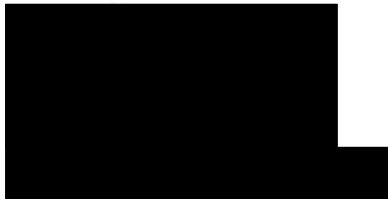Mikki Curtis
Liberty University Doctoral Student

Dear Mikki:

After carefully reviewing your research proposal entitled A Phenomenological Study on the Experiences of Graduates from an Early College High School in the South on their Transition to a Four-Year University, I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study at the ████████████████████████ campus.

Check the following box to grant permission:

☒ I grant permission for Mikki Curtis to conduct her research on the ████████████████ ████████████ campus.

Sincerely,

Appendix C

Consent

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study on the Experiences of Graduates from an Early College High School in the South on their Transition to a Four-Year University
Principal Investigator: Mikki Curtis, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must have graduated from the Southern Collegiate High School with 60 college credit hours and transferred to a four-year university. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to understand the perceptions of graduates of an early college high school in the south on their transition to a four-year university.

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. Participate in a questionnaire. The questionnaire will be completed by the participants before the structured interview to gather demographic and descriptive data. The questionnaire should take 15 minutes to complete.
2. Participate in an individual semi-structured interview. The interviews will last 30-45 minutes and will be audio recorded and transcribed. The interviews can be either in-person or virtual.
3. Participate in a letter-writing activity. Participants will be given a prompt at the end of their semi-structured interview. They will have the opportunity to write the letter before they leave the interview or they will have two weeks to write their letter and email it back to the researcher. These letters will be shared, so be sure no identifying information (e.g., names, emails, etc.) is provided. The letter-writing activity should take 30 minutes to complete.
4. Participate in a focus group. The focus group will consist of five participants randomly chosen. It will occur face-to-face but can be done through zoom due to COVID. The focus groups will last an hour and will be audio- and/or video-recorded and transcribed.
5. Participate in transcript review. Participants will be given a transcript after each data collection activity for them to review for accuracy. The transcript review should take 30 minutes to complete.

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 increased public knowledge on the experiences of students who attended an early college high school and their transition to a four-year university.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Paper copies will be kept in a locked cabinet at the research site. Any paper copies will also be shredded.
- Interviews/focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

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

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Participants who complete all procedures will be given a $20 Amazon gift card. If a participant does not complete all data collection components, they will not receive a $20 Amazon gift card.

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 University of Arkansas Hope-Texarkana. 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, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Mikki Curtis. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Patricia Ferrin, 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, ▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮.

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 study team using the information provided above.

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

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

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix D

Student Questionnaire

1. What is your name?

2. What four-year university did you transfer to?

3. What is your major?

4. What was your GPA when you graduated from the collegiate high school?

5. What is your GPA after your first semester at the four-year university?

6. What courses did you take during your first semester at the four-year university?

7. How many hours did you take during your first semester at the four-year university?

8. What course, if any, was more difficult for you out of the courses you took during your first semester at the four-year university?

9. What are your thoughts on high school students attending an early college high school?

Appendix E

Interview Questions

Moving In: Preparing to transition to a four-year university

1. Situation

    a. Tell me about your experience attending a collegiate high school at Southern Community College. SQ1

        i. How many college credit hours did you have when you graduated high school? SQ1

        ii. Were your college courses online or face-to-face? SQ1

        iii. In what ways did you feel prepared or not prepared for your experiences in college? SQ1

2. Support

    a. Tell me about your family. SQ1

        i. How were they supportive of you while you were in the early college high school? SQ1

        ii. In what ways were they not supportive of you while you were in the ECHS? SQ1

    b. What did your family think about your wanting to transition to a four-year university? SQ1

        i. How were they supportive of your decision to transition to a four-year university? SQ1

        ii. In what ways were they not supportive of your decision to transition to a four-year university? SQ1

      c. What supports did you have while in the ECHS that helped you be successful?

      SQ1

3. Self

      a. How did you feel about graduating from the ECHS with your associate degree?

      SQ1

      b. How did you feel about getting accepted to a four-year university? SQ1

      c. Have you experienced any change or transition similar to your transition to a four-year university? SQ1

         i. If so, how did it go? SQ1

         ii. Was it a successful experience? SQ1

         iii. What helped you to be successful during the experience? SQ1

4. Strategies

      a. What strategies did you use to adjust when you first enrolled in the ECHS? SQ1

      b. What strategies did you use when you first transitioned to the four-year university to help you adjust? SQ1

      c. How would you describe the ways you coped with change and transitions? SQ1

Moving Through: First Semester at the four-year university

1. Situation

      a. What was your first-semester at the four-year university like? SQ2

      b. Was the experience positive or negative? Explain. SQ2

      c. How was your first-semester at the four-year university different than the ECHS?

      SQ2

2. Support

    a. How was your family supportive during your first semester? SQ2

    b. How was your family not supportive during your first semester? SQ2

    c. How did the institution offer support? SQ2

    d. Where else did you find support during your first semester? Explain. SQ2

3. Self

    a. Describe yourself compared to your peers in your classes. SQ2

    b. Describe how you tried to stay positive during your first semester. SQ2

4. Strategies

    a. What strategies did you use to help you adapt to your life at the four-year university? SQ2

    b. What supports provided by the institution did you utilize? SQ2

    c. What extra-curricular activities were you involved in? SQ2

    d. What was the hardest thing for you to overcome? How did you try to overcome it? SQ2

Moving Out: Finishing the first semester

1. Situation

    a. What was it like finishing your first semester at a four-year university? SQ3

    b. Describe your feelings regarding being done with the first semester. SQ3

    c. Describe what you would have done differently about your first semester. SQ3

2. Support

    a. What or who supported you the most as you finished your first semester? SQ3

    b. What supports did you wish you had during your first semester? SQ3

3. Self

    a. How did you feel about being done with your first semester? SQ3

    b. Looking back, how far have you come from when you graduated the ECHS to now? Explain. SQ3

4. Strategies

    a. What strategies did you use during your first semester that you plan on using as you continue in school? SQ3

    b. What strategies helped you through your first semester? SQ3

    c. What strategies do you wish you had used as you transitioned to the four-year university? SQ3

    d. If you had to do it again, would you enroll in the ECHS? Why or why not? SQ3

    e. What are some things you wish you would have known about transitioning to a four-year university? SQ3

Final Question

1. What are some things that you feel are essential for me to understand that we might not have previously discussed regarding your transition from a collegiate high school to a four-year university?

Appendix F

Letter Writing Prompt

Disclaimer: These letters will be shared during the focus group, so be sure no identifying information (e.g., names, emails, etc.) is provided.

"When discussing your transition from the early collegiate high school to a four-year university, how would you describe it to a senior currently in the early collegiate high school?".

Appendix G

Focus Group Questions

1. Take a look at other letters written by other participants. Which ones do you identify with and why do you identify with them?

2. Based on your experiences, how can the early collegiate high school better prepare students for the transition to a four-year university? CRQ

3. Based on your experiences, what advice would you give an early collegiate high school senior getting ready to transition to a four-year university? CRQ

4. Based on your experiences, what advice would you give an early collegiate high school senior during their first semester of college? CRQ

5. Based on your experiences, how can four-year universities better support their incoming first-year students better? CRQ

6. What are some things you feel are essential for me to understand that we might not have previously discussed regarding your transition from a collegiate high school to a four-year university?